

Sex Ed Stories

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Maddy: Hi there, Maddy here. You're about to meet me in just a second. But before we get started I just wanted to put a quick disclaimer. Some of the audio in this podcast is a little messy. We are not professional recording artists, um, and we are just trying to make it work, as I'm sure a lot of you experience in this pandemic working from home. It can be difficult with other people in the house making noise. Uh, we also were retrying to figure out the microphone situation so I really hope it doesn't take away from the wonderful stories people submitted for us. I would have re-recorded it, but unfortunately Jess, the person in the podcast with me is no longer doing their placement at SHORE and is no longer available to record with me and I really didn't want to take away from the work she did. So, I hope you all enjoy. I hope you can overlook some of the audio that's a little messed up, and we will do better next time. Thank you.

Maddy: Hi everyone! Welcome to the podcast. My name is Maddy and my pronouns are She and Her.

Jess: And my name is Jess and my pronouns are She and Her.

Maddy: So this is our podcast in partnership with SHORE Centre, which is us, and the Kitchener Public Library who helped us out with hosting this podcast. For those of you that don't know really quickly, SHORE Centre does stand for Sexual Health Options Resources and Education. So we have a clinic which is located in Downtown Kitchener, where they deal with the sexual health options port-

Maddy: Portion? Porsche?

Jess: Port-

Both: *Laughter*

Maddy: They don't have Porsches. *laughter* They help people out with pregnancy options counseling and then also birth control access. But we more deal with the resources and education part. So I have been a sexual health educator at SHORE for a little over a year now.

Jess: I was a practicum student at SHORE Centre, and then I've been working on the Ed team as a summer student for the past couple months.

Maddy: Yeah so, we are here as a kind of second to our last podcast we did, which you can check out on our website, it was called "Myth or Menstruation" and that was where people shared their experiences of menstruation whether it was their first period or just something wild that happened to them while they

were getting their period. So, we got people to submit stories and it was super fun, we got a lot of really cool stories, a lot of stories that made us think about what access to menstruation and menstrual products can mean for a person. So we thought we would do something similar but this time with Sex Ed stories. Because we know through our work that Sex Ed and access to sexual health education makes a huge difference in people's lives. So we have a few stories coming from people who were getting Sex Ed, whether that was good Sex Ed or sometimes questionable Sex Ed, um, and also stories from some sexual health educators like us. So are you excited Jess?

Jess: Yes, I am very excited and very ready!

Maddy: Alright, let's get into it.

Jess: Alright, so our first submission is from Rose. And their story is: I distinctly remember my Sex Ed teacher describing how the female body just knows when you're in the water and stops your period and that's why you won't get your period in the bath, shower and pool.

Maddy: Yeah, so this is something we hear a lot.

Jess: Mhmm-

Maddy: I've even heard that like your body stops because for biological reasons, so sharks don't-

Jess: Yes!

Maddy: Yeah! Do you remember hearing that too?

Jess: I remember that too yeah!

Maddy: So it's not true, none of that is true and it's actually not true that your period stops. What happens is the pressure from the water just prevents the blood that is inside your body from being able to come out of your vagina. Um, so, your period definitely doesn't stop and as some of you probably know as soon as you get out of the bath or the pool it's gonna come really fast because all of that blood has been building up. So, although I'm sure this teacher was trying to share some information that's useful, there's a bit more to it than that. A really great way to prevent your period in a pool is a tampon or like a menstrual cup or something internal because we know that pads are gonna get filled with water. Um, but yeah, it's important that we get the full story when we're talking about Sex Ed.

Jess: Yeah, and another thing that I think it important to kinda talk about with this story is educators, you know, assuming that bodies are all the same and every body is just going to know to do something because I think it really limits

the different bodies and the different experiences that people have. Because no two bodies are the same. At SHORE Centre we try to make it a point to, you know, be very inclusive and not say things like, um, “female bodies” especially when it comes to talking about periods and such because we know that not everyone who gets their period is female; it happens to people who have uteruses and vulvas and vaginas.

Maddy: Yeah.

