



FEMINIST MAJORITY FOUNDATION

FEMINIST CAMPUS

WORLD'S LARGEST FEMINIST STUDENT NETWORK

Campaign for Sex Positivity

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WHAT IS SEX-POSITIVITY?

Sex-positivity is the belief that consensual sexual expression is both healthy and important in contributing to a safe and inclusive environment. Sex-positivity is grounded in comprehensive sex education, exploring and deconstructing gender norms, and promoting body-positivity and self-love. It fosters safe spaces in which different identities and sexual expressions are valued and bodily autonomy is paramount. Sex-positivity transforms our relationship with ourselves, each other, and our communities and can impact policy.

CONSENT

Consent is the expression of a mutual desire between parties to participate in a sexual activity. Sexual activity without consent is sexual violence. Period.

Consent can be withdrawn at any time and it is given without coercion: a “yes” to sexual activity because someone is too afraid to say “no” is not consent. Forcing someone to engage in a sexual activity that they previously agreed to but have since changed their mind about is also not consensual. Consent isn’t always spoken, but it should never be assumed. The absence of a “no” is not a “yes.” Minors, people who are mentally incapacitated or unconscious, and people under the influence of drugs or alcohol are unable to give consent.

Consent is fundamental in creating a sex-positive space. It is vitally important to respect other people’s consensual choices when it comes to their identity and body.

SELF-DEFINED SEXUALITY

Sex-positivity celebrates healthy sexual relationships, diversity within those relationships, bodily autonomy, and sexual empowerment. You define what is right for you – there is no “right” way to engage (or not engage) in sexual activity, and there is no “right” way to express your sexuality as long as everything involves consent, empowerment, and respect.

BREAKING DOWN GENDER MYTHS

Gender roles are behavioral expectations placed on people in relation to the gender binary. It’s important to remember that gender is a social construct, and actually exists on a spectrum, not a binary system. Critically examining gender roles and participating in behaviors and expressions that make you happy is extremely sex-positive! It is also

important not to limit others’ gender and sexual expressions, (or lack thereof) as everyone should be able to express their identity in a way that empowers them.

SAFE SEX

COMPREHENSIVE SEX EDUCATION

Empowering people to take control of their sexuality begins with educating them on how their bodies work and how to keep them safe.

Sex-positive, comprehensive sex education does not intertwine sexual identities and choices with character and is supportive of students’ safe and informed exploration of gender and sexual expression. According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), comprehensive sex ed is characterized by teaching age-appropriate, medically accurate information on topics such as sexuality, human development, decision-making, abstinence, contraception, and disease prevention. Comprehensive sex ed provides students with factual information on abortion, masturbation, and sexual orientation, and encourages they are encouraged students to explore their own values, goals, and options. These curriculums also cover consent, healthy relationships, communication skills, and bodily autonomy.

SIECUS defines the following curricula as not comprehensive.

- **Abstinence-Based:** Programs that emphasize the benefits of abstinence but also include information about contraception, disease prevention, and sexual behavior other than intercourse.
- **Abstinence-Only:** Programs that emphasize abstinence from all sexual behaviors and don’t include information about contraception or disease prevention.
- **Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage:** Programs that emphasize abstinence from all sexual behaviors outside of a heterosexual marriage, often presenting marriage as the only morally correct context for sexual activity; if contraception or disease-prevention methods are discussed, failure rates of these methods are typically emphasized.
- **Fear-Based:** Abstinence-centered programs that use fear, shame, and guilt via negative messages about sexuality, distorted information about condoms and STDs, and biases about gender, sexual orientation, marriage, family structure, and pregnancy to control young people’s sexual behavior.¹

1. SIECUS. (2008). Sexuality education definitions. Retrieved from the Community Action Kit: <http://www.communityactionkit.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewPage&pageId=886>



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Comprehensive sex education has been proven time and time again to lower rates of unprotected sex, unintended pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). According to research published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, teens aged 15-19 who received comprehensive sex education were 50% less likely to experience pregnancy than those receiving abstinence-only sexual education.² Despite tremendous evidence that comprehensive sex ed leads to a healthier youth population and that abstinence-only programs are ultimately ineffective, the federal government has invested billions of dollars on abstinence-only programs over the past 21 years.³

Only 24 states and the District of Columbia require sex education in public schools, and only 13 of those require sex education to be medically accurate. While President Obama slashed the budget that supports abstinence-only sex education during his presidency and funded comprehensive sex education programs, President Trump has reintroduced funding for abstinence-only education in the 2019 fiscal year budget proposal, and Title X (federal family planning) funds are anticipated to be redistributed to fake clinics and abstinence-only education.

