

sexpressions

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WINTER | 2006

A MAGAZINE FOR INTERVENERS
AND EDUCATORS WHO ARE OFFERING
SEX-EDUCATION ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
OF SECONDARY-SCHOOL AGE

A production of the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux
du Québec and the Université du Québec à Montréal

When
SEDUCTION
amongst adolescents

= **POWER,
SEXUAL ACTING OUT
AND PROVOCATION**

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Québec 



On Friday night, at a party at a friend's place, Caroline and Marie-Claude danced in a very provocative manner so as to get others to watch them. They even kissed each other, not because they find each other attractive, but to "turn on" the boys.

At that same party Marc kissed three girls. Véronique, who had been head over heels in love with him, no longer saw him in the same way. She was embarrassed.

How do you respond to these situations? What do you think of these seduction techniques? Why do girls use their bodies and their sexuality in these ways to seduce boys? How can Marc's behaviour be explained? Was Véronique right to find it embarrassing? Did Caroline, Marie-Claude, and Marc know how the other adolescents would interpret their behaviours?

In adolescence, seduction seems increasingly to be a quest for power, based on sexual provocation and acting out. The purpose of this document is to explain the ways in which this kind of seduction is manifested in boys and girls, the ways boys and girls interpret it, and its possible consequences.¹ As well, this document offers suggestions on how to think about the issue of seduction, and how to intervene.

When we think about seduction, and about the first love affairs of adolescents, what we hope for them is that they will get to know each other gradually, that their relations will begin with smiles and glances, and that as they begin to do things together, their mutual involvement will blossom into intimacy, and thus into sexual intimacy.

This is the evolution that was demonstrated by studies on the subject carried out in the 1970s (Birdwhistell, 1970, and Morris, 1971, in Moore, 1995). But behaviour today is quite different. Seduction is now often a power trip, and rapidly leads to explicit sexual behaviour. To seduce, for example, adolescents will increase the number of their sexual conquests, wear tantalizing clothes, dance suggestively, make direct propositions, and assume provocative poses. These actions are more and more common, and this may surprise you, particularly among girls. In the words of Jocelyne Robert: "In adolescence, being modest and proud, we used to hide our budding breasts. Now we make them poke out and bounce around" (2005, p. 126).

Leafing through magazines for teenage girls, we notice a plethora of articles encouraging readers to adopt seductive behaviours that are, in essence, sexual. These articles are headed with titles that invite girls to learn various tricks for seducing boys, such as:

- "Talking to boys; how to get them really addicted to you;"
- "Tell me how you flirt;"
- "What really drives the opposite sex crazy."

Beyond this, the omnipresence of sexuality in the media-magazines, video clips, porn films, the Internet, reality TV shows, all now have explicit sexual content-exacerbates this phenomenon of a model of behaviour in which one has to be sexually active (Duquet, 1997 and 2004).

According to the dominant heterosexual discourse, men's sexuality is active and women's is passive. What girls are looking for in their relationships is love; what boys are looking for is sex. Though these beliefs are deeply imbedded in social standards, adolescent sexuality is much more complex and diverse (Allen, 2003). Thus, although according to the traditional code it is the boys who should start a seduction, several studies have shown that in fact, it is the girls who take the initiative (Moore, 1995; Bouchard, St-Amand and Tondereau, 1996; Seal and Ehrhardt, 2003).

1. *Sexpressions* does not wish to exclude from this discussion the modes of seduction used in homosexual relations. But since seduction may sometimes be manifested differently, given the homophobic attitudes of adolescent peers, and since it has been little studied, we concentrate on seduction in heterosexual relations.

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To help make this text as clear as possible, we use the term *adolescent* when we are referring to both boys and girls. When we want to distinguish between the sexes we use the terms *boys* or *girls*.

