

Canadian Sex Education Films: A Brief History

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### Canadian Sex Education Films: A Brief History

“History can be a powerful tool for exploring our stories and our place in the world, but it is, like all bodies of knowledge, rendered meaningless unless it is wedded to human activity and experience”

- Christou, 2013, p. 6

Canada’s sex education films are deserving of our attention. Because they have always been (and continue to be) “steeped in assumptions about what men’s and women’s lives and loves are and ought to be,” within an educational context, sex education films are potent ideological vessels (Alldred & David, 2007, p. 6). In their efforts to target the construction of young people’s gendered and sexual identities, these films also play an essential role in defining the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of particular sexual behaviours, sexual values, and sexual politics (Alldred & David, 2007, p. 6).

The history of such films, then, is at once a history of dominant Canadian norms and values and is central to understanding where we have come from, and where we are going, when it comes to the complexities of sex. However, Canadian sex education films have not yet attracted sustained academic interest, despite their intended influence and their richness and diversity as subjects of study. This essay—which traverses six decades of Canadian history to map the development of sex education films in a social, cultural, and political context—offers an initial examination of this fascinating, relevant, and all-too-often overlooked component of the Canadian sex education curriculum.

## **Teenage Rebellion and Conservative Control: Early Sex Education, 1950-1959**

The earliest Canadian sex education films for use in the classroom emerge during the early 1950s. In Canada, as in much of the West, the 1950s heralded massive social and technological change. In the years following World War II, rampant nationalist paranoia regarding the Cold War and the early stirrings of the sexual revolution led to much tension and anxiety between a generation of concerned, traditionalist parents and their rapidly modernizing children. Major transformations in the cultural norms of entertainment, dating, and sex differentiated one generation from the next, and formed the center of a wider Canadian debate on the current state, and future welfare, of Canadian youth.

The teenagers of this generation were unlike any before them: they enjoyed unprecedented autonomy, both financially and socially. This new independence was largely the result of the ample youth employment opportunities that arose after the Second World War; teenagers with jobs gained not only financial rewards, but also the opportunity for individual expression that accompanies disposable income (Gleason, 1997). As teenagers' wallets widened, and their appetites for identity-affirming consumption increased, a new market segment, defined by aggressive advertising efforts, emerged. For example, jukeboxes, and the singles records that accompanied them, arrived as a major youth-fuelled industry during this period; this development allowed young people easy access to the culturally influential music scene of the mid-century and also spawned a favorite pastime for teenagers during this time—the infamous “juke-joint” (Canada Science and Technology Museum, 2013). Television, too, appeared as a major product for consumption and as an ideal method for influencing the

spending habits of young people; during the 1950s, the TV would quickly surpass radio and print media as the primary method for advertising to the teenage market (Canada Science and Technology Museum, 2013). Thus, mass-media and advertising agencies are often credited with establishing the so-called “cult of the teenager,” a market-driven phenomenon that has endured to this day (Comacchio, 2002, p. 159).

Yet, the rapid cultural changes that so transformed Canadian teenagers, were eyed with great angst and suspicion by the elder generation of the 1950s. As Gleason (1997) notes, during this decade Canada’s “experts” were continually warning that society was “paying a high price for a modern way of life” in the form of “rising divorce rates, juvenile delinquency, and increases in the number of married women in the workforce” (p. 443). And, as Gleason (1997) goes on to argue, the issue of perceived youth delinquency was a primary concern, one seen as especially threatening to the future of the nation. For many adults in the mid-century, the stark contrast between two very different generations stood as clear evidence that social change was threatening the “health, education and morals of impressionable teenagers” (p. 460-461).

What teenagers of the period may have understood to be freedom and independence, many of the elder generation called disobedience and rebelliousness: many feared that mid-century teens were poised to make a mockery of social standards and cultural taboos (Gleason, 1997). Thus, the post-war years are marked by a series of paranoid, interventionist efforts in Canada’s school systems, efforts that find paramount expression in the sexual education films that were commissioned during this decade. Three Canadian films from this decade, *Physical Aspects of Puberty* (1953), *Social-Sex Attitudes in Adolescence* (1953), and *How Much Affection?* (1958), were used extensively in Canadian classrooms and have been preserved for contemporary viewing.

In analyzing these films, it is important to note that the generation of concerned adults that produced them—often referred to as the “silent generation”—viewed human sexuality through a very tentative, morally conservative, even repressive lens (Keen, 2005). For this generation, discussions of sex and sexuality rarely escaped the confines of “the parents’ bedroom” (Foucault, 2007, 404). The task at hand was thus a difficult one for a generation founded in silence. It was made all the more difficult because no precursors existed to draw on: although other sex education films had been produced, these were designed for a different audience and a different purpose. All prior films were focused on the “menace of venereal disease” and its potentially devastating effect on both the health of Canadian soldiers and the “quest for national security” (Sethna, 1997, p. 57).<sup>1</sup> Creating films for young people, and films that could effectively address the new “threat of sex delinquency,” was an unprecedented endeavor (Sethna, 1997, p. 58).<sup>2</sup>

Given the dominant ideology of this period, it is unsurprising that such an undertaking was met with considerable resistance. The push for sex education during this decade was not without its detractors: many feared that discussing sex and sexuality in the classroom, in any context, may inadvertently encourage youths to explore sexuality and, in turn, violate moral standards. Put simply, many advocated a “silence is best” approach and cast sex education in the Canadian school system “as a curricular frill incompatible with pedagogical and sexual conservatism” (Sethna, 1997, p. 57).

The conservative agenda of Christian parent groups served to bolster the force of this

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that, despite this history, none of the Canadian sex education films from the 1950s preserved for posterity discuss venereal disease or how to avoid contraction; evidently, it is impossible to discuss VD in the classroom without first discussing sex candidly, a political impossibility at the time.

<sup>2</sup> Sethna (1997) goes on to explain that this “threat of sex delinquency” was broadly defined during this period as the increasing prevalence of “any form of criminal and non-criminal non-marital sexual activity” (p. 58).

resistance, pressuring Canadian schools to halt or reform their sex education curriculum to reflect a more conservative, morality-oriented perspective. Although not all schools relied explicitly on religious affiliation to inform their stance on sex education, many Canadian school boards during the 1950s rejected sex education materials entirely, unless a “Christian point of view could be safeguarded” (Prentice, 1994, p. 64).<sup>3</sup> Such a point of view was most often preserved in sex education films by turning to the Christian middleclass family as an ideal framework for morality in practice (Gleason, 1997).<sup>4</sup> In this way, a Christian “social and moral order” was established and maintained in these films, one that preserved the conservative strongholds of moral fundamentalism, minority-exclusion, class privilege, and the patriarchal nuclear family (Kinsman, 1987, p. 38).