CONDOMS AND CONTRACEPTION

Making condoms and contraception accessible is a critical aspect of empowering people to control their own sexuality. When used correctly, condoms, as well as dental dams and internal condoms, are very effective in preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). However, pairing condom use with another form of contraception, such as the pill, implant, ring, or IUD is typically recommended in order to prevent pregnancy. It is common, especially among younger populations, for condoms to be used inconsistently and incorrectly, which contributes to a failure rate of between 12% and 18% for pregnancy prevention.

It is important for all people to have access and knowledge of these resources. To learn more about condoms and contraception, check out plannedparenthood.org and bedsider.org. To push for better birth control access on campus, check out our Birth Control Access Campaign!

2. Kohler et al. "Abstinence-only and Comprehensive Sex Education and the Initiation of Sexual Activity and Teen Pregnancy." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 42(4): 344-351.

3. Advocates for Youth. (2009). "Comprehensive Sex Education: Research and Results." Retrieved from: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/fscse.pdf>

FIGHTING RAPE CULTURE

"Rape culture" is a term that describes an environment in which sexual violence, sexual assault and coercion are not only prevalent, but normalized. These beliefs are perpetuated through multiple means including misogynistic language, objectification, glamorization of sexual violence and aggression, and victim-blaming ideologies, both in the media and our everyday lives. "Rape culture" exists within and maintains a society that disregards the rights and safety of all people, blames victims and survivors for assaults against them, and sets sexual violence as a standard to be expected, ignored, and silenced, rather than combatted.

Sex-positivity fights rape culture by emphasizing consent, valuing bodily autonomy, and empowering people to make informed decisions. These elements work together to deconstruct slut-shaming and victim-blaming – harmful elements of rape culture that permeate many facets of our society. Sex-positivity also combats rape culture by ending the social cycle of guilt that people may experience when engaging in sexual activity, examining harmful elements of hypermasculinity, fostering safe and supportive spaces for survivors, encouraging people to view others as full humans with bodily autonomy, and deconstructing harmful power dynamics within relationships.

FOSTERING SELF-LOVE

An important element of sex-positivity is the practice of loving yourself holistically: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Body-positivity is about developing a healthy, loving relationship with your body, in all of its uniqueness and perfect imperfections.

All people in our society are affected by the unrealistic and often unhealthy standards of western beauty, but young women and LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately affected. A recent study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that "sexual minority" cisgender men and women on college students are more impacted by eating disorders than heterosexual cisgender women, and transgender college students are the most impacted of any gender or sexual identity group.⁴

Anorexia, bulimia, binge eating disorder, and other specified feeding or eating disorders (OSFED) are caused by a combination of sociocultural, psychological, and biological factors.

4. Diemer, E. W., Grant, J. D., Munn-Chernoff, M. A., Patterson, D. A., & Duncan, A. E. (2015). Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation, and Eating-Related Pathology in a National Sample of College Students. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 57(2), 144-149. DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2015.03.003



Marginalized groups are more vulnerable to eating disorders, but are less likely to be diagnosed and treated. No one should feel ashamed of their body, and our culture shouldn't be pushing unrealistic beauty standards on women and girls. We should encourage young people to define their value by finding what makes them feel strong, healthy, and empowered - not by what society says they should look like.

SEX-POSITIVITY ON CAMPUS

HOST A SEX TALK

Facilitate a conversation on your campus to talk about sex and sex-positivity with students and experts in order to debunk myths, share lived experiences, and broaden understandings of other experiences. Start by facilitating a safe space conversation within your group. Explore how to incorporate sex-positivity into your other activist endeavors.

Once your group feels comfortable, facilitate a broader sex-positive conversation in which the general student body is invited. It may be helpful to seek out a sex-positive speaker to moderate a conversation in which students have the opportunity to learn and bring their ideas to the table.

