Outercourse: Exploring Nonpenetrative Forms of Pleasurable Safer Sex

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Best practices in comprehensive sexuality education call for rights-based, factual lessons that provide healthy options and are sensitive to the varied contextual factors affecting participants. Further, lessons are to better balance positive and negative outcomes of sexual expression that reflect the sexual realities of (young) men and women. This lesson plan contributes to such aims through the facilitation of nuanced activities and discussions to critically assess a wide range of sexual practices with and without a partner and beyond penetrative or procreative acts. The main outcome is to broaden options for healthy sexual expression and consider the potential reconciliation of pleasure and safer sex.

KEYWORDS Outercourse, comprehensive sexuality education, pleasure, safer sex, young people, abstinence, masturbation, HIV/STI/pregnancy prevention

GOAL

The goal of this lesson is to enable participants to consider a variety of ways to express themselves sexually, with or without a partner, so that they may develop pleasurable safer sex strategies in line with their personal values and attitudes.

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OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- List at least five different ways to express one’s sexuality, including those beyond procreative or penetrative sexual intercourse.
- Critically assess the potential for pleasure, safer sex, and/or risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)/HIV/unintended pregnancy of specific sexual practices for oneself and/or one’s partner.
- Assess personal and peer group values and attitudes about sexual pleasure, intercourse, and outercourse practices, including abstinence and masturbation.
- Describe the concept of sexuality holistically in ways beyond procreative or penetrative sexual intercourse.

TIMING

Flexible: This lesson in its entirety takes between 2 and 2.5 hours, depending on how much time is allowed for questions and discussion. It can also be skillfully completed within two or three consecutive 40-minute class periods.¹

RATIONALE

Effective comprehensive sexuality education can provide young people with age-appropriate, gender sensitive, culturally relevant, and scientifically accurate information. This includes structured opportunities for young people to explore their attitudes and values and to practice skills crucial to make informed choices about their sexual lives (United Nations [UN], 2013). Strong international commitments that support comprehensive sexuality education continue to mount (Population Council, 2009; UN, 2013; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2009). However, as global implementation unfolds, there remain unanswered questions and ongoing debate about what constitutes “effectiveness” and “comprehensiveness” both in and out of formal classrooms (Allen, 2011; Hirst, 2013; Ingham, 2005).

Teaching and learning resources are particularly scant around the more positive aspects of sexuality and in facilitating related forthright, ethical discussions around nonreproductive, nonpenetrative, and nonheteronormative

¹ For use in formal classrooms, it is highly recommended that the appropriateness of this lesson plan be assessed carefully against national standards as well as state-specific regulations that may restrict its use in terms of content or deemed age-appropriateness. See commentary for more details.
forms of safer sex (Allen & Carmody, 2012; Boyce et al., 2007; deFur, 2012; Hirst, 2013). This is despite the understanding that nonpenetrative sexual behaviors, also known as “outercourse,” offer significantly reduced risk of unintended pregnancy and STIs, including HIV and enhanced overall health and well-being.

Yet best practices in comprehensive sexuality education continue to call for rights-based, factual lessons that provide healthy options and are sensitive to the varied contextual factors affecting participants. Furthermore, lessons should more accurately balance positive and negative outcomes of sexual expression that reflect the sexual realities of (young) men and women (Hirst, 2013). This lesson plan contributes to such aims whether as part of an agenda to delay first sexual intercourse for young people; enhance sexuality and relationship-related decision making, communication, and negotiation skills; legitimize a wider range of (nonheteronormative) sexual practices; eroticize safer sex; and/or broaden the constituents of giving or receiving sexual pleasure among consenting partners.

AUDIENCE

Description of intended audience(s):

- Young people from the age of 14 and above (primary audience).
- Youth-serving professionals as part of an experiential training method: educators, clinical service staff, psychosocial professionals, outreach workers, peer educators, and so forth.
- Can also be adapted for those living with HIV and their partners.

