

Persuasive Campaign – Audience Analysis Paper

ABSTINENCE

Virgin tested. Doctor approved.

I. Topic – Exigence & Invention

A. Topic/Exigence

For my public service campaign I am focusing on sexual abstinence and the reasons why college students, in general, should practice such a behavior. I am aware that abstinence refers to any sexual activity (vaginal penetration, anal sex, oral sex, heavy petting and “dry sex”), but the abstinence I am focusing on is vaginal/anal. I believe this is an important issue to discuss since it is during college years when young adults explore their sexual values and form their own attitudes and behaviors about sexual intercourse. Throughout the years, the prevalence of pregnancies and STDs has increased among young adults. Here are some statistics to support the urgency for abstinence among college students:

- 84% of college men and 88% of college women have reported as engaging in sexual intercourse (Pluhar, n.p.).
- Sexual activity among college students makes them high-risk candidates for contracting an STDs (Pluhar, n.p.).
- There were only two known STDs 30 years ago, syphilis and gonorrhea, which were curable. Now, there is an estimated 25 STDs, half are incurable (Cushman, n.p.).
- Two-thirds of all STDs are seen in people 25 years and younger (“In Introduction,” n.p.).
- 650,000 Americans contract gonorrhea and 75% are between the ages of 15 and 29 (“Trends in STDs,” n.p.).
- In 2002, there were 950,000 Americans infected with HIV. (“Trends in STDs,” n.p.).

After presenting my campaign objectives, I intend to make college students consider to either a) continue abstaining from sex, or b) decrease their sexual activity by making them more aware of the physical and emotional consequences/benefits of abstinence.

B. Invention

The issue of abstinence has become known as an “old school” belief. It seems as if young adults in today’s society have disregarded the commitment and responsibility of sex their parents have so strongly advocated. I intend to make college students aware that abstinence is not an old-fashion concept and the central issues related to the need for abstinence include the rising rates of STDs, the emotional/psychological factors associated with sex and the glorification of sex in the media. The rising rates of STDs are seen among college students where 1 in 5 men and 1 in 4 women carries genital herpes or the herpes simplex virus (HSV). In addition, the most common STD in the United States is chlamydia, which effects 3 million people each year, and the fact that the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is found in 28% to 46% of women under 25 years old, are disturbing statistics (Pluhar, n.p.).

College students are not considering the new challenges in their health when they engage in sex. Through the years, college students have disregarded the emotional and psychological factors that are connected to sex. It was reported in a study a link between sex, depression and suicide. Women are three times more likely to commit suicide if they are sexually active, while males are ten times more likely. Furthermore, 14% of women and 6% of males, who are sexually active, have attempted suicide (“Sexually Active Teenagers,” n.p.). When it comes to sex, the emotional connection between the lovers cannot be ignored. Sex is not taken as seriously as it should. People, especially young adults, regard sex as casual as a “passing glance.”

The sacredness and love once associated with sex has all but gone out the window, mainly because of its glorification in the media. Everywhere you turn sex is incorporated into primetime, movies, lyrics and video games. Back in the 1950s and 1960s in the hit sitcom, “I Love Lucy,” Lucy and Ricky did not even share the same bed, and they were married! Sex was never a common topic to be discussed like it is on the HBO show “Sex in the City.” In 2002, a *U.S. News* poll revealed 38% of the Hollywood elite and 83% of the public are concerned with the depiction of sex on television. Senator Joseph Lieberman says, “Hollywood has glorified adult premarital sex” (Whitman, n.p.).

II. Audience Analysis

A. General Overview

The audience my campaign is targeting towards focuses on college students. When it comes to the topic of sex, they are the most influential group in society. At this time during their lives college students are exploring their own sexual desires, a part from what they were taught during their teenage years by their parents or guardians. Being away from home and living in a new place with no parental supervision is a new

experience for them, which is sometimes exploited. During college, the average age of students lie between 18-22. In 2004, the top three ethnicities among college students were white (87.1%), black (7%) and Asian (2.6%). The most common religion was Baptist (21.3%), followed by other Christian (17.6%) and Roman Catholics (14.5%), with 15% of students' parents earning \$ 75,000 to \$99,999 a year, 13.9% earning \$60,000 to \$74,999, followed by 13.4 % at \$100,000 to \$149,999.

B. Characteristics

1. Attitude towards topic

College students view sex as a part of a relationship. Some students take the issue lightly and are carefree with whom they have sex with. Others consider it a necessity if they feel they are involved in a serious relationship with someone they love. The majority of college students favor sex and do not wait until marriage to engage in it. In an in-class survey, distributed to Monmouth College students during a persuasion course, 83.3% of males and 90% of females are sexually active. Only, 12.5% of the class was abstinent. These numbers go to show how many college students are engaging in sex. They feel, as I have heard from friends, sex is central and normal to incorporate into a relationship. The valence of sex is very strong; it seems everyone is having sex and some do not think twice about having it. As a whole, they do not consider sex as a "sacred" act anymore; it is just another way to show a boyfriend/girlfriend how much you care or love them. However, I feel college students are not "fixed" in their opinions about sex. Given enough information about the consequences of sex and the benefits of abstinence, I feel their opinions and attitudes can be swayed.

