

Homosexuals: An Outcast in the Sex Ed Classrooms

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“The objectives of sex and relationship education are identified as being to ‘help and support young people through their physical, emotional and moral development... to help young people to learn to respect themselves and others’ and to ‘develop the skills and understanding they need to live confident, healthy and independent lives.’” (Donovan, Hester 277) In a world where every teenager fits a jell-o type mold, this definition can be met with the current mode of sexual education. The current style of teaching is composed of a series of lessons that methodically dance around the touchy subjects that could create the possibility of a frustrated taxpaying parent. The current system dances around controversial subjects from masturbation to teenage pregnancies (Kennedy, Covell 146). More often than not the topic of same-sex relationships gets glazed over in a minute or two in the entire length of the course. This relies on the instructor even mentioning the topic at all. The lack of efficient same-sex sexual education courses leads to very significant problems ranging from classroom neglect to bullying; from increased sexual risks to the heightened possibility of living with an abusive relationship (Donovan, Hester 277-87). A strict reform of America’s current sex education to more inclusively embrace members of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community would drastically reverse the negative outcomes listed above and therefore should be enacted nationwide.

A lack of access to knowledge about healthy relationships through public school sex education programs can often times lead a gay or lesbian student unknowingly into an abusive relationship. A study funded by the Economic & Social Research Council looked into the possible reasons for a higher prevalence of abusive relationships in the gay or lesbian community. After several interviews with affected individuals the researchers came to a solid conclusion. Firstly they discovered that people entering a same sex relationship for the first time can become entirely occupied with the thought of the happiness a relationship could bring them and overlook any possible negative aspects such as an abusive partner. Secondly, the researchers saw a surplus of knowledge provided for individuals on what to expect from a heterosexual relationship, but the same cannot be said about homosexual relationships. Thirdly, in homosexual relationships there seemed to be a trend in which many victims/survivors were missing a connection to people similar to them outside of their relationships. Finally, they noticed that for heterosexual couples there is a plethora of guidance information for relationships

whereas in homosexual relationships the guidance material is rare and what there is can be hard to access (Donovan and Hester 281). The four points discovered through this study could be greatly diminished had the subjects been adequately educated in the area of sex and relationships at an early age.

From an outsider's stand point, all of the points mentioned in this study could be found in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships. This is true, after all between 20% and 46% of heterosexual young couples have reported their relationships abusive. The group of people most susceptible to abusive relationships is those who have experienced abuse in a past relationship (Chutter 39-41). This group is not all inclusive of homosexual relationships and it is fair to say that homosexual relationships, percentage wise, are not the most abused. With that being said, there are other complications that arise.

The first discovery point in the study conducted by Donovan and Hester directly addresses the fact of having someone similar to you who you can relate to. To many gay and lesbian people, the thought of letting the world know their sexual orientation is a very frightening process and can be lightened if the individual has someone to experience it with. Anthony was one of the people interviewed by the researchers and his statement sums up the feelings. "I didn't really have that many gay friends then either. So it was sort of like really hard to sort of meet people. And I was still, I'd only just come 'out' to my parents and so that was all kind of up in the air and it was just nice to have someone who sort of understood." (Donovan and Hester 282) In the case of Anthony, having someone who "understood" was a risk to his own health. Because, Anthony became so caught up in the thought of having someone with him, he looked past abusive aspects of his relationship that should not have been overlooked. Anthony lived with an abusive partner because he felt an emotional tie to him that was very powerful (Donovan and Hester 282). Anthony's abusive partner was the first person to come close to the way Anthony thought and acted and because of this he didn't want to let him go.

According to the research of Donovan and Hester, another significant factor in an abusive relationship is the "Lack of knowledge about same-sex relationships." Here, one might argue that even after a heterosexual person goes through sex education, they still get nervous entering new

relationships as they are unsure of what to expect. The difference lies in the material available. For a heterosexual couple, they can simply turn on the television or open a magazine and see, arguably, what a healthy relationship is supposed to look like. For homosexual individuals, the lack of beneficial material provides a strong obstacle in relationships. It becomes easier for a person in an abusive same sex relationship to accept it as the norm because there is a lack of sample healthy gay couples in their day-to-day lives. More often than not, the epitome of an ideal homosexual relationship isn't even touched upon in the minimal sex education these individuals receive.

