

**Sex, Sexuality, Youth, and Meaning: Redefining the Sexual Citizenship of Youth in the
Sex Education Genre**

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by
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Abstract

With a focus on Canadian films, and Canadian reception of American films, this thesis examines the presence of youth in the sex education genre between the years 1969 to 1981/1982. An examination of the genre reveals a wide range of methods and tactics employed by filmmakers and educators alike. The films produced in this period mark a diversion from earlier sex education films. This thesis works to examine the link between the empowering and emancipatory dimensions of these films and their attentiveness to the youth voice. Chapters are arranged according to the approach employed by the films. This includes an examination of narrative films; films that rely on scientific rhetoric to discuss the biological body; films that examine the social component of teenage sexuality; and films that combine both a biological and social analysis of youth.

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Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the under represented genre of the sex education film in the 1969 to 1981/1982 period. A history of the sex education genre reveals a close connection between the birth of the cinematic medium and the need to disseminate information regarding safe sexual practices. The sex education film makes its first widespread appearance in the years leading up to the First World War. Here, Americans began to experiment with the filmic medium to instruct troops in an effort to combat the spread of venereal disease (Milliken 2003, 38). The years leading up to the Second World War brought a return of the sex education film. Both American and Canadian governments, realizing the instructional potential of film, relied on the sex education film to again combat the massive surge in venereal disease among the troops (Milliken 2003, 109).

In the years following World War II, the genre took a shift and began to be used to instruct the growing youth population about their bodies and their sexual potential. Social and hygiene discourse pervades the majority of these films and the films work to stress the social norms of marriage, childbirth, and appropriate sexual behavior (Milliken 2003, 154). In these films, little latitude is offered to those who deviate from these norms and, as such, the films are committed to protecting and advancing the idea of what is normal. We see this in several films produced during this period. These films include: *Toward Emotional Maturity* (Knickerbocker Productions, 1954), *Your Body During Adolescence* (McGraw-Hill Films, 1955), and *How Much Affection?* (Crawley Films, 1958).

The films that follow the discovery and naming of the HIV/AIDS virus also represent a significant shift in the use and meaning of the sex education genre, as these films begin to be targeted toward new audiences. Because AIDS (in its early years) primarily affected disenfranchised groups, educators and filmmakers saw the need to tailor sex education to specific identities (Milliken 2003, 318). This created a tension between mainstream and alternative programs as sex education films were being directed at new audiences that had previously not been visible in the genre. The 1980's also marks the return of abstinence programs. These developed in conjunction with the growing strength of the Christian Right who began to offer alternative/conservative sex education programs and services to youth audiences (Irvine 2002, 103). Here, we see a return to the pedagogy of fear, as the films evoke the panic and fear of the HIV/AIDS virus to scare their viewers into abstaining from sex (Irvine 2002, 102). During this time we also see a visual shift in the genre as films begin to rely on the use of MTV video aesthetics. One such film, *Talkin' About AIDS* (Atlantis Films, 1989), even goes so far as to open and close the film with a MTV video style rap.

Although the focus of this thesis is on the emerging presence of the youth voice in the sex education genre, I must preface this thesis by stating that in discussing the youth voice, I do not intend to make any claims about the emergence of youth culture in North America. Rather, the focus of this thesis is the emerging presence of the youth voice in the sex education genre and an examination of how this voice works to re-negotiate the sexual citizenship of youths from 1969 to the beginning of the 1980's.

Michel Foucault suggests that sex and sexuality have been both “put into

discourse” and work to *impose* a discourse (Foucault 1978, 11). At the most fundamental level, these discourses “crystalize into institutions, they inform individual behavior, they act as grids for the perception and evaluation of things” (Foucault 1978, 10). The object, as Foucault suggests, becomes to “define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world” (Foucault 1978, 11). That is, a true study of sex and sexuality reveals who is speaking, the position from which they speak, and the place from which this discussion begins. For it is easy for one to acknowledge the omnipresence of the discussion, but it becomes difficult to ascertain the very nature of the power that determines the distribution of these discussions. Thus, an examination of sex and its position in society becomes synonymous with an examination of power and its operating systems.

On some level, sex and sexuality throughout the 20th Century have always been regulated by the state¹. With the advent of marriage licences, legal divorces, laws prohibiting certain sexual acts between consenting adults, the policing of laws concerning the sex and sexuality of children and young adults, and the regulation of birth control methods and practices, the state has had a long history of intervening in the bedroom and sex lives of its citizens. For its part, the educational system is maintained and regulated by all levels of government and, as such, it has always been in the business of social control².

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That is not to say that the state is the single source of power. Rather, governments can be seen as one of the many operating systems that function according to a much larger organization of power.

² It is important to note that this type of social control is productive as well as coercive.

By working to teach students both academically and socially, the educational system, at its most basic level, is built to discipline students in the world of social and cultural law. Through their interaction with their peers, their teachers, and other adults, children are conditioned to adopt, develop, and practice a wide range of personal behaviors like dating, marriage, and child rearing. The classroom is used to educate both formally and socially, and thus becomes a perfect forum for state sponsored social conditioning. In this regard, pedagogical practices become extremely important, since they multifariously influence the ways in which the minds and bodies of students are governed, disciplined, and defined both in and out of the classroom.

Within this system of social, political, economic, and legal controls, sexual education films become one of the modes by which the discursive politics of sexuality are articulated and deployed. As an accepted medium for education, films produced for the purpose of formal and social sex education work to reproduce and perpetuate the acceptable definitions and discussions relating to sex and sexuality. In seeking to regulate ideas of sexual normality/normalcy, gender identity, and sexual decency, films produced with the intent to educate almost always work to respond to contemporary social ills. By responding in a language of control, sex education films most often strive to represent a single sexual identity that rarely deviates from the socially accepted standard. Thus, these films work to produce and reproduce a specific and purposeful discourse on sex and sexuality that seeks to define, regulate, normalize, and maintain specific relations between the sexes, the genders, adults and children, different classes and races, and so on.

A study of sex education films not only reveals the managing discourses that are

at work, it exposes a systemic project of social control that is imposed on the bodies of youths and socialized adults. When I came to this project, I was both interested in the subject matter and the form in which it was presented. After viewing only a few of these films, I realized that this was a challenge that I was not prepared for, as the films revealed more than I originally imagined. A purposeful examination of the films in question revealed that within the larger genre of sex education, there existed a number of sub-genres in which the films could be arranged and defined according to their form, their subject material, and their subjects. This is a significant finding, as one would assume the relative sameness of the films and their intended message. One must also consider the ephemeral quality of the films, as the films are not only topical, they often reference specific and significant changes in public and private thought. As such, the films examined in this thesis are drawn from a larger corpus of sex education films.

In reference to the corpus of films examined in this project, films have been selected for their significant contribution to the genre, but also, they have been selected according to their availability. In finding films for this project, I was forced to confront the reality that many of the films produced during the defined period of examination have been lost or discarded and remain inaccessible to those interested in locating them³. Thus, in some regard, this study, or any study that purports to examine the sex education genre, is limited by access to the material.

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Although the films included in this thesis were selected with purpose, finding the films often occurred by chance as several of the films were not labeled, were found in unmarked boxes, and were stored in Carleton University vaults that are often inaccessible.

The films that are addressed in the following thesis can be specifically located in the period directly following the formal decriminalization of both the birth control pill and medically approved abortions in Canada. Bill S-15 (regarding contraceptive practices) and C-150, also known as the Omnibus Bill (which contained amendments to the Criminal Code which included the decriminalization of abortion), decriminalized birth control and abortion after a series of public legal and governmental debates and received royal assent on June 27, 1969 (Appleby 1999, 245). With the sweeping influence of the Sexual Revolution, the growing strength of the youth population, and the presence of the Pill in Canada as early as 1961, the formalization of these bills worked to reveal a long standing pressure placed on the government to accept the changes present in society regarding the sexual practices and identities of Canadians⁴. While the sex education films produced in the 1969 to 1981 period are in line with the language and discourse of the films produced in the post-war era, their content also reflects the changing discourses that were a result of the changes to the legal system, which in turn occurred in response to the changing views and practices of Canadians.

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While this is of course also an issue in Quebec, the nature of sex education and sexual practices take a different route in French speaking Canada. Quebec's slow sexual reform unfolds in a different manner according to a much more rigid set of social and cultural laws and sanctions. This develops in relation to the Quiet Revolution. Because of Quebec's strong connection to the Roman Catholic Church, Quebec's cultural and social practices regarding the sex and sexuality of its population involved a more complex unraveling of cultural and religious practices, beliefs, and standards. While I acknowledge the importance and influence of this movement, a study of this period that includes the changes in language and the discursive practices of French Canadians located within the province of Quebec would encompass a larger project that is beyond the scope of this thesis. It is for this reason that I must limit my study to the films produced for and screened in English Canada.

While the acting discourses present in Canadian sex education programs function well into the 1980's, and even persist today, the introduction to, fear of, and the concerns surrounding the HIV/AIDS virus worked to change the discourse, approach, and aesthetics of the sexual education film. Much like the films produced in the 1970's, the films of the HIV/AIDS movement work to expose the dangers of unprotected sex, but it is here that their purpose also deviates from earlier films. While the films of the 1970's concentrate on the proper and effective use of contraceptives as a means of pregnancy prevention, the films of the 1980's and 1990's concentrate their efforts on educating viewers about the practices of safe sex and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (Levine 2003, 207). Although each group of films places youth at the centre of their narratives, the periods differ in their central focus. Thus, a time line for the films examined in the thesis shall begin with the royal assent of bills S-15 and C-150 in 1969 and end with the discovery, naming, and developing concern for the HIV/AIDS virus occurring between the years 1981 to 1982⁵.

An examination of the discourse surrounding sex, sexuality, and sex education reveals that there is no explicitly Canadian form of popular discourse that is produced exclusively by and for Canadians (Adams 1999, 88). Canadians working in the field of sex education, experts and layperson alike, have always borrowed heavily from their American neighbors (Adams 1999, 88). This is not surprising when we examine the close

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Although one could easily extend this period to the mid to late 1980's when HIV/AIDS really became an absolute concern in both Europe and North America, the sex education films of the 1980's seem to take a turn toward a new type of education program prior to the mass media awareness of the virus (Levine 2003, 199).

proximity of the assent of both U.S. and Canadian judicial rulings and legislation regarding the sex and sexuality of their citizens. We see this with the 1973 judicial ruling *Roe vs. Wade* which legalized abortion throughout the United States. And although the laws regarding the decriminalization of information regarding birth control and the use of contraceptives changed from State to State, birth control advocates across America had worked to challenge existing laws that prevented the use of methods like the pill. This occurred throughout the 1960's and 1970's as each state was shaped by differing moralistic attitudes regarding the use of such contraceptive methods (Fessler, 2006, 43).

Here it would be naive to conclude that U.S. policies and debates concerning sex and sex education have not influenced the lives and educational programs of those living in Canada. This of course poses some difficulty for those interested in Canadian discourses as it is often impossible to omit discussions of American popular discourse or American cultural material due to its presence in Canada, Canadian discourse, and Canadian classrooms. With the presence of American-made films in Canadian classrooms, we must conclude that those films have become part of the Canadian cultural and sexual landscape. Consider the defensive argument put forth by Louise Mary Adams in her book, *The Trouble with Normal*, in which she states, “but one can still make the argument that Canadians ‘read’ American popular culture in a Canadian way and that the issue of prominence in both countries – juvenile delinquency, obscenity – were negotiated differently in each national context” (Adams 1999, 17). Thus, American films and sources will be used in this thesis because they have influenced and informed Canadian discourses about sex, sexuality, youth, and adolescence.

Films produced in the period between the legalization of the birth control pill in 1969 and the discovery of HIV/Aids in 1982 call on a new generation of youth speakers. Here, youths are given a voice to speak and participate in the meanings that define them. This, of course, develops in relation to the growing strength of youth culture in the larger social, political, and economic arenas. In the sex education genre, this begins with the film *Phoebe: The Story of a Premarital Pregnancy* (Kaczender, 1964), as the film works to confront the challenges and realities of teenage life and teenage pregnancy. In following a teenage girl as she struggles to confront the possibility that she may be pregnant, the film not only lends a voice to a previously muted population of teenage subjects, it calls attention to an issue faced by many teenage girls across the nation.

Phoebe stands as a pivotal film for both its portrayal of youth and its attention to teenage pregnancy. In the film, director George Kaczender draws from the work of contemporary filmmakers and artfully balances the subject matter with a skillful use of the cinematic medium. By placing a youthful subject at the very centre of the film, Kaczender calls on the voice of the growing population of youth speakers. This, no doubt, was key to the film's success, as the film was hugely successful and was the second most widely distributed National Film Board film to be sold in both Canada and abroad (Milliken 2003, 256). The film, valued for its didactic function and its cinematic renderings, also went on to win several awards including: The Donald Mulholland Award for Best Original Screenplay; the Grand Prix for Short Subjects at the Montreal International Film Festival; the Blue Ribbon Award at the American Film Festival in New York (Kaczender 2007). The film would also go on to get nominated by the members of

the Educational Film Library Association of America as "one of the TEN BEST FILMS offered over ten years by the Association" (Kaczender 2007). With its resounding success both as an educational film and as a dramatic short, *Phoebe* presented an alternative to the existing conventions of the sex education genre because it employed a format that placed youth at the very centre of its narrative. Consequently, this thesis will begin with an examination of this film. Although the film predates the specified period of analysis, its presence in this thesis stands to enrich the examination of the genre as the film opens a discussion and creates a format that ultimately revitalizes the genre and allows a different message to be pursued in the films that are to follow.

The films examined in this thesis are drawn from a number of sources and are produced by a number of sponsors. Therefore, the films differ in their responses to changes made in the larger social landscape. The films can be divided into three distinct types and each can be positioned in relation to the film *Phoebe*. *Phoebe* stands as a potent marker of the changing focus of the genre. While Chapter One works to analyze the issues and cinematic meanings put forth in *Phoebe*, Chapter Two examines a group of films that remove the youth subject from the narrative and instead centre their focus on the scientific and clinical understanding of the human form. This works to create a specific set of meanings that differ from the meanings put forth by *Phoebe*, because they centre on a biological understanding of the gendered body. The films *About VD* (Ishu Patel, 1974), *About Conception and Contraception* (Ishu Patel, 1974), *About Puberty and Reproduction* (Ishu Patel, 1974) and *Methods of Family Planning* (Moreland-Latchford, 1974), are produced by two sponsors. Like *Phoebe*, the films in the *About Series* are

produced by the National Film Board of Canada and are animated by the award winning animator Ishu Patel. While the films share a similar producing organization, the films that make up this silent series stand in complete contrast to *Phoebe*, because they are entirely animated and are constructed to illustrate a specific understanding of the body that is supported by dominant culture and established systems of knowledge like medicine and biology. *Methods of Family Planning* shares a similar construction, inasmuch as the film relies on animated sequences to illustrate the meanings put forth by the film's narrator. The film *Methods of Family Planning*, produced in participation with the Catholic Communication Centre, examines contraceptive methods to be used in *family planning*. By locating the lessons within the parameters of the legitimate couple and the family structure, the film works to promote a specific set of sexual meanings that positions sex as a function, right, and purpose of the marital union.

Like *Phoebe*, the films included in Chapter Three examine the social component of teenage sexuality. Again, drawing from *Phoebe*, the films rely on the youth voice as youth subjects make up the majority of the films' speakers. Here the films are drawn from a number of sources and the speakers included in the films work to create multi-vocal texts. In working to cover a range of political, social, and cultural identities, *It Couldn't Happen to ME* (Planned Parenthood, 1976) gives voice to a number of teenage speakers who speak on topics that range from pre-marital sex, to abortion and adoption. A Canadian production, *It Couldn't Happen to ME* is produced by Planned Parenthood and is sponsored by the Family Planning Division of National Health and Welfare. The film addresses issues of teenage sexuality and teenage pregnancy and works to empower

teenage women to question their own sexual habits and to consider the risks that they may be taking. *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* (Document Associates, 1976) presents a similar narrative as it questions a wide range of teenage speakers about sex and sexuality. Here, subjects are arranged according to their specific social and political identities as the speakers are divided by locale. By allowing a range of speakers to speak from a range of positions, including the suburbs, an urban area, and a rural community, the film exposes the range of political and social differences that shape the sexual status of the teenage speakers.

Are You Ready for Sex? (Mayer-Espar Productions, 1976) draws its source material from the same youth subjects as *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* However, the film is structured around fictional sequences to which the teenage subjects respond. Doctor Harvey Caplin, a family therapist, leads the discussion and prompts students to respond to brief narrative segments. Although the film gives a voice to a number of speakers, opinion differs little between the speakers as their responses expose a similar approach to the material. Like *Are You Ready for Sex?*, *Loving Parents* (Texture Films, 1978) is a film that presents a similar format. But in contrast to *Are You Ready for Sex?*, *Loving Parents* asks parents to comment on a series of dramatic interludes that are designed to lead the adults to question their own inability to discuss sex and sexuality in the home.

The final chapter examines two films, *Am I Normal?* (Debra Franco and David S. Shepard, 1979) and *Dear Diary* (Debra Franco and David S. Shepard, 1981). These films combine the efforts of *Phoebe*, the *About Series*, *Methods of Family Planning*, and the

films examined in Chapter Three. In combining the biological, social, and fictional approach, the films present an entertaining series that builds on the successes and failures of the films examined in other chapters. Like the films in Chapter Two, the biological lessons in these films are clearly shaped by specific cultural understandings of the human body and gender relations. Social lessons pertaining to puberty, sexuality, and development are also worked into the narrative and are presented in a series of comedic interludes in which the characters are provided with the answers that they seek.

Any examination of the sex education genre is limited by access to material and is also limited by the information regarding the circumstances of a film's production and distribution, because such information has been lost, misplaced, or deemed unimportant. This speaks to the ephemeral nature of the films. They have been denied a significant status and, as such, the films and their accompanying details have not been preserved with any consistency. Despite these realities, we can still divine several important production details from the films' credit sequences as they often reveal significant information about a film's production.

This is especially true of Canadian film productions. Those who participated in filmmaking endeavors seem to be connected by a small network with those working in the field. Within the National Department of Health and Welfare, the Family Planning Division was established in 1970 and was designed in part to dole out funds to those interested in producing sex education films and documents. With its first booklet issued in September 1971, the division was in full operation in the fiscal year 1972 to 1973 (Appleby 1999, 218). Fiscal reports from the years of operation record the Family

Planning Division's activities under three headings: grants; education and information; and training and consultation. Within this framework, the Family Planning Division sought to allocate resources to provincial and non-governmental family planning organizations and grants were provided to organizations who were willing to produce material that was developed in conjunction with Departmental guidelines. This is outlined in the Department's first official publication. Here they define family planning as:

the knowledge and practices that enable couples to attain the following objectives: to avoid unwanted pregnancies; to bring about wanted births; to regulate the interval between births; to control the time at which births occur in relation to the ages of the parents; to decide the number of children they wish to have (qtd. in Appleby 1999, 219).

The network of those in the field is apparent when we examine the link between *Methods of Family Planning* and *It Couldn't Happen to ME*. Both are connected to a web of production that was produced or funded by the Department of Health and Welfare. Marion Powell participates in both of these films and stands as the most aggressive link between the films. She makes an appearance in *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and acts as a consultant in *Methods of Family Planning*. This is a significant finding when we consider Powell's many roles and titles (seen in the films' credits) and her participation in both the Family Planning Federation of Canada and Planned Parenthood of Toronto. Both received significant funding from the Family Planning Division. The connections between the project of both films is further developed because both films are shaped by a very Christian-centered approach to sex education. While this is immediately apparent in *Methods of Family Planning*, because the film is sponsored by the Catholic

Communication Centre, few often consider the link between Planned Parenthood, the producer of *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, and its Christian roots. The Toronto chapter of Planned Parenthood had an active Clergy Advisory Committee that would often publish pamphlets in participation with Planned Parenthood and that trumpeted the values of the Christian Church (Appleby 1999, 66).⁶

Likewise, significant connections can be made between the film *Phoebe* and the films that are included in the *About Series*, as both are produced by the National Film Board of Canada. Although connections between the material are scanty, the connection between Kaczendar and Patel reflects the mandate to educate youths about sex, sexuality, and their gender roles. And although there is little to no information that suggests an exchange between Canadian and American sex education filmmakers, connections between films can be drawn on the basis of their similar approach to the material and the exchange of dialogue that takes place within the films.

In the remainder of this thesis, I will examine the sexual, social, and cultural discourses that have shaped our own basic understanding of sex and sexuality and its relationship to youths. Using the Foucauldian notion of discourse, I intend to examine the way in which sex education films allow for a specific understanding of sex, sexuality, social organization, and the youth voice⁷. The task of this analysis is to determine which

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Appleby cites one pamphlet in particular that was entitled “What Some of the Christian Churches Are Saying About Family Planning” (Appleby 1999, 66).