Maddy: Alright, now we have a story for you all submitted by Ash.

Maddy: So much of the misinformation that I got through Sex Ed growing up were lies of omission. Growing up conservative and Catholic I was taught that sex was for hetero folks with binary genders and consisted solely of “tab A in slot B”, nothing else. As for genders, there were only 2; penis and vagina. Nothing was said about being trans or non-binary. I didn’t even know non-binary was a thing you could be until I was in my 30’s! To list some of the ways in which my conservative, hetero-centric Sex Ed failed me.... Number 1; I’m asexual – meaning I don’t experience sexual attraction. Asexuality was never discussed which made me assume that I was just fundamentally broken for not experiencing what everyone else did. Number 2; when you are taught that there are only two genders and aren’t even taught that trans is a thing you can be; it is impossible to describe the damage that it does. I spent 34 years trying to be my assigned gender and failing and being abused by my peers and teachers for not being able to perform my assigned gender correctly. Even if one teacher had told me that there are more than just two genders growing up, what a game changer it would have been. Number 3; I’m asexual but also bi-romantic in a man. Talking about the different types of attraction and how you can be attracted differently to people of different genders would have saved me growing up a lot of heartache and trying to figure out that on my own. But of course, we obviously didn’t do that either. So in short, inclusive Sex Ed would have saved me literally thousands of dollars in therapy bills, not to mention the trauma of growing up convinced I was a monster or fundamentally broken as a human being for not being able to fit the rigid hetero and binary mold of gender and attraction.

Maddy: Wow, thank you so much for being open about your experience. I think this story really highlights the importance of inclusive and comprehensive sex education.

Jess: Yeah and the importance that sexual health conversations don’t neglect certain people’s experiences because that can be very harmful. I think it’s important to have sexual health that normalizes and validates the experience of

those who also do not want to engage in sexual activity just as much as it applies to people who do

Maddy: Mhm, I think a lot of the time when we think about teaching Sex Ed a lot of people are going into it from like a binary heteronormative perspective. It's really important that as a community, as allies we recognize that there isn't just one type of experience when it comes to sexuality.

Jess: Yes.

Maddy: if you are looking to learn a little bit more about different sexual identities and what they mean, and maybe how to talk about them, there's a really great Instagram account that I use as a resource quite a bit it's [@mattxiv](#) you can look him up on Instagram. He's a really great resource for me and he also just puts a lot of cool makeup looks into his - I won't explain it, you kinda have to check it out to understand. But, if you are looking for more information I would definitely recommend checking that out.

Maddy: Our next story comes from Christina and she said... I went to a private Christian high school/middle school in Halton region, so Sex Ed wasn't exactly something they wanted to talk to us about. I remember in grade six there were whispers that this was the year we were supposed to get to talk about "the thing". But when we asked the teachers, they were like, "oh no, you will learn about that next year". Cut to grade seven and the teacher said the same thing, "next year you'll learn about it". Grade eight, same thing, but they were like "you will learn about it in high school, don't worry". My middle school and high school were like sister schools and a lot of the kids I went to middle school with were also in my high school. We thought that we were going to get to learn about Sex Ed in gym class, so we asked this middle-aged white dude who was our gym teacher who was already awkward enough talking to girls about excusing them for period pains in gym class about the sexual health talk. All he talked to us about was the biological name for everything and he never actually talked to us about Sex Ed. I never knew about birth control, about condoms; I never knew anything about my sexual health or even just about my own body. Now I'm in university and I laugh at the fact that I literally never got Sex Ed talk and learned everything I know from the people around me.

Jess: it's like kind of upsetting but it seems to be like a common theme about sex education in these stories. It's either being absent or very limited based on the assumption that students will just know information or giving basic heteronormative sexual health information that completely negates different people, bodies, and sexual expressions.

Maddy: Yeah, this was my experience growing up in Catholic school and it was kind of like "oh, whoever takes care of them, their parents, guardians, will talk

to them about it. They'll learn it just by experience..." but we know that's like a really harmful mindset that ends up being really negative for a lot of people.

