

Sexual Health of Same-Sex Attracted Male Youth: Impacts of Abstinence-Only Sexuality Education

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Background

- Abstinence-only sexuality education (AOE) is a hotly debated curriculum (Irvine, 2002)
- Federal funding of state programs has exceeded \$1 billion since 1996

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Background

- Mathematica study (2007) has found:
 - AOE does not reduce risk of teen pregnancy/STI infection and may actually increase risk
 - AOE does not delay the onset of sexual debut
- Despite research findings, AOE is still being funded by federal and state governments

Background

- SEICUS and others have found AOE to be heteronormative/homophobic
 - A-H federal definitions
 - Sexual activity that does not occur within a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects...

Background

- SEICUS and others have found AOE to be heteronormative/homophobic
 - Curricula
 - There is another form of sexual activity that causes an especially high risk of HIV infection. In such activity body openings are used in ways for which they were not designed.
 - ...while AIDS is fatal and has no cure, the behavior that leads to AIDS can be prevented through high personal standards and strong character. (Sex Respect, as cited in Kempner & Batchelder, 2004, pp. 10-11)

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Background

- Research has examined heteronormative environments of schools and the impacts such an environment has on LGBT youth (Szalacha, 2003)
- Others have noted resiliency as a key component in combating homophobia (Russell, 2005)

Background

- No known research has empirically looked at how AOE impacts non-heterosexually identified/active youth

Study Purpose

- This study explored the experiences of same-sex attracted male youth who received an abstinence-only sexuality education in high school.

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Methods

- Semi-structured qualitative interviews
 - Coming out experiences
 - In- and out-of-school sex ed experiences
 - Ideal sex ed
- Self-selective convenience sample
- 8 interviews averaging 30 minutes each

Methods

- Data Analysis
 - Grounded Theory Approach (Charmaz, 2004)
 - Field notes after each interview
 - Review of interview
 - Adjusted protocol for each interview
 - Transcripts analyzed for major themes
 - Colleague independently analyzed
 - Dialectical process to achieve 100% agreement on themes & exemplar quotes
 - Transcripts coded for themes

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Demographics

- Participants were 18-24 years old, self-identified as same-sex attracted males, and believed their high school sex education was abstinence-only
- Participants went to high school in Georgia, Texas (2), Idaho, Montana, California (2), and an American high school in Taiwan
- 6 identified as gay and 2 identified as bisexual.
- 6 white, 1 Native American, 1 Asian

Results

- Feelings of isolation, alienation, and exclusion
- Heteronormative Discourses
- Resiliency

Results

- Feelings of isolation, alienation, and exclusion
 - Isolation
 - I think that like the fact that also I never really saw another person or felt like I saw another person like me made a huge impact as well because I felt like just like such, I don't know, an outcast, ostracized completely, you know. (Max, 21, gay)

Results

- Feelings of isolation, alienation, and exclusion
 - Alienation
 - It's like, well you know shit, if you aren't represented when they talk about Human sexuality, you're not human. You can't be because you're not included. You're not included. And that's fucked up. (Jose, 21, gay)

Results

- Feelings of isolation, alienation, and exclusion
 - Exclusion
 - Like the teachers didn't even discuss about like the existence of people that are gay.
So...it's not really preventing like the young [gay] people from like getting like STD's and stuff. (Ethan, 18, gay)

Results

- Heteronormative Discourses
 - Example
 - Everything was mostly heterosexual. Nothing to do really with homosexuality at all. I mean, it was like brought about occasionally. But more just like touched on and like, yeah, some people do this but it isn't right kind of thing still, just because people do it. (Max, 21, gay)

Results

- Heteronormative Discourses
 - Impacts
 - Psychological implications for identity development
 - I might have been more comfortable, maybe less depressed, because I would have [felt] like I was more accepted because they were including [me] in the class, [rather] than...hushing it away. Yeah, I wouldn't feel as secluded with everyone. (Jason, 19, gay)
 - I couldn't get enough courage to deal with my own [sexuality]. (Max, 21, gay)

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Results

- Heteronormative Discourses
 - Impacts
 - Sexual health
 - They were talking about a man who [has] sexual relationships with multiple women. I don't know what I would be exposed to if it were to be a man, you know... [I didn't know] what [sexual] risk I would be taking (Ethan, 18, gay)
 - [The teacher] pretty much [said] that [gay people are] the reason why STI's are spread. (Pat, 24, gay)

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Results

- Resiliency Sources
 - Family
 - My mom and I talked a lot about sexual orientation...from like sixth grade all the way up until I actually came out to her... (Pat, 24, gay)

Results

- Resiliency Sources
 - Friends
 - I told like a couple of my like really close girlfriends. They were really cool about it. In fact, they actually liked that aspect of me and then [I] made more friends. So, it wasn't really me who was coming out. It was like a few of my friends through their acceptance and they told the [other] people that they were cool with it. (Ethan, 18, gay)

Results

- Resiliency Sources
 - Church
 - Well my parents sent me to this after-church program called OWL. Basically [it was] a Unitarian, sex ed class. They would talk about sexual orientation. They would talk about everything, you know, all the different views. And it was just a much better learning experience [than school]...I remember...feeling like my eyes were open[ed] to a few things. (Lucien, 19, bisexual)

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Results

- Resiliency Sources
 - Media
 - *Queer As Folk* and *Will & Grace*. Those were two of my favorite shows. My grandma both like those shows too, so. It kind of made me feel more comfortable. Like, hey, there's more people out there, you know. It's pretty good. (Jason, 19, gay)

Results

- Resiliency Sources
 - Internet
 - I just went to like sexuality websites. Like, not pornography, but you know what I mean. I typed in GAY SEX ED or something like that and I got a lot of information. (Jason, 19, gay)
 - I had a mental checklist I would go through to determine if the info was invalid or shady. (Daniel, 21, gay)

Conclusions

- AOE lacks sexual health models for same-sex attracted male youth
- AOE lacks curriculum support for avoidance of negative outcomes for gay and bi men
- Resiliency support to counter AOE scattered for same-sex attracted male youth
- AOE may be harmful for LGBT youth

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Discussion

Q & A

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