7

Foucault defines discourse as both an instrument and an effect of power (Foucault 1978, 101). He states that discourse can also be a “hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy” (Foucault 1978, 101). Discourse

discourses are operating and in what configurations. This is especially important when we consider the presence of youth in the films. Youth subjects are allotted a new role in which they are given the ability to participate in the creation of the meanings that define them. Although the youths in the films do not participate in the creation of new meanings—meanings that go outside the sexual and gender norms of dominant culture—their presence in the films often challenges meanings put forth by dominant culture. This is especially true of films that feature discussions with pregnant females and discussions relating to abortion, adoption, masturbation, and sexual pleasure. Thus, by placing youth at the centre of the films, the films acknowledge the emerging strength of youth and work to validate an entire generation of youth speakers.

both transmits and produces power and, as such, discourse both reinforces power while also undermining and exposing it.

Chapter One

Phoebe: The Story of a Premarital Pregnancy: The Youth Voice, Youth Cinema, and the Language of Cinema

As one of the most widely distributed National Film Board of Canada films to be distributed abroad, *Phoebe: The Story of a Premarital Pregnancy* (Kaczender, 1964) is a film that artfully balances the youthful expression of an average teenager and the dangers of teenage sexual transgression (Miliken 2003, 309). The film creates a fictional world in which Phoebe (Sandra Scott), the film's protagonist, is forced to confront the possibility that she may be pregnant. Here, teenage subjectivity is at the very centre of the film.

Phoebe examines the life of a teenager from the perspective of a teenager and the film borrows from other art cinema movements like that of the French New Wave, the Second Italian film Renaissance, and the Nordic cinema movement. Like the films produced by these movements, *Phoebe* offers a unique insight into the newly emerging social, economic, and political category of youth. While the film takes a fictional approach to the realities of teenage life, a hidden curriculum is at the core of the seemingly ambiguous narrative.

As a middle-class suburban teenager Phoebe is given the freedom to live her life with only minimal parental interference. The film chronicles the day in the life of Phoebe as she and her boyfriend Paul (John Kastner) engage in a day of fun at the beach.

Although the day begins in the late morning, Phoebe's fear that she might be pregnant is one of the first things with which she is confronted. This anxiety continues all day and is

visualized through the flashbacks and flash forwards that propel the narrative. These flash forwards and flashbacks feature the reaction and response of characters close to Phoebe and can be divided according to the positive or negative the responses. These take place throughout the day and occur at every location that Phoebe visits, including her bedroom, the beach house, the beach, and the car ride home.

While the film carries the weight of a potentially explosive narrative, the focus of the film is not on what happens to Phoebe. Rather, the film centers its narrative on Phoebe's own personal response to her impending pregnancy. When introduced through a series of filmic inserts, Phoebe's hopes and fears are given a visual presence in the film. Here, positive outcomes are paired with the negative reactions of her boyfriend, counselor, and parents. This external projection of Phoebe's internal thoughts not only forces the audience to confront the emotional and social reality of Phoebe's situation, it works to position Phoebe as a youthful subject capable of self-recognition and self-doubt. Thus, at the very centre of this analysis is the construction of youth as a social subject. In contrast to other sex education films of the same period, *Phoebe* allows viewers to access the realities of teenage living and the internal subjectivities of a teenage mind. The construction of *Phoebe* not only gives us access to the teenage mind, it constructs Phoebe as an active subject. This, of course, creates a shift; instead of talking to teenagers, the film talks about teenagers. Here, the teenager is not only the subject of the talk, the teenager is given a subjectivity that is generally absent in both mainstream commercial cinema and the sex education film genre.

Phoebe is a film that is progressive in both content and form and it offers an

alternative to the typical sex education film. It is easy to get caught up in Phoebe's story and plight as the film is constructed less like an educational film and more like a commercial film. Although the didactic point is present throughout the film, viewers are encouraged to engage with the character. The film is driven by the central image of youth and is aided by the constant use of close-ups and the filmic inserts that visualize Phoebe's internal dialogue. This not only drives the film, it promotes a newly developed recognition of adolescent subjectivity.

Although the film gives an active voice to a previously invalidated population, the narrative structure of the film relies on the use of more traditional forms. Here, the melodramatic form becomes one of the driving factors of the film. The construction of Phoebe as the fallen melodramatic figure works to position Phoebe at a developmental crossroad. The constant pairing of the potential home space and a home space in ruins attends to Phoebe's potential and to her social downfall. This juxtaposition of potential and ruin is not only applied to Phoebe, but can be further extended to the youth population as a whole. The film, produced in the midst of a larger youth movement, attends to the tension between the emerging freedom of youths and the social consequences of the growing population.

In attending to issues of youth, the film inadvertently addresses the issues of the sexual liberation movement. In addressing issues of teenage pregnancy, abortion, and appropriate sexual behaviour, the film attends to controversial issues relating to sexual activity and sexual agency. Although the film offers an introduction to these subjects and gives a voice to a previously muted population, the narrative structure of the film is ultimately driven by a pedagogy of fear. This is a common practice employed by most sex

education films. Because *Phoebe* is driven by the pedagogy of fear, it presents a narrative that encourages the viewer to empathize with the lead character. While other films serve a purely instructional or didactic function, *Phoebe*'s didactic purpose seems almost buried beneath the weight of Phoebe's emotions, struggles, and story. By exposing the realities of Phoebe's situation, the film addresses an entire component of sexuality omitted from traditional sexual education documentaries. That is, *Phoebe* not only gives an unprecedented voice to an entire generation of young adults, it chronicles the life of a troubled subject. Thus, given access to the internal thoughts of such a character, *Phoebe* stands as an example of the emerging youth cinema of youth culture that at once speaks both of youth and to the youth population. The film, taken on its own, stands as a purposeful example of youth cinema that draws on the actions and images of its cinematic predecessors and contemporaries. And when we examine the film's didactic purpose, and its use in classrooms across North America, the film not only stands as an example of a newly emerging cinema, it stands as a pivotal film in the canon of sex education documentaries.

This chapter will examine *Phoebe: The Story of a Premarital Pregnancy* in terms of its revolutionary message, purpose, and pedagogical practice. Analysis of the film will begin by placing the film within the context of this newly emerging youth cinema. By examining the youth voice present in this cinema, we can place the film within a network of meanings perpetuated by mainstream and peripheral culture. This analysis will not only allow the film to be positioned within larger cinematic movements, it will allow for an examination of the trajectory of the sex education film as a genre. Although this type of

genre analysis will be examined in the chapters that follow, it is important to establish this trajectory as *Phoebe* opens a dialogue that is generally absent from the sex education genre.

Phoebe, released in 1964, builds on the themes explored by other prolific film makers working at the same time. Imbued with a moral narrative, the film works to uncover the possible outcomes of Phoebe's sexual transgression. Although the narrative itself does not cast a moral judgement on the film's protagonist, the flash forward inserts reveal a series of scenarios that Phoebe herself will be forced to confront. By relying on a teenager character as a way to explore society's fears and discontents with the growing youth population, *Phoebe* explores the position of youth in larger society. While the central placing of a youth protagonist is not a concept new to all narrative forms, in 1964 this was a relatively new concept in the cinematic medium. Among those concerned with the emerging presence of this population, film makers of the French New Wave began to incorporate active adolescent protagonists into their narratives. This is not surprising when we consider the movement itself. Made up of the "first *film*-educated generation of film makers in history," New Wave film makers worked to expose the "easy narrative assumptions of [film's] first fifty years" (Cook 1996, 567). New Wave filmmakers were aware of the established conventions of the cinematic form and with this knowledge they worked towards the exploration of the full range of the filmic language. Often credited with reviving the stagnant British and American cinemas, the New Wave encouraged an entire generation of young filmmakers to revolt against the established industrial system (Cook 1996, 567). In working against this established system, the New Wave film makers

not only revolutionized the cinematic medium, they spoke to and of an entire generation of young people and future film makers alike.

New Wave filmmakers relied on a self-reflexive style complete with allusions to other films, references to cultural happenings, and strong cinematic framing and editing. George Kaczender, influenced by film makers like Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Ingmar Bergman, and Federico Fellini, draws from the films of his contemporaries. In calling on the youthful exuberance of his generation, Kaczender opens the film with a close-up of Phoebe as she sleeps. The camera moves to explore the contents of Phoebe's room. The tight framing of this long take reveals much about the young girl. Contained within the tight and claustrophobic home space, the strong lines of Phoebe's room expose the young girl's own position within her family and within the larger social culture. This is a visual motif carried throughout the film. While it works to expose Phoebe's confinement as a youthful subject, it also works to expose the contradictions present in her own narrative position. Phoebe is trapped by the social and cultural pressures assigned to the youth population and is thus trapped by definitions ascribed to her because of her age and by her role within the family.

As the camera moves across Phoebe's room, we are given the sense that she too is in the process of defining her own position in society. A hand drawn portrait, playful pictures of her boyfriend Paul, and a single stuffed animal reveal her transition from childhood to adulthood. Perhaps most significant among these articles is the copy of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* that is laid out on her night stand. The novel is captured after the picture of her boyfriend Paul and before the assumed self-portrait. As a

canonical text, the presence of the novel aids in our understanding of Phoebe as a character.

As a book made famous for its portrayal of an angry and defiant teenage boy, *The Catcher in the Rye* stands as both a pivotal novel and as a cultural referent for the problems of youth culture, the expression of adolescent independence, and the discussion of teenage sexuality. The book, published in 1951, not only provoked great controversy, it became a canonical novel and cult favorite among those who have found merit in Holden Caulfield's story. In working to position Phoebe within this youth movement, Kaczender not only places the book among Phoebe's possessions, he goes so far as to name the leading character after one of the characters in the novel. In sharing the same name as Holden's little sister, the name and role played by the young girl in the novel becomes an immediate shorthand for childhood innocence and emotional maturity. While Holden positions his sister as a pure and noble subject in a world full of "phoney" adults, the novel forces the reader to consider other alternatives as it becomes clear that Holden's analysis of childhood is both over-simplified and romanticized. Although this may seem somewhat incongruent with the filmic Phoebe, it does call attention to the conflicting presentation of teenage subjects in other media forms. This is especially true of shows like *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*, which portray the troubles of adolescence as nothing more than a few broken windows and a series of minor infractions. Here, construction of the adolescent as it is portrayed on television works against other forms of media which work to portray youth as a serious problem. Thus, *Phoebe* works to expose the complicated portrayal of youth in the media. Phoebe is framed not as a very troubled

teen, but rather as a teenager who is in trouble and she becomes a character who is enriched by the layers of meaning that envelop her portrayal. In referencing *The Catcher in the Rye*, viewers are encouraged to explore the tensions between the “phoniness” of the adult world and the romanticized ideals placed on the life of children.

Phoebe, awoken to take a phone call from her boyfriend Paul, is scolded by her mother, who urges Phoebe to get out of bed. In addressing her daughter her tone is entirely accusatory and challenging as she states, “I don’t know what to do with you anymore. You stay out all night and then there is no getting you up in the morning.” Still in bed, Phoebe responds by stretching and telling her mother to stop hollering. This short sequence reveals the deep levels of dysfunction present in their relationship and their inability to communicate with each other,. Aware that her daughter has stayed out all night, Phoebe’s mother first tells Phoebe that her father would not approve of her behavior and then asks, “what is wrong with you?” Although the line is phrased like a question, the address and tone positions the line more like an accusatory statement. Instead of speaking to her daughter, Phoebe’s mother reacts to her daughter and any true connection between the two is thus lost in their on-going struggle. This is later repeated in the sequence that occurs after Phoebe has returned home from the beach. Phoebe is seen pacing across the family living room and her mother only briefly looks up from her work to ask Phoebe if anything is wrong. In having established that the relationship between Phoebe and her mother is strained, the sequence reinforces the disconnect between mother and daughter. Despite the fact that Phoebe is making a clear attempt to communicate with her mother, her mother’s questioning confirms Phoebe’s own belief

that she cannot share her secret with her.

This disconnect is not only present in their inability to speak with one another, it is present throughout the film and is manifest in the claustrophobic interiors of the family home. Shot in black and white, the white walls of the family home are a constant reminder of the sterile encounters that take place between the family and its members. The mirrored reflection of the film's characters is framed by tight close-ups, door frames, windows, and is often revealing of a character's emotional and physical entrapment in the suburban home. This can be read in almost every shot that takes place within the home space. While this entrapment begins in the family home, these metaphors of entrapment are extended well beyond the home's interiors as the tight framing and the visual weight of the city sequences also function to signal the deep levels of confinement placed on the body of the film's leading character.

The scenes that feature the city scape are shot as a flash forward and are used to reveal Phoebe's hopes and fears about her uncertain future. The scenes are worked into the narrative and they reveal that for Phoebe, there is no escape. Even the sequences that feature positive outcomes are foreboding and encasing. Although the city may be seen as a potential outlet for escaping the realities of her home life, the first scene in the city works to suggest that it is only a space for Paul to escape. Paul, after having being told by Phoebe that she is pregnant in the first flashback, is seen running away from Phoebe and

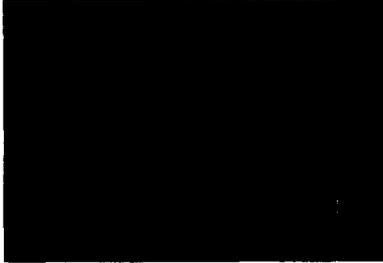


Figure 1 Paul running from Phoebe.

from his responsibility. This is shot in what looks to be an exterior of an office building and we watch as Paul runs through a set of heavy columns. While Phoebe is absent from this shot, the position of the camera seems to take on her vantage point as she watches him run away from her.

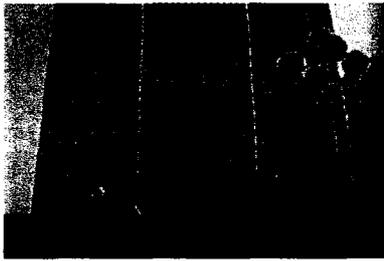


Figure 2 Paul and Phoebe make plans to get married.

This sequence is later paired with a possible positive response from Paul as he suggests that they get married.

Here, both Phoebe and Paul stand in front of a large

commercial building and are seen running through the shot as they speak; when they move down a large set of stairs,



Figure 3 Phoebe runs away.

Paul tells Phoebe that he will forget about university and his plans for the future and instead commit to their future together. And although his response is positive, mise-en-scene reveals the true nature of the future together as the

huge building in the background acts as a visual reminder of their choice to protect their future or have a baby. Their position in the bottom of the frame works to remind the viewer that their choice will not be an easy one and that several opportunities will be lost or denied if they choose to transgress the social norms established by the dominant culture. This theme is further cited in another flash forward as Phoebe imagines herself running to the city and away from her home. As we follow Phoebe running beneath a suspended roadway, the horizontal columns that make up the space come to look more like oversized prison bars than support columns. With few real options but to deal with

the consequences of Phoebe's potential truth, running away seems less like an option and more like a dream as even in Phoebe's subconscious there is no escaping the reality of her situation.

Much like the theme of entrapment, the recurring theme of reality and truth is manifest in both the cinematic arrangement of the film and in the film's over-arching narrative structure. This theme is introduced early, as the illustrated portrait of Phoebe, seen in the opening shot of the film, suggests that the character can be seen in multiple contexts. This image also refers to the layers of meanings that shape and define Phoebe's existence. Key to this concept is the recurring image of Phoebe's mirrored reflection. Here, the reflection works to both position Phoebe outside of herself and to reflect the multiple visions of the young girl and her potential truth. We are introduced to this image early in the film and we first see it when Phoebe's mirrored reflection is revealed during her telephone conversation with Paul. Her image is framed by the dark outline of the mirror before which she is positioned. Here, we do not see Phoebe's reaction to her own image. Seconds later, Phoebe confronts her mirrored image after throwing up in her bathroom. While still looking at herself in the mirror, Phoebe's thoughts are projected on screen as her internal feelings are expressed in the film's first flash forward. She is seen looking at her pregnant body in a full length mirror. Phoebe's illusion is soon broken by her mother's calls. This, of course, leads us to a series of flashbacks that fill in the parts of the missing narrative.

While the filmic inserts included in this section of the film give us insight into Phoebe's past, they also aid in the development of Phoebe as a character. At the

abandoned beach house, the flashbacks reveal that Phoebe and Paul's relationship develops from a playful companionship to a sexual relationship. While there is no indication that sexual relations take place prior to this single encounter, the narrative structure of the film works to suggest that the sexual expression of the teens develops out of their youthful mentality and their playful banter. The position of the characters in such a context works not only to suggest that their sexual encounter was unplanned, it works to suggest that the expression of their teenage sexuality grows out of their excitement and true interest in each other. Phoebe's flashback works to illustrate the nature of their encounter and the youthful innocence that fuels their relationship. The flashback reveals that the encounter is relatively innocent. This again recalls Holden Caulfield's romanticized vision of childhood and the image of his sister Phoebe innocently playing in a field of rye. After having been chased down by Paul, Phoebe and Paul are shown kissing in the over-grown lawn that surrounds the abandoned house. The embrace is both tender and gentle and works to position the subjects as innocent and joyful youths rather than disobedient deviants. Although the flashback is revealed to the audience through Phoebe's own memory of the events, one can assume that her memory of the event differs little from her actual experience as the incident is all-together positive.

Whereas the flashbacks reveal the past, the flash forwards reveal a series of scenarios which Phoebe anticipates might transpire. Again we can recall themes of reality and truth as the inserts are projections of Phoebe's own hopes and fears. The true outcome of Phoebe's story is never fully realized. In fact, throughout the film the reality of Phoebe's pregnancy is never wholly confirmed, as we only assume that Phoebe is

pregnant because of her projected inner dialogue. Positive and negative outcomes are paired and are visualized through a series of flash forwards; each flash forward reveals either Phoebe's hope for the future or the more reality-based response. Given the time in which the film was made, and the commercial media's response to the problem of youth and teenage pregnancy, it is more likely that Phoebe's family, counselor, and boyfriend would respond in line with the events that take place in the negative flash forwards.

Again, this harkens back to the theme of truth verses reality as the three positive responses are highly romanticized versions of Phoebe's potential encounters. In her book, *The Girls Who Went Away*, Ann Fessler reveals that girls were not only sent away from their homes to live out their pregnancy in maternity homes, they were often expelled from school, and could potentially face expulsion or harsh ostracism from their community (Fessler 2006, 75). Girls, held to a different standard, would bear the burden of social condemnation and scorn. Females were responsible for both his and her behaviour if a pregnancy should occur and, as the responsible party, females would not only be socially scorned, they would serve as a public example of youthful sexuality gone wrong. As seen in the flash forwards, the negative responses to Phoebe's revelation illustrate society's deep commitment to this social reality. Phoebe's father stands as a typical example of a likely response and scenario. He makes his first appearance in the film in a sequence that takes place after Phoebe has imagined revealing the truth to her parents. He is framed by the heavy wood trim of the door and paces as he discusses the situation with his wife. This is seen from Phoebe's point of view and the camera movement and styling in this segment work to connect the viewer to Phoebe's own feelings of shame and fear. In the

following sequence Phoebe's father states, "Everyone on the block will know. We are finished around here. Our name is mud." By vocalizing his concern while tying his tie in front of a mirror, the scene reveals the middle-class position of the family within the community. Kaczender's decision to show Phoebe's father as he prepares to exit the homespace in somewhat formal attire not only works to reveal the social position of the family, the mirrored reflection works to expose the family's commitment to the projection of a wholesome and normal suburban image.

The flash forwards that feature the school nurse also work to expose the

community's commitment to the same wholesome,



Figure 5 Positive flash forward sequence.

normal, and obedient family image. Phoebe is forced to face her possible expulsion from the school, when the nurse addresses Phoebe and states that she must leave at once for the school has the "other girls to think of."



Figure 4 Negative flash forward sequence.

While the first flash forward that features the nurse is a positive encounter, the second is negative. And although Phoebe imagines both scenarios, the reality of her situation is managed through and by the perspective that the camera assumes. The camera in the positive scenarios takes the vantage point of an unspecified onlooker and are captured by long shot, while the negative scenarios

are framed as a medium shot and are filmed from Phoebe's vantage point. This not only works to encourage the viewer to empathize with the film's protagonist, it works to

suggest that Phoebe knows that she will have to face the outcomes illustrated in the negative flash forwards. Perhaps positioned as the onlooker gazing upon her own image, the vantage point of the positive scenarios suggest a romanticized and hopeful outlook that would not likely transpire in line with Phoebe's own hopes.

A flash forward that takes place at a house party reveals one potential avenue for Phoebe. Again the camera is positioned as an onlooker and Phoebe is shown discussing the possibility of obtaining an abortion with a girl who has already gone through the procedure. The content of this conversation is not only progressive, it discusses a possibility that had yet to be decriminalized in Canada. Although the decriminalization of abortion had been an issue addressed in Canadian parliament as early as 1961, the contents of the bill had yet to be ratified and it was not until 1969 that abortion was declared to be a legally acceptable option (Appleby 1999, 245). While illegal abortion was an option available to girls in the 1960's, the mention of abortion in an education film was both a controversial and progressive account of the reality incurred by many girls in the 1950's and 1960's who had no other option. Thus, in taking the vantage point of an onlooker, the film both informs potential viewers of their options and works to suggest that it is a possible avenue to minimize the complications associated with an unwanted pregnancy.