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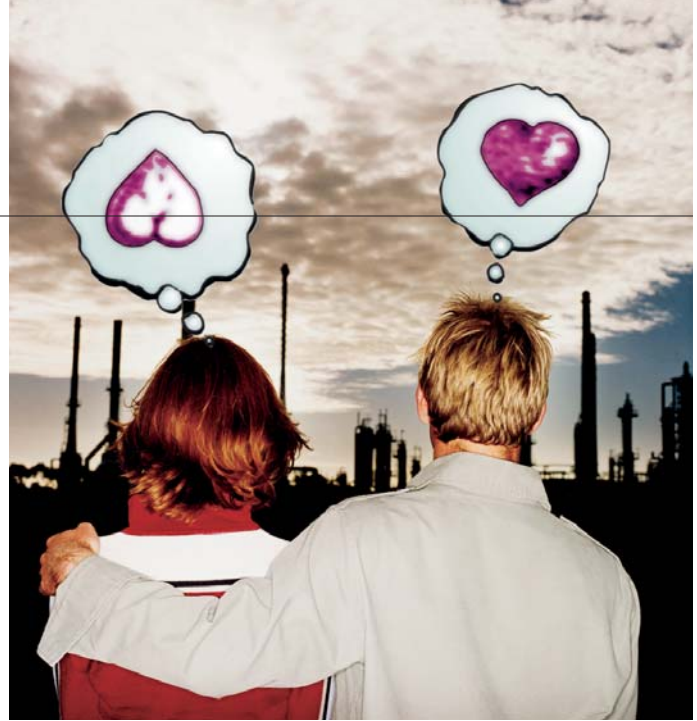
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SEDUCTION IN ADOLESCENCE

Seduction becomes very important during the course of adolescence (Fortin, 2002). Adolescents ask themselves if they have the power to please, and what they should do to get the results they want (Duquet, 1997). Seduction can be defined as a process that comprises a set of behaviours that precede and trigger sexual behaviours (Perper, 1989). It is also characterized by the development of affection, and the sharing of emotions and intimacy between the partners (Seal and Ehrhardt, 2003).

But what about seduction marked with the desire for power and based on sexual acting out? It is worthwhile, first of all, to make it clear that seduction is necessarily linked to power because to seduce is to exercise some kind of control (Silverstein, 1994). According to Robert (2005), girls and boys perceive their power in ultra-femininity and ultra-masculinity. Sexual seduction is, therefore, the use of this power willingly and knowingly, with the intention of being enticing and sometimes provocative.

The scenarios outlined above are good examples of this. Caroline, Marie-Claude, and Marc are aware of how they are behaving, of their powers of attraction, and of what they want to get in return. But are they aware of how others interpret what they do, and what the consequences for them may be of these interpretations?

To avoid disappointments, adolescents should reflect on how others perceive attitudes and behaviours that are directed towards exercising power, sexual acting out and provocation. This is why we are paying particular attention to manifestations of sexual seduction in boys and girls, to the consequences of this kind of seduction, and of how to raise this subject with adolescents.

To seduce is to move closer to someone by demonstrating one's interest in him or her, with the aim of conquering him or her, and keeping him or her as a partner (Fortin, 2002).

SEXUAL SEDUCTION AMONG BOYS

The dominant heterosexual discourse concerning young boys spreads the notions that they must have confidence in themselves and in their sexuality, that their emotions must be independent of their sexuality, and that they must have strong sexual appetites (Allen, 2003).

The various strategies they use to seduce girls include not only seduction games and compliments, but also more direct approaches (Seal and Ehrhardt, 2003). According to Drolet (1996), boys seduce girls mainly to have pleasure and sexual relations. Boys see relations between men and women through the prism of sexuality (Bouchard, St-Amand and Tondreau, 1996).

For boys, therefore, sexual relations constitute a way to feel masculine and to gain status with their peers (Drolet, 1996). Boys will often do anything to impress and to excite the interest of those around them (Fortin, 2002). They will have multiple conquests, for example. In a 1998 study carried out by Bouchard and St-Amand among young (15-year-old) Quebecois adolescents, more than half claimed that the fact of having had several sexual relationships could not ruin their reputation amongst other boys. The same proportion claimed that this fact improved their reputation.

Boys' mode of seduction is well represented by the question: "Am I capable of conquering girls?" (Fortin, 2002). Some boys try to establish loving relations with girls for the prime goal of having sexual relations (Drolet, 1996). In certain cases, they may also demand specific sexual services from their partners, such as fellatio and certain sexual positions (Duquet, 1997). Other boys, girls, and society in general often look approvingly on such ways of doing things. In contrast, girls who try to enter the sexual territory of boys by acting like them are often trapped because they are soon labelled as sluts.