The sex education films of the 1950s, then, were tasked with balancing numerous institutional and public pressures. The result was a series of sex education films that avoid discussing sex. In line with the ideology of conservative sex education, in harmony with a transparently Christian world view, and with special interest in the plague of youth “sex delinquency,” these films are heavily focused on character development, and on modelling acceptable social interactions, as a carefully tuned cure for the “weakening of morals” in the younger generation (Prentice, 1994, p. 63).

The films are overt in their efforts to reinforce traditional gender roles, to emphasize, exaggerate, and even fabricate complimentary differences between men and women, and, as a result, to effectively promote the “natural order” that is the Christian nuclear family construct

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<sup>3</sup> Although individual schools in Canada were given the authority to decide, for themselves, if sex education instruction would be provided to their students, during the 1950s schools that did incorporate educational materials were required to ensure that “classroom instruction was divided by gender and that parental permission was obtained” (Sethna, 1997, 57).

<sup>4</sup> As Gleason (1997) summarizes, in the 1950s, across much of the social engineering work of the time, “the normal child, teenager, and family was equated with the idealized, and more socially acceptable, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class child, teenager, and family” (444).

(Sethna, 1997).<sup>5</sup> They are also preoccupied with associating cultural and technological developments with immorality. For example, both *Social-Sex Attitudes in Adolescence* (1953) and *How Much Affection?* (1958) incorporate teenagers chatting on telephones, watching television, driving cars alone, and listening to records—behaviours that are closely tied to inappropriate, and potentially lascivious, behaviour. In all of these films, parents are consistently presented as authorities on the “teenage problem.” Indeed, unsavoury youths are often depicted as being entirely preoccupied with consuming alcohol, “parking,” “petting,” and dancing at “those juke-joints” while the mothers and fathers in the films uphold moral standards and encouraging teenage imitation of parental behaviour. The smooth baritone of the omniscient narrators in these films, too, effectively conveys adult (male) wisdom and expertise, while furthering a divide between adult “experts” and the misguided youths that need them.

With regard to their approach to human sexuality, by today’s standards these films are almost comically squeamish. Each film coyly avoids candid discussion of sex or sexuality while, instead, desperately clinging to moralizing accounts of the centrality of carefully-planned, heterosexual, middle-class, mono-racial marriage. The response to a perceived deterioration of the status quo was, essentially, to forcefully project the status quo into the minds of Canadian youth.

Much has been written about the effects of this approach during the 1950s, and, particularly, of its importance to the radicalism of the sexual revolution that would rock Canada in the 1960s. As Keen (2005) has argued, the free-loving 1960s may have emerged with such force due to the conservative moral-policing so stubbornly promoted by the “silent generation.”

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<sup>5</sup> See, especially, *Physical Aspects of Puberty* (1953) for an ideologically-infused lesson on the differences between men and women, as they arise during puberty, and the importance of these differences for heterosexual coupling.

As we turn to this decade of intense sexual upheaval, it is clear that the conservative agenda of the sex education films of the 1950s was hardly effective.<sup>6</sup>

### **Perhaps Silence is Best?:**

#### **Avoiding Sex Education, 1960-1979**

The 1960s stands as the most sexually turbulent decade in Canadian history: the sexual revolution, a youth-oriented social movement that upended moral conservatism in Canada, brought with it the early stirrings of gay rights activism, support for the legalization of abortion, the normalization of premarital sex, and open acceptance of contraception and “the pill” (Halstead & Reiss, 2003). Indeed, scholars have argued that advances in contraception served as the fuel of the sexual revolution, dividing sexual activity from reproduction while allowing for a new “emphasis on recreational and promiscuous sex” (Halstead & Reiss, 2003, p. 18). Such changes were reflected in popular culture. Indeed, since the 1960s, literature, magazines, television programs, films, the tabloid press, the music industry and advertisements have all featured increasing sexual content heavily focused on youth sexuality (Halstead & Reiss, 2003).

Not surprisingly, then, Comacchio (2002) summarizes the decade as the ignition point of publically flaunted adolescent sexuality, a trend that, once established, “burns straight through the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the foremost source of adult dread” (p. 161). Parental concern during the 1960s reached a near fever pitch as perceived “sex delinquency” was increasingly

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<sup>6</sup> Noting that conservative approaches are common to educational environments, experts, and educators, McGregor (2000) argues that such an agenda is void of a legitimate “perspective of care” and is, instead, entirely preoccupied with “surveillance and control...monitoring, recording, and curiously scanning” (p. 223).

normalized. The ensuing moral panic had a direct, negative effect on sex education in Canadian schools. As Moran (2000) notes, “conservative parents, unnerved by the new sexual openness of the 1960s,” believed that Canada’s schools should be “havens from the revolutions outside” (p. 188). The result was disagreement and increased fear about the potentially hazardous consequences of “more sex” in the classroom made sex education in Canadian schools “the most discussed educational topic of the 1960’s” (Comacchio, 2002, p. 161).

Many parents expressed their desire to move sexual instruction back within the walls of private homes, where their teenagers, and especially their daughters, might be protected from left-wing, overly liberal “interpretations” of sex education that might undermine dwindling parental authority and weaken the already jeopardized family unit (Graydon, 2011). Such a conflicted socio-political environment helps to explain why the 1960s produced so few sex education films, despite the increased relevance of the topic. Indeed, by mid-decade, only one Canadian sex education film had been produced—the highly acclaimed *Phoebe* (1964) directed by George Kaczender.<sup>7</sup>

*Phoebe* follows the young, strong-willed title character as she realizes she is pregnant and struggles to inform her immature and bizarre boyfriend Paul. During this struggle Phoebe reflects on past events that have lead up to her pregnancy while projecting into the future to

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<sup>7</sup> Only one other sex education film production was undertaken during the 1960s, the six-part *Family Living and Sex Education* series created by the Canadian production company Moreland-Latchford Films in 1969. Unfortunately, these films were not preserved for posterity. However, in 1969 the CBC program *Take Thirty* offered a “coast to coast” journalistic survey of Canadian reactions to the use of these films in the classroom. The intensity of the opinions captured in this program, described as a “regular hornet’s nest” at one point in the film, crystalize the debates that raged in the 1960s. For example, one mother states with conviction that “the home and the home alone” is the place for educating adolescents about sex: she argues that “if this is taken out of the home... the home loses a great deal” and makes it clear that she would actively protest sex education in local schools. Yet another parent, a mother of three, states: “I cannot begin to give them the facts they need; that can only come from trained professionals using a curriculum as carefully planned as a maths course.” These interviews, of both parents and educators across Canada, effectively demonstrate just how divided the nation was on the subject of sex education in the 1960s. Available on the CBC website, this episode is crucial viewing for anyone interested in the sex education milieu in Canada in the 1960s.