Jess: Yeah, and I think it's great that, you know, this person really advocated for sexual health, like they were asking their teachers consistently year after year. Umm, I do think it's important that we advocate for better sexual health information and education, so I mean good on ya.

Maddy: Good on ya! Yeah, and I think if somebody asks you questions, give them the information that they're asking for. I think if somebody's asking those questions, it's right to tell them the information and make sure they have the tools to be able to use that information in a safe healthy way.

Jess: Mhmm.

Jess: Okay, our next submission is from Gord, and Gord's story is... In grade nine boy's gym class during the Sex Ed unit, I remember one of my classmates either being a smart ass or perhaps genuinely ignorant - but probably the former- asking our near retirement, stereotypical jock gym teacher a question. The question was, "if I can't find a condom to use when I have sex with my girlfriend, is it okay to use plastic wrap instead?". The class of teenage boys erupted in giggles, or course, but our teacher looked thoughtful and responded deadpan, "Yes, you certainly can but it's really important that you secure the plastic wrap to your penis using a few thumb tacks to make sure it stays in place". I think I'll stick to condoms.

Maddy: We love this story so much, it's hilarious. There's something about gym teachers, they always just seem to be so quick with the wit.

Jess: On the ball gym teachers. Every time.

Maddy: We meet a lot of gym teachers in our work too, because we usually are in health classes when we do our presentation and they just have those quick responses that are unmatched.

Jess: They do - they really are! But I mean, of course he was goofing around so please, everyone, do not stick thumb tacks in your penis.

Maddy: And also cellophane, or what was it that they used?

Jess: Plastic wrap.

Maddy: Plastic wrap! Not sufficient to protect against pregnancy.

Jess: It's not the one.

Maddy: It's not meant to go inside people's bodies. Please stick to condoms.

Jess: Yes. Please try to find a condom.

Maddy: Please, we beg you.

Maddy: So, if you listen to real podcasts, you'll know that in the middle they often have an advertisement, this is a different type of advertisement. Instead of for a product, it's gonna be for another sexual health program because believe it or not, Jess and I are not the only people who teach Sex Ed. Ugh, so, we're gonna throw it over to Erin who is gonna tell you a bit about their program and we will see you after.

Erin: Hi there, my name is Erin and I work at ACCKWA; the Aids Committee of Cambridge Kitchener/Waterloo and Area. ACCKWA has provided support to people living with HIV in the Region of Waterloo since 1987. Today, in addition to our support services, we also conduct education and harm reduction programming to reduce the transmission of sexually transmitted and blood borne infections locally. We offer free sexual health harm reduction materials including; condoms, dams, and lube as well as injection and inhalation substance use equipment. We operate from a harm reduction, intersectional, and peer led approach. If you're interested in learning more about what kinds of education, harm reduction, and clinical services we offer, please find us at ACCKWA.com, on [Facebook by searching ACCKWA](#), or on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter @AIDSCKW](#). Thanks for listening and remember, HIV happens here.

Jess: I thank you Erin, and we are back for some more stories for all of you.

Maddy: Our next story is from Sally, and she said.... In high school we were in health class and the teacher asked us all to close our eyes and raise our hands if we've ever used a tampon. When we opened our eyes I was the only one with my hand up. My friends obviously had figured out what was going on before I did. I was then asked to come to the front of the class and demonstrate how to insert a tampon into a plastic vagina. I was nervous and embarrassed but I did it. My friends laughed, I laughed, and I didn't really think about it again until later that day when a girl in my class came up to me and just said, "thank you". I understood then that she didn't know how to use a tampon, and that it helped her feel more comfortable, and me being embarrassed for a few minutes was worth it.

Jess: I think that this is a really, like, beautiful story that really speaks to what a difference sex education can make for people when, you know, they're given it. Um, and I mean, sometimes embarrassment just comes with like the territory of talking about our bodies and sex and sexual health, um so that's - I feel like very natural.

Maddy: But, we definitely would never call someone out like that.

