

Introductory Exercise 2

"Earlier I used to joke about sex and sexuality. Now I realize that we need to talk about it openly."

CARE staff member

"Everyone wanted to explore sexuality but we never got the environment. This learning phase lets us absorb as much as we can."

CARE staff member

"People should have the opportunity to feel and understand their sexuality any way they choose to. They are also entitled to be respected for their choices."

youth

What is Sexuality?

Introduction

In CARE, we have used an adaptation of Advocates for Youth's Circles of Sexuality exercise (see www.advocatesforyouth.org) to explain the idea of 'sexuality' to staff and project participants. We have used it in workshops to update and orient program staff in youth programming in Africa and Asia, and to orient new program staff in sexual and reproductive health, starting in 2002.

Objectives

- To better understand sexuality as an integrated concept
- To explore how gender and sexuality intersect
- To imagine why and how we can integrate concepts of sexuality into our work

Timeframe: 2 – 2 ½ hours

Materials needed: flipchart paper, pens or markers, prepared flipchart pages with circles of sexuality (as shown on page 12), prepared flipchart pages with WHO's working definition of sexual rights, prepared flipchart pages with WHO's working definition of sexuality, handout with definitions for circles of sexuality (one for each participant)

Ideal workspace: All participants must be able to see the flip chart. For Part A, enough table or floor space is needed so that small groups can write on flip chart paper.

Number of participants: 10-25; preferably similar numbers of men and women

STEP 1

Part A:

Ask the group to brainstorm all the words that they can think of associated with sexuality. Have 2 people write down the words on large sheets of paper as the facilitator probes for more words. This should be done quickly.

Probe for missing words: Any positive associations? What part of sexuality does society not like to talk about openly? Try to pull out the hidden aspects of sexuality. What are some negative consequences or actions related to sexuality?

Here are some examples from previous workshops (in no particular order)

Kissing	Hugging	Contraception	Body image
Massage	Sexual harassment	Need to be touched	Petting
Caring	Loving/liking	Pornography	Impotence
Infertility	Abortion	Sperm	Bisexual
HIV	Date aggression	Self-esteem	Anal sex
Touching	Masturbation	Orgasm	Communication
Fantasy	Passion	Sexual attraction	Emotional vulnerability
Sharing	STIs	Withdrawal method	Flirtation
Child spacing	Ovaries	Getting pregnant	Incest
Rape	FGM	Lesbian, gay	Unwanted pregnancy

When the group has run out of ideas, show them the Circles of Sexuality diagram (see page 12), which represents one definition of sexuality. Everything related to human sexuality can fit in one or more of these circles. Explain the definition of each circle, and ask for examples of sexuality concepts, thoughts or behaviors that would fit in each circle.

Divide the group into smaller groups of 4-5 people each. Distribute flip chart pages prepared ahead of time with the five circles of sexuality including the definition of each. Each group will need pens or markers and one of these flip chart pages.

How do the words that the large group brainstormed to describe sexuality fit in the circles? Are there any that don't seem to fit? Ask the small groups to put each of the words in an appropriate circle. Tell them that a word may fit in more than one circle; the circles are not mutually exclusive.

When the groups are finished, facilitate a discussion with the larger group, asking

- Did any other associated words need to be added? Did more occur to you?
- Which circles had the most words associated with them? Why?
- Do we tend to focus our work around some circles but ignore others? Why?
- Which of the five sexuality circles feels most familiar? Least familiar? Why do you think that is so?
- Is there any part of these five circles that you never before thought of as sexual? Please explain.
- Are there certain circles that make you feel more or less comfortable talking about? Which ones do you think carry the heaviest silence and are hardest to talk about? Why is that? Can you imagine talking about these with your children? With your parents? With your peers?