2. Attitude towards relevant behaviors and message proposed

Even though college students may agree with me when I say abstinence is important and should be considered, the majority of them may not follow my advice and take action. This is because some feel it is too hard to say "no" to sex, especially if they are sexually active. They may ask themselves, "If sex is enjoyable and gratifying, why should I stop, especially if I am in a loving relationship?" They must realize that "love" does not equal "sex" and that it can be expressed in other ways. In addition, the in-class survey reported, between college junior and seniors, the average sexual partners for women were 3.6 and 4.7. Again, college students are engaging with more than one sexual partner during their college years and if I can make them realize their behavior through my message, I can get them to change. I feel some college women may

experience pressure from their boyfriends and close friends to engage in sex. Since they think everyone is doing it, they should follow suit. Even though college students may consider abstinence and see its benefits, they may not follow this notion because they want to experience sex like the rest of their friends.

3. Relevant audience beliefs

College students mainly have the same attitude when it comes to sex: they believe it is expected in a relationship. To some, “sex” may equal “love” and believe it can help them relate to their peers and become more accepted. To others, sex is a part of a committed relationship, an act to show trust. Sex has become normalized in relationships and has become an accepted behavior. College students’ believe sex is good and enjoyable, however beliefs and attitudes may vary between college men and women. In a fall 2004 study, national college freshmen men and women were asked, “If two people really like each other, it’s all right for them to have sex even if they’ve known each other for only a short time.” 45.65% of men and 23.2% of women agreed with the statement (“The American Freshman,” n.p.). From this response, college men do not take sex as seriously as women. They consider it a casual act between a man and a woman. College women, on the other hand, are not in a rush to jump into sex with a near stranger, since 76.8% think sex should be between two people who, at least, know each other pretty well. I believe college woman will be the ones most willing to change their behavior and attitude towards sex. With enough knowledge and facts, they can be better informed when making the decision to have sex. Since women are more emotional than men, by showing them the emotional and psychological consequences sex brings, I can sway their opinion to accept abstinence.

4. Relevant audience values and their saliency

College students value companionship, love, acceptance and socialization and are driven to act in a way that will make them accepted among their peers. They are more conscious of acting in ways parallel to their peers they may disregard their own values in order to be accepted. The majority of parents teach their children that sex is a serious issue and it should only be acted upon when married or in a serious, committed relationship. However, these religious/moral associations with sex have been dissolved by college students who do not regard sex as seriously as they should. By valuing companionship, love, acceptance and socialization, college students are influential to discount the values they were taught in order to “keep” a lover or be “part of the crowd.” But, these students with this notion should realize being sexually active does not make you a more socially accepted person.

5. Relevant audience needs and motives

College students are motivated to act in way that are acceptable, given their environment. They need to be social among their peers so they feel they have made a home away from their families. The need to be loved is also very influential and often motivates couples to have sex. The in-class student also revealed the top three reasons why these students decided to have sex. Among the women, maturity was number one, followed by long-term relations and intoxication. For the men, maturity was also number one, with commitment and “no reason” in second and third. I intend to reveal that even though people may feel mature enough to have sex, they need to step back and realize if they are emotionally capable of handling sex. I will support this statement with another statistic from the survey. When asked, “Do you feel, now, that you were mature enough for sex when you started?” 80% of the males and 33% of the women said “yes.” This shows the different emotional ties connected to sex between men and women. Women feel that when they lost their virginity they were too young and not mature enough to handle the responsibility. Through my message I intend to show college students that sex does not bring love, but it does bring extra stress, emotional ties and worries. I will talk about how love is conveyed through words and actions that do not deal with sex. Also, if a student feels the need to be accepted sex is not the answer. A person disposition, personality and charisma all determine if their peers accept them. What often motivates college students to have sex is paranoia for them to keep a boyfriend/girlfriend. However, they must realize having sex should not be that big of an issue if abstinence is important to that person. If they truly love you and respect you, the absence of sex should not matter.

6. Reference groups for this audience

When entering college, men and women are forming their identities. Often, these identities are formed through association and memberships into certain groups/organizations. College students associate with those people who are most similar to them and tend to act in accordance. If girls in your sorority are having sex, a college woman may question her stand on the importance of sex in her relationship. This notion to act like the rest of the people associated with you may drive a person to go against their own beliefs and values. The need to be accepted into a sense of unity is very powerful among college students. Some students may feel sex is a way for them to associate with certain people, especially if they admire someone. In order to be like that person, they may think they have to act in a certain manner. However, this notion is wrong because then the individuals begin to lose their own identity. College students may think, “People like me in

my group are having sex, why don't I?" and this motivates them to have sex. However, my message intends to show that the unity created among peers come from the individuality of the members.