Jess: No

Maddy: And we know often middle school, high school kids are not as comfortable as maybe sexual health educators when talking about Sex Ed. So I think a really great way, instead of calling people out, is to acknowledge the fact that this is sometimes an awkward topic, and we're really comfortable talking about it but we don't always expect other people to be.

Jess: Yes, for sure, and I mean it's really great that this person's experience turned out to be a really positive learning opportunity for another, but I think it comes with having a good understanding, and you know, a good amount of comfort to talk about these things in order to support and teach others. So, yeah, we do not want to be putting people on the spot because it can make things worse.

Maddy: For sure.

Jess: Alright, our next story was submitted anonymously. So the story is... I went to a very Catholic high school – not to generalize to religion or anything, however that did play a part in what I was taught. I remember going to an assembly in grade ten and hearing from two people about how traumatizing abortion is to your soul and to your body and seeing videos of women recounting how traumatizing experience it was for them. Ummm, I don't want to take away from people's actual experiences of abortion, but learning that it would be the worst experience of your life made me have this image that stuck with me for a long time. But it's not the truth for a lot of people.

Maddy: Yeah, this story really hit home I think because I also had a similar experience in Catholic school where I was made to think abortion was awful and was gonna ruin your life, and although that definitely is some people's experience, I think for the majority of people it's not. It's something they do, um, and it doesn't have a ton of lasting effects.

Jess: Yeah, and I think that, you know, giving people a narrative about this like, traumatizing experience, it really limits people from having those options because it instills fear in that being an option for them, when we do know that there are often times a lot of people who feel very relieved after having their abortion.

Maddy: Yeah. Um, Jess and I just watched a movie, it's called "Unpregnant" and you can find it on Crave, and the reason I loved it so much is it's just a fun, like, road trip movie, but the premise of the movie is that there's a girl, she lives in Missouri (I think – some sort of state like that) and she has to drive all the way to New Mexico to get an abortion because in her state you have to get a parent's signature to get an abortion if you're under 18. And it's kind of the story of her and her friend traveling to get an abortion and, not to ruin it for anyone, but the abortion ends up being a really empowering, good experience

for her. And it was really cool to see media that portrays it as something positive.

Jess: Yeah, and I think there needs to be a bit more conversations around normalizing those experiences instead of um, you know, degrading them.

Maddy: Yeah, and I think it's important when teaching Sex Ed to talk about it in a way that makes it seem like something normal, and okay to talk about and not something that's scary. So, highly recommend watching that movie if you have Crave, um also, there's a book, it's also called Unpregnant that's also awesome. I actually read it, I took it out from the Kitchener Public Library -

Jess: Ooooh

Maddy: And read it so, shout out to them for stocking the best books!

Jess: KPL!

Maddy: Okay, now we're going to throw it over to Linzi, who is also a sexual health educator, so let's hear from her.

Linzi: My name is Linzi Williamson. Currently, I am a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Saskatchewan. I have been teaching sex education for about 15 years in community based and University settings to diverse populations in both Ontario and Saskatchewan. I have many stories to share; stories about individuals learning to recognize the red flags in their intimate relationships and finally gaining the courage to leave their partners. Or people sharing their experiences with abortion and navigating the challenging health system. Or individuals disclosing experiences of sexual abuse and needing answers about where to go and what to do. Or individuals gaining an appreciation for the diversity of human sexuality and learning to respect those differences. The story that I would like to share today is related to an undergraduate human sexuality course I taught in 2019. For this class I assigned a reading for each week related to topics we were covering and asked students to submit weekly reflections on these readings. For one of my lectures on anatomy and biology, I assigned students a chapter in the book, "Vagina" by Naomi Wolfe. Controversy aside regarding her work, Wolfe presented some fascinating ideas and research including the role of the autonomic nervous system and the sexual neuro network in the experiences of sexual pleasure. One student submitted the following reflection on this chapter. "This reading has by far been my favorite of not just this class, but of all my classes. When I read it, I literally would stop and say 'YAS' or even clap. I responded this way because I appreciated just how much the author instils that sense of importance in pleasure, particularly female pleasure, being a unique experience for every person and that safety, feeling safe and protected and loved, is so, so important for real pleasure to occur. It