MATERIALS

- Newsprint/flip chart paper (at least 10 sheets).
- Tape or something to stick the flipchart sheets on the wall, chalk board, or easel.
- At least four black markers, four green markers, four blue markers, and four red markers. (If not available, at least have four markers of any color and give one to each group for the first activity.)
- Before the lesson begins, prepare the INSTRUCTIONS either on a chalkboard or a sheet of flip chart paper and post them visibly during the group-work activity.
- Before the lesson begins, prepare the CONSOLIDATED LIST OF SEXUAL PRACTICES either on a chalkboard or a sheet of flip chart paper and post visibly during the group-work activity.
- Big “I AGREE,” “I DISAGREE,” and “I AM NOT SURE” signs.
PROCEDURE

1. Introduce the topic, goal, and objectives of this lesson by posting them or reading them aloud. If this is the first contact with your participants, build rapport with introductions and a relevant warm-up or ice-breaker activity. However, given the nature of the content of this lesson, it is assumed that some rapport has already been established with the participants; therefore, no ice-breaker activities or common group rules have been included here.

As this can be considered among the most sexually explicit and sensitive lessons, facilitators will need to gauge their audience and remind them that maturity and respect for sexual diversity and various levels of experience will be required. One recommendation is to instruct participants that they are to discuss sexuality and specific practices that they know of in a general sense and therefore to not disclose whether they have or have not engaged in such behaviors personally nor disclose the names of others that may or may not have experienced specific practices either. This assists in maintaining the safety, anonymity, and levels of confidentiality within the group. Also, participants are to be reminded that they have the right to “pass” on participating in any part of the lesson if they do not feel comfortable.

2. Divide participants into four groups. A quick and easy way regardless of the size of the entire group is to have the group count off from one to four. Ask all the “ones” to form a small group, all the “twos” to form a small group, and so forth.

3. Give each of the four groups a sheet or two of newsprint/flip chart paper and a set of markers in each color so that each group has a black, green, blue, and red marker. Ask them to record on the flip chart and choose one group member to present their feedback after carefully reflecting on the following:

INSTRUCTIONS

a) With black marker:

- List all the ways an individual can express sexual feelings alone and/or with a partner, including all the specific sexual behaviors that you know. Once you have listed everything you can think of in your smaller group and cannot think of anything else to add then go through each item on your list and:

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2 See commentary section for more about the prerequisites to this lesson.
b) With green marker:
   - Put a star “∗” next to the ones that are considered safer sex

c) With blue marker:
   - “Underline” the ones that do not include penetration of any type

d) With red marker:
   - Put an “X” next to the ones that involve some form of penetration and are unprotected, that is, NOT safer sex practices.

4. Once the majority of groups have finished (allow about 15 minutes for the group work), ask a representative from the first group to display that group’s list with tape or whatever is on hand and to read off the list to the entire group. Repeat this procedure until all four groups have presented their lists. Ask the entire group for their comments and reactions to the process of participating in this activity and to the contents within the produced lists.

5. Compare and contrast the similarities and differences that the different groups came up with on their lists. Take care to discuss in such a way that does not assume heterosexual partnerships or levels of sexual experience among your audience. Then either combine them into one master list, or in the interest of time display your previously prepared consolidated list based on the sample provided. Be sure to add anything to the master list from the lists of your participants. Invite participants to add to the master list if additional items come to mind during the consolidation as the idea is to have the longest, most exhaustive list possible. Ask the group to further reflect on the activity and the list generated. Probing questions to stimulate discussion may include:
   - Were there any sexual practices particularly difficult to decide whether to place a ∗, “X,” or underline? Why or why not?
   - Does the sex (male/female/trans/intersexed/other) of the person or people involved, and/or whether one is the ‘giver’ or ‘receiver’ of the behavior, make a difference in the level of safety, risk, and enjoyment/pleasure? Why or why not?

6. The probing questions above link to the participants’ understandings of penetration, safer sex, what is considered “sexual” or not, and so forth. During the discussion, assess what your participants understand by the terms “safer sex” and “penetration” by asking them for their own definitions. Explain that penetration for purposes of this lesson generally refers to the insertion of a penis, finger, or sex toy into the vagina, anus, mouth, or other orifice of the body. In some parts of the United States, penetration includes any finger or penis placed between the female labia.

   “Safer sex” refers to forms of sexual expression that reduce the risk of acquiring or spreading a sexually transmitted disease, including HIV. This can be achieved through the use of physical protection, such as a male or female condom or nonpenetrative methods. Safer sex practices also serve
as a form of contraception and therefore also protect against unplanned pregnancies.3

Related to the probing questions above, some discussion may include whether oral sex practices are considered penetrative such as the case of penis in mouth or finger or tongue in anus or vagina. This may also be an opportunity to shed light on evidence that suggests that while unprotected oral sex may not be as “risky” as unprotected vaginal or anal intercourse, there is still the possibility of transmitting some sexually transmitted infections if no barrier methods are used with partners of unknown health status.