While the flash forwards and flashbacks work to visualize Phoebe's feelings, her worry, fear, and thoughts can be read in other parts of the film. Phoebe is repeatedly placed in front of windows and is repeatedly seen looking out beyond the space of the interior in which she is contained. While symbolic of the possibility of escape, the image

of the window also serves to remind viewers that Phoebe is trapped by the realities of her world. In an image that recalls Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Phoebe's own story parallels the plight of Emma Bovary. By gazing out the window, Phoebe not only expresses her desire to escape her world, the image serves as a symbol of her entrapment. As in *Madame Bovary*, the moral structure of the film forces Phoebe to assume responsibility for her actions. Again, like Emma, Phoebe is unable to escape and instead is caught up in the trappings of her own romantic ideals of her future. While Emma craves the wealth and social status that is beyond her own, Phoebe's hope is more pragmatic as she wishes to see her situation develop along a romanticized vision that the viewer knows is not possible.

Kaczender and Flaubert both critically examine the middle-class values that inform and define the status of their protagonists. While Flaubert uses the character of Emma Bovary to convey his own hatred for the middle class, Kaczender uses *Phoebe* to explore the position of youth within the larger social economy. These discourses relating to youth often impart conflicting images of the teenage population. The seemingly contradictory status of youth is emblematic of the position of young people in postwar Canada when the youth population was a symbol of both hope and promise for the future (Adams 1999, 40). Seen as the hope for the future but the danger in the present, the youth population was given unprecedented social and economic freedoms that had been denied to earlier youth populations. Although emerging youth populations were given freedoms not offered to earlier generations, concerns relating to the health and success of the youths seems also to increase during this time. This relates to the years following the Second

World War when normality became the primary marker of success and difference from these standards marked one's failure to contribute to national stability (Adams 1999, 83). This was carried into the '50's, 60's, and 70's. Here, normality is paired with moral discourses; those who were not normal were faced with the possibility that they would be ostracized or even cast out of their community for their so called deviant behaviour. The family is placed at the very centre of this debate and becomes a primary marker of normality and social stability. In particular, the suburban nuclear family model becomes the dominant image of a normal, natural, and moral lifestyle.

Phoebe's family adds to the sense of entrapment that is carried throughout the film. The black and white melodramatic interiors not only confine Phoebe to the physical space of the home, they work to reveal a certain repetition and sterility present in the home space. For example, in the film the white walls are brightened by the heavy blacks and grays that are scattered around the home. This is enhanced by Kaczender's decision to film using black and white film stock. Despite the brightness of the walls, the home remains relatively empty of any personal touches. Thus, the white walls emphasize the physical and emotional sterility of the home space and the family's relations. While personal objects are present in Phoebe's room, the lack of personal authorship in the rest of the home works to reinforce the parental desire to be defined as normal.

This idea of normal is also present in the family's dialogue. Although it is clear that the family suffers from a general lack of communication, Phoebe's parents continually work to teach their daughter that "normal" is natural and that any deviation from what society deems normal is an offence against herself and her family. This can be

seen early in the film when Phoebe's mother reminds her daughter that staying out all night is not a decent act for a girl her age. In urging her daughter to adopt a sense of decency, Phoebe's mother reminds Phoebe of the decorum of behaviour that presumably regulates her own behavior. In a flash forward, Phoebe's father later confirms his wife's position by stating that Phoebe's pregnancy will not only ruin their good name, it will position them as outcasts.

Despite Phoebe's relative confinement in the realm of the home, Phoebe is given the freedom to leave the home space and she uses this opportunity to spend the day at the beach with her boyfriend Paul. Upon their arrival, the pair immediately ventures to the abandoned beach house which they discovered earlier. While in the house, Phoebe continues to look out the windows of the abandoned structure. The house comes to function as a metaphor for Phoebe's life and is symbolic of both potential and ruin. In having transgressed social norms, Phoebe's potential pregnancy can both make a family or break a family apart. At the same time, the house also stands to remind the viewer of Phoebe's own emotional state as Phoebe is unable to talk to anyone about her potential problem. The beach house stands alone and is abandoned and functions to remind viewers that Phoebe has not only been forced to live alone with her secret, but that she has also been forced to confront the possibility that she too will be abandoned should anyone discover the true nature of this secret.

While the beach and the beach house do offer Phoebe some freedom away from the confines of the home space, there really is no escaping her feelings of fear and loneliness. Paul offers little respite from the mis-communication and non-communication

of the home as he also lacks the skills to communicate effectively with Phoebe. Paul addresses Phoebe through dance, foolishness, and a series of well meaning, but completely useless, ramblings. This works to isolate Phoebe and also aids in the construction of Phoebe as a “fallen women.” Alone and unable to resolve successfully the problems relating to her pregnancy, her single social transgression positions Phoebe outside of her community and solidifies her position as a “fallen woman.”

Kaczender, aware of the cinematic achievements of his peers, not only relies on the visual and narrative short-hands of well developed genres like the melodrama, he directly references the work of an entire generation of film makers. More specifically, Kaczender make reference to the work of Fellini. This overt reference to Fellini and his work comes in the form of the three beach characters who are seen playfully dancing as Phoebe lies in the sand. The three beach characters are seen with a big hat, an oversized beach ball, and a sun umbrella and can in part be described as external projections of Phoebe’s internal emotions. We never see the faces of the “surrealist” characters. Instead, they are kept in shadow, framed by long shots, and distanced from Phoebe. Despite Phoebe’s relative distance from these characters, Paul interacts with them. After having had an argument with Phoebe, Paul moves toward the characters and engages in their child-like play. Like Paul, the characters inhabit adult bodies, but their childlike actions betray their adult status. Here, Kaczender effectively hints at the disconnect between the real life bodies of his subjects and their emotional maturity.

Phoebe is unable to find Paul after their disagreement and takes refuge in the calm waters of the lake. But even the cleansing properties of the water stop Phoebe from

her attempts to distance herself from the impending reality of her pregnancy. While swimming, Phoebe has several visions that are presented as flash forwards. One of these flash forwards builds on the child-like play of the beach characters. Although it is not clear if this sequence is in fact a flashback or a flash forward, it attends to Phoebe's desire to distance herself from the reality of her situation and her desire to engage in the activities performed by the beach characters. Held in shadow, and framed by the large columns of an industrial structure, Paul and Phoebe are seen dancing. With the city scape in the background, and the jarring piano music that is present throughout the film, Kaczender recalls the whimsical fantasy of teenage freedom and youthful play. Perhaps symbolic of Phoebe's desire to return to a so-called life of teenage leisure, this sequence aids in our understanding of Phoebe's regret for the loss of her own youthful freedom.

In the final sequence of the film, Phoebe finally tells Paul that she suspects that she is pregnant. After her attempt to reveal the truth to her mother has failed, Phoebe telephones Paul and confesses that she is in fact pregnant. Without waiting for a response, Phoebe hangs up the phone. The final shot of the film captures Phoebe in front of her bedroom window as she again looks outward upon the world. This is paired with the jarring music that plays throughout the film. Phoebe's emotions can be read on her face as she cries for both the loss of her youth and in fear of what is to come. In admitting the truth, Phoebe's illusions end and so does her story, as the vocalization of her secret makes her pregnancy both a reality and a fact.

Thus, *Phoebe: The Story of a Premarital Pregnancy* is a film that carefully explores the realities faced by youths. In chronicling a day in the life of a teenage girl who

thinks that she may be pregnant, director George Kaczender explores a realm of possibility previously omitted from the sex education genre. The film was both well received and widely distributed. Indebted to his film making contemporaries, Kaczender created a film that not only drew on issues relating to the emerging youth population and youth cinema, but drew on a history of both narrative and art cinema as a whole. While one could assume that the film was not in fact intended to be screened as an education film, there is no doubt that the film serves both a didactic and pedagogical purpose as it explores the real life consequences of teenage sexuality and teenage pregnancy. It is for these reasons that *Phoebe* can be described as both a pivotal and poignant film in the canon of youth cinema and sex education

Chapter Two

Biology, Medicine, and Clinical Language: Sex Education Films and the Absent Youth
Voice

While *Phoebe: The Story of a Premarital Pregnancy* (George Kaczender, 1964) is a film that carefully manages its didactic function through the fiction medium, *About Conception and Contraception* (Ishu Patel, 1974), *About Puberty and Reproduction* (Ishu Patel, 1974), *About VD* (Ishu Patel, 1974), and *Methods of Family Planning* (Moreland-Latchford, 1976) serve as purely instructional texts that seek to inform adolescents about their bodies and their body's potential. Because they rely on a scientific approach to the body, the narrative elements present in *Phoebe* are omitted in favor of a biological understanding of the human form. Although biology is the central underlying discourse that underscores this category of film, social lessons are present in both the films' narration and visuals as the films work to teach adolescents how their gendered physiology in part defines their sexual, social, and cultural roles.

While *Phoebe* gives a voice to teenage subjects, this category of film denies adolescents an active voice. Here, youth subjectivity is removed from the film and is instead replaced with a purely didactic form of expression. By relying on science and biology to explain "normal" and "natural" functions of the body, these films seek to construct adolescence as a category of development in which adolescents formalize the gendered social and sexual roles learned in childhood. Here, the body serves as a platform for analysis in which these social roles are both proven as "fact" and are naturalized as

true expressions of the gendered body. These films also seek to naturalize heterosexual behaviour and they are committed to the presentation of a very sanitized presentation of sex and sexuality. In adopting this hetero-normative ideal, the films again work to reinforce the established roles that are connected to this model.

In working to promote a “normal” and “natural” expression of sex and sexuality, other “deviant” behaviors are omitted from discussion. This works to construct these sexualities as both irregular and unnatural expressions of human sexuality. Here, heterosexual intercourse is not only constructed as the normal and natural expression of sexuality, it is presented as the *single* sex act. This again works to affirm the longstanding social and cultural roles that divide the genders, as it positions the sexes in relation to each other instead of highlighting the range of sexual differences that exist among the diverse population of sexual subjects. The films are filtered through an established body of knowledge and the science behind these presentations often allows for real truths about the body to be denied. We see this in the films as the “scientific” and clinical renderings of the human form effectively censor viewers from the realities of human sexuality and the human body.

The use of science, biology, and medicine to explain the functions of the body certainly serves as a suitable method of evaluation and practical learning. However, these scientific assertions are infused with cultural and social assumptions about the body and about social formations. Here, the didactic and pedagogical function of the films serve to authenticate a system of knowledge that arranges the sexes according to their gender functions and their socially defined roles. While in films like *Phoebe* viewers are

encouraged to respond and react to the film and its characters, films in this category induce the opposite response; here, viewers are encouraged to internalize the lessons, perform their defined roles, and practice the behaviors presented in the films⁸.

In working to naturalize a system of sexual and social behavior, the films included in this section actively participate in the preservation of established social and cultural norms. While the films may serve as an introduction to the physical body, the lessons presented in the films ultimately serve a larger social and cultural function. Here, images and discussion of the biological and social body are conflated. This results in the creation of specific meanings and symbols that manage the bodily form. This becomes an invisible operation that is managed through scientific fact, but ultimately serves a larger purpose. The films work to create a specific image of the body by negating the conceptual dualism that allows the subject to distinguish the biological body from the social body.

Thus, while the films may be used to provide instruction about the physical body, the films ultimately serve to formalize established social and cultural behaviours and definitions. Because they are made for viewers who are in the process of transitioning to adulthood, the films serve to reinforce the behaviors and cultural assumptions learnt in childhood. Although this is a project common to most sex education films, what defines this category of film is its complete reliance on science, medicine, and biology to prove that these behaviors and definitions are normal, natural, and factual. While other films speak to their viewers, this category speaks of their viewers. In speaking of its subjects,

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It is Judith Butler who connects gender with performance. In fact, she states that it is a “performative accomplishment” put on by the subject (Butler 1997, 402).

this category of film projects and imposes an established system of meanings on the bodies of its audience. Viewers are encouraged to internalize these behaviours as fact as they are backed by established systems of knowledge. Whereas films like *Phoebe* encourage viewers to feel, the overarching structure of these films imposes a system of beliefs on their subjects and their bodies. In watching the *About Series* and *Methods of Family Planning*, no feelings or emotions are required. Rather, students are told unquestioningly to digest, accept, and internalize the information presented by the films as truth and fact.

In working to project a certain type of meaning, the films included in this category rely on the use of animated bodies to illustrate facts about the human form. The films are presumably shaped by concerns about exposing children to sexual materials before they are ready and, as such, the animated bodies are used to shield subjects from the full realities of the human form that educators have deemed too dangerous and illicit for young audiences. Here, the body is visualized through the use of simplified schematics. As seen in the *About Series* and in *Methods of Family Planning*, the flat, motionless, two-dimensional figures reveal very little of the true male and female form. In working to keep sex “clean,” these films most often negate discussion of the external form in favor of an analysis of the internal mechanisms of the body. Because they are committed to a method of presentation that teaches through suppression, omission, and negation, the “dirty” and provoking details of the material body are left out of the image and instead are replaced with a hairless, shapeless, and muted recreation of the original form.

The films in the *About Series* are both entirely animated and completely silent.

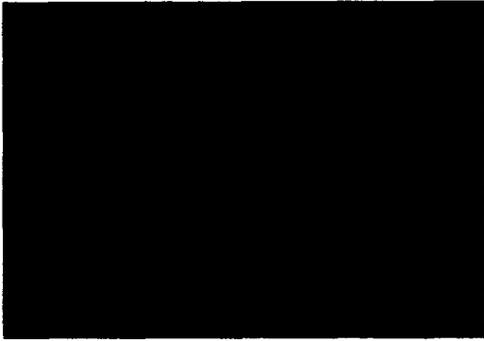


Figure 6 From *About Puberty and Reproduction*

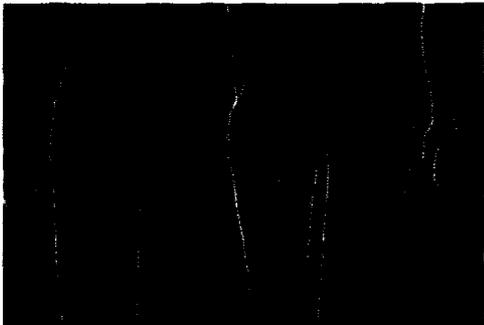


Figure 7 From *About VD*

The films, produced in the 1970's, were commissioned by the National Film Board of Canada and are designed to eradicate any reference to real bodies or “dirty sex.” This series features a number of silhouettes and shadowy figures that stand in for the real human form. The animated bodies in the films are animated by the award winning Ishu Patel and are faceless, emotionless, and are without definition. While each film differs in its instructional purpose, they differ little in their approach to the body. Although details are absent

in the construction of both the male and female form, there is a definite hierarchy of representation that shapes the basic understanding of the male and female body. The films in the *About Series* are shaped by a social and cultural understanding of the body that works to expose and confirm existing gender hierarchies and social relations. Here, images and descriptions of the body are used to confirm and validate established patterns as the films grant an unequalled access to the male form and male sexuality. The penis is constructed as a sexual organ and is visualised in both its flaccid and erect state. Here, we are given access to both the internal and external working of the male form and ejaculation is visualized while the penis rests inside the vagina. Although in all of the films the penis remains motionless, movement of the ejaculate through the vasdeference positions the male as the active subject while the female body remains motionless and

inactive.

This relationship between the sexes is confirmed in *About Conception and Contraception* as the vagina is continually featured as a receptacle for the male ejaculate. In seeking to provide information about the use and function of an array of contraceptive methods, both the male and female bodies are continually defined in relation to their



Figure 9 From *About Puberty and Reproduction*



Figure 8 From *Methods of Family Planning*

reproductive capacity. Although this speaks to the purpose of the film, this works to create a very biased and limited understanding of the body as the film continually works to present males as sexual bodies and women as reproductive bodies. The concentration on the bodily forms continually positions females in relation to reproduction and, as a result, the females are denied access to other potential realities. Again this imagery creates a hierarchy of meaning as the female organs are exclusively associated with reproduction, pregnancy, and childbirth. This is accomplished using a variety of visual and narrative

tactics. First, the complete negation of the vulva, clitoris, and external workings of the female sexual organs works to reinforce the primacy of the vagina. The vagina is connected to the uterus and is continually positioned as the birth canal or as the site through which the menstrual blood exits. This is illustrated in *About Puberty and Reproduction* as the film continually works to reinforce the reproductive capacity and destiny of the female subject. Although analysis begins with the presentation of whole

and unified bodies, the film quickly moves to lessons that work to fragment the body, as organs like the vagina, uterus, and ovaries are dislocated and separated from the body of the animated subject.

The organs are split and spliced in an effort to detail the functions of the female form and they are isolated and framed by the use of a simple black background. Whereas illustrations of the internal workings of the male organ are framed by a thin outline resembling the penis, the female organs are not granted the same privilege. Instead,



Figure 10 From *About Puberty and Reproduction*

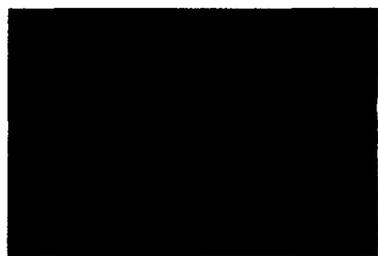


Figure 11 From *About Puberty and Reproduction*

representation of the external organs is not only negated they are often completely removed from the frame as the image of the internal organs begins mid-way up the vagina. The vagina is positioned as a passage way from which the baby will emerge and the female body is further dissected in the sequence that details the moment of conception through to the actual birth of the baby. This is illustrated in a sequence that is comprised of only nine shots and the growth and development of the fetus takes place in a dislocated uterus. The unified female body returns in the final shot of the sequence. But again, the female form is

disfigured, as the animated figure is halved to reveal the details of the child's birth. In reality, the scene actually reveals very little, as the child exits the uterus through an imprecise and somewhat useless rendering of the female anatomy. The baby is contained within a sack-like pouch and exists the female figure's body through an *opening* in her

body rather than through the true form. This works to solidify the relationship between female anatomy and its birthing function.

The presentation of the female organs as nothing more than an opening to the female body is a theme that runs throughout the canon of sex education films and other sex education documents.



Although this theme is continually maintained throughout the majority of these films, the construction of the animated scenarios and bodies in the *About Series*

Figure 12 From *About Conception and Contraception* is most effective in maintaining this tradition. This is communicated most simply in *About Conception and Contraception* in the diaphragm sequence. The diaphragm is inserted into a large opening and is positioned around the cervix to deny the sperm entry into the uterus. The illustration works to deny the realities of the female form like the labia, the clitoris, and the vulva. It also works to confirm suspicions that position the female organs as nothing more than an opening for the penis to enter and a baby to exit. This film also works to introduce a series of controls that are placed on the female body.

In her essay “Medical Metaphors of Women’s Bodies: Menstruation and Menopause,” Emily Martin examines the ways in which medicine and technology have imposed a system of controls on the female body. Her examination of scientific texts of both past and present reveals a connection to the prevailing cultural assumptions and preoccupations connected with the period in which they are produced. For example, Martin states that 19th Century analysis of menstruation, menopause, and the female body

are most commonly linked to a model of industrial society (Martin 1997, 23). This includes references to business loss and gain, factories and production, and references to the “safety and hygienic appliances of a great city” (Martin 1997, 22). Whereas discussion of the male body is relatively positive, Martin reveals that discussion of the female body is generally discussed in terms of failure, missed signals, breakdown, atrophy, and loss (Martin 1997, 27). The language used to describe the natural functions of the female form most commonly links the female body to an operating or signaling system and, as such, the language works to imply that the female body must be controlled, regulated, and managed.

About Conception and Contraception confirms this relationship as the entire film reveals the ways in which the female body must be managed. In examining the different methods used to prevent pregnancy, the film introduces a series of controls that are unequally distributed between the male and female subjects. While this idea of regulation, control, and unequal distribution of birth control methods is not exclusive to sex education films, the presentation of these regulatory controls works to expose the larger hierarchical system of control that positions women as the sex responsible for the management of their bodies and pregnancy prevention. Although the film does feature methods that are employed by the male subject (condom and vasectomy), the film ultimately frames these methods as steps that prevent the active male sperm from reaching the awaiting egg. Thus, the image of the docile and inactive female body and the active male body is maintained.

In working to promote established forms of masculinity and femininity, the

films included in the *About Series* fuse scientific details about the body with cultural and social assumptions about sex, sexuality, gender. In working to sanitize sex and limit students' interaction with "graphic material," the scientific controls put in place to discuss sex and the sexual body work to remove discussion of pleasure and desire. This, of course, also adds to the gender hierarchy constructed by these films as students are presented with unequal access to male and female pleasure and arousal. While the penis is shown in both its flaccid and erect or aroused state, issues of female arousal are negated and omitted from discussion. The very negation of the clitoris, vulva, and labia work to confirm this fact. This, combined with the omission of any image that details the various states of female arousal (the increase in vaginal lubrication or the swelling of the clitoris), works to position the female body not as a sexual body, but rather as a reproductive body that waits for male deposits. Thus, while liberal movements of the 1960's and 1970's were working to dismantle the relationship between the social body and the material body, sex education films like the ones included in the *About Series* were working to strengthen this link in an effort to preserve traditional sexual roles, practices, and cultural formations.

