



THE STATE OF SEXUAL
HEALTH EDUCATION IN
UPSTATE NEW YORK

Hadiyah Chowdhury

Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Anthropology, '18

Abstract

I have always been interested in sexual health education and am planning to do some research on the state of sexual health education in upstate New York. I plan on working with Jane Powers from the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research in order to do research about the efficacy of different sexual health programs in New York State. This research would consist of some database entry, but also qualitative research about how sexual health educators have found success in their work with adolescents. In addition, I plan on producing a pamphlet or some other kind of written work as a result of my research that would be circulated amongst different sexual health educators in order to help them increase the efficacy of their programs. I would be doing this research in Ithaca.

Biographical Sketch

My name is Hadiyah Chowdhury and I am a junior at Cornell double majoring in Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Anthropology. I was born and raised in Corning, NY and lived in Paris, France for a couple of years. My parents were born and raised in Dhaka, Bangladesh, so I have always been interested in trying to understand cross-cultural understandings of sex and sexuality. My research will be focused upon qualitative and quantitative data regarding the efficacy of different methods of teaching adolescents about pregnancy prevention.

Statement of Purpose

I have always been very interested in sexual health, specifically how children are taught about sexual health. When I found out about this program run through the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, I realized that it was very much related to my interests. I am from Corning, NY where Planned Parenthood has a fairly strong presence and because of this received an excellent education in sexual health as an adolescent. After I came to Cornell, I realized this narrative was not necessarily the norm and that many people didn't have any exposure to learning about sexual health at all in high school. After this realization, I thought it would be interesting to look at how sex ed was implemented in other places and how effective different methods might be for certain populations.

My goal in doing this work is to produce a pamphlet which sexual health educators can use in order to make their work the most effective. The program I will be working with has already collected data about how adolescents have responded to the education they have received about pregnancy prevention, so my role would be to analyze that data and see if there were any trends to be found. For example, it is possible that one method of teaching about a certain subject was received more positively by a specific population or demographic than another. In general, much of the data collected has been found by administering pre and post assessments to the students who attending programs about pregnancy prevention.

The Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research essentially aims to make research accessible to more people. My work on the state of sexual education in upstate New York would contribute to this effort in that its purpose to help educators understand which methods of teaching work for their students and which do not. As can be seen by Jane Power's article,

evidence-based programs consistently achieve better results than programs conducted without evidence. I have also included here two other sources that are essentially handbooks to how pregnancy prevention programs have been implemented in the past and how they are meant to be implanted according to the federal government's standards.

I am very much hoping that my research might have an impact on helping sexual health educators improve their methods of teaching so that they can have the most positive effect on the most people. One area that I am particularly interested in is talking about how cross-cultural understandings of sex, sexuality and gender can impact the way a classroom might function. For example, if a student was brought up more conservatively in terms of sexual acceptability, they might find it difficult to talk about more sensitive topics in a classroom setting. My work would strive to try to find strategies in order to work around such problems: What methods can be employed on the part of the instructor in order to be able to accommodate several different perspectives in one classroom? How can the space be kept safe so that everyone feels like their experiences are valid and listened to? While some of these questions may seem purely pedagogical, it is important to keep in mind the importance of evidence-based programs – what has been shown to work and why? This is where my theoretical framework within Feminist, Gender and Sexuality studies may be useful to me. Because of the way that sex and sexuality are stigmatized, it can be very difficult to talk about both topics; in addition, different genders and sexualities within a class can definitely affect the way that the class might function or how students might interact with one another.

Ultimately, the research I will do will culminate in the production of a pamphlet for the educator's use. My hope is that I can produce something with enough of a theoretical framework that my writing has enough substance to be productive, but is also able to resonate with the

educator in such a way as to be useful. Having been exposed to different cultures and having an understanding of what it might be like to be in a classroom with other's views are radically different from one's own leads me to believe that I will be able to produce such a product. My pamphlet would be available for any sexual health educator to access online and therefore would reach a fairly large audience.

Finally, because my research would be done in Ithaca with data that has already been collected, I only need funds for my living expenses, like rent, food and gas for transportation. I hope that my research project can have a real, tangible result for sexual health educators in upstate New York.

Bibliography

Kirby, D. (2007). *Emerging answers 2007*. Retrieved from National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy website: <https://thenationalcampaign.org/resource/emerging-answers-2007%E2%80%94full-report>

Powers, Jane, Mary Maley, Amanda Purington, Karen Schantz, and Hutta Dotterweich. "Implementing Evidence-Based Programs: Lessons Learned From the Field." *Applied Developmental Science* 19.2 (2015): n. pag. Web. 3 Mar. 2017.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Teen Pregnancy Prevention Evidence Review*. <http://tppevidencereview.aspe.hhs.gov/>