Discussion may also get specific around penetration and the safety involved in the use of various sex toys. The last three bulleted items on the sample list include those that require more detailed explanation. For example, the safety of these practices could be dependent on whether there is broken skin on either partner. Another specific safety related issue with the use of sex toys in anus is the need to be extra cautious if the base of the toy is not wider than the toy, thus making it possible that the toy goes deep into the anus, making it difficult to withdraw and/or causing trauma to the anus.

This is an opportunity to stress that if one is trying to practice the safest sex possible, one cannot assume whether a partner has or does not have HIV or another STI or is correctly and consistently using a method of contraception. Therefore, participants should take that unknown status into consideration when deciding how they will or will not express themselves sexually.

It is also recommended that when discussing the potential for sexual pleasure against the items on the consolidated list, conceptions of pleasure extend beyond the physical embodied notions and incorporate emotional and spiritual aspects as well. Explain that experiencing sexual pleasure is a component of overall sexual health. A basic definition of “sexual pleasure” may be helpful to assist in guiding the discussions. Sexual pleasure is “the physical and/or psychological satisfaction or enjoyment one derives from any erotic interaction” (Philpott, Knerr, & Boydell, 2006).

7. If it has not come up already, underscore that the list clearly demonstrates there are many more ways to express one’s sexual feelings that are safer than unsafe ones. This will appear more visibly when colored markers are used and where there are less cases of red Xs.

A sample consolidated list may look like the one below. Although it may initially seem cumbersome, note that for the purpose of

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3 This definition of safer sex is the amalgamation and extension of other definitions. Unless otherwise indicated, all definitions used in this lesson plan are adapted from the curricula cited in the references.
achieving maximum impact in visualizing the many safer options available, the major permutations of each sexual practice have been separated out. For example, vaginal intercourse with or without a condom is listed as two separate items.

CONSOLIDATED LIST OF SEXUAL PRACTICES

- Hugging*
- Kissing*
- Writing love letters, sexual phone text messages, chat, or emails*
- Exchanging/sharing clothes*
- Thinking or fantasizing about sex*
- Discussing sexual fantasies with someone in person or over phone/internet/SMS/chat, etc.*
- Giving and/or receiving massage*
- Caressing breasts*
- Oral sex – mouth to penis X
- Oral sex – mouth to penis with condom*
- Oral sex - mouth to vulva/vagina/clitoris X
- Oral sex- mouth to vulva/vagina/clitoris using a cut opened condom or dam as a protective covering*
- Sucking/licking body parts other than vagina/penis/anus*
- Wearing sexy clothes*
- Making erotic eye contact*
- Undressing in front of a sexual partner*
- Rubbing bodies with clothes on*
- Rubbing bodies without clothes on*
- Masturbation of self without condom or dam/barrier*
- Masturbation of partner without condom or dam/barrier*
- Masturbation of self with condom or dam/barrier*
- Masturbation of partner with condom or dam/barrier*
- Anal sex with condom*
- Anal sex without condom X
- Vaginal sexual intercourse with condom*
- Vaginal sexual intercourse without condom X
- Rubbing the penis between the breasts/thighs/armpits/behind knee*
- Sexy dancing*
- Exchanging gifts*
- Watching pornography/erotica (alone or with others)*
- Showering/bathing together*
- Fingering the vagina or anus (with or without condom/ dam/barrier)* X
• Inserting objects into the vagina: plastic penis/dildo/vibrator/other penetrable objects (with or without condom; with or without sharing same object with partner)* X
• Using sex toys other than vibrators and dildos (with or without condom depending on type of sex toy; with or without sharing with another person)* X

8. Ask the group to brainstorm what they believe is the definition of “outercourse.” Broadly explain the concept of outercourse with the following definition to guide you: outercourse refers to a range of sexual expression, with or without a partner that does not include penetration of the genitals. You may write down the definition on the chalkboard or newsprint. Explain that outercourse practices can be forms of safer sex.

9. It may be helpful to (re)-visit a definition of “sexuality” as it links with this discussion. For example, Planned Parenthood offers an easily understandable description below.