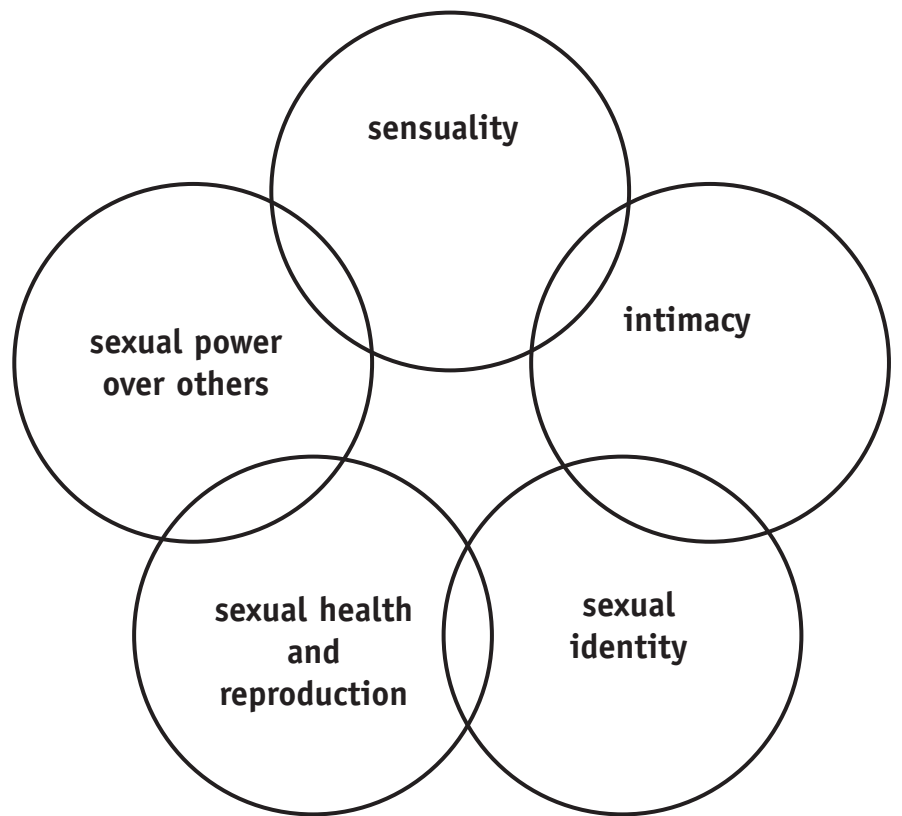


Sarah Kambou/ICRW



Evelyn Hockstein/CARE

Circles of Sexuality



Definitions for Circles of Sexuality

Sensuality

Awareness and feeling with one's own body and other people's bodies, especially the body of a sexual partner. Sensuality enables us to feel good about how our bodies look and feel and what they can do. Sensuality also allows us to enjoy the pleasure our bodies can give us and others.

Intimacy

The ability and need to be emotionally close to another human being and accept closeness in return. While sensuality is the need to be physically close to another human, intimacy is the need to be emotionally close.

Sexual identity

A person's understanding of who he or she is sexually, including the sense of being male or female, culturally-defined gender roles, and sexual orientation. Sexual orientation refers to whether a person's primary attraction is to people of the opposite sex (heterosexuality), the same sex (homosexuality), or to both sexes (bisexuality).

Sexual health and reproduction

One's capacity to reproduce, and the behaviors and attitudes that make sexual relationships healthy and enjoyable. This includes factual information about reproduction, sexual intercourse and different sex acts, contraception, sexual expression, and reproductive sexual anatomy, among others.

Sexual power over others

Using sex or sexuality to influence, manipulate or control other people, such as seduction, flirtation, harassment, sexual abuse or rape.

Part B:

Share with participants the World Health Organization's working definition for what constitutes sexual rights:

Sexual rights embrace human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus statements. They include the right of all persons, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, to:

- the highest attainable standard of sexual health, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services;
- seek, receive and impart information related to sexuality;
- sexuality education;
- respect for bodily integrity;
- choose their partner;
- decide to be sexually active or not;
- consensual sexual relations;
- consensual marriage;
- decide whether or not, and when, to have children; and
- pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life.