weigh possible reactions to her news—positive and negative—from her parents, her school principal, and the father of her child. Utilizing “the French new wave style of cinema, with hand-held cameras, shock, and jump cuts,” the film moves from Phoebe’s memories through to her fears of the future very rapidly, even jarringly, in order to create a distinct sense of her perturbed mental state (Low, 2002, p. 148).<sup>8</sup> The disorienting effect is emphasized by the musical score which is out of tune, fragmented, and unsettling. This film became popular with both Canadian and American educators due to its intelligent treatment of a complex and politically charged topic and has a longstanding reputation as one of “the finest examples of an affective sociodramatic educational film ever made” (Alexander, 2010, p. 113).<sup>9</sup>

It is not surprising that the central film of the 1960s focused almost exclusively on teenage pregnancy. Indeed, as Prentice (1994) has made clear, parental concern during the sexual revolution was often focused on “adolescent pregnancy and female ‘ruin’” (p. 3). Summarizing the discourse of the day, Prentice (1994) suggests that institutional and parental paranoia painted an overtly sexist, warped picture of “unmarried pregnancy”: young girls carrying children were consistently cast as welfare-dependent and, in turn, unattractive mates for future, bread-winning, “high-quality husbands” (p. 13). As Prentice notes, “embedded in this chain of assumptions is the belief that marriage is the ultimate goal for women: that is, that

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander (2010) describes this cinematic approach as a montage of “dramatic and psychological perspectives, among the most progressive of their type ever made, with abstract camera angles underscoring the alienation of the subjects” (p. 112).

<sup>9</sup> Impressively, this film, “the first half-hour short drama ever made at the [National] Film Board,” went on to become “its all-time second best-selling film” (Alexander, 2010, p. 112).

men shop for wives and only want “unsullied’ goods” (p. 13).<sup>10</sup>

Yet despite the continued presence of conservative propaganda throughout the 1960s, the sexual revolution raged on. In fact, as King, Balswick, & Robinson (1977) noted early on, “liberalization was accelerated in the early 1970s” especially, it seems, with regard to “premarital sexual behavior and attitudes...especially among females” (p. 458). Indeed, the “liberalization” of the 1970s gained special momentum from the uprising of second wave feminism. This decade marks the pinnacle of public debate regarding women’s positions in society, sexual discrimination, and gender inequality with regard to educational, economic, and social opportunity. As Alldred and David (2007) explain, this feminist agenda drew strength from the sexual revolution and was closely allied with questions of free access to abortion and contraception as well as the destabilization of the restrictive, traditional family construct.

Yet public controversy on the subject of sex education in schools continued: many of the arguments called upon to resist sex education in schools during the 1960s were echoed again in the following decade. During the 1970s “it was adolescent experimentation with sex that held the most potential for disrupting conventional morality and blurring the line between children and adults” (Levine, 2007, p. 79). Since cultural unrest and radical liberalization were increasing rather than decreasing during this period, and social and political instability remained the order of the day, relatively few sex education films were produced in Canada during this time. Essentially, the educational trend established in the 1960s continued for yet another decade. From 1970-1979, only three separate sex education films were released in

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<sup>10</sup> Although *Phoebe* epitomizes this preoccupation with teenage pregnancy, *How Much Affection?* (1958) offers a subplot that stands as an early echo of such paranoia: in the film a classmate of the main female character becomes pregnant and is forced to leave school. Lacking other options, and scorned by her family and peers, she is forced to marry the unscrupulous father of her child and endure a life void of spousal affection and wracked with poverty, isolation, and shame.

Canada.<sup>11</sup> Thus, with regard to adolescent sexuality, the two most tumultuous decades in the history of Canadian culture produced the fewest sex education films.

Given the continued unrest of the period, those that were produced in the 1970s feature an intentionally neutral approach to the subject matter. These films attempt to tread carefully in an effort to avoid moral or political argument and favour a distanced, factual, clinical style. No educational films exemplify this trend quite so acutely as *About Puberty and Reproduction* (1974) and *About VD* (1974), two films, produced for use together, that, quite literally, opt to say nothing at all. A two part series, both of these films are brief, crudely animated, and completely silent. They are designed to allow educators ultimate flexibility in terms of what content is discussed, and what content is ignored—a clever response to the instability of public opinion at the time. Understandably, the films were very appealing to a full spectrum of school districts, teachers, classrooms, and parents.

The first film, *About Puberty and Reproduction* (1974) presents roughly-crafted, faceless representations of male and female bodies to depict the physical changes associated with adolescence.<sup>12</sup> The second film, *About VD* (1974) uses similar male and female representations to illustrate how gonorrhoea and syphilis enter human bodies; special attention, and extended screen time, is dedicated to the unfortunate symptoms of these diseases.

Although these films transparently attempt to avoid social, political, and moral commentary, they are not entirely successful in this effort. In both films, symbols and subtle visual metaphors are called upon to create a moral framework for the sexual behaviour of the

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<sup>11</sup> This is a strikingly low number: consider, for example, that the most production-heavy decade in the history of Canadian sex education films, the 1990s, boasts twenty-six separate productions.

<sup>12</sup> Unusually, the changes that occur to these bodies are grossly exaggerated: for example, the breasts of the female body slowly grow from non-existent to very, very large while the penis of the male body easily quadruples in size. These exaggerations, presumably efforts to make the films especially clear, open the door to body image anxiety for both genders.

crude, faceless man and woman. For example, *About Puberty and Reproduction* (1974) contains a visual message that sex can only occur, or should only occur, between a man and a woman who love one another. Early in the film, as the two crudely gendered shapes merge to imply coitus, the space between their faces forms a throbbing heart (Figure 1).

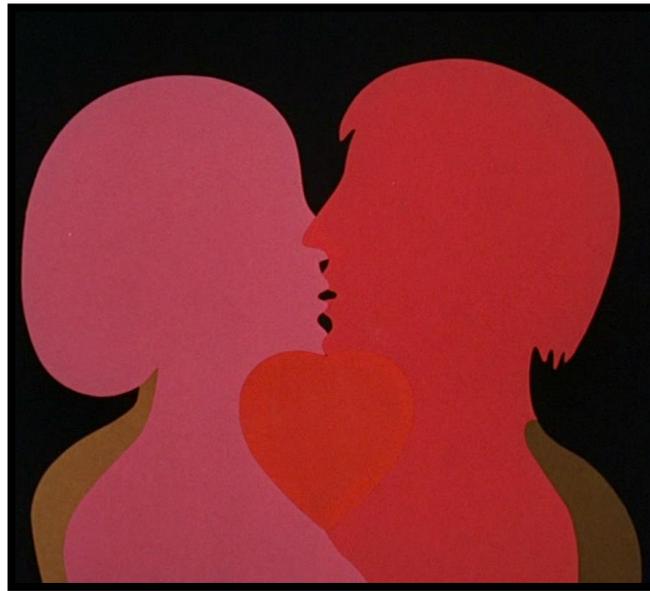


Figure 1.

Such symbolism does far more than imply a special connection between the adult partners, it effectively negates casual or recreational sexual activity while reinforcing heteronormative assumptions.