     Sexuality is about much more than just sex. It includes
     • your body, including your sexual and reproductive anatomy and body image—how you feel about your body
     • your biological sex—male, female, or intersex
     • your gender—being a girl, boy, woman, man, or transgender, or gender queer
     • your gender identity—feelings about and how you express your gender
     • your sexual orientation—who you’re sexually and/or romantically attracted to
     • your desires, thoughts, fantasies, and sexual preferences
     • your values, attitudes, and ideals about life, love, and sexual relationships
     • your sexual behaviors—including masturbation (2014, para. 3)

     Therefore explain that sexuality is an expression of who we are as human beings and changes and grows throughout our lives.

10. Discuss possible advantages and challenges of engaging in outercourse practices. Discuss age, gender roles, cultural and traditional values, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and any other issues that may make it (seem) difficult or preferable to engage in outercourse practices. Explain that various cultures and individuals within those cultures have different ideas of what is and is not acceptable for themselves and others. Underscore various benefits in engaging in outercourse such as being creative and not following common routines of sexual expression, the added comfort level some sexual partners may feel with outercourse during menstruation, and being responsible in pregnancy prevention and HIV/STI prevention. There are additional emotional/psychological benefits of sexually expressing oneself through outercourse if there is the aspiration to delay or not engage in penetrative intercourse
by conducting oneself in a manner that is in line with personal values and attitudes or respecting the wishes/sexual boundaries of one’s partner.

11. Acknowledge that sometimes it may not be that easy for some individuals and/or their partner(s) to limit sexual expression to nonpenetrative practices. Stress that unless the form of sexual expression is by oneself, then communication and negotiation skills and ethical considerations are required so that both partners agree on what is acceptable so that maximum respect, responsibility, and enjoyment may be achieved. For example, explain that one common myth/belief is that men may say that once their penis is erect, they would like to have some form of penetration or at least have an ejaculation. Ask how could someone (whether yourself or a friend) respond to such a situation? Ask for two members of the group to volunteer to role play this scenario if time permits.

12. Ask participants to define “abstinence” and then provide the following definition as a guide around more orthodox notions of abstinence: Abstinence means choosing not to engage in sexual behavior with other people and is the safest way to avoid pregnancy and STIs including HIV if practiced consistently and correctly. Ask whether there are other benefits to abstinence aside from HIV/STI/pregnancy prevention. Some people consider themselves virgins because they have not had penile-vaginal intercourse but they have engaged in other penetrative behaviors such as oral or anal sex or perhaps in nonpenetrative outercourse activities. Ask participants if they would consider such a person a virgin? Why or why not?

It is important to stress in the discussion that for most people, abstinence or being a virgin is not a fixed condition or identity. It is usually a decision during a specific period or periods of time in one’s life. For example, abstinence may come to an end in a person’s life once a person begins to engage in partnered forms of sexual expression. Another example is that a person may choose to abstain from partnered sexual expression certain times of the month to avoid pregnancy, during menstruation, during the recommended period after childbirth, after ending a sexual relationship, and so forth. Explain that whether one abstains now or not, it is still important to know about other sexual behaviors and safer sex before you are ready to actually engage in them. It is also helpful to know about such things so you can discuss them with your friends and future sexual partners.

Discuss that like other methods of contraception and safer sex, abstinence can fail in its effectiveness if it is not practiced consistently and correctly.

13. Discuss whether or not an individual increases the chances of getting HIV, STIs, or having an unplanned pregnancy the earlier the individual
begins to engage in sexual intercourse. Ask for opinions. Some research suggests this because at younger ages one may have limited knowledge and skills to handle all of the responsibilities involved with being sexually active. The younger an individual, the more dependent the individual may be on a partner and the less able to negotiate condom use.

However, there are some people that can and choose to behave in ways that are sexually responsible at any age. They can plan with their partner to use (male or female) condoms during sexual intercourse. If people begin their journey of sexual intercourse using condoms, the more likely a health-seeking pattern of behavior may become part of the routine. That is, one may be more willing to continue to use condoms correctly and consistently throughout one’s sexual life until the decision is made with one’s partner to stop, whether to choose to get pregnant or any other reason that makes sense for the health and happiness of both partners.

14. Discuss the concept of having sexual intercourse and then deciding to abstain later in life (secondary virginity). Have participants think about and discuss their personal values about sexual intercourse and abstinence.