made me feel validated in a sense because of past experiences with partners where I felt guilty for not being able to perform the way that they had wanted me to. It was not due to me being sexually flawed, but the way these men had often become aggressive or demanding or insensitive, they overall were dismissive of my need to feel safe in those extremely vulnerable situations. The information in this chapter makes me feel more confident in my decision to not settle when a man is ignorant or lazy or selfish and to really prioritize my pleasure when it comes to sex with a partner. For too long, I placed men's pleasure above my own and that's sad. Women and men still believe that that is how we are supposed to do sex, not anymore. PS. I love how the author repeatedly states that touches must be done skillfully. It really reinforces the idea that a true effort must be made and done to a woman's enjoyment and not some half-assed quick caresses. Who wants that? Not this girl".

Maddy: Thank you so much Linzi for sharing your story, that was awesome.

Jess: Yeah, it shows how rewarding good sexual health education can be and how rewarding it is to teach good sexual health information to other people.

Maddy: Yeah and I think good sexual health information includes talking about pleasure, because it's important. It's important that sex is a pleasurable experience for everybody.

Jess: Yeah exactly, and knowing our bodies vs what feels good and what doesn't feel good is good to know from childhood into adulthood and obviously, in different contexts and different scenarios, but you know, knowing what we like, what we don't like, and being empowered to discuss our bodies with others.

Maddy: Yeah. Sexual health is beyond just anatomy, and STI's, and harm reduction. Although those things are important, it's also important that people feel empowered and like it's something they want to talk about because it's in those discussions I think that people learn and we improve on what it means to be a sexual human being or not be a sexual human being.

Jess: Exactly.

Maddy: Wow, those were some awesome stories we got.

Jess: Mhmm, yes.

Maddy: I thought to end it out, we'd talk about me, because I love to talk about myself.

Jess: *Laughs*

Maddy: Ah, but, I definitely had an interesting experience of Sex Ed going to a Catholic school as I feel like a lot of people did. I remember in grade nine health class our teacher telling us that if you hadn't got your period by the time you were 15, something was wrong with you and you were probably sick, and little grade nine Maddy did not have her period yet and I freaked out, I was so stressed. And then I remember he handed out the junior catechism.

Jess: Sorry, what is, uh, the junior catechism?

Maddy: Well, if you're Catholic, those maybe who are Catholic, the catechism is like, kind of, not the bible, but it's a written out set of rules for the Catholic faith. Like, kind of clarifying things.

Jess: Okay...

Maddy: And the junior catechism, is a junior version of that, I guess, and it focuses a lot, believe it or not, on sex and abstinence. Um, so yeah, that's what it is. We read that, it was, you know, very scary very shaming.

Jess: Mhmm.

Maddy: So, as I was already feeling bad, I felt worse, which is always fun. And then I also remember that same teacher telling us that every time somebody with a penis masturbates that is a baby that could have been born that's being lost into the world and every time that happens, God cries.

Jess: Oh wow.

Maddy: And that little baby that could have been born, goes up to heaven and sees God and cries with him, and that's all our fault. So, yeah, that was my experience. So maybe some of you can see why I became a sexual health educator. I went to University and I found all this information that made my life better and it was empowering. And I said, "I want to be involved in helping other people".

Jess: Yeah. I mean, I also went to a Catholic elementary school and high school and in high school part of our religion curriculum - like religion class - um, was to watch this movie that basically talked about abstinence and why people who aren't practicing abstinence will automatically become pregnant and have to have an abortion and it will be the worst mistake they've ever made. So I feel like that's where a lot of - um, it could be problematic when you're having sexual health integrated into like a religion class kind of thing. Because it doesn't really get to like, the actual sexual health portion, it's more, "just don't have sex".

Maddy: Yeah, and just to like, shock you all, kids who go to Catholic school are also having sex.

Jess: Oh yes.