*About VD* (1974) also communicates a moral message via visual metaphor on more than one occasion. For example, after both the male and female bodies have contracted diseases, and after the symptoms of these diseases are examined under intense, animated magnification, the film closes with these same silhouettes being pulled apart in slow motion. A sad, forlorn mood is established as a throbbing heart appears between the figures, then rapidly shrinks and fades away (Figure 2).

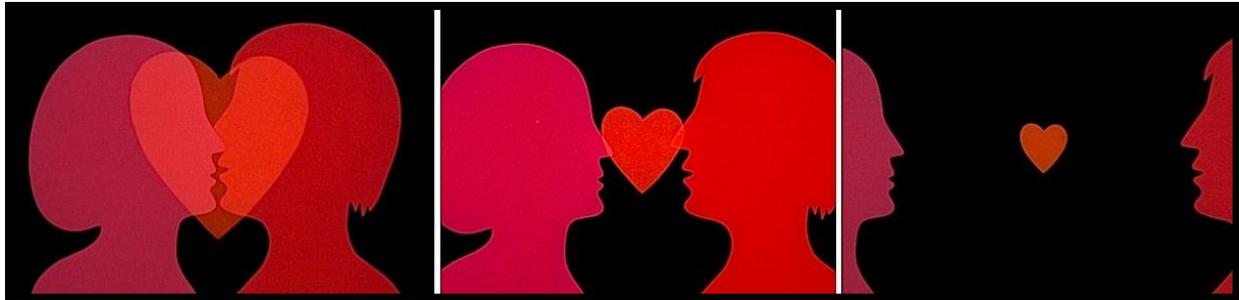


Figure 2.

The film thus implies that sexually transmitted diseases destroy love and terminate relationships, effectively producing fear and anxiety in the film's intended audience.<sup>13</sup>

### **For the Sake of the Children: Sex Education as Child Protection, 1980-1989**

In 1977, the Canadian media converged on one of the most highly publicized cases of sexual assault and murder in Canadian history: the tragic death of Emanuel Jaques, a twelve year old Toronto boy, resulted in nation-wide attention (Graydon, 2011).<sup>14</sup> Other high-profile cases, in both Canada and the United States, would soon follow. Extensive media coverage of each event effectively implied that child abduction and sexual assault were dangerously common, and equated missing children with abducted and abused children. Of course, such reports often “glossed over the reality that about 95 percent of missing-child reports were on runaways, while most of the rest involved custody disputes” (Simpson, 2010, para. 5). Despite the statistical improbability of child abduction and abuse, fear and panic permeated the

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<sup>13</sup> One interesting omission in this film is the utter lack of information on how to protect oneself from contracting VD; evidently, for this film, sex education can be readily reduced to a pathological survey that conveniently instills disease-oriented fear in a young audience.

<sup>14</sup> The case garnered the second broadest media coverage of any Canadian murder to date, second only to the capture of serial killers Bernardo and Homolka in the mid-1990s (Braz, 2009).

Canadian social landscape and parents began calling for institutional protection for their children (Simpson, 2010).<sup>15</sup>

Thus, as the 1970s came to a close, this new moral panic, one that feared for the welfare of Canada's children in the face of sexual predation, effectively recalibrated the purpose and importance of Canadian sex education films. During the 1980s the majority of the sex education films produced were created to educate children about healthy sexuality at a young age, to address the dangers of adult sexual predators, and to encourage children to develop a healthy respect for their bodies and an understanding of their personal rights.<sup>16</sup> Within this new paradigm, sex education was recast as a powerful protective agent, an effective and necessary means for defending children from perverse outside threats, rather than as a perverse threat itself.

The most widely distributed National Film Board film of the 1980s, *Feeling Yes, Feeling No* (1984), is a particularly well executed example of the merger between child protection and sex education that occurred during this period (Low, 2002). The National Film Board describes the film as “a sexual-assault prevention program for young children...designed to give children the skills necessary to protect themselves from sexual-assault from strangers, from family members, and from other trusted persons.” This three-part film uses simplistic language, role-playing, rhyme, and cheerful music to invite children into a positive, but frank

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<sup>15</sup> Simpson (2010) notes that during the 1980s, an increasing number of women were entering the job market; many of these women, who were now spending less time in the home, were already anxious about their children's domestic isolation and vulnerability. Thus, this demographic shift, combined with truly chilling, high-profile cases of abduction and abuse, likely contributed to widespread paranoia about child safety.

<sup>16</sup> From 1980 to 1989, five out of the six Canadian films produced during the decade were created specifically for children and early adolescents.

discussion regarding what sexual assault is, how to recognize it, how to avoid it, and how to respond to it should it ever happen to them.

The educators in the film are deliberate in their use of accurate anatomical terminology and descriptive language as they work to empower children to take ownership of, and carefully protect, their unique bodies. *Feeling Yes, Feeling No* (1984) does not shy away from potentially disturbing topics, such as molestation and assault, but, rather, presents education as the only way to protect children from sexual predators.

Yet, just as a culture-wide paranoia surrounding the sexual safety of children legitimized sex education, a second source of panic had arrived in Canada that would also have a dramatic effect on the content of sex education films. Beginning in 1981, a mysterious sexually transmitted disease began receiving widespread media attention, and by 1983 a new and frightening disease had been identified—the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and the disease it causes, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) (Cullen, 2003). Within just a few years, sex education films began incorporating discussions of HIV and AIDS. Although many of the films targeted younger audiences, discussions of safe sex practices and HIV/AIDS prevention became central to many films' agendas. As the decade continued, more and more time was spent discussing this important topic: *Head Full of Questions* (1989), and *Safe for Life* (1989), and especially *AIDS: The New Facts of Life* (1989), all include very detailed discussions of the disease.

*Head Full of Questions* (1989) is unique in this list in that the AIDS discussion is targeted at a pre-adolescent audience. One of the two adult hosts of the video adopts a somber tone as he speaks directly to camera, stating bluntly:

AIDS is a virus that lives in the blood, and people die from it. Now listen to me...you cannot, I repeat, you cannot get AIDS from being in the same room with someone who has the disease. Or by touching that person, or by swimming in the same pool, or by breathing the same air. You cannot get AIDS from a mosquito. All that is total nonsense.

This film, like others in the period, is dedicated to dispelling myths about AIDS. Yet one such myth, perhaps the most prevalent and damaging of any, is conspicuously absent from it, and from all of the other films in this period—namely, the myth that AIDS is both caused by, and primarily effects, gay men.

During the early 1980s, so-called “AIDS hysteria” led to intense “hysterical reaction and out-and-out bigotry...against members of certain high-risk groups” (Katz, 1986, p. 573).<sup>17</sup> As Slagle (1999) notes, “because the epidemic affected the gay male community so significantly in the early years of the epidemic, gay men became an easy scapegoat for the disease” (p. 95).<sup>18</sup> This vicious scapegoating quickly saturated Canadian culture, and despite expert opinion and calls from the medical community to dispel this myth once and for all, many came to believe that AIDS could be blamed on, and primarily affected, gay men (Adler, 1986).<sup>19</sup> The absence of any mention of this prolific myth in any of the films of the 1980s (and,

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<sup>17</sup> See also Grönfors & Stålström (1987) for a detailed account of “overt and covert hostility...discrimination and violence against gay men” during the early 1980s.

