

Sailor Jerri's Seven C's

Ahoy, I'm Sailor Jerri the health edutainer! Today we are going on an adventure on the "Seven C's". Sex, sexuality, health, and the social ethics related to these topics can make one feel lost as sea. I consistently return to the "Seven C's" as a compass to navigate these choppy waters. So what are the "Seven C's"?

1. **Consent**
2. **Constructs**
3. **Confidence**
4. **Communication**
5. **Connection**
6. **Community**
7. **Credibility.**



Whoa! That is a lot of words! Let's break it down.

Consent. ALL SEX BASED IN CONSENT IS "GOOD SEX". We have all been hearing this word "consent" related to sex, but what does it mean? The most basic definition of consent is "an enthusiastic, free and informed agreement." In the context of sex this means that ahead of the sexual encounter a person is provided all the honest information related to a sexual action beforehand, and then this person enthusiastically agrees to participate. Why am I being so specific? Because sex is complicated. Just because someone has agreed to a sexual act in the past does not mean they are willing to participate in that act again. Additionally, just because someone is interested in one specific, agreed-upon sexual scenario does not mean they will agree to participate in a different scenario. Another important part of consent is acknowledging that there are situations where people are unable to give enthusiastic, free and informed consent to a sexual encounter. To better understand these situations let's move on to the next "C".

Constructs. Social constructionism is a sociological theory that examines how people build their understanding of the world and the people around them based on shared social assumptions. This means that it is important to acknowledge the difference between facts and things that may seem factual but are actually based on those shared assumptions. These social assumptions are intertwined with social power, because those with the power will be sure to spread information that supports

the social assumptions that put them in power. This control of information to bolster the powerful is called *cultural hegemony*. A classic example of how shared social biases can lead people, even very intelligent people, away from facts is the story of GRID. (Gay Related Immune Deficiency), the acronym originally coined by doctors for the virus that would come to be known as AIDS. In 1982 a medical team was studying the community of the deaths of gay men from San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. They did not connect these deaths to others in the non-homosexual community, instead at least one physician suggested that male homosexuals “reconsider the practice of engaging in anonymous sex”. These 1982 doctors let their own biases against members of the gay community and their perception of their activities lead to a conclusion that these patients’ orientation somehow left them susceptible to a disease. This is impossible, a disease does not *know* the sexual orientation of its host. The biases of social constructionism spread from sexuality, sexual identity, gender and gender roles to race, religion, and the other power dynamics of our daily lives. The concept of constructs ties into consent because it is impossible for an individual to grant informed consent to a sexual encounter if they don’t understand the difference between facts and shared social assumptions. These are times consent cannot be rendered outside of constructs. For example if the law states that a person is under the age of consent or if the individual is inebriated, in these situations no one can give consent, no matter the social constructions. However there are situations where those shared social assumptions can blur the lines of consent. A classic example is Marital Rape. Legally this is a modern concept, in the 1970’s that the United States even began to acknowledge it was possible for a spouse to not give consent and it wasn’t until 1993 that all 50 states finally put into law that being married to someone is not the same as giving a carte-blanc of consent. Before this time a husband did not have to get consent before a sexual encounter would take place, the law was shaped by social assumptions that a wife is property that can be used whenever and however it pleased the owner of the property, in this case her husband. This shows that social assumptions can adapt over time, and it also shows that the power dynamics created by social constructionism can leave those with less power with less sexual agency and less of an ability to deny consent. You won’t always be in situations where people accept that these social assumptions can impact our sex lives. It takes confidence to confront social assumptions and assert consent in your life.

Confidence. RuPaul says “If you can’t love yourself how in the hell are you gonna love somebody else?” I like to say “If you don’t have confidence in what you want sexually how in the hell are you going to give consent?” Basically, the foundation of fostering a satisfying sexual encounter is based in loving yourself and welcoming your desires. In America we are constantly surrounded by capitalist messages telling

us “You’re not good enough! Not until you buy THIS!” It is really easy to have your confidence undermined by the constant bombardment of advertisements or Hollywood expectations of the “perfect body”. You may read an article on “10 Ways to Please Your Man” and find yourself thinking “Wow, I don’t do any of that. Is my partner *unpleased?*”. When you start thinking this ask yourself, “Is this trying to sell me satisfaction?”. Trust me, the only people who like themselves are those who have made the conscious effort to like themselves. There is no easy way to feel confident in your own skin, it takes work. And so does feeling confident in your desires. Often people will think “Well if I do this sex act, that is a reflection on the type of person I am”. Remember, all sex based in consent is good sex. Additionally, a sexual act does not an orientation make! Most American’s have their early first sexual experience (“playing doctor”) with the same gender, this is not because most Americans are homosexual it is because most American play groups are separated by gender. Therefore when children begin to experiment with those around them, these tend to be same-sex experiences. A sexual identity is something you have to take on yourself, it can’t be branded onto you by simply participating in a sexual experience. For example, someone may eat broccoli and not identify as a vegetarian. Equally a man could participate in anal sex and not identify as a homosexual. Remember your sexual desires may differ from your sexual identity, and that is okay. Have confidence in your desires and avoid social pressures that try and fit complicated concepts into neat little boxes. Returning to the food analogy, sexual desire is a lot like taste in food. Most people enjoy eating chocolate, many people like french fries, some people eat pork. These are just personal preferences that most of us accept in other individuals. Now relate this to sex: most clitoris-havers enjoy clitoral stimulation, many prostate havers enjoy prostate milking, some people enjoy bondage. Again, these are just personal preferences. Feel confident in what you want and feel free to explore and change your mind. So you feel good about what you want, now how do you feel comfortable telling someone and how do you reciprocate by hearing that person’s desires?