In her canonical essay "The Sex Which Is Not One," Luce Irigaray discusses female self-definition within the "dominant phallic economy" (Irigaray 1997, 249). Irigaray argues that the penis, not the vagina, is the only sexual organ that is of recognized value and, as such, the vagina is constantly defined in relation to the male phallus (Irigaray 1997, 249). In relation to the penis, female sexual organs are defined in terms of lack and atrophy and are counted not as *one* but as *none* (Irigaray 1997, 251). The vagina is presented as a singular organ that is devoid of pleasure, that is shrouded in

secrecy and shame, and that is valued only for the “lodging” that it provides to the male organ. Often described as the “horror of nothing to see,” the visual negation of female sexual organs works to reinforce the confusion, shame, and sexual inadequacy of the female body (Irigaray 1997, 250). Here, Irigaray identifies the very gap in language that denies the female sexual organs to be named and identified; instead, as Irigaray argues, maternity is used to fill in the “gaps in a repressed female sexuality” (Irigaray 1997, 251)⁹.

This substitution of maternity for female sexuality can be seen throughout the films, as the vagina becomes the primary sexual organ associated with the female form. The vagina is positioned as a reproductive organ and is imaged in relation to the function it serves in both conception and the birthing process. This trend is continued in the film *Methods of Family Planning*. A film produced in participation with the Family Planning Division of Canada, the Toronto Department of Public Health, the National Department of Health and Welfare, and the Catholic Communication Centre, *Methods of Family Planning* explores the various methods of birth control used by couples to prevent unwanted pregnancy. The very title of the film reveals its underlying purpose as the film works to strengthen the link between sex and the sanctioned couple. Because it is used to teach couples about *family planning* rather than *birth control*, the subtle shift in language reveals the film’s true intention.

9

Whereas society locates female sexuality in reproduction and maternity, Irigaray calls for a geography of pleasure that is far more diversified. She states, “*woman has organs more or less everywhere*. She finds pleasure almost anywhere” (Irigaray 1997, 252).

In working to create a normative image, the film concentrates its efforts on the heterosexual couple. The couples are paired in both a group interview and in private sessions and are matched according to age and ethnicity. This visual pairing serves a dual purpose; it works to reinforce the centrality of the couple and also works to encourage couples to seek family planning support early in their union, prior to their decision to engage in sexual activity. This idea is especially important when we consider the support lent by the Catholic Communication Centre. The film's family planning instruction went against the official policy put forth by the Vatican. The *Humanae vitae*, published by the Vatican in 1958, pronounced that methods of artificial contraception stood in contrast to Catholic doctrine (Appleby 1999, 27). Although many Catholics continue to use methods of birth control not endorsed by the Catholic Church, this practice is often quietly accepted by the institution if the couple has legitimized their union through marriage.

The normative images and discourses presented in these films are especially important when we consider the proliferation and relative acceptance of the sexual identities that gain a voice in the 1960's and 1970's¹⁰. The Christian Right, seeing the emerging sexual identities as evidence of the moral decline of the nation, mobilizes during the same time and commits to the protection of the morality of the family system (Moran 2000, 184). In developing along side the movements associated with the Sexual Revolution, the Christian Right becomes one of the most determined advocates against

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Here I do not mean to suggest that these sexual identities are new to the period in question. Rather I seek to suggest that there is a new awareness that allows these sexual identities (gays, lesbians, transsexual, and transgendered, for example) to emerge despite the fact that they are still relegated to the shadows of perversity and non-existence.

sex education programs and sexual liberalism (Moran 2000, 184). In fact, conservative advocates feared that teaching sex would endorse sexual promiscuity and maintained that sex education programs were to provide moral instruction that prepared students to establish a family in accordance with the moral definitions associated with the family (Irvine 2002, 39). But even “liberal” sex educators see the need to frame discussions of sex within the parameters of what are defined as normal and moral patterns of behavior. In this regard, children need to be sex educated to “meet and adjust to current conditions by making intelligent choices and sound decisions based on the progressive acceptance of moral responsibility for their own sexual conduct as it affects themselves and others—when faced with alternative standards and patterns of behavior” (Irvine 2002, 39). Thus, the representation of the moral and normative model of the married heterosexual couple is established as an absolute rule of educational programming and is thus positioned as the central image in many films like *Methods of Family Planning*.

While the visual codification and naturalization of the heterosexual couple is a pattern that emerges in all sex education films, *Methods of Family Planning* extends the imagery and pairs the opposite sex couples according to their ethnic identities. By placing the couple at the very center of the film, *Methods of Family Planning* frames the heterosexual couple as the sole site of sexual relations and stresses that couples should align themselves with partners of the same ethnic and racial background. The discussion that accompanies these images further solidifies this pairing as the discussion centers on the use of birth control as a means of *family planning*. Couples engage in group lecture and private sessions with qualified health professionals. No individual body is given

private instruction; all birth control counseling is given to both partners. Although Christie Miliken has argued that there is no evidence that these couples are engaged in a sanctioned union, the constant coupling, and the ensuing discussion, stand as evidence of the nature of the relationship shared by the couple (Milliken 2003, 384). In fact, the title of the film itself reflects the intention of the film, as couples discuss birth control in terms of *family planning*. This, combined with the constant visual coupling, stands to naturalize the image of the monogamous heterosexual couple as well as the institutional relationship and its reproductive capacity, function, and responsibility.

In positioning the genders in line with their reproductive roles, the film works to substitute maternity for female sexuality as the film directly links functions like menstruation to reproduction. Whereas the female body is presented as a reproductive body, the male body is more often presented as a sexual body. This is most simply illustrated in the sequence that examines the surgical options offered to couples to prevent pregnancy. While other sequences feature young couples, this sequence features an older couple. Here, the narrator stresses the permanency of such options and states that these surgeries should only be considered if the couple is entirely sure that their family is complete. This again is an unequal presentation of the facts as the narrator concentrates on the vasectomy. In discussing the procedure, the narrator assures the viewer that the surgery does not diminish the male sex drive. Instead, the narrator suggests that the procedure might *increase* the male sex drive as it removes the fear of unwanted pregnancy. The narrator describes the procedure stating that the surgery prevents the release of sperm into the seminal fluid. This, when compared to the explanation of the

female tubal ligation, serves as a full explanation and positions the male as the privileged body because the narrator describes male ejaculate as a “special fluid” that will continue to be ejaculated after the surgery. This description works to both position the male as the active and privileged body as the ejaculate is praised as a special fluid and the magnified sperm cells that are included in the sequence are praised for their vigor.

In contrast, attention to female tubal ligation does not receive an equal amount of attention as the narrator briefly discusses the surgery without mentioning the possible after affects that the patient may encounter. Here there is no reference to female sexuality, sexual virility, or the intensity of the actual surgery. Whereas discussion of vasectomy works to confirm the male’s position as a sexual body, the investigation of female surgery reveals little about female sexuality and instead focuses its attention on the position of females as reproductive bodies. This relationship is further confirmed by the film’s examination of other methods of birth control, as the film continually links the use of these products to *family planning*, thus strengthening the link between sex and the couple’s reproductive role and function.

As previously mentioned, sex education films produced during this period work to confirm the legitimacy of the nuclear family model by positioning the sanctioned couple as the sole site of sexual relations. Throughout the films, the sanctioned heterosexual couple is positioned as the natural and moral model and is used to provide a standard from which viewers are to derive normal standards of both sexual and gendered behaviour. In working to create the illusion of social conformity, these normalizing standards are used not only to define what is normal and natural, they also work to define

discusses this in terms of the perverse implantation. As a result of the discursive explosion of the 18th and 19th centuries, the perverse implantation refers to the proliferation of discourses which set apart “unnatural” as a specific dimension in the field of sexuality (Foucault 1978, 39). In this regard, infractions appear “against the legislation (or morality) pertaining to marriage and the family, and on the other, offences against the regularity of a natural function (offences which, it must be added, that the law was apt to punish)” (Foucault 1978, 39). Thus, what emerges is a system that seeks to regulate normal sexual behavior. This system operates both to protect the family as a unit and to identify abnormal subjects which threaten the institution.

This can be seen throughout the films, as the films included in this category seek to preserve the institution of the family and its connection to sexuality and reproduction.

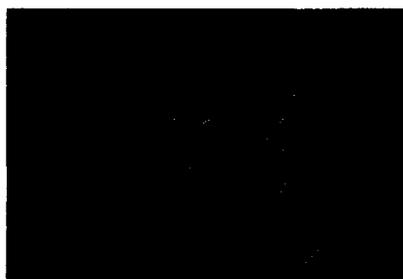


Figure 13 From *About VD*

In this regard, the family comes to function as a metaphor for the expression of a normal and natural sexuality. While this is a discrete operation, *Methods of Family Planning* exposes its intention to preserve this institution not only in its title, but in the constant coupling of its subjects. This pattern is further re-enforced in the *About Series* as each sexual encounter is prefaced with a “heart-kiss” sequence in which the animated bodies are brought together prior to the sexual union. The figures are positioned across from



Figure 15 From *About Puberty and Reproduction*

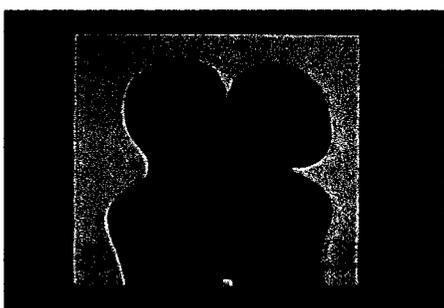


Figure 14 From *About Conception and Contraception*

each other and the “heart-kiss” sequence brings them together to engage in what looks like a kiss. However, the animated bodies do not kiss, as they are overlapped and motionless figures. While the figures engage in this “kiss,” a heart grows out of their combined faces and frames their upper bodies as they embrace. Although this is a recurring image present throughout the series, the opening sequence of *About VD* inverts this sequence as the faces of the male and female subject are revealed when the heart shaped figure grows. In working to naturalize the link between sex and love, these sequences work to remind viewers of their social and moral obligation to develop emotional connections with their partners prior to sexual activity.

While the films may not directly address marriage, the sub-text of the films works to establish a normalizing standard of behavior in which sex is linked to both marriage and reproduction. This is confirmed in part by their reliance on biology, medicine, and clinical illustrations and language. The films effectively work to naturalize the link between the expression of sexuality, gender, and reproduction. This relationship is further confirmed by the overarching narrative structure which the films impose on their viewers. While *Methods of Family Planning* relies on the use of voice-of-god narration and the visual presence of medical professionals like doctors and nurses to transmit information about the body, the *About Series* relies on classroom supervisors to provide the

accompanying narration to the texts¹¹. The voice-over narration functions both to tell viewers what to believe and it directs the viewer's understanding of the material. Here, material is presented by an impersonal voice of authority. Specific meanings presented by the film are confirmed by the narrator/authority figure and, as such, viewers are encouraged to accept the presentation as fact.

Scientific knowledge is produced in relation to operating systems of power and is shaped by the perspective of those who transmit and formulate knowledge about the body and its construction. Sexuality is made up of a great network of meanings and is thus constructed by the very power that tries to hold it in check. In her essay "Mothers, Monsters, and Machines," Rosi Braidotti describes this type of power and states that it "becomes the name for a complex series of interconnects, between the spaces where truth and knowledge are produced and the systems of control and domination" (Braidotti 1997, 60). Science and medicine are produced in relation to these systems of power and are "given the right to scrutinize the inside of the body for scientific purposes" (Braidotti 1997, 72). This is seen in these films as the body is split, spliced, and organs are dislocated from the body to illustrate the mechanics of the form. When separated from the body, the examination of these organs is not only infused with cultural assumptions, it becomes an "extremely perverted version of that original question" (Braidotti 1997, 72). This "knowing" is shaped by the desire to see and do and related to the scopophilic drive (Braidotti 1997, 73). Braidotti describes this as a sadistic pleasure that is linked to the

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Although we can assume that the films came with narrative scripts, NFB archivists have had no luck in helping me locate the accompanying narration.

“web of curiosity” and the need to physically rip apart the objects of curiosity in order to intellectually master the object of interest (Braidotti 1997, 73). These statements can be applied to the sex education film as the very content of the films is shaped by the scopophilic desire to see and to know.

While films like *Phoebe* work to position the subject as an active body, the films included in this section work to deny the emotional and physical reality of their subjects. In the films the subject/body/object of interest is not only denied a voice, it is often completely omitted from the frame. Instead, the organs that make up the body replace the unified whole and act as stand ins for the true form. This can be specifically seen in the *About Series* as the film is entirely animated and is entirely constructed to deny both the realities of the human form and the youthful subjectivity present in *Phoebe*. While *Methods of Family Planning* works to position the subject within the film, the overall commitment to the expository mode of address actively negates the youth subjects as their voices are denied and their actions are highly formulated.

This dictated format can be seen in the diaphragm sequence. This takes place in a small office of the established medical professional, as a young couple is provided with information about the use of the diaphragm as a method of birth control. Here the doctor hands the diaphragm to the male subject who squeezes it and nods in approval. These motions are clearly staged and are preformed by the male subject. This relates back to the highly constructed nature of the film as the meaning that are produced by the film are carefully constructed and work to represent dominant Christian morals.

Perhaps most interesting about the film, besides its Catholic backing, is the

presence of a black nurse. Although her appearance is brief and only occurs twice in the film, the presence of this woman works to acknowledge the emerging status of the black community. This, of course, develops in relation to the liberation movement and it signals the loosening of traditional structures of power. In providing the nurse with a role in the film, the film not only acknowledges the changing status of women and their call for methods of contraception not endorsed by formal structures like the Church, the film also acknowledges the changing realities of the nation. This, of course, is an image that had yet to be supported by the commercial media. Thus, despite her subordinate position to the white male doctor, the presence of the black nurse stands as a controversial inclusion in the film because she is not only positioned as an authority figure, but as an educated woman.

While the *About Series* relies exclusively on animation to transmit information about the body, *Methods of Family Planning* uses real bodies and professional figures to inform its audience. Although animation remains the primary vehicle for transmitting information about the internal workings of both the female and male sex organs, the presence of the silhouetted and shadowed nudes that open and close the film work to impart a representation omitted from other films. Under the guise of clinical and medical instruction, the inclusion of these real bodies works to introduce an element absent in the *About Series*. Despite these inclusions, the overarching pedagogical approach differs little from the highly constructed *About Series* and the subjects are ultimately denied a voice in the film and are thus positioned as inactive subjects who are provided with the same censored styling that is presented in the *About Series*.

These films are shaped by a highly constructed form of presentation that works to deny the realities of the body and deny their actors an active voice. Whereas *Phoebe* examines the life of a teenage girl who thinks that she might be pregnant, the *About Series* and *Methods of Family Planning* concentrate their analysis on pregnancy prevention and the internal workings of the human form. Split from the body, organs are isolated and examined by the films. To confirm existing assumptions about the social and cultural body, these films tear apart the subject in order to define their sexual role and function. While the *About Series* examines issues that are not considered by *Methods of Family Planning*, the application and examination of the material is ultimately the same, as all of the films present the body in relation to established scientific rhetoric and existing cultural definitions. This can be seen specifically in the application of material relating to methods of birth control. Here, the films not only share in the same collection of visuals, they also share the same material because the presentation is underscored by a similar approach to the sexual and social body.

Thus, constructed as a purely didactic form of cinema *About VD, About Puberty and Reproduction, About Conception and Contraception*, and *Methods of Family Planning*, examine the body using the same biological and clinical approach. The films work to negate the dualism that separates the biological body from the social body and, as such, the films actively participate in the construction of a specific type of meaning that seeks to define the normal and natural functions and roles associated with the sex and gender of the subject. Although the films embark on a project that is defined by the sex/gender of the given subject, sex, sexuality, and social status of the subject become the

ultimate focus of the films. And while the films work to define the role and function of both genders, the films ultimately centre their analysis on the project of femininity as issues relating to female sexuality and female self-definition become central to the films and their purpose.

Although systems of sexual meaning are never unitary or hegemonic, there is no doubt that these filmic bodies are shaped by a clearly defined cultural and social project to unify the body under a single understanding of the human form. Backed by the knowledge provided by medicine and science, truth and fact are conflated with social and cultural meaning. Meaning is thus imposed upon both the filmic subject and the viewer. The lessons provided by the sex education film are shaped by a moralistic understanding of the body and offer a very limited understanding of the human form and human sexuality. But this, of course, is part of their project, as the films are used as a tool to introduce adolescents to the world of dominant belief while denying the reality of adolescent curiosity.

Chapter Three

Revitalizing the Genre: Sex Education Films and the Presence of the Youth Voice

In contrast to the presentation provided by the *About Series* (Ishu Patel, 1974) and *Methods of Family Planning* (Moreland-Latchford, 1976), the films *It Couldn't Happen to ME* (Planned Parenthood, 1974), *Are You Ready for Sex?* (Mayer/Espar Productions, 1976), *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* (Document Associates, 1978), and *Loving Parents* (Texture Films, 1978) attend to the social component of teenage sexuality. Here, the youth voice is represented in the films and teenage speakers make up the majority of the films' subjects. The films' subjects are given the opportunity to speak about the reality of their own situations and they often echo the sentiments put forth by their adult contemporaries as the issues explored by the films often centre on the problems of youth and youth sexuality. However, despite the presence of the adult commentaries, the films stand as relatively progressive examples of sex education texts because youths are present in the construction of their own meanings. While the films inadvertently concentrate on the preservation of established forms of gender and gender behaviour, the very presence of youths in the construction of meaning harkens back to the film *Phoebe* (Kaczendar, 1964). The films' subjects offer a relatively new type of presentation, in which youths are not only given a voice, they are given an opportunity to speak about their own emerging position in the larger social and cultural landscape.

Whereas the films in the *About Series* and *Methods of Family Planning* work to construct adolescence as a stage of biological development, *It Couldn't Happen to ME*,

Are you Ready For Sex?, *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, and *Loving Parents* work to position youth as a social and political category in which adolescents begin to emerge as adults with budding sexual self-awareness. While the films examined in Chapter Two enable a discourse that is shaped by a very specific type of knowledge that defines and regulates the body, the films included in this chapter enable a new type of discourse that allows the youth population to speak and reflect on their own situation and their own sexual definition. Like the film *Phoebe*, these films work to position youth in the throes of sexual self-definition as the speakers presented in the films vocalize their own traumas, beliefs, and practices. While *Phoebe* is structured around a fictional narrative, *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, *Are you Ready For Sex?*, *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, and *Loving Parents* operate as social issue documentaries, as the films feature youth speakers who comment on the emerging realities of their own social, political, and sexual status.

Through a series of personal and group interviews, the subjects featured in these films speak from a number of social, economic, political, and ethnic positions. By covering a wide range of opinion from a diverse population of speakers, the films offer a multi-vocal format which stands in contrast to the films examined in Chapter Two. While the films in Chapter Two speak of adolescence, *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, *Are you Ready For Sex?*, and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* speak to adolescents as the films feature youth subjects who speak about themselves and who also comment on the lives and decisions of their peers. This, of course, enables a discourse in which youths are given the authority to participate in their own political, social, and sexual definition. While the *About Series* and *Methods of Family Planning* tend to dictate and impose a

system of knowledge on the bodies of their subjects, the films that make up this group encourage youth to engage in, and with, the sexual, social, and youth discourses that shape their understanding of both themselves and their peers.

While each film works to empower youths to participate in their own self-definition, the construction of the films differs as each film employs a format that allows youths to participate in differing ways. *It Couldn't Happen to ME* is constructed to speak to a large and diverse population and works to give voice to a number of youths who speak on topics ranging from abortion and adoption to abstinence. *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, which was produced by the Family Planning Unit of Toronto and The Department of National Health and Welfare, takes a radical step and even gives a voice to the previously muted population of pregnant teens. In speaking on behalf of themselves and others who may have found themselves in a similar situation, the pregnant teens are given the freedom to speak about their situation and their lives. Like the girls who talk about their experience with abortion and adoption, the pregnant girls in this film are separated from the rest of the film's speakers. The pregnant girls are given a voice through a group interview and they speak without the presence of males or their male partners. While the film features other youth speakers, the youths included in these sequences are made up of both male and female speakers who comment on issues that differ from the discussion that takes place in the pregnant girls' discussion. Often mediated by the presence of voice-over narration or the voices of adult authorities, this film works to carefully balance a number of voices that speak from a number of perspectives.

Like *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* seeks to

represent a number of perspectives that come from a number of youths. While *It Couldn't Happen to ME* works to manage the youth voice through adult speakers and the organization of the film, *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* manages the opinions of its speakers through a carefully constructed narrative that seeks to arrange the speakers according to their locale, social status, and political position. Here, three distinct categories of speakers emerge. This is made evident by the location shooting and differing addresses of the subjects and, as such, the subjects can be identified as suburban, urban, and rural speakers. This, of course, serves a variety of purposes as the film addresses issues of teenage sexuality that affect a wide array of teenage speakers. This is perhaps the most interesting component of the film, as each group addresses issues of gender and teenage sexuality with varying levels of acceptance and denial. For example, while suburban speakers concentrate on issues relating to virginity and marriage, rural speakers discuss their sexual experiences in relation to the violence and ignorance that has shaped their own understanding of sex and sexuality. By opening the discussion to a variety of teenage speakers, the film deliberately addresses the multiple discourses that shape the basic cultural understandings of sex and sexuality. Although the speakers are similar in that they speak from the same biological and developmental category of adolescence, their differing attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs reveal the multiple levels of discourse that are at work both in the film and in society.