<sup>18</sup> See Kinsman (1987) for an exploration of the “early straight media” and their preference for referring to AIDS as the “gay plague” (p. 211).

<sup>19</sup> Bhugra (1986) offers a typical example of an impassioned plea to dispel of the “gay AIDS myth” during this time: he states, “we have to accept that AIDS is here and does not respect sex or sexuality...We have to be dispassionate about this debate and not make the sexuality of an individual an issue. One of the reasons why help (financial and otherwise) has not been forthcoming is because the ‘moral majority’ dictates terms. It is not a homosexual disease. Sufferers of AIDS need help and they need it now, along with our compassion and understanding. Everyone needs information and education on AIDS, and needs it now, if we are to make any headway in combatting the disease” (Bhugra, 1986, p.882). Despite such articulate and concise pleas, this particular myth still finds traction to this day.

sadly, any of the films in the following decades) speaks to underlying homophobia and an unwillingness to wade into politically-charged territory in Canadian culture past and present.

Yet despite this glaring shortcoming, major advancements in other, socially progressive arenas are evident in the films of the 1980's. In particular, the films reflect tremendous progress in the cultural acceptance of the feminist movement as the first sex-equity focused films emerge during this decade. The most progressive of these films, *Head Full of Questions* (1989), offers a particularly dynamic feminist perspective on gender roles, sexual pleasure, and the politics of courtship. The educators in this film rely on an animated, humorous love story, between two college students, "Fred" and "Anna," to explain the core concepts of sex (romance, pleasure, coitus, pregnancy, birth). Yet "Fred" and "Anna" are not married in the film, nor is marriage ever mentioned, and they repeatedly engage in non-stereotypical gender behaviour. For example, while on a rollerblading date "Anna" catches an unstable and uncoordinated "Fred" and then proceeds to carry him as she demonstrates her athletic prowess. In a later domestic scene, "Anna" lifts the furniture with ease while "Fred" uses a vacuum cleaner to tidy beneath it.<sup>20</sup>

The animation in this film is also very unusual in its candid depictions of sexual intercourse (referred to as "making love") which include a nude and erect "Fred" embracing a nude and smiling "Anna" in a face-to-face, self-consciously equitable sexual position. The act of "making love" is thus depicted as a respectful and enjoyable venture grounded in equality.

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<sup>20</sup> This kind of overt feminist influence is not surprising considering that the 1980s represented a series of major victories for the feminist movement. For example, during this decade the first woman was elected to lead a provincial party (1980), the first female Supreme Court Justice was appointed (1982), the DisAbled Women's Network (or DAWN) was established (1985), federal legislation to protect the rights of women, First Nations individuals, and those with disabilities was passed into law (1986), and the Supreme Court of Canada determined that legislations making abortion illegal were in violation of the constitution (1988) (Brayton & Guénette, 2010). The importance of educational equity also made tremendous progress in this decade; for example, by 1989 Women's Studies departments had been established in 25 Canadian universities and at least 56% of full-time students enrolled at Canadian universities were women (Brayton & Guénette, 2010).

The animation also indicates that sex-for-pleasure is the most common kind of “making love” and even defines orgasms as a “warm feeling” that both men and women experience.

This film, like others in the latter half of this decade, also demonstrates awareness of social and cultural diversity, and places emphasis on inclusivity as an important value. For example, with regard to sexual diversity, this film includes the earliest acknowledgement of homosexuality extant in the Canadian sex education catalogue. Homosexual relationships are described as valid alternatives that feature a deep respect, love, and “need” for a member of the same sex. Diversity is also acknowledged in that the child audience is culturally diverse, is comprised of boys and girls, and includes many levels of ability. Such issues, then, are represented visually, if not directly in the film’s dialogue.

### **Individualism and the Teen as Expert: Reinventing Sex Education, 1990-1999**

Following the diversity and inclusivity reforms of the late 1980s, the films of the 1990s represent a pinnacle moment in the expression of a new found tolerance in Canada. Sex education films are more plentiful in this decade than in any other and the content of these films is extremely candid. With few exceptions, the films of this decade promote a balanced understanding of both the joys and the risks of sexual activity while endorsing a sex-positive, self-affirming, and inclusive perspective. Such an approach was bolstered by the advancement of progressive sexual politics, the hallmarks of which were “pervasive contraceptive usage, unmarried cohabitation, and the demise of adultery as grounds for divorce” along with “the decriminalization of homosexual acts and the widespread availability of sexually explicit

material” and a whole host of other more permissive standpoints on sex and sexuality (Treas, 2002, p. 267).

Such a major cultural shift resulted in significant consequences for Canadian youth, including increases in the sophistication of their sexual knowledge and increases in their awareness of sex as an integral part of human life and personal identity (Halstead & Reiss, 2003). Potentially damaging consequences also emerged, largely in conjunction with the commodification of sexuality in the arenas of media and entertainment and the arrival of the internet. These changes included widespread access to pornography, viewed at increasingly young ages, and decreases in romantic understandings of sexuality as sex became more closely associated with entertainment (Halstead & Reiss, 2003). Thus, sex education films during this period needed to respond to these evolutions in turn.

The resulting liberalism of the films is often refreshing. Sex as a primarily recreational activity is unabashedly recognized, achieving orgasm (including female orgasm) is often identified as the primary goal of sexual activity, and sexual slang terminology is incorporated, unflinchingly, in many of the films. Some films, such as *Fresh Talk* (1991), seem to take their newfound, uncensored approach to youth sexuality to previously unheard-of extremes. For example, at one point in this film an 18 year old teenage girl named Mechelle is interviewed to discuss her opinions on sex: she describes her own considerable experience frankly as a highly experimental source of great pleasure. Consider this excerpt from her evocative interview:

One night stands are great you know, every now and then everybody needs to just get laid!...You know what I like? I like to make a fast set of Jell-O in the tub, and just sort of hop in and play like you are two whales or seals. It's great fun...I'm going to be

really rash, and I hope that all of you watching this don't get offended, but I love a man who can eat pussy until my fingernails go into the headboard.

Admittedly, this level of descriptive detail and confessional approach to adolescent sexuality is unusual. However, the focus on sex as a pleasure-oriented pastime, as well as the use of colloquial language, is standard practice for the period. Yet fear regarding the potential dangers of sharing “too much” with curious adolescent minds, the kind of paranoia that peaked during the 1950s and 1960s, was also present during the 1990s—albeit in a far more subdued form. Some films in the period are certainly interested in pointing to the negative consequences of sexual liberalism in Canadian youth and encourage the reigning in of such nonchalance.