Reflect after these experiences on where to go next. What have you learned from facilitating these conversations? Are there ways that the administration at your university can support sex-positive ideas on campus? Arrange a meeting with your administration to work with them in order to advocate for sex-positive changes on campus!

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL CLINICS

Comprehensive reproductive health clinics typically provide not only much-needed care, but also access to sex education and safe sex resources. You can build a relationship with your local reproductive health clinic by volunteering, escorting, and interning. Clinics often love working with students, and can even come to your campus to help educate people about sexual health!

By working with your local clinic, you can also help destigmatize the relationship that many people have with seeking reproductive health care. For more ideas on how to support local reproductive health clinics, check out our Adopt-A-Clinic campaign.

SUPPORT COMPREHENSIVE SEX ED

Locally appointed officials and school boards often shape sex education curricula; learn more about the curriculum in place in your community



and put together a proposal for local decision makers to improve it! Launch a petition and organize to raise awareness in your community about the proposal and attend local school board meetings to advocate for your changes.

HOST A SAFEZONE TRAINING

SafeZone training is meant to develop, enhance, and maintain environments that are culturally competent and supportive to LGBTQIA+ individuals. Get your feminist group SafeZone certified and encourage your university community to do so as well!

CELEBRATE LOVE YOUR BODY DAY

Love Your Body Day is an annual campaign created by the National Organization for Women to celebrate people's bodies as they are. Join the celebration on campus by:

- Posting body-positivity notes on mirrors in residence halls
- Hosting a screening of a body-positive movie and having a body image discussion afterward
- Encouraging people on your campus to share what they love about their bodies on social media

HOST A SEX-POSITIVE GAME NIGHT

Many young people don't know the facts about safe sex practices. See if you can get condoms and dental dams from your school's health center or a local women's health clinic and host a sex-positive social event on your campus to educate and spread awareness while also demystifying STIs, contraception, healthy relationship practices, and myths about gender! Try downloading or making some condom bingo cards or hosting a sex-positive trivia night.



GLOSSARY

Gender: The socially-constructed idea that categorizes individuals based on societally-accepted ideals of “masculinity” and “femininity”

Gender Binary: The social dichotomy that polarizes the masculine and feminine and allows for little gender variance or non-conformity in gender expression.

Heteronormativity: The societal belief that privileges heterosexuality as the only normative, and therefore assumed, sexual orientation.

Cisnormativity: The societal system that privileges cisgender identity as the only normative, and therefore assumed, gender identity.

LGBTQIA+ Spectrum: A range of sexual and gender identities; includes folks who are:

- **Asexual:** someone who does not typically experience sexual attraction
- **Bisexual:** someone who experiences attraction to people of one or more genders
- **Gay:** someone who experiences attraction primarily to a person of the same gender
- **Intersex:** someone whose sex characteristics at birth do not fit within typical definitions of “female” and “male”
- **Lesbian:** a woman who experiences attraction primarily to other women
- **Non-binary:** someone whose gender falls outside of the gender binary
- **Pansexual:** someone who experiences attraction to people of all genders
- **Queer:** a reclaimed term used by some members of the LGBTQ+ community to describe their sexuality or gender; can also be used as an umbrella term to describe the community
- **Transgender:** someone whose gender doesn't align with the sex they were assigned at birth; often used as an umbrella term to include genderqueer, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and other genders

Cisgender: someone whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth

Monogamy: a relationship practice in which people partner with only one person at a time

Polyamory: a relationship practice in which people may partner with multiple people in varying ways

Privilege: a position of social or cultural power someone is born into (i.e. white privilege) or otherwise obtains (i.e. education or wealth)

Self-Care: the act of taking steps to honor your physical, emotional, situational, or spiritual well-being

Sex: the socially-constructed idea that categorizes individuals based on sex characteristics (i.e. hormones, chromosomes, external and secondary sex organs, etc.)

Slut-Shaming: making someone feel bad, guilty, or inferior for their actual, alleged, or presumed sexual behavior

Victim-Blaming: making victims of crimes feel responsible for what they have experienced, rather than believed or supported; this occurs frequently in conversations about sexual assault, in which others blame a survivor for the assault rather than the perpetrator(s)