SEXUAL SEDUCTION AMONG GIRLS

Seduction techniques that are motivated by the desire for power and involve sexual acting out can also be manifested by girls, and in various ways. First of all, girls want to test their seductive powers on boys. They make themselves beautiful by revealing their charms and their bodies, by showing off their breasts, buttocks, thighs or legs, and by dressing in enticing ways. Girls ask themselves if they are going to drive boys crazy (Fortin, 2002).

Moore (1995) compared the seduction strategies of girls between 13 and 16 years old with those of adult women. The same non-verbal signals were used in both cases, but some of the signals used by the girls, such as very enticing clothing, extreme makeup, and provocative facial expressions (seductive glances, for example) seemed exaggerated. The girls often seduced boys only to provoke them and

to amuse themselves. For the girls, these seduction games are central elements in their relations with the boys.

Furthermore, "girl power" is a philosophy that offers girls the possibility of being active in their sexuality by openly revealing it and by desiring elements related to it, while exercising power over the opposite sex (Allen, 2003; Fernandez, 2004). In a study conducted by Bouchard, St-Amant and Tondreau (1996), boys emphasized the fact that some girls thought only about sex and took the initiative, notably when at parties. Thus one boy described how girls would cling to them and press their breasts against the boys' faces... The example of Caroline and Marie-Claude, who danced together provocatively and kissed each other to turn boys on, is a good illustration of "girl power". For girls, being sexually active is not only about being sexually skilled, but also about being enticing and provocative (Duquet, 1997). Girls can seduce in order to see themselves as "hot" and to win the respect of others (Bouchard, St-Amant and Tondreau, 1996).

They can also seduce for the simple pleasure of pleasing, even if they are not interested in the other person (Fortin, 2002). This being so, girls know very well what effect their behaviour has on boys; they can see it in how boys look at them (Fortin, 2002).

Table 1 shows that seduction marked by the desire for power and based on sexual acting out is manifested both directly and indirectly, both verbally and non-verbally, and by both boys and girls, but in different ways. But how do boys and girls interpret this type of seduction effort when it comes from a member of the opposite sex?



HOW BOYS INTERPRET SEDUCTION

Boys can perceive girls who take the initiative in seduction as being sexually available (Seal and Ehrhardt, 2003). Whatever their intentions may be, girls have no control over the reactions they trigger in boys, nor in other girls (Fortin, 2002). A display of breasts, buttocks, thighs, or legs easily takes on sexual connotations (Fortin, 2002).

For the majority of boys, the message being disseminated by girls who dress in an enticing manner is "Look at me". (Fortin, 2002). Girls forget that revealing your body does not just signify that you are displaying its beauty. Boys can interpret this and similar attitudes as signs that girls are sexually active and experienced, and as an invitation to join in sexual adventures (Fortin, 2002).

According to a study Seal and Ehrhardt (2003) conducted among men over 18 years old, those who had experiences in which a woman initiated the seduction appreciated this seductive behaviour when it was not sexual in nature. Men who believed that it is their role to take the initiative felt, however, ambivalent in this situation, and their ambivalence was more marked when the nature of the seduction was purely sexual. If the men were open to the chance of having sexual flings, a woman who used seduction strategies based on sexual acting out did not at all represent for them a potential long-term partner. Even if, for men, seduction is motivated by sexual desire, they express respect for women who do not want to have sexual relations right away (Seal and Ehrhardt, 2003).

Some adult men are more direct in their approaches, and women who respond to their advances risk being labelled "easy". On the other hand, women who resist the sexual advances of men are considered by these men as being "good girls", with the potential of becoming long-term partners in an emotionally intimate relationship (Seal and Ehrhardt, 2003). Many adolescents have similar ideas. In the study conducted by Bouchard, St-Amand and Tondreau (1996), a girl remarked that boys who chase after sexual partners are well regarded, but girls who do the same thing are "whores". In the scenario described at the beginning of this article, the other adolescents would probably label Caroline and Marie-Claude "easy".

HOW GIRLS INTERPRET SEDUCTION

Bouchard, St-Amand and Tondreau also reported that girls aged 14 and 15 years criticize boys for thinking only of sex, for not respecting the privacy of love affairs and sexual encounters, and using these relations to impress their peers. In the girls' view, this way of behaving mainly allows boys to improve their status, gain an enviable reputation, and win popularity amongst their peers. In fact, the boys think that if they have more conquests not only will they impress their peers, but they will make girls interested in them. The reality, however, is more that the girls criticize boys for their multiple conquests. One can thus understand the embarrassment that, in the scenario above, Véronique felt about Marc, and that his attitude will not encourage her to express her feelings.