For example, *Baby Blues* (1990), an intense, cinematic film that follows a fictional adolescent couple as they negotiate their sexual relationship and eventually confront teen pregnancy, depicts Canadian youth as being extremely casual about sex, even to the point of impracticality and frivolity. The teenagers in this film speak and act as if sex has no real consequences. Thus, when “negative” consequences arrive in the form of pregnancy, the teenage couple and their friends are rendered incapable of comprehending the situation or responding to it adequately. So, although this film is perfectly in line with others from the period in its open discussion of sex (it traverses topics as varied as sexual pleasure, the use of condoms and birth control, sexual responsibility, abstinence, adoption, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases, and AIDS), it simultaneously suggests that teenage casualness and openness to sex and sexuality is to blame for adolescent delinquency and teenage pregnancy. In implying that liberal sexual attitudes and behaviors are dangerous and can lead to negative

consequences, *Baby Blues* (1990) clearly intends to encourage an entirely different set of behaviors than those represented in the film.<sup>21</sup>

The continued fear surrounding the AIDS pandemic was also utilized in some of these films to encourage sexual protection and/or sexual restraint. For example, upon discovering that a classmate was pregnant, a supporting character in *Baby Blues* (1990) cries aloud, “What about AIDS...AIDS is killin’ people man!” *Degrassi Talks* (1992) includes a harrowing account of the struggles of a Canadian homosexual man with AIDS:

We thought that we were immune. [But] I started to think about it. I thought, if I’m sleeping with people from Detroit, and people from Detroit are sleeping with people from Chicago, and people from Chicago are sleeping with people from New York and Los Angeles, then I could be infected. You try to think that you are going to beat this, that you are going to take care of yourself. But every time you see a friend of yours die [from AIDS] that confidence is diminished and you become a little bit more fearful.

Examples like these, that connect AIDS to casual sex first and unprotected sex second, and that use fear to promote change, are common in many of the more tempered sex education films of the 1990s.

Both the films that largely advocate for sexual liberalism, and those that call into question the permissive values of the 1990s, follow similar, new delivery models: the vast majority of films in this decade favour personal interview and autobiography over the direct

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<sup>21</sup> This film’s conservative underpinnings are especially transparent in its portrayal of the supposedly limited options available to young, pregnant, Canadian women. The film implies that if a teenage girl becomes pregnant, her access to resources is limited, her doctors trust is uncertain, and, most ridiculously, that attempts to visit a family planning clinic may be kyboshed by angry community picketing.

instruction methods so popular in prior decades.<sup>22</sup> As many scholars have noted, the 1980s, and especially the 1990s witnessed the increasing adoption of cultural individualism as a dominant ideological perspective (Treas, 2002). Such an outlook “favors sex for individual pleasure as opposed to family-based, procreative sexuality,” prioritizes personal choice and identity expression over conformity, and resists “the collective controls exercised by family, church, and community” (Frank & McEneaney, 1999; Treas, 2002, p. 268). Given the rise of this unique combination of values, a shift in the informational delivery methods of sex education films that now prioritizes self-expression and individual stories is entirely fitting.<sup>23</sup>

Yet this ideological shift created one very specific and very relevant educational effect: a major change in the understanding of what constitutes expertise. In the films of all of the previous decades, authority and expertise were the domain of educated adults: parents, doctors, teachers and educators, most of which were cast as mature males.<sup>24</sup> Yet, in keeping with the zeitgeist of the decade, the films of the 1990s clearly prioritize lived experience over formal, credentialed knowledge. Thus, these films shift authoritative power to the teenagers themselves, who are then cast as experts on their lived experiences and, by extension, their own demographic. The *Degrassi Talks* (1992) series of films is a particularly pronounced example

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<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, those that do not adopt personal interview approaches opt, instead, for narrative-driven, cinematic styles reminiscent of the very earliest Canadian sex education films. These films, perhaps unsurprisingly, often belong to the more conservative genre of sex education films.

<sup>23</sup> This shift is seen clearly in the autobiographical nature of numerous films from the 1990s including *Playing for Keeps* (1990), *Fresh Talk: Youth and Sexuality* (1991), *Kecia: Words to Live By* (1991), *Degrassi Talks: Abuse, Alcohol, Sex, and Sexuality* (1992), *Toward Intimacy* (1992), *Thinking Positive* (1993), *Journey Home* (1994), *The Long Walk* (1998), and *IV Positive: An Educational Documentary About Living Positive* (1999).

<sup>24</sup> These individuals told adolescents and children how to behave directly and had ultimate control over what information was considered appropriate for young people and what should be censored or withheld completely. By way of reminder, consider again *Physical Aspects of Puberty* (1953) and *Social-Sex Attitudes in Adolescence* (1953), both films in which omnipresent male narrators reveal deep insights into the inner workings of the adolescent mind and body. Or consider *Phoebe* (1964), in which authority is constructed via an aggressive father figure and a mature female school principle: both characters granted tremendous influence over the life of the confused and vulnerable title character.

of this power shift: these films build off of the famous Canadian television program's "unflinching, open minded treatment of social issues, from teenage pregnancy to multicultural identities" (Levine, 2009, p. 516).<sup>25</sup> Yet the sex education films are not fictionally-driven, like the iconic television show. Instead, members of the cast discuss their own teenage experiences; they also interview Canadian teenagers at high-schools across the country to collect more candid accounts on a range of sexual subjects.<sup>26</sup>

As is demonstrated in the *Degrassi Talks* (1992) film, this focus on autobiographical storytelling is extremely effective in providing a voice to marginalized and oppressed individuals and groups. As McGregor (2011) has noted, the direct instruction methods of previous films can be categorized as "narratives of power purporting to represent the 'truth' of others and, as such, needed to be challenged by the individual stories of those who are silenced by 'authority' and 'expert' opinion" (p. 3). Of course, for previously "silenced" individuals, sharing their individual experiences and histories can be an extremely therapeutic, empowering event; it can also serve vital political, social, and cultural ends as such stories may demystify and humanize marginal populations while challenging common assumptions and stereotypes. In fact, sustained attention to the personal experiences of marginalized and oppressed Canadian youth—in part in an effort to protect them from peer harassment, violence, and self-harm—had grown into a matter of central educational importance by the dawn of the new millennium.

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<sup>25</sup> As Byers (2005) has explored, the *Degrassi* series of television shows also received positive attention for their pro-feminist approach to teenage issues, noting that the programs are shaped by "discourses about gender, power and equality" (p. 193).

<sup>26</sup> This film series is also unique in that it is the only example of Canadian celebrity merging with sex education to increase interest and credibility. This approach was far more common in American sex education films during this period. Yet, in this case, such a merger was truly an ideal match: the longstanding series of *Degrassi* television shows were well known for "dealing with the complex issues and facing them in a mature and realistic fashion" and remain, to this day, as "one of the most internationally recognized aspects of Canadian popular culture" (Rintoul, & Hewlett, 2009, p. 126).