7. Situational variables

Considering the best time to present my campaign, I must consider the issue I am concentrating on the rising rates of STDs, the emotional/psychological factors associated with sex and the glorification of sex in the media. I can actually start any time I would like, however, I feel the impact of my campaign will be mainly felt if I associate it to a specific topic or month. I can begin to campaign during AIDS awareness month, which is in December. During this time I can stress the importance of abstinence and how it is the safest way to reduce a college student's risk of obtaining an STD or HIV/AIDS. I can also begin in March during Women's Month. I believe women are the most empowered person when it comes to adding sex into a relationship. If I can empower women with the knowledge of what sex does to their body, both physically and emotionally, I can gain their acceptance of abstinence. Finally, during Sweeps Month in May, I can illustrate to my audience how much sex is incorporating into the television media as away to gain rating. By doing this my audience will see how sex has crept into our daily television viewing hours and has normalized our behavior into accepting it. However, I must be aware of certain location and time constraints when the discussion of sex is inappropriate. For example, I should not offer a view of a very graphic PowerPoint, including pictures of STD patients, during family weekend activities on campus. Also, publicly displaying graphic pictures on campus to yield a response is another limitation I will have to consider.

8. Mental sophistication

While constructing my message I must consider my audience's mental sophistication. I must consider how knowledgeable they are about abstinence, what their definition of abstinence is and how informed they are on the effects of sex. Also, since my audience is college students, I must recognize they come from different backgrounds, fields of study and experience. My use of medical terminology and jargon should be limited in order for them to understand, comprehend and remember by message. If I speak too aloof they may consider me arrogant and flamboyant, disregarding my message. However, since I am too a college student, by talking to them as if we were engaging in a one-on-one conversation, they may feel more comfortable interacting with me. Also, explanations and clarifications on my part would clear up any misunderstandings and ensure that my message is being executing to its fullest extent.

C. Goal(s)

My ultimate goal of my campaign is simple: to make college students aware that abstinence is not an old-fashion concept. It is still practiced today and is not shameful to practice. In order for me to achieve my ultimate goal, I must acknowledge the multiple outcomes along the way. By using the Rational Model of Persuasion:

Beliefs + Values and/or Motives = Attitude → Behavior

I can impact the way sexually active college students view sex and abstinence. It is necessary for me to change college students' beliefs towards sex by showing them how sex is not a fundamental act to engage in while dating. Also, by making them believe that abstinence is not an "old-fashion" rule, but is still practiced among college students today for various reasons. Next, I will need to change their values and motives for wanting sex. If I can show them they want sex for all the wrong reasons, then I can get them to see the benefits of abstinence. With these two changes accomplished, I can cause them to change their attitude not only about sex, but also about abstinence and have them see the advantages of abstaining from sex. If I can get them to change their attitudes, then they may feel included to change their behavior as well and decrease their sexual activity. How much they choose to decrease it is up to the individual. I cannot make someone who is having sex twice a day, five a days a week to suddenly performing the act only twice a week. How much they decrease having sex is up to their discretion. However, for those who are still virgins, my goal is for them to continue abstaining from sex and to advocate its benefits, acting as spokespersons for my campaign.

1. Obstacles

Some obstacles that could hinder the effectiveness of my message are those college students who are set in their ways and will not hear any other opinion other than their own. If these people are adamant in their beliefs, and are opinion leaders, they may sway some of the audience to follow their mentality. Another obstacle is the people who say, "Well, I am not a virgin, so why should I stop having fun?" Again, these people may influence their roommates and friends into disregarding my message. Also, the significant-others in the relationship may obstruct my message. If a girlfriend is considering reducing the amount of sex she has with her boyfriend, he may start fighting or threaten to break-up with her because of her decision. If she really loves him, she may consider compromising her own ideas and values, ignoring my message and continuing her behavior. It is at this time I hope to show women in a similar situation how sex is not worth the mental manipulation.

D. Segments

1. *Sexually active*

The sexually active college students make up one segment of my audience where I seek the most change. These students are engaging in sex for many reasons – personal beliefs, pressure, acceptance, etc. – and I want to show them how sex is not as important in a relationship as they think it is. The distinct characteristic of being sexually active relates to my goal of making them aware of how abstinence is not an “old-fashion” concept. I seek the greatest change in them because they are having sex, and some might be doing it for the wrong reasons – to be loved, needed accepted, admired, etc. Through informing and making them aware of the advantages of decreasing their sexual activity, I hope to change their perception of sex and what sex entails.

2. *Virgins*

The virgins that make up the second half of my audience embody the characteristics of restraint, commitment and abstinence I am advocating. These men and women will act as spokespeople for my campaign, examples of relationships without sex. These people can relate to their peers on a personal level and offer a “comfort zone,” in which sex and abstinence can be discussed. Those who I am seeking to change their attitudes and behavior can go to this segment for advice and personal experiences to gain a more in depth understanding of the benefits of abstinence. Along with the message I am conveying, this segment will assist me in persuading others to change their behavior.

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