15. Ask the group if anyone can define “masturbation.” Brainstorm other words or descriptive phrases that describe masturbation such as “playing with oneself,” “jerking off,” and so forth. Explain what masturbation is:

- The pleasurable stimulation of the genitals causing sexual arousal, often to the point of orgasm. However, orgasm is not always the end result.
- Touching, rubbing, or stroking one’s private parts.
- It may take place using finger/hand movements, clothing, pressure from running water, sex toys, and other objects.
- Some women enjoy vaginal penetration during masturbation; others do not. More often masturbation focuses on stimulation of the clitoris. Unlike every other part of the male or female body the only function of the clitoris is sexual pleasure.
- Masturbation may be done alone or together with others.
- Mutual masturbation is when two people (or more) stimulate each other’s genitals for sexual arousal (and/or stimulate their own genitals in the presence of their partner).
- Sometimes people masturbate in groups. This is more common among young men who may show each other how to masturbate and/or show that their bodies are mature enough to ejaculate semen.
- Sometimes young men masturbate while wearing a condom. Reasons young men give for this is: it can be a form of practice using a condom in preparation for using one with a partner, it makes “cleaning up” after

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See, for example, Epstein et al. (2014) and Stöckl, Kalra, Jacobi, and Watts (2013).
ejaculation neater and easier, and it provides variety in the stimulation and pleasurable experience of orgasm during masturbation.

16. Facilitate the “Forced Choice Exercise,” also known as “Vote with Your Feet Exercise,” on masturbation. Post the previously prepared papers “I AGREE,” “I DISAGREE,” and “I AM NOT SURE” on the floor or the wall visibly in different parts of the room. Then read out the statements below and direct the participants to stand near the sign that best reflects their own view. Allow participants to move if they change their minds after discussing the issues around each statement, especially among those that are unsure. Statements can be changed or added as well to suit local contexts:

- People who masturbate will not enjoy sexual intercourse as much as those who do not.
- Masturbation while in a relationship is wrong.
- Masturbation should be taught as a safer sex option to young people in school.
- Young people who know about masturbation are more in charge of their own bodies and their own sexual pleasure.
- People who masturbate can still consider themselves as being abstinent.
- Masturbation can lead to homosexuality.
- Masturbation is an addictive habit.
- Masturbation can provide a healthy outlet for sexual fantasies.
- Masturbation can be sexual expression with someone you love.
- Both young men and women masturbate.
- Masturbating with a condom is good practice for when you may use one with a partner.
- Masturbating with a condom can be as pleasurable as masturbating without one.

Good questions for the facilitator to ask after each statement include: “Why did you choose to stand there?” and “What would it take for you to change your mind?” Such questions should be answered by representatives from each position: I agree, I disagree, I am unsure.

17. Go over these facts about masturbation:

- Masturbation does not cause physical or emotional harm.
- Masturbation is a safe and reasonable expression of sexuality whether you are in a relationship or not.
- If you do not feel comfortable about masturbation for yourself, that is a personal choice that is to be respected, and, similarly, respect others by not spreading myths, misinformation, or negative/harassing views about masturbation.
18. Summarize the main points of the lesson through the key messages below.

**Key Messages: Outercourse: Nonpenetrative Forms of Pleasurable Safer Sex**
- Sexuality is an expression of who we are as human beings and changes and grows throughout our lives.
- There are many ways to express one’s sexuality besides sexual intercourse that are pleasurable and forms of safer sex.
- Sexual health and relationships benefit when people respect each other’s values.
- Abstinence, or not having penetrative sexual intercourse, is one of several ways to prevent HIV, STIs, and unplanned pregnancy.
- There are both positive and negative consequences of having sexual relationships that can affect you, your partner, and your family, so it is beneficial to be as prepared as possible.
- Even if you are not in a sexual relationship now, it is important to know about sexuality and safer sex for when you are ready for a sexual relationship.
- Outercourse refers to safer ways of expressing your sexuality and experiencing pleasure with or without a partner apart from intercourse or penetration.
- Outercourse includes hugging; kissing; writing love letters, emails, text messages, and chats; sharing clothes and food; making eye contact; sexy dancing; rubbing bodies with clothes on; walking and spending time together; holding hands; giving/receiving massage; fantasizing; and masturbation, to name a few.
- Masturbation is a type of safer sex and can be an option to assist (young) men and women with their choice to abstain from sexual relations with another person.
- Men and women can masturbate alone or together with a partner (mutual masturbation) or when your partner is away or otherwise unable to satisfy you at a particular time.
- There are a lot of myths and incorrect information about masturbation. Remember that masturbation does not cause physical or emotional problems.
- For most people, the older you are when you have sexual intercourse for the first time, the more likely you will be able to negotiate the situation and enjoy it: what you do, who you do it with, where you do it, and how you do it, including safer sex.