As with *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, *Are You Ready for Sex?* gives voice to a number of youth subjects. When asked to comment on the actions of their peers, the subjects in this film respond to a series of dramatic vignettes

that feature other youth subjects. The film is moderated by Harvey Caplin, a family therapist, and claims to be a recording of a Family Life education class in which students discuss the limits of their own sexual beliefs and sexual freedoms. The film is subtitled, *Are You Ready for Sex?: Values and Decision Making* and purports to clarify the questions related to the choice to engage in sexual activity. While the film relies on the youth subjects to respond to the vignettes, discussions are led by the therapist.

The film attends to the period prior to sexual activity and, as such, the film asks youths to respond to questions relating to romance, birth control, and the dangers of risk-taking behaviour. Like *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, *Are You Ready for Sex?* opens a dialogue for the youth perspective to be acknowledged and voiced. However, while *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, work to represent a plethora of voices and opinions, *Are You Ready for Sex?* often presents a homogenous teenage opinion as the youth speakers, despite their gender or varying ethnic identity, respond to Caplin's questions with relative consensus. Here, we can account for this similarity by concluding that speakers share similar attitudes because they share the same socio-economic status. The film is presented as a recording of a classroom discussion and, as such, students who attend the class speak from a common perspective as they presumably reside in a similar area and thus share similar attitudes about the social and sexual mores established by the community.

Thus, like *Phoebe*, the films in this chapter examine the social component of teenage sex and sexuality. Whereas the *About Series* and *Methods of Family Planning* concentrate their instruction on sex as a function of the reproductive body, *It Couldn't*

Happen to ME, All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X., and Are You Ready for Sex?, harness the youth voice to discuss the changing realities and presumptions that shape the larger social and cultural understanding of teenage sex and sexuality. Although the films operate in relation to dominant discourse, they enable a new type of discourse in which youths participate in the creation of meaning. This not only opens a dialogue, it allows for new types of meaning to emerge.

It Couldn't Happen to ME is an interesting film that carefully balances the emerging strength of the youth voice with the dominant social discourses about sex, sexuality, and youth. Perhaps what is most significant is that the film gives voice to females who have become pregnant. While the film lends a voice to other teenagers, both male and female, the film is centered around the dialogue put forth by the female speakers. This becomes evident early in the film as even the film's title reflects upon the female position and invokes the voice of the female speaker. Here, the title reveals that although teenage girls recognize the possibility of pregnancy, they do not consider it as part of their own personal narratives.

The title of the film opens a dialogue in which female speakers are forced to negotiate their own positions as sexual and reproductive bodies. This is also made evident by the discussions and interviews that take place with the pregnant teens. This attitude, in part, develops in relation to the stigma attached to young females and sexual activity. In her book, *Pregnant With Meaning*, Deirdre Kelly addresses the double standard that works to morally evaluate women's sexual practices but not men's (Kelly 2000, 28). Whereas for the average teenage boy intercourse is seen as a culturally sanctioned way of

proving his masculinity, teenage girls are faced with a different reality and are burdened with a variety of mixed messages that state that they should protect their virginity, that what they really want is love, and that sex can get in the way of what they really want (Levine 2003,166). This mentality is further reinforced by a legal system that seeks to protect female sexuality– or rather, to protect the virtues of the female subject (despite her position as a consenting individual). This can be seen specifically in the age of consent laws which seem to be directed at females more than their male equivalents. In fact, we can cite the origins of the laws back to late 13th Century Britain as it was here that they were originally designed to protect the virginity of young females who were the property of their fathers (Levine 2003, 71). Although the purpose and application of these laws such as age of consent laws may have changed and may be necessary and useful measures to protect youths, the laws encode an enduring sexist idea that “in sexual relations, there is only one desiring partner, the man” (Levine 2003, 72). Thus, told that they are not desiring bodies, the teenage female’s sexual ownership is denied, or at the very least, her sexual ownership is severely diminished. While the common assumption that women are responsible for managing sexual activity remains, the reality is that these relationships are shaped by an enduring power imbalance that grant women comparatively less power than their male partners.

Although the application of this double standard works to shape the gendered experience of both the male and female subject, the female comes to bear the ultimate burden of meaning. As we saw in Chapter Two, the female body not only signifies difference, it comes to embody the absence of physical meaning. By dislocating the

organs from the body, female sexuality, and the realities of the female form, are subverted. While the *About Series* and *Methods of Family Planning* work to position female sexuality in relation to reproduction, *It Couldn't Happen to ME* works to examine this relationship and works to promote a healthier understanding of female sexuality. Although the images and narratives put forth by the film do not radically challenge the messages put forth by the films examined in Chapter Two, they do work to challenge prevailing assumptions about the female's relationship to her sexual and gendered body.

It Couldn't Happen to ME is a film that features women who have become pregnant as teenagers and, as such, the film gives voice to a population of youth speakers that have been positioned as a "symbol of suspect status" (Kelly 2000, 25). For people concerned with the changing realities brought on by the liberal movements of the 1960's and 1970's, teenage mothers came to represent a symbol of sexuality out of control, the breakdown of traditional lines of authority, and a symptom of the overall moral decline of society. Described by Kelly as the "likely catch-all enemies," teenage mothers came to function as both the cause and consequence of the on-going social problems faced by the nation (Kelly 2000, 25). What is interesting is that this film extends the representation of pregnant teens and includes two interviews with women who have undergone other experiences relating to their pregnancies. The presence of these women, and their discussion relating to their experience with adoption and abortion, positions the film as a progressive alternative to other programs that tend to concentrate their efforts on moral development, reproduction, and contraceptive procedure.

While adoption and maternity homes had been a common refuge and solution for

many teenage girls, the practice of surrender is one that is too commonly omitted from sex education programs. The girl who has given her child up for adoption is present in the opening sequence of the film (although at this point we are not familiar with her story) and returns at the end of the film where she is granted a full private interview. The interview takes place in an indoor setting. Here, the young girl is questioned by a male interviewer and is asked to respond to specific questions relating to her sexual past, her decision not to use birth control, and her decision to have sex. The girl's response is very telling of her true experience, as she responds nervously to the interviewer's questions. A close-up of her hands reveals her tension. The woman is seen giggling and laughing throughout the interview and her inappropriate response signals her discomfort¹². Perhaps uncomfortable with the interviewer's leading questions, or troubled by her decision to surrender her baby, the girl is forced to defend her position while her male counterpart is excluded from the discussion. The girl responds to a series of leading questions put forth by the interviewer and provides him with the desired response. For example, when asked if having sex was "worth it," the girl responds with a simple "no." Her response to this question is captured in a tight close-up. In fact, all of the personal questions are framed using the same obtrusive camera styling. While the woman's response to less invasive questions is held in a medium shot, the tight framing that occurs during the intensely personal questioning is somewhat jarring. Although the interview is about adoption, very

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While any evaluation of the girl's state of mind may be speculative, the emotionally charged response of the speaker indicates a general unease with the material covered in the interview.

few questions actually relate to the girl's experience with the process. Rather, the interviewer seems to concentrate on her decision to have intercourse and her personal failure to protect herself during the encounter.

Although the evidence is scanty, authors like Fessler and Kelly have suggested that adoption campaigns throughout the 1950's, 60's, and 70's were aimed mainly at middle-class white women (Kelly 2000, 59). In order to hide the reality of their daughter's sexual indiscretion, parents relied on adoption as a way to preserve the integrity of their moral values and to conceal their daughter's transgression of the norms established by the middle-class environment of the suburbs. Because she was often shipped to a maternity home, or moved to the home of a relative or a family friend, a woman's pregnancy could be hidden from her community, a community to which she would return after the birth and adoption of the child. The presentation of the female speaker in *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, who gave her child up for adoption develops in relation to this practice. Isolated from her peers, the female discusses her situation in private. Here, the emotional component of this decision is subverted. The interviewer instead concentrates his questioning on the girl's decision to have sex without contraception instead of questioning the girl's experience with the adoption process. The woman is often held in tight close-ups and the commitment of the girl within the frame works to expose the claustrophobia, secrecy, and shame imposed on her by her position within the middle-class community. While psychological theories of the day suggested that white unwed mothers could redeem their status through a three step treatment that included remorse, surrender, and "renewed commitment to fulfilling her destiny as a real

woman [through marriage],” few psychologists actually considered the psychological and emotional toll of this treatment (Kelly 2000, 59). And again, while assumptions about the emotional state of the woman may prove to be faulty, one cannot deny the emotional tension present in the interview.

Like the topic of adoption, abortion is a little discussed “solution” to the “problem” of teenage pregnancy. As a highly controversial topic in both Canada and the United States, abortion was most often absent from curriculums due to the moral debate that accompanied the issue. Despite this fact, *It Couldn't Happen to ME* addresses the issue and gives voice to an articulate speaker who reveals her own experience and relationship to the topic. The film introduces its viewers to the controversial practice of abortion, which was decriminalized only a few years prior to the film's production date, and positions it as an option open to women who may find themselves pregnant. Although the film does not overtly side with any of the options or beliefs put forth by any of the film's speakers, the presence of this issue stands as a progressive approach that works to encourage women to take action on their own behalf and operate in accordance with their own beliefs.

In contrast to the woman who is interviewed about her experience with the adoption process, the woman who speaks about her experience with abortion is confident, assertive, and well-spoken. The woman states that she obtained an abortion in her fourth month of pregnancy and she confidently asserts that abortion was a decision that was right for her. As in the adoption interview, the female subject is interviewed by a male speaker; however, unlike the previous interview, this interview is conducted in an exterior

setting and stands in contrast to the static images of the adoption interview. In what looks like a public park or a university campus, the woman is questioned by the interviewer as they *move* through the setting. The interview is captured using a variety of shots, including the long shot – a shot that is absent throughout the rest of the film. This, in part, works to protect the anonymity of the female speaker. It also distances the viewer from the subject and depersonalizes the interview. This is further reinforced by the disconnect between the speaker's dialogue and filmic image and the speech is out of sync with the subject's image. Although the voices of the interviewer and the subject are not entirely disembodied, this subtle shift in the presentation signals a difference that separates the speaker from the other subjects in the film.

The woman who obtains an abortion discusses her situation with ease and lacks the emotional component present in the previous interview. In fact, the speaker even states that her decision to have an abortion was not an emotional one— rather, it was a practical solution to her unwanted pregnancy. She stresses the urgency of her situation and states that she was immediately in contact with people who could provide the support and help that she needed. Because she was already four months pregnant, the woman states that she could not wait two weeks to obtain an abortion in Canada and instead had to travel to New York to terminate her pregnancy. Although the woman does not discuss the costs associated with the abortion, her ability to travel to New York to obtain the procedure stands as evidence of her social standing and economic position.

The environment and relative ease of movement through the city park and urban setting during this interview stand to remind viewers of the differing levels of access

among women across Canada. While the women of the second group of speakers, the pregnant girls who are interviewed in a controlled, private, and indoor setting, agree that their ability to access birth control and other methods of contraception is limited because of their location, their relative isolation, and their inability to maintain their anonymity, the urban environment offers the urban speaker the freedom to obtain both contraception and an abortion while maintaining her privacy.

While the film works toward an understanding of the discourse that shapes our cultural understanding of female sexuality, female desire, and sexual responsibility, this film also serves to remind the viewer that access to specific realms of social and sexual thought is shaped by the gender, race, class, and social standing of the subject. According to Kelly, these social, economic, and political relations not only shape understanding of sex and sexuality, they “inevitably shape what stories get told and how they are interpreted” (Kelly 2000, 163). This, of course, offers one possible explanation for the differing presentations in *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, as the class and status of each individual is revealed through their speech and topics of discussion¹³. This also is manifest in the visual presentation as each interview is conducted in a different locale.

This idea is echoed in the film *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* as the film is

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Here I do not mean to suggest that there is a hierarchy of representation. Rather, I mean to suggest that each speaker is presented in relation to their social position. In *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, this is not a hierarchical relationship— it is a method of presentation in which each speaker is aligned with a specific realm of social, political, and sexual thought. This is dictated by their class, race, and status. For example, adoption was an option most commonly endorsed by middle-class white women; thus, this position is filled by a middle-class white woman whose address (styling and movements included) can be linked to the prevailing beliefs and attitudes of that class.

structured around the examination of the differing sexual behaviors of suburban, urban, and rural youth. Much like the woman featured in the urban environment in *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, the speakers in the urban environment in *All the Guys Ever want is S.E.X.*, speak about sex and sexuality with relative freedom and ease. While their suburban counterparts discuss issues relating to virginity and marriage, urban speakers discuss sexuality in a broader context and cover issues relating to image, pregnancy, promiscuity, the social pressure to have sex, and the social pressure to talk about their relationships. The urban speakers express a certain type of discourse that is specific to their own social and political beliefs.

Whereas the woman who obtained an abortion in *It Couldn't Happen to ME* moves freely through her surrounding environment, the location shooting that frames the urban speakers in *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* is more imposing as the interview takes place on a concrete playground. The visual status of these urban speakers is somewhat diminished by their cold concrete surroundings as they are positioned in front of a chain link fence. While their suburban counterparts are interviewed in a well manicured park that is rich with colour, the urban subjects are framed by a background that imposes a different type of meaning and that calls forth a different approach to the subjects and their ensuing discussion. Perhaps what is most interesting about this film is the way in which the visuals of the film relate to their subjects' status and the nature of the discussion. For although each environment imposes a different type of meaning on the teenage subject, all of the environments operate as visual metaphors that signal the speakers' relationships to their own environment. That is, each environment, by virtue of

the beliefs and social mores practiced by those who make up the community, imposes a different level of control on the subject.

In *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, this is first seen in the suburban environment. Here, the camera placement works to suggest a certain level of surveillance. The image of an out of focus tree is found in the foreground. This is a subtle operation as the camera is placed in front of a tree and the tree limbs are present in the foreground of the frame. And while this type of framing is not consistently present throughout the interview, it does work to link the subjects to an environment in which their behavior is constantly monitored and policed. The speakers are situated in a well manicured park and the stylized surroundings work in tandem with the subtle framing. The locale works to suggest that appearance and order are a paramount concern for the subjects who reside in the suburban community. Mary Louise Adams confirms this reality when she states that for middle-class families residing in the suburbs, unified normality and conformity is not only a goal, it is a component central to the suburban identity (Adams 1999, 28-29). This is especially true of families residing in suburban areas in the years following the Second World War as the encroaching threat brought on by the Cold War worked to create a general feeling of unease and an intolerance of difference. Those who deviated from this proscribed normality/morality could either be framed as a threat or a delinquent— or, even worse, those who threatened the status quo could face harsh criticisms from their community members and could even face potential expulsion from the community

(Fessler 2006, 72)¹⁴.

The location shooting and framing become just as significant in the interview with the first rural woman. Here, the surroundings serve as a visual marker of the girl's isolation, loneliness, and shame. The image that opens the sequence, the image of a train crossing the tracks, stands as a potent marker of the girl's locale and her distance from the help and information presumably provided to her suburban and urban peers. The girl is positioned as a woman from the "wrong side of the tracks." In accordance with this role, the young woman discusses her sexual status in relation to the trauma, drug use, and violence that has shaped her sexual experiences. A close-up of the patch on her pants stands to remind viewers of her self-defined status as the patch clearly displays the word "slave." The camera seems to linger on this image; perhaps intended to invoke a response from the audience, this shot stands as a reminder of the speaker's own position within her community. The film continually draws on cliché images; train tracks, a walking stick, a shoeless subject, and an isolated forest location all work to reveal the status of the subject and serve to remind viewers of the differing experiences faced by youths, particularly females, across a wide range of political and social identities.

Monda Halpern writes about the position of rural women in Canada in the 20th Century and states that although changes in the 1950's and 1960's dramatically changed the position of women in rural areas, their role was ultimately shaped by the traditional

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Although some may consider the arguments put forth by Fessler as somewhat misleading, we must consider the fact that her conclusions are based on the real life experiences and beliefs of actual subjects living in suburban communities from the 1940's through the 1970's.

sexual division of labor (Halpern 2001, 135). The rural woman was defined by her reproductive and domestic role and her value was often determined by her commitment to domestic production. This becomes especially true of rural farm women whose role was primarily defined by their reproductive capacity. In terms of economics, efforts put forth by males were consistently more valued than the domestic production provided by females. As a result, the rural male takes priority over the rural female. Thus, one's value was determined by one's gender identity.

As a rural woman, the first rural speaker echos the sentiments put forth by Halpern. As we follow the young woman through the forest, the camera's lingering close-up of the girl's patch becomes both a literal and figurative reminder of the girl's gendered position. Her statement that she will never again have a sexual experience unless she is "high or drunk," reveals her own unease with her position as a sexual object. Her tale of sexual abuse and rape is later echoed by two other rural speakers who reveal the trauma of their own sexual past. One of the rural girls states that she does not believe in birth control. Here the young girl reveals her position as she states that she will get pregnant when her body is ready, and thus birth control is a useless endeavor. However faulty, her argument speaks to the girl's own sexual self-definition. As we saw in *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, the pregnant females, and the women who have been pregnant, described contraception as a preparatory measure that was rarely pursued. All of the speakers agree that they did not obtain birth control because they were afraid of being discovered, of being called a "slut," of being used, or of an increase in their sexual behaviour. In the film, Doctor Carolyn Peltier echoes this statement. She states that students are not only

ignorant about birth control, they rarely consider the risks associated with unprotected sex. While a male narrator suggests that Peltier's lectures on the use of birth control offer no moral instruction, the statements offered by the women in both *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* suggest that the decision to use birth control is a moral decision as the use of birth control works to acknowledge the female's position as a sexual subject. This, of course, stands in contrast to prevailing assumptions relating to the practice of femininity as, in accordance with the films examined in Chapter Two, definitions of femininity rarely acknowledge woman's position as a sexual subject; instead, definitions of female sexuality are linked to reproduction and motherhood. And while *It Couldn't Happen to ME* seeks to challenge these assumptions, the presence of this familiar discourse stands to remind the audience of teens' inability to reconcile their needs with their desire.

Like *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, *Are You Ready for Sex?* works to explore and expose the mixed messages given to youth about sexual decision making. But whereas *It Couldn't Happen to ME* uses youth speakers who may not have made the right decisions to highlight the need for youth, especially females, to consider the risks involved in their behaviour, *Are You Ready for Sex?* redirects efforts put forth by other films and instead asks youths to comment on the behaviour of their peers. In a series of dramatic vignettes, the film attempts to confront situations faced by the average teenage subject. After having screened the narrative segments, the students who comprise the class are asked to animadvert on the misguided behaviour of the dramatic characters. Although comments provided by the subjects are interesting, the issues put forth by the youth speakers tend to

be burdened by a very singular understanding of sex and a hegemonic project of meaning. That is, although the group is made up of a variety of ethnic and racial identities, all of the subjects seem to respond to the vignettes and Caplin's questioning in a similar way. Despite this, the film operates in a way similar to *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* in that it boasts a format that allows youths to participate in the construction of meaning— even if this meaning is supported by a very unified understanding of youth, sex, and sexual definitions.

As in *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, *Are You Ready for Sex?* confronts issues relating to the use of birth control and encourages its subjects to contemplate their inability to communicate their need for protection and their desire to postpone activities until they have researched the topic as a couple. This is illustrated in the first of the four dramatic sequences presented in the film. The scene begins mid-way through the action. The opening shot of the sequence captures two teenage subjects as they engage in sexual play. Here, sitting on the ground in a wooded area, the internal dialogue of both the male and female subject reveals their own unease with what is about to happen. As they kiss, the internal dialogue of the two subjects is alternated. This begins with the thoughts of the female subject. The speaker states that although she wants to stop, she is too afraid as she does not want to lose the boy. While the female worries about losing her boyfriend, the male subject exercises his bravado stating, "if only the other guys could see me now." What comes next confirms Harvey Caplin's later assessment that teens are unable to talk about sex prior to engaging in the activity. As the teens engage in sexual play, their dialogue reveals that they are both

unsure about their own protection. While the girl admits that she is not on the pill, the boy's dialogue reveals his hope that she is. The scene concludes with a mutual statement in which the teens resolve that they will figure out the consequences of their behaviour "later."

A similar scene is repeated later. Two teens, who are seated under a tree, discuss the possibility of a sexual encounter. In an interesting turn of events, it is the male subject who refrains from the possibility of a sexual encounter stating, "I am not ready. I would feel responsible if something were to happen." While the female subject is willing to consider the possibility of sex, the male subject commits to his decision to refrain from sex. What makes this sequence so interesting is that the film reverses the gender roles as it is most commonly the female subject who is positioned as the apprehensive participant in the sexual encounter. Although this segment follows an earlier segment in which the gender roles are reversed and it is the woman who refrains from sex, this segment stands as an interesting example of the reversal of gender roles— a reversal that is not commonly considered in the sex education genre because femininity and the preservation of female sexuality (or non-sexuality) are most commonly the issues that are at stake in the films.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the sex education genre, especially those films produced in the era prior to the AIDS movement, often relies on the melodramatic address and the melodramatic mode. Although this will be examined in detail in Chapter Four, it is worth a brief mention here as the dramatic segments included in *Are You Ready for Sex?* often employ conventions commonly linked to the melodramatic genre. In fact, to some degree, all of the films examined in this section rely on generic short hands. For

example, the continued position of the female as the fallen woman is present throughout all of the films. Given the opportunity to redeem their status by sharing their stories with others to prevent a similar tragedy, the female speakers in *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* can be easily linked to the fallen woman present in the melodrama. Similarly, because it is described as a woman's genre, the melodrama shares a common purpose and audience with the sex education film as the information provided in sex education films is often gender specific and most often speaks to the project of femininity (Gledhill 1987, 10). And while films like *It Couldn't Happen to ME* seek to confront the stigma that denies women the right to accept their position as sexual subjects, the film does not overtly challenge any of the messages put forth by the dominant culture. Rather, the film gives voice to minority subjects in an effort to encourage women to accept their roles and to protect themselves accordingly.