Maddy: It doesn't, you know - acting as if it's not happening doesn't stop it from happening.

Jess: Yeah, and that's why it's so important that people have the knowledge and the resources to enact those decisions in the safest way possible and not be afraid or ashamed to ask for those things or to try to seek that information and those resources out on their own.

Maddy: Yeah. And I do have a lot of friends who went to Catholic school who got great sexual health education.

Jess: Mhmm!

Maddy: And a lot of friends who went to public school who did not get so great sexual health information. So, it kinda depends on your experience, but we are here to advocate for consistent, good, LGBTQ inclusive, positive sex education.

Jess: Yes, exactly.

Maddy: So, um, yeah. We do have one more story, and this one happened to Jess and I. So, when I - this was a few months ago. I was doing a booth at the University of Guelph. Um, just so you all know, we do booths. We kind of sit there with like our few models, we answer people's questions, we give them resources... and so somebody came up to my booth and was asking about menstrual cups. And if you don't know what a menstrual cup is, it's a menstrual product that's a cup that you insert in your vagina and you take it out and it collects it in a cup rather than absorbing it like a tampon does. When you take it out, you pour it in the sink - the blood that is collected in there - and then you wash it and you reinsert it. So, it's a reusable menstrual product which is really empowering for a lot of people because not only is it reusable, but it's something that you can leave in for a lot longer than you can leave in a tampon. It's like 10 hours rather than 6. So, somebody was asking questions they were interested in a menstrual cup and because I'm scatter-brained I had forgotten the sample menstrual cups that we bring around in order to show people and I was like, "oh shoot, I wish that I could show you my cup, but I don't have one". And somebody else was standing there and they said, "Oh, I have a menstrual cup, I'll show it to you". And it was their own and I said, "sure, if you're comfortable, do that". So, I was telling that exact same story to a previous coworker of mine, so exactly how you just said it, and I'm hoping, that those of you at home understood that they did not take it out of their body, they took it out of their bag... it wasn't, you know. But, the coworker I was talking to, as I was telling the story, got this look on his face like -

Jess: Was shocked.

Maddy: “oh my god like”, and I was like it’s not that shocking, like, you’re a sexual health educator you should probably understand. And I was so confused, like, “why are they so...” and then afterwards he was like, “did they call security? Like did you get somebody over there?” and I was like, “what? Like no?”

Jess: *laughter*

Maddy: Turns out, he thought that the person had taken the menstrual cup out of their body in front of us to show it to this person.

Jess: *laughter* What a mess that would have been!

Maddy: And I told Jess this story because we were driving to a workshop and we just about got into a car accident we were laughing -

Jess: We were laughing *laughter*

Maddy: - so hard. So, yeah, there’s a lot of funny stories -

Jess: And I think it even, like, honest to god it’s, kinda speaks to the fact that like when you’re talking about sexual health like, information, stories and stuff, it’s so important to be specific because things really can get like, lost in the weeds. Like *laughter* like if you just leave it up to judgment and assuming people know, then things like that can be misconstrued and completely misunderstood.

Maddy: Oh yeah, totally, you have to be super specific. I think because it’s something that like, for a lot of people they don’t talk about. They’re not used to talking about it and so, it’s not something that there’s like those assumptions around - you have to be super clear-

Jess: Yeah.

Maddy: - when you say stuff. Obviously this was a misunderstanding in a different way-

Jess: Yeah!

Maddy: We try to be super clear in everything we say. So, there’s our story for you all.

Jess: Yes.

Jess: Okay, we really want to thank every single person who submitted a story for us to share today. And for people who submitted their own stories, it was really awesome and we are very grateful for that.

Maddy: Yeah, we also want to thank ACCKWA and Erin for supporting the podcast.

Jess: And last but not least, we would love to thank the Kitchener Public Library for giving us this platform and for editing yet another podcast.

Maddy: Yeah. This is Maddy.

Jess: And this is Jess

Together: And we are signing off.

Jess: Alright, well thank you guys for tuning in.

Maddy: We hope you had fun

Jess: We did.

[End of Transcript].