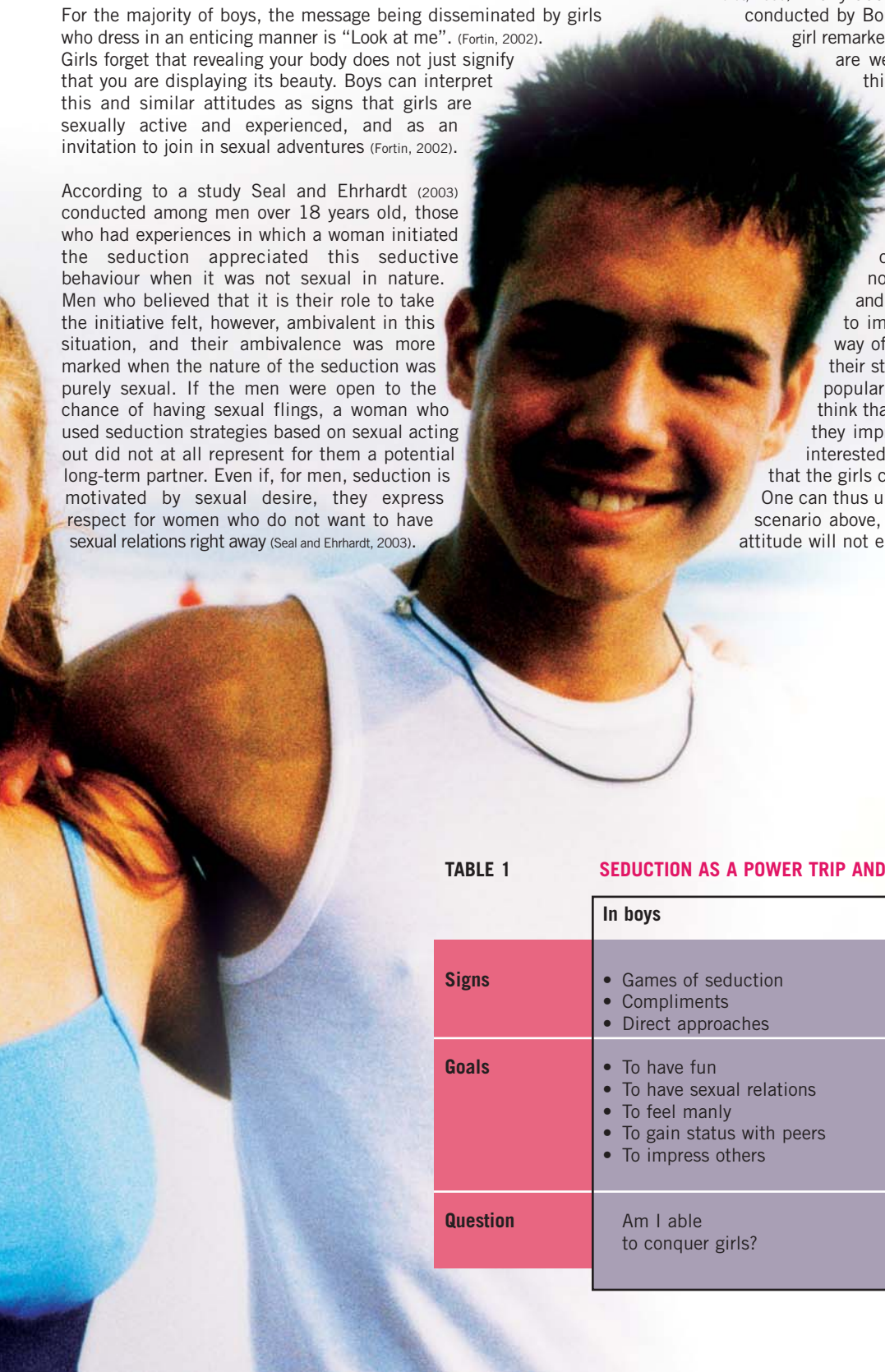


TABLE 1

SEDUCTION AS A POWER TRIP AND BASED ON SEXUAL ACTING OUT

| | In boys | In girls |
|----------|--|--|
| Signs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games of seduction • Compliments • Direct approaches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexy clothing • Seductive glances • Provocative bearing |
| Goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have fun • To have sexual relations • To feel manly • To gain status with peers • To impress others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To test their power of seduction • To please • To amuse themselves • To provoke boys • To win the respect of others • To think themselves "hot" |
| Question | Am I able to conquer girls? | Am I going to drive boys crazy? |



THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEDUCTION THAT IS POWER-DRIVEN AND BASED ON SEXUAL ACTING OUT

Behaviours and attitudes that are based on power, provocation and on fundamentally sexual acting out can have negative consequences on adolescents. Seduction becomes a crutch when someone with low self-esteem uses it to increase his or her standing. Adolescents thus become dependent on what others think (Fortin, 2002). Messages circulating in the media lead them to believe that they must become sex machines (Duquet, 1997); they want to be noticed, and can begin to compete with each other for attention (Silverstein, 1994).

CONSEQUENCES FOR BOYS

Boys associate the number of their conquests with their popularity (Fernandez, 2004). For this reason, those who fail in their seduction attempts question themselves about their masculinity and their sexual orientation (Seal and Ehrhardt, 2003). They may also think that girls are sexually active and experienced, and this brings on a feeling of inferiority relative to girls (Fortin, 2002). Since girls are more and more demanding of boys (a muscular body, a flat stomach), those who do not meet these criteria find it difficult to believe that a girl could love them (Carboneau, 2002).

CONSEQUENCES FOR GIRLS

Some adolescent girls have sexual relations to impress others and show their competence to their partner without even deriving any satisfaction from the relation. They feel obliged to have an active sex life (Duquet, 1997). According to Fortin, “because they want to seduce, girls find themselves plunging into sexual activity faster than they would have wanted to” (2002, p. 31). They can very quickly be labelled “easy” and thus become objects of contempt (Seal and Ehrhardt, 2003). Moreover, some girls suffer from affective dependence. They need to be loved, and sexuality becomes one way to meet this need (Rioux-Soucy, 2005).

TABLE 2 CONSEQUENCES OF SEDUCTION THAT IS BASED ON POWER AND SEXUAL ACTING OUT

| In adolescents | In boys | In girls |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are dependent on the opinions of others. • Think they have to be “sex machines.” • Competition between boys and girls. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question their masculinity and their sexual orientation. • Feel inferior relative to girls. • Have difficulty believing that a girl could love them. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have sexual relations without feeling ready. • Are seen as someone who is sexually experienced. • Are labelled “easy.” • Become an object of contempt. • Become affectively dependant. |

HOW TO RAISE THE SUBJECT WITH ADOLESCENTS

Authors are in agreement as to the importance of intervening with adolescents with regard to the phenomenon of seduction that primarily involves power and sexual acting out. But, once again, the right way of intervening has to be determined. There is no doubt that few boys are going to share their innermost feelings about the girls who go in for this kind of seduction. Nevertheless, it is important to discuss the question, and not to avoid it with the excuse that boys can look after themselves and react on their own. It is important because, as we have already stressed, these boys may be feeling inferior to girls and ill at ease with them.

First of all, one has to help adolescents recognize how their peers interpret this type of seduction. Generally, when adolescents seduce, they have a precise goal: to please, to be noticed, or even to provoke. Often they want to show themselves as being nearly perfect. Thus they act as they do to interest the other, and not to reveal their true personality (Fortin, 2002). The desire to please and seduce is, of course, perfectly legitimate, as long as this seduction is not just sexual (Nobert, 2002). For this reason, one must also induce adolescents to distance themselves from trends and from the “gang’s” criteria (Fortin, 2002). One has to see to it that they do not fall into the consumption of sexuality (Duquet, 1997). One has to help adolescents recognize and affirm who they are, with all their strengths and their weaknesses, so they can avoid taking refuge in simply copying others (Ribstein, 1995). In this way they can adopt a style of seduction that suits them, instead of trying to conform at any cost to the strictly sexual and provocative model of seduction.