According to Christine Gledhill, the challenge of the melodramatic genre lies “not in confronting how things are, but rather in asserting how they ought to be” (Gledhill 1987, 21). This, of course, is a practice that is shared with the sex education genre, as films of the genre often presents a picture of teenage sexuality as it is “supposed to be” rather than dealing with the realities faced by the teenage population. Although this is not a practice endorsed by all of the films examined in this chapter, this normalizing standard is a practice that can be easily observed in *Are You Ready for Sex?*. When compared to *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, *Are You Ready for Sex?* works to present a relatively unified set of meanings. Whereas *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* address issues relating to abortion and adoption,

Are You Ready for Sex? strays away from any mention of these controversial issues and instead works to “clarify the questions” that teens may have about sex. Perhaps one of the most significant alterations made in the film is the use of the youth voice. Here, youths are given a chance to speak from inside a classroom. While the speakers in the other films speak in less formal environments, the classroom environment positions the youth speakers in relation to the institutional setting. This not only determines the nature of the discussion, it pre-empts the dialogue as, within the confines of the classroom, their speech is limited by the institutional purpose¹⁵. Thus, what emerges is a discourse that employs the youth voice to interpret and disseminate dominant meaning and definitions.

Indeed, the varying presence of the voice of authority also works to shape and mold the youth voice. While *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* is almost completely absent of the adult voice, *It Couldn't Happen to ME* and *Are You Ready for Sex?* relies on adult speakers to mediate and inform the speech provided by the youth subjects. In *Are You Ready for Sex?*, the youth dialogue is mediated by the film's senior authority, Harvey Caplin. Here, Caplin questions the classroom subjects about their own perception of the dramatic segments. Caplin is positioned as the classroom authority and speakers are inadvertently prompted by his questioning. Whereas *Are You Ready for Sex?* relies on a

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This is not to suggest that discussion that takes place in the other films is not shaped by a similar type of discourse, rather, I intend to suggest that the discussion is shaped in relation to the environments and locales in which the subject speaks. For example, in *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, the group of pregnant girls can speak freely by virtue of their environment. Seated with other girls who share the same status, the girls can discuss their situations without the intrusion of institutional judgement or societal opinion.

voice of authority to manage the classroom discussion, *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, employs the voice of authority to validate, confirm, and support the youth speakers. This is first seen in the opening sequence of the film as voice-over narration supports the claims made by the film's female teenage speakers. These authorities are later introduced to the viewer and are given a visual presence. This begins with speaker Marion Powell, who discusses sex and its prevalence in the media. Like Powell, Doctor Carolyn Peltier is introduced by a male narrator. Here, the narrator's introduction includes a statement that confirms her instructional function. By stating that Peltier conducts lectures on the use of contraception that are absent of any moral instruction, the narrator positions Peltier as a health professional who instructs without judgement. Peltier is filmed as she conducts a lesson to a classroom full of students and she is positioned as an authority on both the use of birth control and an authority on the sexual practices of the youth subjects that she instructs.

Like the other authority figures in the film, M.O. Vincent is introduced by the male narrator who begins his introduction by stating that for Christians, premarital sex and teenage sexual action is a moral issue. Of all of the introductions, Vincent's is perhaps the most interesting as his introduction to the audience is prefaced by a montage of church buildings. Images of several churches are revealed through a series of canted angle shots, short pans, and quick tilts. The tight framing of the church doors, church windows, and church steeples works to reference the strict system of morality set forth by the church. Although Vincent is to act as the film's psychiatrist, his interview includes a level of moral instruction absent from the other interviews. In his interview, Vincent

reveals the details of his own beliefs as he preaches abstinence and states that he waited until he was married to have sex. Here, Vincent introduces the Christian argument by stating that engaging in sex before marriage can deprive couples of a lifetime of satisfaction as premarital sex encourages participants to separate love from sex. This is followed by an interview with a young Christian couple who restate Vincent's earlier sentiments. The couple is seated in a church as they discuss the details of their beliefs and they are framed by the architecture of the church. The presence of strong horizontal framing provided by the church pews and the vertical framing provided by the structure impose a system of meaning onto the bodies of the subjects as abstinence is linked with a religious institution and a system of belief.

As previously stated, in these films *mise-en-scene* becomes a primary marker of status and speaks to the subject's emotional state. Here, as in the melodrama, the *mise-en-scene* of the films is suffused with meaning and purpose. Whereas this is a clearly intentional practice in *Phoebe: The Story of a Premarital Pregnancy*, the intentionality of the filmmakers included in this chapter is not as clear. Despite this, the management of the interior and exterior spaces as they are presented in these films is a central component in the production of meaning as they speak to the emotional state of the film's speakers. In speaking of the melodrama, Thomas Elsaesser confirms the relationship between *mise-en-scene* and meaning by stating that in the melodrama, dramatic conflict can be read in the "decor, colour, gesture, and composition of the frame" (qtd. in Gibbs 2002, 71). This relationship is particularly apparent in *Are You Ready for Sex?* when the film enters the interior setting of the family home. This transpires during two of the four dramatic

vignettes. The first of these scenes is framed by the exterior window trimmings (much like the framing of a film cell). The scene employs surveillance tactics similar to the one presented in the suburban locale in *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* as the camera is positioned as an outsider looking into the family living room. What unfolds is a pretty typical narrative. A couple, seated on the family couch, discuss their relationship. While the female subject states that she wants to wait to have sex, the male subject is not so convinced. However, the scene ends with the male subject stating that he is glad that his girlfriend knows what she wants. This scene is paired with a scene in which the roles are reversed. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the scene takes place atop a hill and features a similar discussion in which a teenage couple discuss their decision to have sex.

By sharing a format similar to *Are You Ready for Sex?*, the film *Loving Parents* approaches sex education using the same vignette/response format. *Loving Parents* also stands as an example of a growing trend in sex education that begins in the 1970's that seeks to instruct parents on how to talk to their kids about sex and sexuality (Kelly 2000, 109). The film asks parents to respond to a series of dramatic vignettes that feature teenage subjects as they act out everyday scenarios. The construction of the film differs little from other sex education films as it seeks to discuss appropriate behavior, how to talk about sex, and the reality of teenage sexuality. The film begins by addressing adult sexuality. Parents are asked how they conduct their own sex lives and how they reveal their own sexuality to their children. An animated sequence closes the discussion. Here a title card reads: "If parents didn't have sex, they wouldn't be parents." This reaffirms the parents' position as sexual beings and reproductive bodies and reminds parents that a

healthy sexuality is productive.

The first dramatic sequence in the film asks adults to question their own behaviour and their own expressions of their sexual identity. The scene is set in the master bedroom. A couple is awoken by an alarmclock. After realizing that it is Saturday and they do not need to get up, the couple begins to engage in fairly innocent sexual foreplay. Seconds later, their small child enters the room to see if her parents are awake. This, of course, presents an interesting challenge to the parents and to the adults who are asked to respond to the dramatic segment— for the master bedroom is the site of *private* sexual relations. And while many of the film's speakers agree that sex and sexuality is a normal, natural, and healthy expression of marital happiness and love, many of the film's speakers have problems negotiating between their own sexual expression and the sexual awareness of their teens. This idea returns in the remainder of the film's sequences as the adult subjects are provoked to question their own inability to discuss sex, sexuality, and healthy forms of sexual expression with their teens.

Perhaps most interesting is the following dramatic segment. In a scene that clearly references the gender roles and gender identities present in the melodrama, the sequence presents a scenario that confronts the possibility of teenage sexual activity in the stereotypical middle-class family and middle class home. The viewer is witness to the role allotted to the nuclear mother, who is aligned with the domestic sphere, as we see her unloading the groceries and preparing the family's dinner. Only seconds later, her daughter enters and introduces her mother to her new male friend. Although the mother thinks nothing of her daughter taking her friend up to her bedroom, she is later scolded by

her husband for allowing such behaviour to occur. Like the melodramatic mother, the nuclear mother is to “guarantee the privacy of the home by maintaining its respectability” (Mulvey 1989, 69). In allowing her daughter to entertain a boy in her bedroom, the nuclear mother in this segment neglects her responsibility to protect the home. However, the danger and risk in this behavior is not realized until after the father has sexualized the behavior. After having been informed that the actions may be sexual, the nuclear mother leaves the kitchen to break up the action. Here, we witness a sublimation of the dramatic conflict in the *mise-en-scene*. The camera is placed at the bottom of the stairs. This, combined with the dim lighting, suggests a looming and lurking threat. The very nature of the threat is taken up by the group as they discuss both the threat posed by the male subject and the potential threat of teenage sexual activity entering the home space. The responses to these questions are generally gender specific. Not surprisingly, the male subjects generally conclude that the boy had no place in the girl’s bedroom, while the female subjects generally agree that the behaviour must be judged according to the child’s maturity level, the established rules of the home, and the trust that the parents have for their child.

This discussion is followed by a short animated sequence that introduces the audience to the differing behaviors and cultural practices that shape the experience of teenage subjects across the globe. The sequence references several cultural practices, including those of the Trobriand Islands and old world Spain. This sequence ends with the question that asks what is the expected pattern of behaviour for teenagers today. The third dramatic sequence builds on the question posed by the short animated sequence.

Here, parents who are seated in the family living room greet their son as he returns home from a friend's house. After asking him a series of short questions, the boy exits the room and makes his way to his bedroom. After the parents have exchanged glances, the father follows his son upstairs and attempts to discuss sex with his son. The father is both hesitant in his discussion and in his approach as even his entry into his son's room reveals the emotions that lurk beneath the surface of his actions. Of course, despite his father's intentions, the son is fairly unresponsive as he answers his father's questions with single words.

In the discussion that follows, the parents generally agree that the father waited too long to talk to his son about sex. This opens the way for a discussion about when to talk to your kids about sex. This discussion is concluded with the final dramatic segment that features a pregnant teen and an older gentleman who states state sex education in school should be limited because instruction should be provided by parents in the home space. This segment sets the stage for the discussion that is to follow. Here, the parents discuss who is responsible for providing their teens with sex instruction. While the majority of the parents agree that it is the parent's responsibility, they also agree that few parents are up to the task. The shot that concludes the segment sends an ominous message. It reads: "More than half a million teens get pregnant every year." By offering this statistic to the viewer, the film seeks to encourage parents to drop their own prejudices and consider the health and safety of their teen.

As a concern common among parents, the film *Loving Parents* addresses the parent-child relationship and parents' difficulty in communicating with their child on

issues relating to sex and sexuality. As suggested by the film's title, and the film's first dramatic segment, the key to a successful sex education program starts at home with the parents and begins with the healthy expression of affection and sexuality. While the film acknowledges the disparity between theory and practice, it attempts to rectify the situation by opening a dialogue between parents and between parents and their children. This is a topic that is addressed not just in *Loving Parents*, it is also a topic that is examined by all of the films that examine the social component of teenage sexuality. Directly, or indirectly, the films expose the gap that divides the youth speakers and their parents.

For the first rural speaker in *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, the shame and secrecy that shapes her sexual identity is so deeply rooted that she cannot even reveal the details of her abuse to her parents. In fact, the girl states that her parents are so disillusioned that they cannot even say the word sex. The girl also states that her parents think that she is a virgin and would be really "hurt" if they found out otherwise. A male speaker in *It Couldn't Happen to ME* echos this statement and states that parents are not as open about sexuality as the up and coming generation. A female speaker, in response to the male subject, agrees and adds that earlier generations sought to keep sex in the bedroom, while new generations carry sex into their everyday lives. What is so striking here is that despite the speakers' attempts to distance themselves from the sexual repression of earlier generations, the titles of the films paint an entirely different picture as both titles evoke a somewhat telling teenage response to sex and sexuality. This is especially true of *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* as the word sex is spelt out instead of being openly stated. One possible explanation is that the filmmakers have inserted their

own assumptions about sexuality into the film's title, because the teens who discuss sex and sexuality in the film are relatively open and discuss a wide range of topics. In fact, one female speaker even brings up the topic of masturbation and states that, despite its secrecy, there is no shame in the practice.

Thus, in contrast to the films explored in Chapter Two, the films included in this chapter seek to examine the social component of teenage sexuality. Here, the films address issues that are excluded from films that rely on the scientific and clinical examination of the sexual body. Given a chance to participate in the creation of meanings and definitions that define youths, teenage sexuality, and sexuality in general, the films *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, and *Are You Ready for Sex?* give voice to a population of youth speakers whose voice had previously been denied by the sex education genre. The exchange offered by the youth speakers enables a different type of discourse. This also signals a significant change in the genre, as this voice is absent from earlier sex education films.

While the films give voice to a previously muted population of teenage speakers, the speakers often echo the familiar sexual discourses of dominant culture (as in *Are You Ready for Sex?*). Despite this, what we can divine from their presence in the films is the growing acceptance of the youth voice and the need to modify the pedagogical approach in order to reach the expanding population. The growing strength and purpose of this generation of youths is made evident by the proliferation of youth movements that begin as early as the 1950's. As a movement perpetuated by youth counterculture, the Sexual Revolution emerged at the same time as a number of subsidiary movements that included

the Civil Rights Movement, the Gay Rights Movement, and the call of Second Wave feminists. Although some critics of the Sexual Revolution have stated that the movement was not as far reaching as many assume, others have seen the increased attention to sex education programs and sex education films as clear evidence of the momentum brought on by the movement (Moran 2000, 218). In working to provide youths with instruction needed to combat the so-called moral decline brought on by the liberation movement, sex education films were seen as an antidote to the over-sexed images produced by the commercial media. By including youth in the construction of meaning, the films not only change their approach to the material, they offer new formats that revitalize the genre.

Beginning with the film *Phoebe*, the films produced in this period saw the growing need to alter the genre and to make it more accessible to youth audiences. The films included in this chapter accomplish this through the re-directed presence of the youth subject. Whereas earlier films centered their analysis on the presence of the adolescent as the *subject* of discussion, *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X*, and *Are You Ready for Sex?* position youth speakers as both the *subject* and *speaker*. Thus, although the films do not offer an extreme form of discourse, the films present the material in a new format, as the authorial intention of the films works to challenge the dominant and established approach to youth culture and teenage sexuality.

Chapter Four

Am I Normal? and *Dear Diary*: A Fictional Approach to Biological Development

Like *Phoebe: The Story of Premarital Pregnancy* (George Kaczender, 1964), *Am I Normal?* (Debra Franco and David S. Shepard, 1979) and *Dear Diary* (Debra Franco and David S. Shepard, 1981) manage their instruction through fiction. The films examine the lives of two thirteen year olds as they manage the changes that occur during puberty. The films were created to be screened either in sequence or individually. While *Am I Normal?* examines the life of Jimmy (Joel Doolin) and his friends Tony (David Carr) and Barry (John Perrigo), *Dear Diary* follows the plight of Janie (Hillary Ellin) and her friends Maureen (Shannon Dopson), and Cathy (Carmelee Wesley). In both films, the narrative is structured around the main characters' quest to answer questions that they have about their bodies, the changes that are occurring to them, and the social pressures of adolescence. While some of the characters, such as Tony and Maureen, pressure their friends to accept the changes without questioning their meaning, other characters are more supportive of their friends and their curiosity. Both of the films are structured around the main character's own personal quest for validation and both conclude with sequences that assure the main characters that the changes that occur during puberty are normal and natural functions of the human body. Hence, viewers themselves are reassured that changes will occur and that they should examine and be critical of the pressures placed on them by their parents, peers, teachers, and the media.

The films address the different pressures and changes that shape the experience of

the average male and female teenager. While *Am I Normal?* addresses the issues that affect the male body, *Dear Diary* attends to the changes that occur to the female body. The films, produced by the Boston Family Planning Division, work to address issues that specifically pertain to the gendered experience of both the male and female adolescent. Although the films differ in their content, the films share in the same narrative concept and structure, as the information provided by the films is managed by a similar approach to the material. The films rely on comedy, internal dialogue, animated sequences, and familiar generic short hands to communicate the challenges of puberty and adolescence. By using a fictional format, the films construct a narrative that is akin to other commercial media productions, as they present their instruction using a captivating and entertaining format that not only engages their audience, but also allows their audience to identify with the films' protagonists and speakers.

By placing youths at the centre of the narrative, both *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary* position youth as active subjects and allow youth to define the parameters of their own sexuality. This is especially apparent when we consider the characters' interactions with their parents and other authority figures, as these adults often lack the vocabulary necessary to communicate effectively with their children on issues pertaining to sex and sexuality. While professionals like the school nurse and biology teacher are able to provide answers to the questions put forth by the inquisitive teens, questions are often answered by other less authoritative figures such as a shop clerk and a zoo keeper. As active subjects, Jimmy, in *Am I Normal?*, and Janie, in *Dear Diary*, not only engage in an active pursuit to find information about their bodies, they share the information with their

peers. This works to facilitate an understanding of the body that encourages the films' viewers to participate and to engage in an active pursuit of sexual knowledge. The final sequence of each film also works to encourage youths to share information with their peers because the films actively participate in a method of teaching that works to dispel existing myths and misconceptions about the human form and its functioning.

Despite the attention that the films pay to dispelling familiar myths about the body and its function, the films often rely on the use of stereotypes to communicate with their audience. Although this adds to the entertainment format of the films, it often works to confirm existing models of gendered behaviour, because the presentation of these models is shaped by a very gendered understanding of human interaction and gender performance. This becomes especially evident when we examine the use of genre and generic short hands that are employed by the films. While *Am I Normal?* relies on a more active approach to the body, *Dear Diary* often employs visual and narrative tactics that are commonly associated with the melodramatic form. While the title *Am I Normal?* suggests an active pursuit of knowledge that requires a detective-like approach, the title *Dear Diary* implies a quiet and personal reflection in which Janie is given the opportunity to contemplate her own status with the emotional and private empowerment provided by the pages of her diary. Although her private reflections are voiced throughout the film, the secrecy and shame associated with the examination of the female body are ultimately contained within the pages of her own personal writings.

While the films commit to an entertaining format, their didactic message and purpose is placed at the very centre of the films. Here, information is managed using a

variety of techniques that include direct instruction, animated diagrams, voice over narration, and participatory involvement. Although the characters featured in the films are fictional, the approach to the material is presented in a highly captivating format which seeks to encourage youths to challenge familiar misconceptions about their body, while also defining their own place within the normative roles provided by society. While the films feature a number of critical images and discussions like masturbation and orgasm (issues that are absent from the majority of sex education films), their overall commitment is to normative images and normative behaviour. This is present throughout the films and is made evident when we compare the strategy, message, and function of each film as they examine the differing developmental processes and their affects on the lives of maturing male and female adolescents.

The films have been produced to elicit a positive response from their audiences. As with the film *Phoebe*, viewers are again encouraged to develop an emotional connection with the characters in *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary*. While *Phoebe* deals exclusively with the social component of teenage sexuality and the dangers of premarital sex and teenage pregnancy, *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary* effectively combine the biological study presented in the *About Series* (Ishu Patel, 1974) and *Methods of Family Planning* (Morland-Latchford, 1976) and the examination of the social component of sexuality as presented in *Phoebe* and in the films examined in Chapter Three. Here, the real biological and social lessons are managed by a unique approach to the sex education genre because the films employ both an entertaining and energetic format. This energy is present in both the form and content of the films. Although they employ the dry and static

formats presented in the *About Series* and *Methods of Family Planning*, these segments are included as part of a larger and more engaging narrative. The fictional narrative that is employed by both films not only allows the filmmakers to combine the social and biological approach, it works to produce a format that is injected with an energy that is absent in other sex education films. Thus, the films *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary* build on the successes and the failures of films examined in earlier chapters and effectively combine the biological and social approach to teenage sexuality to create an easily digestible format that features a number of engaging characters.

Whereas films like those in the *About Series* have worked to forge a link between male and female puberty, *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Dairy* divide the lessons and the films individually examine the changes that occur to each of the gendered bodies. Here, the separation of the sexes, and the division of the material, work to create a set of meanings that is specific to each gender as they make their way through the troublesome changes of puberty. Again, the didactic meaning and purpose of the films is first articulated in the film's titles, as each title introduces the viewer to each gender's differing approach to their bodies. With *Am I Normal?*, the title sets the stage for what is to follow as Jimmy takes an active approach to understanding his body early in the film. In his opening monologue, Jimmy describes himself as an average teenage boy who is biologically entering manhood. After introducing his friends Tony and Barry, Jimmy reveals that although the group once did everything together, the changes brought on by puberty are occurring at different rates between him and his friends. This is especially true of Jimmy's "cool guy" friend Tony who plays the role of the know-it-all adolescent. This is

somewhat troubling to Jimmy, and his developmental status leads him to pose the question that drives the rest of the film. This is articulated by Jimmy in his opening monologue when he states that although he has many questions about the changes that are occurring to his body, the question that plagues him most is “am I normal?”