The responsible exercise of human rights requires that all persons respect the rights of others.

Source: WHO draft working definition, http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexual_health.html



Sarah Kambou/ICRW

“We feel that these issues of sexuality should not be kept under the carpet. Opening up makes us tolerant and mature.”

CARE staff member

“On being told that she eats three times a day, I advised the pregnant woman to eat more often at shorter intervals, to maximize nutritional intake. She told me that if she ate so frequently, her husband would think that her constant hunger was caused by her having sex with other men!”

female CARE staff member working on nutrition for pregnant women

“We were excited about working on gender and sexuality but we also had fears and apprehensions. We asked ourselves, what should we do, what will this mean to us? What will happen to our privacy?”

CARE staff member, India

“I am more comfortable to discuss sexuality... I do not feel shy or embarrassed any longer.”

CARE staff member, Vietnam

“When I shared my experiences about my sexuality, especially the negatives ones, I felt very light as I had never discussed or shared them earlier.”

CARE staff member

STEP 2: Discussion

Initiate a discussion with the group using some or all of these questions as a starting point; ask additional probing questions as appropriate. Encourage debate within the group, and be ready to spend some time discussing the issues that arise.

- What do you think of the WHO definition of sexuality, now that you have just worked through the exercise to define sexuality for yourselves?
- When did you (or when do young people generally) first become aware of your own sexuality? How did you (or young people generally) express your sexuality when you were younger? How does it change as people mature? How has it changed as you've matured?

Note to Facilitator: Many participants in this exercise have said they recall the first time they understood themselves to be a sexual person – for example, when they caught sight of a “sexy” picture. Others said they thought that even babies clearly experience erections, so it's hard to say when a person “becomes” a sexual person – perhaps it's from birth! There does not seem to be an upper age limit to sexuality – people of all ages consider themselves to be sexual beings.

- How is sexuality associated with power?

Note to Facilitator: Many participants say that both men and women have a lot of power in relation to sexuality. In fact, this question generated a lot of debate on who has more “sexuality” power! Using your sexuality as power can include flirting, dressing in a certain way, offering sex in exchange for money or gifts, sexual harassment, sexual coercion, and even rape. “Power” is not necessarily a positive or negative thing – it is just power – but it can be used to influence, coerce, or force others into doing something. In our programs, we want to be aware of the power that sexuality can have, and provide opportunities for more choices, respect and dignity for everyone.

- In what ways are gender and sexuality similar? In what ways are they different?
- Whose responsibility is it to define and uphold sexual rights?
- If people are not aware of their rights, do the rights still apply? How?
- Why is there a gap between stated rights and real life? What can we do as individuals to close this gap? What can we do as professionals?
- Who defines responsible sexual behavior?
- What do sexual rights mean in the context of our work?
- A common argument is that our culture, religion, or society won't tolerate open talk about sexuality. This is a powerful argument. Is it valid? What can we do to change it?

STEP 3: Closing

Congratulate participants on their contributions. Encourage them to become more aware of how they and others express their sexuality, and how it may change in different situations.

Provide pieces of paper to each participant and invite them to write how their understanding of sexuality has changed after this exercise. Also ask them to write one action or change in their life they will take this week as a result of participating in this exercise. No one is asked to write their name on the paper, so it is anonymous. Anyone can volunteer their thoughts on what they wrote out loud with the group, after everyone is finished.

“This is the first time that I have linked gender and sexuality. We have discussed many new ideas and it has been very interesting.”

CARE staff member, Vietnam



CARE

“We now have access to information. Before only boys had access to information on sexuality through magazines and blue films [pornography]... The boys used to trick us, since we didn’t have the right information.”

young woman, India

“After these discussions and exercises I wonder how can we be so short-sighted so as to design reproductive health programs excluding gender and sexuality.”