### **Exploring the Margins: Inclusivity and Anti-bullying, 2000-2012**

When compared to their earliest predecessors, by the turn of the century Canadian sex education films had undergone a truly remarkable transformation. Far from morally conservative, homogenous, and exclusive productions, millennial films pursue precisely the opposite agenda. In particular, these films are transparent in their efforts to explore and include marginalized groups and to cater their messages to all levels of diversity. Although cultural individualism, and the expansion of the permissive liberal zeitgeist of the late twentieth century, certainly set the scene, the educational emphases of the early 2000s were heavily influenced by the success of the feminist and gay rights movements.<sup>27</sup>

For example, films that directly address what were once extremely marginalized and oppressed demographics—such as twin-spirited First Nations youth (*Two Spirits in Motion*, 2007), transgendered and transsexual teenagers (*A Girl Inside*, 2007), and the sexuality of individuals with disabilities (*Want*, 2007)—were all produced during this decade. A special interest in the sexual rights and personal freedoms of gay and lesbian youth, an interest first established strongly in the 1990s, garnered continued and increased attention. As Alldred and David (2007) have noted, during the early 2000s it became increasingly clear that Canadian schools represented “the ever-present nature of heterosexualized gender relations” and that alternatives such as “lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or trans—or ambiguously gendered identities—[were] being marginalized, stigmatized or persecuted” within Canadian schools (p. 5). Thus, the sex education films of the 2000s are focused extensively on the mental health and

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<sup>27</sup> Indeed, as third wave feminism strengthened, the movement’s concerns with the oppression of women expanded rapidly and allied closely with larger social movements fighting against the oppression of a range of vulnerable groups, in an effort to eliminate social and structural injustice (Richards, 1980).

physical safety of sexual minorities and engage fully with the so-called “bullying problem” (Jacob, 2013).

Indeed, by the turn of the century bullying had become a major moral panic in the West, and Canada was no exception. As Walton (2008) has argued,

During the past ten years, attention on bullying has intensified among educators, parents, journalists, and educational researchers in the wake of high-profile incidents of bullying in some Canadian schools. Safe schools policies and programs have proliferated as a result. However, the issue of homophobia—a pervasive form of bullying—tends to be absent from public discussion, anti-bullying programs, and so-called safe schools policies (p.1).

As Walton explores in more detail, the Canadian popular press certainly fuelled concerns: newspaper article titles, such as “Students ask BC government to tackle homophobic bullying” (News 1130), “Many Canadian gay, bisexual, trans students bullied” (Toronto Star), “Homophobic bullying in schools can and does kill” (Calgary Herald), and “Gay Ottawa teen who killed himself was bullied” (CBC News, Ottawa) have come to dominate Canadian headlines (Loxam, 2012; McQuigge, 2010; Lakritz, 2008; Burke, 2011).<sup>28</sup>

One recent Ipsos Reid poll conducted exclusively for Global News revealed that “a staggering 88 per cent of Canadians say they’re worried about youth bullying” (Chai, 2012, September 5, para. 2). John Wright, the Vice President of Ipsos Reid later told Global News that this particular study revealed “the highest levels of concern the firm has ever recorded” (Chai, 2012, September 5, para. 5). Although studies such as this one certainly demonstrate the

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<sup>28</sup> Outside of bullying specific attention, Western media’s relentless focus on increasing rates of teenage suicide, the unexpected prevalence of teenage female-on-female violence, and the continued threat of school shootings, to name but a few examples, has ensured that the concerns over the physical and mental safety of school age Canadian children remain front of mind for many.

degree to which this particular moral panic has overtaken Canadian culture, they also reveal the intensity of the media's preoccupation with it (consider that a media corporation funded this study in order to obtain news-worthy, "hot-topic" data). Clearly, although concern for the safety of Canadian youth had been a hallmark of the past two decades—the 1980s seeing considerable concern over sexual predation and abduction (an adult threat) and the 1990's seeing panic rise over sexual nonchalance and the AIDS pandemic (a cultural and medical threat)—in the 2000s the perceived threat to Canadian children was, decidedly, other Canadian children (a peer-group threat).

Public and media concern was further fueled, and validated, by numerous studies that placed Canada in a negative light with regard to school bullying. International studies continually placed Canada in the top quartile for incidence of bullying and in the top third for teenage victimization (Craig & Pepler, 2003). Thus, in the early 2000s, extensive academic and policy work began to identify, define, and remedy bullying in schools. Such research quickly revealed that school bullying was an extremely varied phenomenon: as Nansel et al. (2001) explain, bullied teenagers may be "belittled about religion or race, belittled about looks or speech, hit, slapped, or punched, the subjects of rumors, [and/or] the subjects of sexual comments or gestures" (p. 2097).<sup>29</sup> Major studies also demonstrated that school bullying adversely affects a diverse range of students—"stratified by race and ethnicity, immigration, gender, and sexual orientation, as well as other detrimental economic, social, and educational characteristics" (Peguro, 2012, p. 410). However, during this period special attention,

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<sup>29</sup> Researchers have amalgamated data to work toward a specific, formal definition of bullying. For research and policy purposes, bullying is commonly defined as: "a specific type of aggression in which (1) the behaviour is intended to harm or disturb, (2) the behaviour occurs repeatedly over time, and (3) there is an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one. This asymmetry of power may be physical or psychological, and the aggressive behaviour may be verbal (e.g., name-calling, threats), physical (e.g., hitting), or psychological (e.g., rumors, shunning/exclusion)" (Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2094).

especially within Canadian sex education curriculum, was directed toward a particularly vulnerable group—namely, teenage sexual minorities (Peguro, 2012, p. 410).<sup>30</sup>

During this decade, Canadian school boards were urged to update curriculum to include special focus on representations of, and education about, the rights of sexual minority groups. Such reforms, as explored by Jacob (2013), produced notable positive effects, and set the stage for a more inclusive educational environment for many contemporary teens. Due to such reform, in many schools in Canada “it is no longer taboo to learn about and discuss LGBT issues in informal classroom discussions and as part of district-approved curriculum” (Jacob, 2012, p. 112). However, despite such progress—and despite the onslaught of media reports that draw attention to continued “incidents of physical assault on LGBT youth and suicides triggered by student-on-student harassment”—many Canadian schools “have still not taken steps to reduce the bullying of youth who do not conform to gender-role expectations” (Jacob, 2013, 99). The prevalence of bullying-instigated tragedies in Canadian schools, combined with the slow (sometimes entirely absent) response from some Canadian school districts, encouraged many independent film makers, educational societies, and not-for-profits to take sexual-minority-oriented, anti-bullying education into their own hands. Between 2002 and 2012 an impressive 12 educational films were produced by individual students or by independent educational and special interest groups.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Oddly, many of the studies that explore the demographic trends of bullied youth fail to include individuals with disabilities as a separate stratum; such unfortunate omissions effectively silence the “school related harassment” many in this minority group endure (Holzbauer and Conrad, 2010, p. 143).