This is also a question put forth by Janie in *Dear Diary*. But whereas it is the question that drives the narrative and fuels Jimmy’s quest in *Am I Normal?*, Janie’s worries are mulled over in silence as she states, “I have my diary to tell what I am feeling.” *Dear Diary* is structured around a series of private revelations and differs from *Am I Normal?* in that Janie’s internal monologues are always linked to her diary confessions. While Jimmy’s monologues are also presented as private utterances, they are generally less emotional as they are not linked with the private confessions of the written word. Like Jimmy, Janie has a friend who presumes to know everything about the changes that bring the girls to womanhood. But whereas Tony’s bravado stems from his supposedly vast knowledge of girls, sex statistics, and the male body, Janie’s friend Maureen is presumed knowledgeable on topics relating to boys, dating, and kissing because of her status as a “gorgeous” and popular girl. In fact, in the opening sequence of the film Janie prefaces Maureen’s introduction by stating that Maureen wants simply to be “gorgeous” when she grows up. Here, the films introduce the differing priorities of the genders as Tony’s status is secured as a result of his macho status, while Maureen’s status is related to her beauty. This is an early reminder of the sexual status of the gendered subject. Here, male status is secured in relation to his supposed conquests, whereas the female’s status is secured in relation to her position as a sexual object. And although the

films do not necessarily endorse this type of gender status and ranking, the presence of such characters signals the films' awareness of such judgements.

This can be confirmed if we compare the first full appearance of the two characters in each film. Tony, seated in the boy's locker room, is introduced to the viewer while reading a book titled, "*Great Moments in Sex*." In working to assure his status, Tony references a story from the book that states that a man had a two foot erection that lasted forty-eight days and broke off after three people sat on it. When asked if the story is true, Tony replies stating, "it happened to a friend of my brother." In much the same manner, Maureen performs her role as the stereotypical female beauty. In the girl's locker room Maureen reads a magazine and chants off the ideal female measurements. This develops in relation to the feminine ideal and the performance of femininity and feeds Maureen's desire to grow up "gorgeous."

In her canonical essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," Judith Butler critically examines the construction and performance of gender identities and the dramatic consequences of these positions. Butler positions the articulation of gender as a "performative accomplishment" and further states that the project of gender is grounded in the "stylized repetition of acts through time" (Butler 1997, 401, 402). By working to conceal its own genesis, gender becomes a "tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions" (Butler 1997, 405). And while we assume that these articulations are in fact natural articulations of the body, Butler reminds us that gender is in fact a learned behavior (Butler 1997, 402). The acceptance of this binary system as a natural concept guarantees the reproduction of these

norms and punishment is imposed on subjects who contest these established gender scripts (Butler 1997, 415). Performed, produced, and sustained, gender thus constitutes the very identity of the subject. In this regime of gender and identity, you cannot be a person without being either male or female.

This is clearly the case in *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary* as the films are structured around an examination of the gendered experience. This begins with the filmmaker's decision to divide and separate the material— this is also made evident by the differing approaches employed by the films. Although the films share a similar format, the difference in the address speaks to established conventions of gender. These differing addresses become apparent when we examine generic short hands that are employed by the films. And although both films can be linked to the melodrama, this generic reliance becomes especially apparent in *Dear Diary* as a large number of the film's narrative sequences take place in the home space and rely on the conventions of the genre.

According to Laura Mulvey, the subject matter that defines the genre is “associated above all with woman, the family, the home, passion, and so on” (Mulvey 1989, 73). Like other film scholars, Mulvey identifies the roots of the genre when she states that the melodrama draws its source material from the unease and contradiction within the “very icon of American life, the home, and its sacred figure, the mother” (Mulvey 1989, 64). We see all of this at work in *Dear Diary* as the film explores the realm of the home, the relationships that develop in this space, and the articulations of gender that relate to this space. This is especially apparent in the sequences that feature Janie's mother, because her presence in the film can be unquestionably linked to the

image of the melodramatic mother.

Our first introduction to Janie's mother comes after Janie has revealed to her diary that she has her period. Although the sequence is structured as a flashback sequence, the transition from Janie's private reflections to the sequence is relatively seamless. After excusing herself from the family dinner, the viewer hears Janie's off-screen scream. The reason for her scream is immediately recognized by the family and her mother reveals the news to Janie's little brother, who is somewhat confused by the entire incident. When he questions his mother and father about the meaning of Janie's screams, his mother responds stating that Janie has become a woman. The boy states, "she doesn't look any different to me."

This scene is followed by a sequence that takes place in the family's livingroom. Here, Janie asks to speak to her mother about the meaning and purpose of her period. Although her mother's response is positive, the meanings that she puts forth are revealing of her own feelings about her sex, sexuality, and gender as she repeats the lecture given to her by her mother when she first got her period twenty-five years earlier. Her delivery is fast and her speech is somewhat convoluted by her inability to confront the issue directly. She states that a woman will get her period for the majority of her lifetime, menstruation will stop if a woman becomes pregnant, and Janie should not get pregnant unless she is married. She continues by stating that menstruation will occur for the next forty years until it "stops." Although she provides no details about why menstruation stops, she does present Janie with the preliminary material that indicates that the menstrual cycle will in fact cease.

Janie's mother's discomfort can be read in her speech, gesture, and can also be read in the film's mise-en-scene. The role of the mise-en-scene is a defining characteristic of the melodrama. While in other genres conflicts can be externalized and projected into direct action, the physical and social sphere in which melodramatic characters live prevents them from openly expressing themselves or resolving concerns through decisive action (Gibbs 2002, 71). In other words, the characters of the melodrama have no outlet for their emotions, and thus dramatic conflict is sublimated into the film's mise-en-scene.

Christine Gledhill echos this argument and states:

The melodrama is iconographically fixed by the claustrophobic atmosphere of the bourgeois home and/or the small-town setting, its emotional pattern is that of panic and latent hysteria, reinforced by a complex handling of space in interiors...to the point where the world seems totally predetermined and pervaded by 'meaning' and interpretable signs (qtd in Gibbs 2002, 71).

This is of course evident in the scenes that feature Janie's mother, as her speech and gesture not only reveal her discomfort, but her inability to discuss topics relating to sex, sexuality, and menstruation. We see this discomfort in the dinner sequence, in the livingroom discussion, and later in the bookstore where Janie and her mother go to pick up a book on puberty. During the dinner sequence, the mother's cheery disposition seems somewhat plastic as she responds to her husband's positive comments about dinner. Here, she confirms her role as the domestic mother by stating that she tries out a new recipe once a month in order to keep dinner fresh and new. In the livingroom discussion that follows the dinner, Janie's mother's emotions are just as superficial and plastic. Her expression remains stale and her gestures are just as revealing. Although she stands to

deliver her first “woman to woman” lecture to her daughter, the pace of her speech, and her movement across the room, work to expose her inability to express herself adequately.

Janie’s mother’s disconnect is also present in the *mise-en-scene* as the muted colours of the family’s livingroom expose the depths of the mother’s passivity. As she speaks to her daughter, Janie’s mother is positioned in the corner of the room. This is symbolic of her own status in the home as she is made vulnerable and is cornered by the very role that defines her. For Mulvey, the melodramatic mother can be defined by the two strands of silence that define her position. These strands are doubled up and “intertwined like a double helix” (Mulvey 1989, 76). She states that as the primary signifier of censorship, the melodramatic mother represents the silence imposed by censorship, while at the same time, she herself is contained and constrained within and by the language of patriarchal domination (Mulvey 1989, 76). This is made evident in Janie’s mother’s speech as she lack the vocabulary necessary to express herself adequately. Also, her decision to participate in the transmission of inadequate meanings (those first put forth by her own mother), perpetuates a cycle that encourages the limiting discourse that has come to define the female subject. When Janie asks her mother about the true and factual details of her body, Janie’s mother responds with “you don’t need to know because your body knows even if you don’t.” Here, the mother not only censors the material, she also lacks the language and knowledge necessary to present the details to her daughter.

Issues of censorship return on their trip to the book store where Janie’s mother

again lacks the language even to ask the book clerk for assistance. While Janie's mother assures Janie that she will take care of talking to the clerk, her statement "my daughter is at the age where girls do and she did," leaves the clerk confused. In the end, it is Janie, who has not been stunted by the same forms of femininity as her mother, who asks the clerk for a book that contains information about puberty. This sequence also stands as an interesting reminder of Jimmy's plight and his own journey for sexual self-discovery in *Am I Normal?* because Janie is handed the same book that the librarian hands Jimmy. Also, Jimmy, Tony, and Barry make an appearance during this sequence as they too are in the bookstore. The three boys are revealed as the clerk hands the book to Janie. They are seen reading a book and giggling at the images. It is clear that they have aged since their original appearance in *Am I Normal?* This adds an element of inter-textuality to the films because it forces viewers to both remember Jimmy's plight and compare his story to Janie's.

Connections between *Dear Diary* and the melodrama can further be seen in the film's narrative reliance on use of the diary. The presence of the diary throughout the film works to reference the tropes of the melodrama and it works to encode the silence that has shaped our understanding of the female body. As mentioned, the presence and reliance on the diary throughout the narrative also speaks to the gendered roles of the melodrama. Here, like in the melodrama, Janie is given a passive role; unlike Jimmy, she must internalize her confusion rather than directly confront the issues that bother her. As a genre that places emphasis on "talk rather than action," melodramatic characters must resolve their emotional conflicts through speech (Gledhill 1987, 21). The presence of the

diary in the narrative allows Janie an outlet to voice her concerns and talk about her problems. In fact, Janie's diary becomes a register for her emotions. This is not an uncommon theme in the melodrama as the use of a diary allows characters to express emotions that are prevented expression in the passive space of the home. Thus, the diary aids in her expression and allows her to resolve concerns that cannot be openly confronted by the narrative.

Although *Am I Normal?* operates in the melodramatic mode, elements of the film can also be linked to other genres like the detective film. Throughout the majority of the film Jimmy's voice-over narration harkens back to early detective films that rely on the narration of the protagonist to reveal details about the case to the audience. Other elements of this genre are present in the sequence where Jimmy has his first wet dream. After waking up, Jimmy turns on his bedroom light to reveal what has happened. He responds to the situation by grabbing his sheets and by going to the bathroom to "hide the evidence." As he makes his way down the hall, the full details of Jimmy's face are cloaked by the strong vertical framing provided by the dim lighting. This, of course, is a characteristic feature of the film noir/detective film as the characters in this genre are often found lurking in the shadows and are often framed by strong lighting patterns and stylings. The accompanying music picks up in pace as Jimmy makes his way to the bathroom. The music included in this sequence is reminiscent of film scores associated with the genre and is especially reminiscent of *The Pink Panther* (Blake Edwards, 1963) theme. This is a relevant connection as *The Pink Panther* is a film that also plays with established conventions of the genre.

The connection to the detective or private-eye film is further solidified once Jimmy reaches the bathroom. After cleverly disposing of the “evidence,” Jimmy, while looking at himself in the mirror, states, “I decided to take action... I had to find the answers out for myself.” By referring to his decision to hunt down the truth and find the answers to his questions about his body, Jimmy’s voice-over positions him as the detective who is willing to stop at nothing until he has broken the case. By relying on the tropes of the detective genre, Jimmy is positioned as a pro-active subject who is engaged in the pursuit of concrete and accurate knowledge about the human body. This reference to the genre is significant for several reasons. Most importantly, the reference to the genre signals the need to uncover material that is masked by society’s laws of morality and decency. By uncovering the truth about the sexual body, Jimmy emerges as a detective who has solved the mysteries surrounding the male form, development, and sexuality.

As in *Dear Diary*, Jimmy turns to his father for some help in answering the questions that he has about his body. Again, as in *Dear Diary*, Jimmy finds no help in asking his parent for clarification. This scene is set in the family livingroom where his dad is seated watching a baseball game. Jimmy, who is first positioned outside the room, is framed by the dark outline of the door. Although Jimmy is hesitant to enter the room and question his father, he finally stumbles through his words and tells his father that he wants to know about sex. He is first met by praise when the father triumphantly replies, “that’s wonderful son!” He states that *his* father told him relatively little about sex. What comes next is a mix of comedy and blundering as his father reveals the details of sex through a series of metaphors and allegories. Jimmy’s questions ultimately go

unanswered as his father begins his lecture by stating that men have baseball bats and women have catchers mitts. He goes on to relate sex to the game of baseball: “there is first base, second base....” Jimmy, not finding his father’s comments useful, interrupts his father and asks him to elaborate on the changes that are occurring to his body. Again, Jimmy’s father produces a response similar to Janie’s mother. He tells Jimmy that men do not need to talk about the changes because they should just know what is happening.

In both *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary*, parents fall short in being able to provide the answers to their children’s questions. As a result, Jimmy and Janie are forced to find other sources to provide them with the information that they need. Both films follow the same structure as each question posed by the teens is answered by a similar adult figure in each film. While Jimmy consults a nurse, a librarian, and a zoo keeper, Janie speaks to a teacher, a bookstore clerk, a shop clerk, and her coach. While some of these sequences include comedic elements (zoo keeper and shop clerk), others serve as a foray into the scientific and clinical didacticism introduced in Chapter Two. As with the films in the *About Series* and *Methods of Family Planning*, *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary* rely on the use of animation to visualize the internal workings of the male and female form. This again speaks to the literal construction of the sexual and gendered subject, because like the films examine in Chapter Two, the animated bodies in these sequences are constructed by a specific understanding of the body. In *Am I Normal?*, the first round of scientific and clinical discourse begins at the library after Jimmy has sought the assistance of a librarian to help him find a book about the “male penis.” This scene is somewhat humorous because Jimmy has to repeat himself twice before the librarian understands

him. On his second try, Jimmy's statement, "I am looking for a book on the male penis," catches the attention of nearly everyone in the library, who collectively gasp at Jimmy's request.

As Jimmy opens the book, we are introduced to the voice of a male narrator who guides the viewer through the presentation. The film begins by addressing changes that occur during puberty and the accompanying animated images work to illustrate these changes. These include an increase in body hair and body development. From here, the animation moves to a close-up of the penis. Here, the voice-over narration reveals that the penis will become increasingly sensitive to physical and emotional feelings and that this will cause an erection. This is significant because it is the first time that the scientific and clinical approach employed by the films included in this project have acknowledged an emotional or pleasurable component of sex and sexuality. While the images produced in the *About Series* and *Methods of Family Planning* have suggested male arousal, arousal is never linked to positive sensations, emotions, or feelings. This of course stands in contrast to the presentation in *Dear Diary*, because that film upholds the gender imbalance that grants females less access to their bodies and their sexual form. While Maureen references the "mushy feeling" that a female might get "down there," this idea is never validated by the experts or by the clinical examination examined in the animated inserts.

In reference to Jimmy's earlier dealings with Tony, the film *Am I Normal?* works to clear up common misconceptions about the male penis. In the same animated sequence that is discussed above, the narrator informs the audience that the penis is not a bone and



Figure 16 From *Am I Normal?*

that it cannot break or be snapped off. These assertions are supported by onscreen images when the words are literally spelled out and then crossed out as the narrator speaks. This scene is later continued. While seeking refuge in a stall in the boys' bathroom, Tony, who has come to find his friend, warns Jimmy that if you "do it" too much "it" will fall off. Tony warns Jimmy that masturbation can cause leprosy, can make your skin peel off like paper, and can make your palms hairy. Again, Tony's presence in this scene offers comic relief when he falls into a toilet during his attempt to spy on his friend Jimmy.

After Tony's fall, the viewer is reintroduced to the same animated instruction.



Figure 17 From *Am I Normal?*

This instruction is prefaced by a shot of the book titled *About Your Body*, that Jimmy was given by the librarian. Here, the camera zooms in on a page that is blank except for the words, "About Masturbation." This return to the instructional and animated world constructed by the book is accompanied by a tingling sound reminiscent of those heard in cartoons to suggest travel, a flashback, or a day dream. Again the narrator references the pleasure and stimulation that occurs as a result of masturbation or sexual activity. In fact, the narrator links ejaculation to the word orgasm. This, of course, is a word that has, up until now, been completely absent from any of the films, including those that examine the social component of teenage sexuality.

Although masturbation gets a brief mention in *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, the practice is never linked to orgasm.

The visuals taken up in this sequence work to support the narrator's statements that masturbation is a normal and perhaps fulfilling action when the narrator describes the practice as one that relaxes the subject. In reminding viewers that masturbation cannot hurt you, the image of a wolfman with hairy palms and glasses is systematically stripped of these supposed consequences of masturbation. Again the narrator addresses the audience and reassures the viewer that masturbation cannot hurt you and states that many men and women of all ages masturbate and that it is normal if you do masturbate and normal if you do not. While the narrator refers to people who may find masturbation to be against their principles, the overall approach to the topic is a positive one.

Although the practice of masturbation is addressed in *Am I Normal?*, it is a topic that is absent from the discussion in *Dear Diary*. In fact, the film seems to revert to the method employed by the purely scientific and clinical films examined in Chapter Two because the film stresses the biological imperative of the female subject and repeatedly links the female sexual organs to reproduction. This can be seen in the first animated sequence in the film. This sequence, like all the other animated interludes, is worked into the narrative and the topic of menstruation is discussed after Janie's biology teacher, Mr. Barker, has read a note that Janie has sent to her friend Maureen. Again, in working to dispel common assumptions made by teens, Mr. Barker responds to Janie's question and reassures the class that one can go to gym class if she has her period. After reading the note, Mr. Barker openly addresses the class and asks how the class feels about

menstruation. The class, made up of both young men and women, sighs and groans at the mention of the topic. In fact, one of the male students can even be heard saying “that’s gross!” Despite his class’s groans, Mr. Barker continues his lecture and his schematic renderings of the internal organs of the female anatomy segue to the animated sequence.

This time, the animated sequence is narrated by a female speaker who details the functions and purpose of the menstrual cycle. Here, the narrator links menstruation with reproduction by stating that the fluid that makes up menstrual blood is the body’s way of preparing for a possible pregnancy. Issues relating to pregnancy and biological determinism are taken up by the following animated sequence when the narrator describes the changes that occur to women during puberty. When pointing out the details of the female anatomy, the narrator links the parts to their birthing function. The vagina is described as both a passage way to the *womb* and the place from which *the* baby will be born. By placing emphasis on the birthing process, female sexuality is inevitably tied to reproduction and child birth. And although the film references sensation sites like the clitoris, there is no mention of female stimulation, the signs of female arousal, or the physiological changes that occur during arousal.

The narrative structure of *Dear Diary* also focuses on dating, kissing, and finding a boyfriend. While these are topics addressed in *Am I Normal?*, they are addressed with less detail and take up less narrative focus. These issues are brought up relatively early in *Dear Diary* when Janie confesses to her diary that at thirteen, she is already “too old to be single.” Throughout the film, Maureen encourages Janie to find a boyfriend and she even goes so far as to teach Janie her own method of attracting boys. This is all brought up in

Janie's bedroom as Maureen practices her kissing technique on one of Janie's pillows. Again, Maureen's instructions harken back to the ideal forms of femininity, as she instructs Janie to flutter her eyelashes for exactly three second before she goes in for a kiss.

Throughout the film, Roger becomes the focus of Janie's romantic affections. Despite her admitted lack of interest in dating, her friends continue to push Janie to make a decision regarding her future boyfriend. In fact, Janie's admission causes Maureen to question her position as a woman: "it's like you don't even want to be a woman." Janie responds to Maureen's statement with frustration; she picks up her books and tells her friends that she is going running. This is followed by a scene in which Janie runs from her friends. Janie, who is still unsure about her own position as a sexual subject, turns to her track coach for help.

Unlike her mother, who is restricted by her position as a melodramatic mother, Janie's coach is more responsive to Janie's questioning. Here, Janie approaches her coach with a statement that reveals her uncertainty about the changes that are occurring to her

body and to her social position as a woman. Her coach



Figure 18 Janie's Mother
From *Dear Diary*

responds to Janie's questions by relating her development to Janie's passion for running. She confirms Janie's position as a sexual subject and reminds Janie that she does not have to do anything, even if she is pressured by her friends, until she is

ready. In comparing Janie's developmental status with a race, she reminds Janie that she



Figure 19 Janie's Coach
From *Dear Diary*

will ultimately win if she sets her own pace.

As a black woman, Janie's coach is granted access to her position as a sexual subject. In her essay, "Selling Hot Pussy," bell hooks examines the position of the black woman and states that her position is synonymous with sex, accessibility, and availability

(hooks 1997, 117). In documenting the history and presentation of black women in culture and popular media, hooks uncovers a systematic project that works to reduce black women to "mere spectacle" and works to position them as a cultural commodities available to anyone who can "pay the price" (hooks 1997, 114). Although this position as a sexual commodity is not a positive one, it does grant the filmic/fictional/discursive black women access to specific realms of sexual articulation and thought that are denied to other cultural identities like the melodramatic mother. We see this at work in *Dear Diary*. This is made evident in both the coach's address and her attire. Her clothing works to highlight her female features and sexual status. Whereas Janie's mother remains confined by her suburban status, Janie's coach is able to acknowledge Janie's position as a sexual subject and as a woman. In fact, Janie's coach even gets down to Janie's level and discusses Janie's realizations while seated on the grass. And although the coach's presence in the film is most likely meant to signal an inclusive and well balanced narrative, one cannot deny the divergent strategies of representation between the coach and the other females who are featured in the film.