Communication. We discussed how the foundation of fostering a satisfying sexual encounter is based in loving yourself and welcoming your desires. The walls built on this foundation will be created using communication. Communication includes both speaking and listening. Some very useful tools I have found in fostering positive communication in a relationship are the concepts on NVC (Nonviolent Communication). The basis is that all parties approach communication in “*the natural state of compassion when no violence is present in the heart*”. In NVC a communicator focuses on being empathetic and honest and the listener job to be attentive and expressive. Effective communication is additionally assisted by implementing non-assumptive gender-inclusive and language. Shifting to gender-inclusive language respects and

acknowledges the gender identities of all people and removes assumption. Communication is a skill that needs constant attention and improvement. In your sex-like communication is key to satisfaction and risk reduction. I know what you are thinking “Risk reduction? Sailor Jerri that sounds scary!” I know but I don’t believe the term “Safe Sex” is accurate. After all, you could be masturbating at home, slip on some lube, crack your head on the bedside table and LIGHTS OUT! So by communicating before, during, and after sex you can discuss and reduce known risks like pregnancy, STIs, medical conditions, the shoddy carpentry on your bed, whatever! By communicating openly and honestly you can positive platonic and sexual connections.

Connection. A common trap that many folks fall into is the *Fairytale Narrative*. The concept: *one day I will find this one person and they will be my whole world and fulfil all emotional, physical and social desires I ever have from now until the end of time*. I have one questions for folks who are looking for this: Do you know ANYONE (outside of fictional characters) who has this? I don’t! Humans are social creatures, and even the most introverted of us needs more than one person to fill all the needs in our lives. Human intimate needs are often broken down into: Sex, Love and Intimacy. And I’m here to tell you if you think one person is going to fill all those needs all the time, it is unlikely! Most people gets their needs in these categories met by more than more person. I’m not saying most people are polyamorous I am just saying that most people have more than one person in their life. Most people get sex from themselves in the form of masurbation and they may also seek out sex from others. Most people get love from their family and friends and they may also seek out romantic lovers. Intimacy can come from many places: a close friendship, a social organization or even your local community. And community can be key to a healthy sexual identity.

Community. Your community is simply the people who love and support you. Is may be your biological family or your family or choice. Your community may be your local church or your local lgbtq club chapter. Humans are social creatures so it is important to find people who can love and accept you. You may have different communities for different needs in your life. Your Nana may not be who you choose to share the details of your session with your dominatrix. But if you need to process your sex-life verbally you can find in-person and online communities to connect with. These can be resources to learn sexual techniques or just a chance to meet up with like-minded folks. If your sexual desires seem “strange”, you may have just not met the right people yet. Find ways to foster your own confidence and take the risk to seek connections, many young queerlings are inspired by their first Pride Parade. So even though the first steps can be scary the rewards that community has to offer is great.

Credibility. Now more than ever it important to know if what you are reading is fact or opinion. Fake News and “Truthiness” are not confined to Presidential elections. Misinformation is common-place in the world of sex and health. The most important thing to remember that facts are discovered through the scientific process. Someone does research, publishes it in a peer reviewed journal and the conclusions of the study are repeated in multiple testings. Anecdotes are based on one person’s observations of a personal situation. A lot of the time there is not well funded scientific research related to sex and sexuality so many people turn to anecdotes as fact. As admiral Ackbar might say “It’s a trap!” One person’s personal sexual experience will most likely not apply to everyone else. In fact, there are few things in sex and pleasure that are universal. In-stead health educators rely on 3 magic words: Some, many, and most. When discussing sex and desire, the best way to maintain accuracy is to use these terms: “Some people participate in Kinky sex”. “Many people self-identify as homosexual”. “Most people will masturbate at some point in their lifetime”.

Did you enjoy our adventure sailing the “Seven C’s”? We learned that all sex based in **Consent** is “good sex”. Consent means an enthusiastic, free and informed (including concepts like social **Constructs**) agreement. We know that working on personal **Confidence** can help foster skills in **Communication**. We learned that humans need **Connection** in the form of Sex, Love and Intimacy from both romance and **Community**. And finally we learned that **Credibility** comes from facts not anecdotes. I’m not here for quick answers to complicated subjects, but I do promise to provide you with fact-based sex and health edutainment. And based on the concepts of the “Seven C’s: I invite you to learn and laugh aboard with me, Sailor Jerri!

-Sailor Jerri

