

# SEX-ED FOR DUMMIES: LESSONS FROM THE NETHERLANDS

Comparing Sex Education in the  
United States and the  
Netherlands

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF SEX-ED:

- A highly influential experience that resonates with individuals well into adulthood.
- Shapes ones' overall sexuality throughout the lifespan
  - Sexual experience, attitude towards sex, relationships, communication skills, emotional intelligence (EQ), sexual health, pregnancy, self-esteem, self-efficacy
- Has an inter-generational ripple effect
  - Sex education practices passed on (or lack thereof) are often passed through multiple generations
  - Like anything passed on, becomes a cultural norm

# U.S. TEENS & SEXUAL HEALTH

## ■ **Pregnancy & Abortion**

- Highest rate of teen pregnancies and abortions

## ■ **HIV & STDs**

- 1 in 4 girls teen girls have at least one STD
  - Over 50% African-American

## ■ **Gender Equity**

- Males take a dominant role, while females take a passive role in sexual matters
- Over-emphasis on male sexual assertiveness

## ■ **First Sexual Experience**

- 70% of US teens regretted their first sexual encounter

# SEX EDUCATION: ABSTINENCE VS COMPREHENSIVE

## Abstinence-Only

- Sexual repression
- Experimentation
  - Discourage and Delay
- Gender= Biological
- Fear-based
- Waiting until marriage
- Classifies gender by body parts
- Discourages sexual discussion (taboo)

## Comprehensive

- Sexual openness
- Experimentation
  - Natural and Essential
- Gender= Physiological
- Knowledge-based
- Waiting until one feels “ready”
- Acknowledges spectrum of genders
- Encourages sexual discussion

# SEX-ED: THE NETHERLANDS & THE U.S.

## The Netherlands

- Age 4: Sex-Ed begins
- Age 8: self-image and gender stereotypes
- Age 11: sexual orientation and contraceptive options
- Teens: capable of love and relationships
- Encourages parents to get involved on a general basis
  - “Parents’ night”

## United States

- Starts in middle school or high school
- Enforces gender segregation
  - Separates boys and girls for sex-ed
- Teens: bundles of exploding hormones (*Schalet*)
- Encourages parents to give one all-encompassing talk
  - “Birds and the Bees”

# VARIOUS COMPARISONS

## Netherlands

- Rape: 9.2%
- HIV/AIDS: 0.2%
- Teen Pregnancy: 2,823
- Teen Birthrate: 5.3%
- Low birthweight: 4.7%
- Abortion: 24,141
- Violent Crime (Rapes per million): 92.08
- IMR: 4.59 deaths/1,000 live births

## United States

- Rape: 27.3%
- HIV/AIDS: 0.6%
- Teen Pregnancy: 494,357
- Teen Birthrate: 34.2% (6x more)
- Low birthweight: 7.8%
- Abortion: 825,564
- Violent Crime (Rapes per million): 274.04
- IMR: 6.06 deaths/1,000 live births (32% more)

# CONSENT, COMMUNICATION & FIRST EXPERIENCES

## ■ **First sexual experiences**

- Danish teens have sex at a later age than American teens.
- 70% of U.S. teens wish they had waited longer before having sex
- Majority of Danish teens report it as being a “positive and fun experience”

## ■ **Consent:** one of the earliest lessons

- Respecting each others’ boundaries
- Taught how to say “no”
- Acting responsibly and respectfully towards their partner

## ■ **Communication**

- To decide what and how much they want
- What feels good/comfortable for them
- Enhances emotional intelligence/communication skills

# SEX-ED & NATIONAL POLICIES

- **United States:** varies by state and region
  - Conservative states emphasize Abstinence-only approach
  - Liberal states emphasize comprehensive sex-ed
  - *Socio-demographics*
    - Determine access and quality of sex education teens receive
- **EU and The Netherlands:**
  - national policy required to be taught
  - Universal access to sexual health information and services
  - The “unwritten Social Contract” for youth in EU:  
*“We’ll respect your right to act responsibly and give you the tools needed to avoid unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections and HIV”*



# SEX-ED: SOCIO-CULTURAL-POLITICAL

## The Netherlands

- Contraceptives widely available
  - Vending machines / schools
- Able to speak openly to parents about sex
  - 2/3 able to have partner “sleep over” and share bedroom
  - Sex and intimacy ultimately discussed
- Socialized Healthcare
  - Equal accessibility to sex education resources

## The U.S.

- Contraceptives
  - Limited / varied availability
- Often must sneak around their parents to have sex
  - Relationships often forbidden
  - Sex is not discussed openly; an uncomfortable topic
- Capitalistic healthcare
  - Resources only available to some,
  - Socioeconomic disparities

# THE LINK BETWEEN SEXUAL REPRESSION AND DEVIANCE

- Restriction of sexuality → Sexual dysfunction
- Netherlands are culturally “desensitized” towards sex starting from a young age
  - Demystification of sex reduces overall appeal and fascination
- The “Forbidden Fruit” always looks more tempting
  - Tendency for people to gravitate towards the very things that are specifically told *not* to do- especially teenagers
  - *Examples:*
    - Marijuana is widely available/legal at “coffee shops” in Netherlands, but annual Cannabis use is 3x more in the U.S.
    - Religious “sworn” zealots who are known to engage in sexual deviance

# SEX-ED: PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY

## MALES

- De-stigmatize the need for non-physical forms of intimacy
  - Romantic feelings
  - Emotional connection
- Teach men to respect partner's boundaries
  - Emphasize consent
  - Think about partners sexual boundaries
  - Effective Communication

## FEMALES

- Encourage women to be more sexually assertive
  - Focus on self pleasure
  - De-stigmatize masturbation and sexual pleasure
- Communicate/enforce their sexual boundaries