The third discovery in the study conducted by Donovan and Hester found Allies and friends very resourceful in dealing with an abusive relationship. Many times, an abusive partner cuts ties to all outside resources such as support groups or friendships. In the case of a young man named Jeb, his partner was not out and kept Jeb from meeting any new gay people in the community (Donovan and Hester 284). Jeb's partner feared that it would come back to him and his secret would get out.

Lastly, the research discovered that many homosexual people in abusive relationships have problems identifying them as abusive and the few that did recognize the abusiveness had trouble reporting the problem. Victims of abusive relationships often contact their friends or family first about the problem. But when it comes to contacting the police about the issue, less than 10% of homosexual victims/survivors involve law enforcement in the issue. In a world that is often critical, the chances of a homosexual in an abusive relationship feeling comfortable enough to approach someone becomes much slimmer than a heterosexual individual. (Donovan and Hester 285) Had these now victims been taught where and how to seek out help from an abusive same sex relationship they could avoid many abusive situations.

From an early age, every individual should have access to information on everything from history of the world to sexual health. In today's sexual education system there is a lack of comprehensiveness that is due in part to the fear that an extensive sex ed. program will invoke promiscuity and homosexuality in the students. The argument is brought about, why a heterosexual student should have to encounter homosexual sex education. Parents also fear that a

lesson plan involving homosexual sex education infringes on their say in what is being taught to their children. This aspect may be true, but currently the voices of the parents of homosexual students are being silenced. When it comes to sex education and the minority sexual orientations, this right is stepped on more frequently. (Kennedy and Covell 143-5)

The studies show that the less knowledge the students are exposed to about homosexuality, the more their prejudices increase. It is constantly being reported that many students feel that the discussions on homosexuality, if any, in sex education classes were the weakest and they obtained the least amount of knowledge on the issue. This aspect leads to significant increases in the amount of prejudice reinforcements and bullying in school environments for homosexual students. (Kennedy and Covell 146-51)

The most common form of sex education in the United States is abstinence only until marriage. This thought and practice became difficult for gay and lesbian teens to understand as there are many obstacles between a homosexual couple and marriage. These two facts left many teens confused with what to do with their sexual urges. Those not involved would suggest homosexuals give in to peer pressure and choose a heterosexual life path. Lambda Legal, a legal advocacy group for LGBTQ rights, says schools that teach an abstinence only sexuality curriculum “are creating a uniquely dangerous environment for youth who are LGBTQ or questioning their sexual orientation.” One abstinence only until marriage curriculum known as Sex Respect has a way of making homosexuals into victimizers when they say that “AIDS, the STD most common among homosexuals, bisexuals, and IV drug users, has now made its way into heterosexual circles.” (Fisher 63) This upsetting type of abstinence sex education was signed into legislation by President Bill Clinton and became widely known as Title V. At some point between 1996 and today all states except for California accepted money to teach this discriminatory type of sex education that leads to so much confusion amongst the gay and lesbian teens in our nation. (Fisher61-4)

Pookie is a lesbian student in Chicago and daughter of a conservative pastor. Pookie embodies many of the issues children face as they experience weak sexual education in public schools. Because of Pookie’s home life, she is not ‘out’ and receives no valuable information

about sex at home. For Pookie, the school she attends doesn't attempt to provide much more information than she receives at home. In referring to sex education at her school she says, "[it's] all about heterosexual sex and heterosexual diseases... all about a penis and vagina coming together to make a baby, or a penis and a vagina coming together with a condom to not make a baby." (Hauswirth 1) The fact is that more and more students every day face scenarios very similar to Pookie. Pookie even tried once to quiz her sexual education instructor on some gay topics and the instructor blatantly stated the topic wasn't in the curriculum. Because of responses like this, students including Pookie started a musical production of a new play intended to discuss what sex ed is avoiding. (Hauswirth 1-3)