Contrary to what one may think, adolescents hope that feelings and emotions will play an important role in their relationships, so that intimacy may later develop (Duquet, 1997). On the other hand, despite

physical contact, which is often rapid, what strictly sexual seduction creates is not intimacy but the illusion of intimacy. If they are to be spared disappointments, adolescents must seduce while remaining authentically themselves. Therefore, one must show them that when people are comfortable with themselves, their way of being and the atmosphere they create are attractive to others (Fortin 2002). Qualities such as honesty, faithfulness, intelligence, and a sense of humour-qualities that go beyond mere appearances-are what both boys and girls look for in another person (Bouchard, St-Amand and Tondreau, 1996).

Moreover, it is important to show adolescents that using their personal characteristics to seduce has many advantages: you can remain who you are, you avoid creating unrealistic expectations, people know who they are dealing with, and you avoid disappointments.

A pedagogic activity that encourages critical thinking and is offered in the context of a class or group activity seems to be the best kind of intervention to help adolescents understand what the opposite sex thinks of a mode of seduction that is tinged with power and based on sexual acting out, and the consequences

that can flow from such a mode of seduction. Such an activity should be targeted particularly at adolescents in secondary 4 and 5, and should be designed to offer them alternatives to this behavioural model.

In the Spring and Autumn 2002 editions of the *Petit Magazine de la Formation personnelle et sociale*, there are pedagogic activities entitled “La séduction ‘hyper sexualisée’ chez les adolescents: qu’est-ce qu’il faut en comprendre?” (Nobert, 2002) and “Les relations sexuelles adolescentes: est-ce banal?” (Bossé, 2002). These articles are available at <http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/itss> under the tabs documentation > Professionnels de l’éducation, and could serve as introductory activities to the activities described below.

Therefore, when people are comfortable with themselves, their way of being and the atmosphere they create are attractive to others (Fortin 2002)

TABLE 3 THE MAIN QUALITIES SWISHED FOR IN AN IDEAL PARTNER (BOUCHARD, ST-AMAND AND TONDREAU, 1996)

| Boys wish a girl: | Girls wish a boy: | Qualities desired both by boys an girls: |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with a nice attitude. • with a sense of humour. • who is faithful. • who is honest. • who is intelligent. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who is not macho. • who is not violent. • who is not jealous. • who is not a hypocrite. • who is faithful. • who is intelligent. • who has a sense of humour. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • honesty. • fidelity. • intelligence. • sense of humour. |



Pedagogic Activities

The pedagogic activities suggested in this magazine are presented in a logical order. It is preferable to do the activities in this sequence, although it is not necessary to conduct them all on the same day.



FIELD OF LEARNING

Moral education²

CROSS-DISCIPLINARY SKILLS

Use information, exercise critical judgment, realize one's potential, cooperate, communicate in an appropriate manner.

GENERAL DOMAINS OF TRAINING

Health and well-being, media (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 2004).

GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES

- To become aware of the consequences of a mode of seduction that is marked with the desire for power and based on sexual acting out.
- To find ways to seduce other than those linked to power, provocation, and sexual acting out.

2. The staff of *Services éducatifs complémentaires* (Complementary educational services), through its promotional and prevention service, could also be called upon. For example, the subject could be discussed at a noon-hour debate organized in collaboration with the school's nurse, animator of spiritual life and community service, and psychologist.

ACTIVITY 1

Modes of Seduction

DURATION
30 minutes

OBJECTIVES

- To identify the different modes of seduction used by boys and girls;
- To define the goals of boys and of girls in their different ways of seducing;
- To confront the perceptions of boys and girls as to the means used to seduce and what one or the other sex is hoping to get out of the seduction.

Begin the meeting by making it clear that the activity is about seduction between boys and girls.

1

Separate the class into **unmixed teams** each comprising four or five boys, or four or five girls. Ask each team to answer the questions listed below.

QUESTIONS FOR THE GIRLS

- What are the different means that boys use to seduce girls?
- What do you think that boys hope to get by acting as they do?

QUESTIONS FOR THE BOYS

- What are the different means that girls use to seduce boys?
- What do you think that girls hope to get by acting as they do?

2

The facilitator can reproduce Table 1 (page 4) without its contents so that it can be filled in later with the group. The table can be used to fill out or ask about the goals associated to a sign and identify the question that emerges, and then compare the boys' and girls' goals.

3

The facilitator asks each team to **name a spokesperson**, and writes the boys' and girls' answers on the board. The facilitator then gets a **discussion going** using the following questions.