CARE staff member

Notes to the Facilitator

Sexuality is often misunderstood, and can be a difficult concept to fully articulate. We understand it to some degree on an intuitive level, but we do not often discuss it.

There are many different ideas about what sexuality is and what it means. The **World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexuality** (2002) as follows:

- Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction.
- Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships.
- While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed.
- Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical and religious and spiritual factors.

The nature of one’s sexuality is created by a unique combination of biological and social factors and is constantly changing. Because it’s socially constructed and not entirely innate in us, there are huge variations across generations, cultures, ethnic groups, etc. Sexuality can have a different meaning for people in various stages of life, and there are differences with regard to age, gender, culture and sexual orientation.

Often when people see the words ‘sex’ or ‘sexuality,’ they think of sexual intercourse or other sexual activity. **Sexuality is much more than sexual feelings or sexual intercourse.** It is an important part of who every person is. It includes all the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of being female or male, being attracted and attractive to others, and being in love, as well as being in relationships that include sexual intimacy. It also includes enjoyment of the world as we know it through the five senses: taste, touch, smell, hearing, and sight.

Gender and sexuality are both closely linked to identity and self-expression. The way we express our sexuality is often determined by our gender; often men are expected to be sexually promiscuous, while women are expected to protect their virginity and reputation for chastity, and deny that they feel sexual pleasure. In many places, there is an assumption that a woman’s or a man’s sexuality is uncontrollable. For example, if a man rapes a woman, it is assumed he could not control his sexual urges.

Sexuality is part of life. Whether for physical, emotional and psychological well-being, livelihoods or reproduction, **sexuality is central to human existence.** Choices available to men and women with regard to sexuality are often related to giving and taking power.

Sexuality is a human right. Everyone has the right and the responsibility to allow others to meet their sexual desires in the way they want. Sexual rights include your right to express and satisfy yourself, while not discriminating against others or having fear of discrimination against you. Sexual rights guarantee that people can express their sexuality free of coercion, discrimination and violence, and encompass mutual

consent and respect.

Many people participating in or working on development or humanitarian aid projects understand that **sexuality is very important to achieving personal, community or even national economic development goals**. Our cultural understanding and norms related to sexuality influence age of marriage, whether people are allowed to leave their homes freely, a nation's policies on access to information about contraception and family size, and whether certain kinds of people experience work-related discrimination, such as people who work in sex work, or who are living with HIV.

The Institute for Development Studies (IDS Policy Briefing No. 29, 2006) provides context to the concept of **sexuality in development**. "Development policy and practice has tended to ignore sexuality, or deal with it only as a problem in relation to population, family planning, disease and violence. However, sexuality has far broader impacts on people's well-being and ill-being. The need to respond to HIV/AIDS and the adoption of human rights approaches have created openings for a franker debate on sexuality and more resources in this area. Social and legal norms and economic structures based on sexuality have a huge impact on people's physical security, bodily integrity, health education, mobility and economic status. In turn, these factors impact on their opportunities to live out happier, healthier sexualities."

As with gender, staff need to explore and comprehend their values, attitudes and beliefs relating to sexuality as well as their understanding of its placement within conceptual frameworks and models of behavior change.

More reasons to use a sexuality lens in our work include:

- Lack of information leads to risky and even violent, coercive behavior
- Fear about sexuality can negate the possibly pleasurable aspects of sex
- To recognize sexual minorities that are otherwise hidden (such as homosexuals, sex workers, etc)
- Expand programming focus beyond individual behavioral change to influence social and cultural meanings of sex



Nathan Bolster/CARE

"I believe that most of CARE's projects in HIV and reproductive health focus only on medical services, or on knowledge of reproduction or infections. This is not wrong, but it is not the complete picture. By not addressing the other components of sexuality in our programs, we are denying [our project participants] information of what their sexual needs are and the different options they have to address them."

female CARE staff member