Same-sex sex education in the schools is minimal if existent. This fact leads children both directly and indirectly into a life of risks, abuse and harassment. A conservative parent may fear their heterosexual student is at risk to learning more about the homosexual lifestyle and become corrupted if the information is taught in all public schools. Realistically the rights of the homosexual student are being infringed upon when they are not taught any healthy way to live their lives. The truth lies in the data, same-sex individuals are at risk to becoming victims of sexually transmitted diseases and abuse. Both of these could be avoided if same-sex sex education became more mainstreamed. In 2004 the World Health Organization created a new definition of sexual health: "Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence."(Kennedy and Covell 152) With this definition of sexual health as the lesson plan for sexual education courses, the children in our public schools would get an all inclusive lesson and the gay and lesbian students would get applicable knowledge as would the rest of the teens in the country.

Works Cited

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Activity: Inclusion in the classroom

In today's world, gender deviant students are feeling more and more accepted in the society. Because of this, they are beginning to express themselves more in the world. As educators, you must ensure acceptance and competency in the classroom. Assuming and using the wrong gender pronoun in a classroom can disengage a student and hamper their learning environment. This exercise will introduce you to non-gendered pronouns and their importance in the classroom.

Goal

To obtain a better understanding of the possible influences of gender specific pronouns in a classroom.

Materials

- Scenario pages
- Pronoun lists

Exercise Introduction

The mentor's for this activity must ensure that they are being sensitive to everyone's comfort. Not everyone will be at the same level as their peers when discussing gender variances. Begin by explaining that the exercise is designed to spark the thoughts around different gender identities. In addition, explain that this exercise will strip the idea of a gender binary from the educators vocabulary.

Exercise

1. Go around the room and ask all participants to introduce themselves and announce their preferred gender pronoun.
2. Every educator will need to work with a partner. Pair them up with an educator in a different grade level or field of education
3. Say "For this exercise, you will all have every day conversations with your co-worker but we will be eliminating all gendered pronouns (he, she, him) from our speech and replacing them with appropriate alternatives such as they, them, you, or the individual's name."
4. Hand out the list of pronouns (one per pair of educators).
5. Read the first scenario and give the group approximately 5 minutes to engage in dialogue back and forth. Encourage the partners to give feedback at the end of the dialogue.
6. After completing the scenario, ask for feedback and questions.
7. Have all educators switch partners
8. Repeat steps 4-6 for scenario two and scenario three.

Scenarios: Inclusion in the Classroom

Scenario One

John, a student in your class, has verbally out lashed against another student, Alicia, in your classroom. You have to escort the two students to the principal's office and explain what happened in your classroom. (One educator will play the principal and one educator will play the teacher. Then switch.)

Scenario Two

A parent has called you to complain that their child, Ashley, is not receiving the proper grade in your class. You try to explain to the mother that Ashley is not doing all of the assigned work when the mother begins to get frustrated. (One educator will play Ashley's teacher and one educator will play Ashley's mother. Then Switch.)

Scenario Three

Max comes to you telling you that John, a student from another class has been bullying Max and some of Max's friends. You want to have a discussion with Max to begin the dialogue about combatting bullying. How to you prepare Max for the next time John begins to bully Max and Max's friends? (One educator will play Max and one educator will play Max's teacher. Then switch.)

Follow Up Questions

- Did you find this difficult?
- Why do you think this is important in our classrooms?
- How can we begin utilizing this tool in our classroom?

Follow Up Discussion

- We can't always know a person's Preferred Gender Pronoun (PGP) by looking at them so it is best to not assume.
- Calling someone by any pronoun other than their PGP can be oppressive and offensive
- Remember, that you are setting the example for your students.
- If you do wish to use gendered pronouns, ensure that you ask each student what their preferred gender pronoun is. Simple ways to ask include "What pronoun would you like me to use?" or "Do you have a preferred gender pronoun?". After asking, ensure that you respect that students wishes and remain consistent throughout the school year.
- If you make a mistake and use a pronoun other than the student's PGP, take responsibility immediately and apologize. We are all human.