The final sequence of both *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary* are telling of the films'

differing approaches to material. The “revelation sequence” in each film speaks to the project of gendered meaning produced by the films. Although each character is presented as an active subject, the final narrative segment in each film reveals the status of the gendered subject. While Jimmy is presented as a character who speaks with precision and authority, Janie is not granted the same privilege and she remains silent during her “revelation” sequence. Jimmy’s final revelation, in contrast to Janie’s, is revealed during a somewhat comical trip to the zoo. The comedy comes during a sequence in which Jimmy and his friends watch the zoo animals from behind a chainlink fence. Here, he and his friends comment on the size of the animals. While we first assume that he is speaking about the size of the animal’s penis, a reverse shot of a giraffe reveals that they are in fact speaking of the size of the giraffe’s neck. This, however, leads to a discussion of penis sizes when Barry asks his friends if size really does matter. Tony responds in accordance with his role and states that size does make a difference. Jimmy, who is unsure about Tony’s comments, seeks the advice of the zoo keeper and asks the elderly gentleman if penis size actually does matter. In response, the zoo keeper tells Jimmy that he has come to the right man as he has seen a lot of animal penises. He states that animals never worry about penis size and that some people use penis size to make other people feel small so they can themselves “feel big inside.”

A similar sequence takes place in *Dear Diary* and is set in the change room of the local department store. Janie is accompanied by Cathy and the two are seen looking at bras; both are unsure what to look for. The store keeper recognizes their distress and comes to the girls’ aid. Like the zoo keeper in *Am I Normal?*, the store clerk in *Dear*

Diary claims to be an expert in all matters relating to female sizing. Her speech is clear and concise and she addresses the girls with a British accent. This adds to the campiness of her character as she comes to function more as a caricature than an actual expert.

Despite this, Janie and Cathy voice their concerns to the clerk and question her about breast size. The clerk responds by stating that variety is the spice of life; her statement is proven true as she illustrates this fact to the girls by pulling back the curtain of several occupied change rooms. Again, like the zoo keeper, the clerk confirms that different body types and differing sizes are normal and natural and it is not something that the young girls should be worried about.

In his final revelation sequence, Jimmy shares his findings with his friends who admit that they too seek the answers to Jimmy's questions. Although Jimmy's speech begins with him revealing his findings to his friends, his statements and findings draw a crowd which confirms Jimmy's status. In fact, the crowd even offers Jimmy praise for his inquisitive nature and his decision to share his findings and many of the crowd members agree that they too were confused about their body and its meanings. Although similar praise is offered to Janie, her revelation is presented in a different context. After having left her diary on the bleachers, Maureen shares the diary with a group of teenage girls who cannot help but read the details of Janie's private musings. Janie, after having been warned about Maureen's plan to share her diary, runs to the girls in order to keep her secrets safe. This plays out in a slow motion sequence. Although Janie does not make it in time to stop the girls from reading her diary, the slow motion sequence validates her character as she fulfills her dream of becoming a runner, which is uttered at the beginning

of the film, and her running skills are put to use.

Unlike Jimmy's final monologue, Janie is not granted the privilege to divulge her findings. Instead, after running to the group of girls, Janie is praised for her confessions when the other girls reveal that they share Janie's feelings and confess that they too are not as ready as everyone thinks they are. Although Janie is offered the same amount of praise as Jimmy, the decision made by the filmmakers not to include her findings leaves her discoveries unacknowledged and they remain hidden within the pages of her diary.

In examining the social and biological components of teenage sexuality, *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary* offer a different interpretation of the sex education genre. By drawing on the successes and failures of the biological films examined in Chapter Two and the social films examined in Chapter Three, these films present an entertaining format that encourages viewers to participate in the construction of meaning. Like *Phoebe*, the films rely on a fictional format to present the material and the biological lessons are worked into the narrative and into the characters' stories. Throughout the films, Jimmy and Janie develop both biologically and as characters, which forces them to encounter the biological and social changes brought on by puberty. Like the *About Series* and *Methods of Family Planning*, the biological lessons that are incorporated into the narrative are shaped by specific assumptions about gender, sexuality, and youth. The films are made to address the different challenges of male and female sexuality and they structure their analysis around this gendered process. The films address the challenges that are specific to each gender. This is manifest in their form and content as each film is shaped by a format that relates to the gender of the subject. While Jimmy engages in an

active pursuit that draws conventions from the detective genre, Janie's self-discovery is more personal and private as her revelations are revealed only in her personal diary.

Thus, what the films explore is the gendered experience of the average teenager. These lessons, while informative, are shaped by the dominant language of sexual and social thought. While the teens in the films engage in an active pursuit to find the answers to their questions, they are met with lessons that are approved by the dominant culture. Although the films do address some issues that are not covered by other films examined in this project, the meanings presented in these lessons are shaped by a very gendered sense of meaning and purpose. By placing youth at the centre of these films, the youth subjects become the primary source of these meanings. Thus, the lessons put forth by the films and their leading characters are spoken by youths and to youths and are constructed to encourage viewers to adopt the dominant and established meanings positioned by the films.

Conclusion

As noted throughout this thesis, Film Studies has maintained a protracted inattention to the diverse body of films that constitute the sex education genre. An examination of the genre reveals a wide range of methods and tactics employed by filmmakers and educators alike. In the foregoing chapters, I have sought to explore the relationship between the films, their intended meaning, and their didactic purpose. What comes into relief is a complex network of meanings that is informed by dominant culture and a sense of propriety that shapes any examination of sex and sexuality with an intended youth audience. This is not to say that the tactics and methods employed by the films are not useful or productive. Rather, an examination of the films reveals that the forces that shape our understanding of sex and sexuality are productive as well as coercive. And while the debates surrounding sex and sex education continue to be a prevalent concern across both Canada and the United States, an examination of the films that were born out of social movements like the sexual liberation movement of the 1960's and 1970's reveals that the films do in fact include progressive elements of social and political culture. The films' potentially empowering/emancipatory dimensions have been linked to their attentiveness to the youth voice. This too is born out of the movement in which the films were made, inasmuch as previous works of the genre were often not intended for youth audiences (Milliken 2003, 4). Thus, by placing youths at the very centre of the films, the films work to both speak to and speak of an entire generation of youthful subjects.

This begins with the film *Phoebe: The Story of a Premarital Pregnancy* (George Kaczender, 1964). *Phoebe* was produced in the midst of the youth revolution of the 1960's and follows a young girl who is forced to confront the reality that she may be pregnant. The presence of youth culture is key to the film's success since it appeals to the emotions of a generation of youths. These emotions are revealed throughout the narrative and they can be seen as early as the film's first sequence. Phoebe, having been woken by her mother, is visibly frustrated and agitated by her mother's forceful suggestions that her behaviour is not fitting of a young girl of her suburban status. This sequence also introduces the audience to the emotional, physical, social, and generational disconnect between Phoebe and her mother. Communication between Phoebe and her mother is stunted due to their inability to relate to each other. This disconnect is further solidified in later sequences when Phoebe's mother fails to recognize and address the source of Phoebe's frustrations and displaced emotional aggression.

This disconnect is not limited to the relationship between Phoebe and her mother. The film, which follows Phoebe through the course of a single day, continually works to reveal Phoebe's emotional distance from those who surround her. Although this begins with Phoebe's mother, this type of dysfunctional communication can be seen throughout the film, as Phoebe is unable to vocalize her true feelings or receive the support that she needs. Phoebe's alienation is confirmed in the flash forwards and flashbacks. Here, even Phoebe's own visions of her future are coloured by her feelings of loneliness and isolation. Although several of the flash forwards visualize a positive scenario and a positive reaction from the people with whom she speaks, such sequences are explicitly

coded as fantasy images which are shaped by Phoebe's hopes for the future rather than the reality that Phoebe knows is to come.

These fantasy flash forwards can be seen in the sequences which Phoebe speaks to the school nurse, when she reveals the truth to her parents, and when she delivers the news to her boyfriend, Paul. Whereas the negative flash forwards are seen from Phoebe's perspective, the positive scenarios are shot from the vantage point of an unspecified onlooker. Here, Kaczender references the self-reflexive nature of the filmic medium. Phoebe, like the film viewing audience, watches as her fantasies play out on screen. These self-reflexive sequences not only illustrate Phoebe's distance from her community, they come to function as a social commentary on society's inability to address successfully the problems faced by youth and faced by those who may find themselves in situations similar to Phoebe's.

As a precursor to the films examined in the later chapters of this thesis, *Phoebe* stands as a progressive example of the sex education genre due to its capacity to represent youths. By placing a youthful protagonist at the very centre of the film, Kaczender sets a precedent that is taken up by the films that are to follow. *Phoebe* not only introduces audiences to a youthful protagonist, it introduces audiences to themes that shape the very construction of the genre. First, and perhaps most significant, is the generic reliance on the forms and modes of the melodrama. Specifically, the film, which is largely about the space of the home, takes up issues faced by those who reside in the domestic sphere. The narrative confronts the potential ruin of one specific home in the community. Here, the stability of the home is threatened by Phoebe's potential pregnancy. This is echoed by

Phoebe's father, who questions what will happen to the family should Phoebe's pregnancy be made public.

As mentioned, this generic reliance on the melodrama is a theme that is present throughout the sex education genre and can again be seen in almost all of the films that are under consideration. Melodramatic tropes figure prominently in the genre and can be seen in the films *It Couldn't Happen to ME* (Planned Parenthood, 1976), *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* (Document Associates, 1976), *Are You Ready for Sex?* (Mayer/Espar Productions, 1976), *Am I Normal?* (Debra Franco and David S. Shepard, 1979), and *Dear Diary* (Debra Franco and David S. Shepard, 1981). In working to address the social component of teenage sex and sexuality, these films enter the home space and discuss issues taken up by the melodramatic genre. Melodrama is often described as a woman's genre and the connection with the sex education film is not unfounded as sex education films often centre their efforts on an examination of issues that directly pertain to females, conception, and the effective use of contraceptives (Mulvey 1989, 73). Thus, it is not surprising that the films employ the conventions of a genre that is most commonly associated with women.

In seeking to educate youth about their bodies, reproduction becomes the most referenced function of the sexual body. This, of course, relates to issues of propriety as the films are mediated by the morals of both parents and educators. In calling on the use of the melodrama, issues relating to the sexual body are often limited by the prevailing definitions of gender. Consequently, what this means is that females are continually positioned as reproductive bodies. Here, their sexuality is invariably linked to issues of

maternity and motherhood. Films like *Methods of Family Planing* (Moreland-Latchford, 1976) and *Dear Diary* continually make this link between female genitalia and its function in the birthing process. In fact, *Dear Diary* goes so far as to name the vagina as *the* place where the baby will exit. This not only reinforces the female's reproductive role, it works to encourage women to accept childbirth and motherhood as part of their developmental destiny.

This trend is repeated in the films that rely on scientific rhetoric and clinical definitions to explain the body. In the *About Series* (Ishu Patel, 1974), presentation of the sexual body is continually linked to reproduction and childbirth. Although this is a natural link considering the topics that are explored in the films, one cannot forget what this focus relegates to obscurity. This includes a complete negation of any illustration of the vulva, labia, and clitoris. And although the meanings in the silent series may be altered by a classroom narrator, one cannot deny that without extra-textual framing, the films under consideration ultimately present a binary model of gender which reduces the genders to their reproductive functions.

In the *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault reminds us that discourses cannot be theorized outside of their relation to the conduits of power-knowledge (Foucault 1978, 100). That is, discourse is “both an instrument and effect of power” (Foucault 1978, 101). As an instrument and effect of power, “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it” (Foucault 1978, 101). An examination of the sex education genre thus works to expose the prevailing discourses that have shaped our understanding of sex, sexuality, and the sexual body. As mentioned, these

discourses serve both a productive and coercive function. And while the films work to reinforce established forms of gender, gender pairing, and traditional views of sex and sexuality, they also attend to the changing realities faced by youths living in the specified period of analysis. These dates, 1969 to 1981/1982, reflect a specific period that was inevitably shaped by the political, social, and cultural changes that began to take place in the years following the Second World War. Brenda Margaret Appleby identifies the years leading up to 1969 as a time of moral transition in Christian belief and moral thinking (Appleby 1999, 242)¹⁶. This transition, of course, was a lengthy one and relates to the belief that the use of contraception is moral if it is used by married couples who feel the need to plan a pregnancy. The formal decriminalization of these behaviours reached royal assent in 1969. The changes did little to change Christian traditions of marriage and morality as Christians maintained that “responsible human control over reproduction was permissible only in marriage and illicit outside it” (Appleby 1999, 242).

By 1981/1982, Christian definitions of marriage, morality, and sexual activity had not been significantly altered and the expected consequences of the removal of contraception from the Criminal Code failed to materialize (Appleby 1999, 245). However, what does change is the overall awareness of the sex education genre and the need to educate youths about the dangers of unprotected sex. The discovery and naming of the HIV/AIDS virus in 1981/1982 worked to prompt new sexual concerns and

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Although Appleby examines the nature of this transition in Canada, we can assume that a similar transition took place in the United States, as Christians all over North America were forced to confront the changing realities of their situations, moral attitudes, and religious obligations.

vocabularies. This, combined with the sexually stigmatizing rhetoric of the newly elected right wing American President Ronald Regan, marked an important dividing line in North America's approach to sex education and sexual education films (Irvine 2002, 89). While the youths were still present in the films that were produced in the 1980's, the shift in meaning, purpose, and form separates the films from those produced before them.

Discussion relating to the films examined in this thesis reveals that although the majority of these films offer a relatively conservative or neutral view of sex and sexuality, some of the films invoke surprisingly liberal messages and images. These images and discussions are not always limited to the topics of sex and sexuality. As we see in *Methods of Family Planning*, *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, *Are You Ready for Sex?*, *Loving Parents*, *Am I Normal?*, and *Dear Diary*, some films have worked to present an integrated model that represents a multiplicity of identities and ethnicities. And although these representations are often stilted by the films' commitment to stereotypical images like the subordinate black female (the nurse in *Methods of Family Planning*), the sexualized black female (Janie's coach in *Dear Diary*), and the more sexually experienced urban teenager (*All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*), often the very presence of such identities can be seen as progressive examples of the emerging presence of peripheral and minority subjects in both mainstream media and the sex education genre.

Other divergent images and topics are covered in *Dear Diary*, *Am I Normal?*, *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, and *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* *It Couldn't Happen to ME* gives a voice to a group of pregnant teens who discuss their situations and the events that lead up to their pregnancies. As "one of the most marginalized groups in society," the

presence of these pregnant teens stands as a progressive attempt to give a voice to a population of pregnant youth speakers that had previously been excluded or positioned as sexual deviants (Kelly 2000, 25). And while we can conclude that the film does work to uphold some of the stereotypes and traditions that frame the image of the teenage mother, the very presence of the pregnant teens in the film works to quash some of the barriers of representation that faced young women who may have found themselves in similar situations.

A similar representational status is granted to several speakers in *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.* The film grants a voice to teenage speakers who freely discuss their own sexual past and some of the speakers even reveal the sexual abuse and trauma that they have suffered. While the films *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary* work to offer a more traditional view of sex, sexuality, and sexual development, the films include progressive references to masturbation, the sexual drive, and sexual pleasure. In fact, of the films explored in this thesis, *Dear Diary* is the only film to name and visualize parts of the female anatomy like the vulva and the clitoris.

Thus, what we can conclude is that although these films often operate in the mode of dominant discourse, the films offer images and discussions that differ from familiar representations of sex, sexuality, and teenage culture. Central to this divergent representation is the presence of the youth voice in the dialogue. Whereas earlier incarnations of the genre worked to impose a meaning on their subjects, the youths that are present in these films are given the freedom to speak of and speak to the meanings and definitions that have been imposed upon them. And although the rhetoric that is

employed by the films does not overtly challenge the established discourse, the presence of the youth voice in the films does stand as a potent marker of the films' emancipation from earlier generic productions.

I have divided the films made in this period into three categories of presentation: those that employ the use of scientific rhetoric; those that attend to the social component of teenage sexuality; and those that combine scientific discourse and social discussion of teenage sexuality with fictional narratives. Each of these categories offers viewers different types of meanings and, as such, each chapter of this thesis examines the differing categories of the genre.

Like the film *Phoebe*, the films in the *About Series* were produced and distributed by the National Film Board of Canada. However, the films in the *About Series* produce a set of meanings that differ from *Phoebe* and distance the viewer from the youth voice. Here, meanings are imposed on the viewer. The images and voice-over narration provided by the films work to produce a system of meaning that develops in line with dominant discourses of knowledge. A similar approach is employed by the film *Methods of Family Planning*. This film, which is aided by the instruction of a male voice-over narrator, discusses the use of contraceptive methods that were to be used in family planning. The film was produced in participation with the Catholic Communication Centre and reflects the changes in Christian morality. Again, like the films in the *About Series*, *Methods of Family Planning* employs a clinical approach to the body. But unlike the *About Series*, the film features real life subjects. These subjects are paired according to their race and ethnicity and are seen participating in a classroom lecture on the effective use of various

contraceptive methods.

Lessons about the body are aided by the use of animation and simplified schematics. Although the film works to include images of youthful bodies, the presence of these characters ultimately works to reinforce the idea that any of the methods explored by the films are to be used only by the legitimate, married couple. Despite the limited or non-representational status of youth in the films, the very idea that youths would be instructed on the use of contraception stands as a potent marker of the shift in moral attitudes. The very fact that teens are granted access to this type of material is not only a new concept, it works to acknowledge the sexual status of the films' teenage viewers.

While the films in Chapter Two work to distance the audience from the fully vocal youthful subject, the films in Chapter Three work to discuss the social component of teenage sexuality. By drawing on these voices, the films *It Couldn't Happen to ME*, *All the Guys Ever Want is S.E.X.*, *Are You Ready for Sex?*, and *Loving Parents* create a type of meaning that differs from earlier incarnations of the genre. Here, youths are given the freedom to speak freely and participate in the creation of the meanings that define them. Likewise, the visual format of these films is more relaxed than that of the films examined in Chapter Two. The films' subjects are seen sitting in parks, walking through forests, and informally discuss the social pressures placed on them by their peers, their parents, their teachers, and their community. By dealing with the social component of teenage sexuality, these films address issues that had been omitted in more conservative sex education films. This is not to suggest that the films examined in this chapter offer a more effective method of instruction. Rather, these films offer an alternative format that allows

for different meanings to emerge. That is, the films both acknowledge youth's sexual potential and allow them to define the parameters of their own sexual citizenship.

The films examined in Chapter Four combine the efforts put forth by *Phoebe* and the films included in Chapters Two and Three. Created to be screened in succession or individually, both *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary* rely on fictional characters to transmit information to their viewers. In following the lives of Jimmy and Janie, viewers are provided with the answers to questions put forth by the films' leading characters. Lessons about the body are transmitted through a careful blend of fiction, comedy, and clinical instruction. Clinical lessons are inserted into the narrative and are presented by both qualified professionals and unassuming adults. As in *Phoebe*, the characters learn that they cannot always rely on their parents to provide them with the support that they need and, as such, the films work to encourage viewers to seek support from other adults who may be more comfortable answering their questions. By working to present an alternative to the exclusively biological or social format, the films examined in this chapter evoke a type of discourse that combines the efforts of the other films and work to create another sub-genre within the larger corpus of sex education films.

Attention to the differing modes of address that are employed by the films not only reveals the growing strength of youth movements, it also reflects a societal shift in attitude and opinion. This shift proliferated through all areas of society but resonated particularly with Canadian youths. According to Appleby, Canadian studies of post-secondary students during this time noted "an acceptance of increased permissiveness and less guilt about sexual activity" (Appleby 1999, 4). The significance of both the sexual

revolution and the youth-counter culture movement is that they both influenced and were influenced by the widespread use of contraceptives. This is present even in the most conservative sex education films. We see this in the *About Series* and *Methods of Family Planning*. Although these films employ a more formal and conservative approach to sex education, the shift in moral attitudes is present in the basic construction of the films, as they work to address issues of contraception and the sexual development of teens. Films examined in Chapter Three build on these issues. In confronting the social component of teenage sexuality, the films attempt to remove the stigma attached to the teenage sexual body. By removing this stigma, the films work to promote a healthy sexuality that includes the use of contraception. Like the films examined in Chapter Three, *Am I Normal?* and *Dear Diary* were made to be screened by youths and the films encourage viewers to question the meanings that are attached to their bodies and their sexuality. By de-stigmatizing issues relating to the sex and the sexual body, the films encourage youths to develop a healthy body image earlier in life, which, in turn, works to promote a healthy sexuality.

Thus, an examination of the sex education genre reveals a diversity of formal and thematic strategies that regulate and define sex, sexuality, youth, and their position within society. Discourses relating to sex and sexuality are omnipresent as sex and sexuality relate to every expression of human interaction. Sex education films become one expression in this network of meaning, knowledge, and power. By placing youths in the discussions, the films attend to the social category of youth and allow them to define the parameters of their own sexual status. Whereas previous generations of youth had been

denied access to these realms of definition and power, the films in this thesis allow youths to outstrip the discursive, political, and social framings that have long defined their position in the world of social and sexual law. This works to create new meanings and grants youths the permission to be defined as sexual citizens and to define their own position within this status.

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