Sex in the Stacks: Teenager Sex Education Information Seeking Behaviour and Barriers to the Use of Library Resources

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Presentation Outline

- My Interest in the Topic

- Definitions

- Relevant Literature

- Research Questions

- Methods

- Findings

- Conclusion

My Interest in Sex Education ISB

- Proliferation of Information Sources in 21st Century

- Hegemonic Narratives Dominate Curricular Instruction

- High Societal Risks for Misinformation

- Libraries Improve Service

Definitions

- **Sex Education** has historically included pubertal development, reproduction, menstruation, contraception and sexually transmitted infections, but a recent expansion of this listing includes subjects like sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual assault and interpersonal relationships

- (Cohen, 2006; Haffner, 1992; Kerslake & Rolinson, 1996; Levine, 2002)

Definitions

- **Teenager**: a person between the ages of 13 and 19 inclusive (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.)

Relevant Literature

- Importance of Sex Education
  - Balme & Gunn, 1999; Chelton, 1978; Haffner, 1992

- Internet as a Sex Education Information Source
  - Carswell et. al, 2012; Goldman & McCutchen, 2012; Gray & Klein, 2006; Hilier et. al, 2001; Kanuga & Rosenfeld, 2004

- Formalized Sex Education in Schools
  - Forrest et al., 2004; Kerslake & Rolinson, 1996; Walter, 1994

- Adolescent Information Seeking Behaviour
  - Amos et al, 1989; Julien, 1998; Lucić, 2013; Poston-Anderson & Edwards, 1993; Shenton & Dixon, 2003; Shenton & Dixon, 2004; Todd & Edwards, 1994
  - Dervin, 1983; Erdelez, 1997

- Library as a Source for Sex Education Information
  - Cohen, 2006; Levine, 2002

Research Questions

Source-specific → Source-Inclusive

Staff Perspective → User Perspective

Research Questions

- How do teenagers seek sex education resources?

- Why do they select their chosen sources?

- Do teenagers use the library as a sex education information source?

- Why or why not?

Methods

- Four Semi-structured interviews
  - Each 20-30 minutes in length

- Broad recruitment, eventual convenience sampling

- Participants: Ryan, Stuart, John and Regina
  - Three males, one female
  - Ages 14, 14, 16, 17
  - Three cisgender, one transgender
  - Three heterosexual, one bisexual

- Pre-interview activity conducted to gain rapport and trust

- Data recorded, transcribed, coded

Findings

Teenagers use a variety of sources for sex education

- Classes in school (Health, CALM and Psychology)
- Internet (Wikipedia, health organization websites, fan fiction, advertisements, queer community websites, academic scholars papers)
- Interpersonal (peers, siblings, parents, teachers, sex education presenters, members of the queer community, therapists)
- Media and books

Findings

- Internet was the most frequently used source
    - "I would say the Internet [is where I get most information about sex] but, like I mean...not willingly. So like, the Internet...there's always [ads] like... "10 ways to get your girlfriend into bed." It's all these, like pop-up ads....I don't want that information, but that's where I get the most information from."

        -John

- Sex education information seeking behaviour was discussed abstractly
    - Many behaviour descriptive, recollection-based questions needed to be rephrased to a hypothetical situation

Findings

- Wide range of factors attracted teenagers to information sources

  - Ease and privacy attracted participants to the Internet

  - Experience held in high esteem
    - Attributed based on age, disposition, position or communication

  - Knowing interpersonal sources aided in contextual assessment of information

    "I can take their viewpoint and see what they're trying to say, kind of analyze it and think, OK, well if they're trying to say this, that means this, and I believe in that so I guess maybe it is true."

    -John

Findings

- Wide range of factors attracted teenagers to information sources (cont'd)

    - Quality of "openness" or direct, honest communication praised

        "If they don't dance around the topic and if they just answer the question...that makes me feel they understand the material more."

        -Stuart

    - Reliability checks between resources completed

        "I think of everything else that I've...learned, and so if I see something that...goes against everything I've already learned, then I'm thinking maybe that's not completely right."

        -Regina

Findings

- None of the participants used the library for sex education information
    - All were familiar with their school library, one mentioned frequent public library use

- Privacy and awareness were the biggest barriers to library use
    - None were aware of sex education resources in their school library
    - Privacy in browsing and selecting, from peers and staff.
    - Internet confidentiality

        "Usually [they keep Internet histories.] I mean, with the way a lot of computers that are open to the public are used...there will be someplace where they can actually track everything, even if you delete it...they would be able to track back who logged on and - when, and what they searched up."
        -Ryan

Analysis

- Sex Education Information Encountering piqued further behaviour
  - Epistemic and diversive curiosities witnessed (Leslie, 2014)

- Interpersonal sources derive credibility differently than other sources
  - Cognitive authority assigned to some (Wilson, 1983)

- Two types of information reliability evaluations:
  - External action to verify with other sources
  - Internal comparisons with previously constructed knowledge

Conclusions

- Library Service Models Can Be Improved
    - Provoke serendipitous discoveries
    - Promote collections
    - Develop diverse collections
    - Privacy and confidentiality must be communicated

- Limitations due to Pilot study
    - Socioeconomic and racial homogeneity
    - Selection bias
    - Interview Design

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Questions?

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