- Girls, do you agree with what the boys have said about your ways of seducing and what you hope to get from seduction? Why?
- Boys, do you agree with what the girls have said about your ways of seducing and what you hope to get from seduction? Why?
- In what you have listed, are there means of seduction that are based on sexuality?
On the use of the body?
On the exercise of power?
On provocation?
- In your opinion, why do some people use these means of seduction?
- How do others view these seduction techniques?

4

The facilitator **brings the session to a close** by making it clear to the adolescents that one can seduce in several ways (by using power, sexual acting out, and provocation or by using charm and personality), and that sometimes others do not interpret our means of seduction in the way we would have wished.



DURATION
30 minutes

OBJECTIVES

- To determine the main reasons for the choice, in a particular situation, of a mode of seduction marked with the desire for power and based on sexual acting out;
- To determine how boys and girls interpret this kind of seduction in the context of a particular situation;
- To know the consequences of seduction that is marked with the desire for power and based on sexual acting out.

The facilitator invites the adolescents to continue, by means of scenarios, their exploration of seduction.

ACTIVITY 2

Seduction Based on Power

1

The facilitator **gives each team one of the two scenarios** presented at the beginning of this Magazine. The facilitator makes sure that both boys and girls get the same scenario so that their responses to it can be compared.

2

The facilitator **distributes a sheet with the questions below**, and asks each team to answer them.

SCENARIO: CAROLINE AND MARIE-CLAUDE

- What do you think of this seduction technique?
- In your opinion, why did Caroline and Marie-Claude use their bodies and sexuality to “turn on” the boys?
- Do you think that Caroline and Marie-Claude would have succeeded in “turning on” the boys? Explain your answer.
- In what way could others have interpreted their behaviour? Explain your answer.

SCENARIO: MARC AND VÉRONIQUE

- What do you think of this seduction technique?
- In your opinion, why did Marc kiss three girls during the course of the same evening?
- Why, in your view, did Véronique find Marc’s behaviour embarrassing?
- How could others interpret Marc’s behaviour and that of Véronique? Explain your answer.

3

The facilitator asks the **teams to share their answers** with the whole class. The facilitator makes sure that both boys and girls answer questions about the same scenario, so that the differences and similarities between the sexes can be noted. The facilitator then **leads a discussion** with the help of the following questions.

- In your opinion, what might the consequences for boys be of the use of power, provocation, and sexuality in seduction? What might the consequences for girls be?
- Just how far are you ready to go to please? Not to displease?
- What, do you think, are the limits to seduction that is based on power, provocation, and sexual acting out?

4

Using Table 2 (page 6), the facilitator can **sums up the discussion** by making a brief outline of the consequences of this seduction.

5

The facilitator **ends by making it clear** that seduction based on power and sexual acting out can have consequences among adolescents. Appearance is certainly important, and to show to advantage certain physical characteristics so as to seduce is perfectly legitimate. But the important thing is to remain authentically yourself.

ACTIVITY 3

Learning To Be True to Themselves

DURATION
20 minutes

OBJECTIVES

- To name various characteristics, other than physical ones, that are desirable in a partner;
- To name means of seduction other than those associated with the use of power, sexual acting out, and provocation;
- To be aware of the advantages of remaining yourself while seducing.

The facilitator invites the adolescents to continue their exploration of seduction, by means of a group activity.

1

The class is still divided into unmixed teams of boys or girls. The facilitator asks the girls and boys to **write down, on a sheet of paper, four characteristics** not linked to physical appearance that they would like a boyfriend or girlfriend to have.

2

The students reform into a group. The facilitator asks **each group to present the characteristics** chosen by the team. With the help of the following questions, the facilitator then leads a discussion.

- Do the characteristics differ from one team to another?
- Do you agree that these characteristics are desirable? Why?
- Boys, do you see yourselves in these characteristics? How about you, girls. Do these characteristics describe you?
- Is it possible to show these characteristics to advantage so as to seduce?
- How? (Being funny, being nice, being respectful, paying compliments, etc.)
- What are the advantages of doing so? (Avoiding raising or having unrealistic expectations; knowing whom you're dealing with, avoiding disappointments, etc.)

3

Conclude by making it clear that it is important to remain yourself while seducing by relying, for example, on qualities such as honesty and a sense of humour. This avoids disappointments and unrealistic expectations. People learn to know us as we really are. This is why it is important to look for one's own style of seduction rather than trying to conform to a strictly sexual and provocative model.



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