<sup>31</sup> For example, *OUTlet: Queer Youth Speak Out* (2002) was produced by an independent education group, *Want* (2005) and *Becoming 13* (2006) were produced by feminist organizations, *Hidden Plague: Our Modern Epidemic* (2007) was produced by a First Nations group, and *To My Grade 7 Self* (2012) was produced by a student-based social action group.

This increase in the number of independent educational productions may also be the result of dramatic reductions in National Film Board (NFB) funding that began in the late 1990s and continued throughout the 2000s. As Hays (2013) notes, 1996 marked the beginning of major funding slashes from the Liberal government of the time, all in the name of economic austerity: justifying their decision as crucial to the eradication of the federal deficit, the NFB's government allocations were cut by one-third in this year alone. Federal cuts have continued since then, resulting in less available assistance for film makers, imposed limits of three to four major projects per year, and, most recently, the closure of two storefront locations in Montreal and Toronto that offered public viewing stations and access to over 10,000 NFB titles (Dixon, 2012).<sup>32</sup> It seems, then, that the prevalence of formally produced educational films, including sex education films, has been declining dramatically in the past two decades, and the future for this particular avenue of production funding and support looks bleak. Lower-budget, independently motivated, and independently funded educational films have thus moved to fill a very real need.

Perhaps due to such austere economic times, and to the lack of focused, formal educational films available to contemporary youths, many of the independent films of this period are designed to address a range of educational messages: often merging some level of sex education (particularly geared toward the sexuality of minority groups) with the promotion of inclusive educational environments and strongly-worded anti-bullying pieces. One of the best examples of such a multitasking film is *OUTlet: Queer Youth Speak Out* (2002). Despite obvious budget constraints, this independently produced, pro-gay, anti-bullying sex education film seems primarily designed to challenge hetero-normativity and homophobia within a

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<sup>32</sup> Such reductions have become absolute necessities; since the early 2000s the NFB Board of Trustee's has been operating according to a series of "Strategic Plans" designed specifically "to address the impact of major reductions to the NFB's parliamentary allocation since the 1990s"(National Film Board of Canada, 2012).

candid discussion of human sexuality, displays of public affection, the legal right to marriage, and the influence of the media.

The first segment of the film is grounded in a witty social commentary in which an alternative reality is presented that demands young people “come out” as heterosexual. In a world in which traditional sexual norms are reversed, these “straight teens” face parental disappointment, community exclusion, and cries of outrage, all negative scenarios that are common occurrences for sexual minorities. The second segment of the film includes a series of direct interviews with student members of the LGBTTSQQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Twin-Spirited, Queer, and Questioning) community. These interviews are extremely candid and dwell on the dangerous environments that queer Canadian youth face. The interviewees discuss their ongoing sense of endangerment and describe some of the worst cases of bullying they have experienced. For example, one articulate and strong-willed gay youth breaks down in tears as he explains a particularly traumatic experience: “I got bashed and had a bunch of my ribs broken. I got kicked in the back a couple of times and they actually broke my flesh with their boots.” Thus, this film interlaces information about sexual health and challenges to gay stereotypes with discussions on the detrimental effects of “queer bashing,” bullying, exclusive language, and other forms of anti-gay violence.<sup>33</sup>

Although this film seems to have been created specifically for use in an educational context, most of the other films produced during this time were created for, and viewed through, the internet. The advent of online video sites such as YouTube provided independent

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<sup>33</sup> In its particularly powerful conclusion, *OUTlet: Queer Youth Speak Out* (2002) presents a realistic telephone conversation between a young lesbian woman and her mother. During this conversation the young woman attempts to share her sexual orientation for the first time: the mother is extremely resistant, clinging to bigoted perspectives while equating alternative sexualities to religious cults. The young girl’s efforts to have her mother say “I love you” go unanswered before the film ends abruptly.

educational film makers with the ability to distribute their messages with ease, and has led to an environment in which voluntary, public audiences determine what content receives recognition and rises to prominence on the World Wide Web.<sup>34</sup> The internet has not only revolutionized the production and distribution of sex education films in Canada, it has effectively democratized the process.

One such film, *To My 7th Grade Self* (2012), was created by a group of University of Western Ontario students explicitly for distribution on the internet and attempts to combat bullying, myths about homosexuality, and the (often subtle) presence of homophobia. The film is composed of numerous teenage Canadians recording hypothetical video messages to their 7th grade selves—the content of these video messages is largely related to discovering and defending sexual identity, guarding against devastating sexual or social thoughtlessness, and challenging homophobic behaviour in early adolescence. The film is typical of this period in that it is part of a larger anti-bullying and anti-homophobia volunteer effort, called “Get REAL,” that speaks to students in Canadian middle schools and high schools to address the prolific use of homophobic slang terminology (i.e. “gay,” “fag,” “dyke,” and “queer” when used as derogatory expressions) while touching on social isolation, emotional pain, and teenage suicide.

The internet has been crucial to the dissemination of independently produced, progressive sex education content in Canada and the popularity of many of these films may point to the future of sex education in a Canadian context. As McGregor (2011) advises, “in

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<sup>34</sup> Recently many powerful online anti-bullying films—usually personal accounts that are transparently educational in intent—have received near-viral attention in Canada and beyond. For example, a video designed to draw attention to the prevalence of bullying in Canadian schools was recently produced by the Canadian spoken word poet Shane Koyczan (famous for representing Canada at the opening ceremony of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics). Koyczan’s video, entitled “*To This Day Project*” (2013) is available on YouTube and, astoundingly, has been viewed over 8 million times.

order to best respond to the educational needs of many contemporary youth, schooling systems must become more finely attuned to the socio-cultural and technological revolutions that are shaping the attitudes and subjectivities of their students” (McGregor, 2011, p. 4).<sup>35</sup> It seems that encouraging students to become more active participants in the creation of sex education and other allied films, as well as continuing to stress the importance of the personal authority of the individual to share, and to shape, experience, will define much of the content produced in the years to come.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Although the internet has had a decidedly positive effect on the distribution of valuable sex education and anti-bullying knowledge, it has also had a major effect on how bullying emerges in an adolescent context: indeed, many Canadian schools are grappling with the “rapidly emerging trend of cyber-bullying/Internet bullying [and] other forms of electronic aggression” (Jones, Waite & Clements, 2012, p. 6).

<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, to encourage such efforts, many areas have established film competitions to sponsor youth-created anti-bullying educational films. Two popular examples include the highly successful *Stop Bullying Film Festival* and the *Youth United Anti Bullying Film Festival* (Saltman, 2012; Boys & Girls Club Services of Greater Victoria, 2012). Such initiatives, importantly, extend learning opportunities about bullying outside of schools and in to communities while encouraging direct participation from Canadian youth.

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