19. Refer back to the learning objectives. As you read each one by way of summarizing the lesson, ask for feedback/comments from the participants to assess whether the objectives were met. Make any clarifications and final concluding remarks, thank the group for their active participation, and as with the closing of any sexuality-related lesson, it is good
practice to make referrals to credible sources of further information and to local relevant (youth friendly) sexual and reproductive health and psychosocial services.

**COMMENTARY**

This lesson plan was adapted from lessons used in developing world contexts intended for both classroom and community-based settings with limited resources. To maximize its application in assorted sites, this lesson plan is purposely low-tech, not dependent on electricity, utilizes easily available inexpensive materials, and is relatively easy to facilitate for a previously trained and knowledgeable sexuality educator.

The lesson has been field tested several times with youth-serving professionals, peer educators, and young people in diverse socioeconomic contexts in Malawi, Papua New Guinea, and Swaziland through UNICEF funding (Bakaroudis, 2011a, 2011b; National AIDS Council, 2010; UNICEF ESARO, 2009, 2011). More specifically, this field testing of the entire lesson was conducted during outreach, community-based activities for young people (by adults and peer educators), and in-service trainings of teachers and curriculum developers within two hours. Thus, it will be necessary to adjust the use of this lesson plan for conventional classroom sessions, most likely within two or three class periods. It is the responsibility of individual facilitators of this lesson to be knowledgeable of age and content regulations within their local contexts that may prohibit the open discussion of certain topics within this lesson.

The list of sexual practices provided is consolidated from past participants between the ages of 14 and 24 and are a reflection of their own cultural contexts. Thus, some further adaptation or explanation may be required to fit local contexts. As countries across the world seek to benefit from the scholarship and education practices of the United States, so too is this an opportunity for American sexuality educators to be exposed to what is transpiring in sexuality education on an international scale and share best practices and resources accordingly. The explicit presence of HIV and the deep commitment to curb its spread within international development contexts have enabled the creation of what can be subjectively considered a “radical” lesson plan, or at least one that pushes many boundaries of what can or should be possible in sexuality education (for young people).

The lesson has been well received by facilitators and beneficiaries (primarily young people 14–24 years old, peer educators 19–26 years old, and adult youth-serving professionals) alike. Specific feedback centered around its frank approach, the lesson plan’s grounding in the evidence that the participants themselves provide, and its potential application with diverse age groups and settings with the shared goal of broadening options for healthy,
pleasurable sexual expression across the continuum of gender and sexual identity/orientation, health and relationship status, (dis)ability, and so on. For example, this lesson can be employed as HIV prevention among those living with HIV. Indeed in the African contexts of Malawi and Swaziland where this lesson was initially field tested (Bakaroudis, 2011a, 2011b; UNICEF ESARO, 2009, 2011), HIV prevalence is among the highest in the world and among participants were young people and youth-serving professionals who identified as HIV positive and made special mention of the inclusiveness they experienced during this lesson.

In Malawi, through the Sister-to-Sister extracurricular peer education initiative where this lesson was first field-tested in 2009 and again in 2011, sexuality and safer-sex-related knowledge retention, behavioral development/behavior change, and health-seeking behaviors were measured for intervention effectiveness, with evidence supporting that knowledge was sustained over time (Bakaroudis, 2011a; UNESCO, 2012).

It is assumed that participants have prerequisite information regarding broad definitions of sexuality, as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights and basic HIV/STI transmission and prevention information.

This lesson may challenge the facilitator’s personal values and attitudes and professional ethics around the sexual practices of their audience. In a climate where sexually explicit materials, especially online erotica/pornography are easily accessible, facilitators cannot assume the level of knowledge or experience members of their audience have in this regard and, through this lesson, facilitators may be exposed to forms of sexual expression that are new to them as well.

Impending tangents within this lesson or directions for related lessons are plentiful. For example, additional lessons could link to more in-depth discussions about sexuality and the meanings attached to engaging in sexual expression, the human sexual response cycle, individual and societal norms/expectations around pleasure, the centrality of orgasm-focused sexual interactions versus more open-ended forms of sexual expression, the meanings of foreplay, “real sex,” virginity, abstinence, and the interrogation of sexual rights, gendered roles, and responsibilities within sexual relationships, to name a few.

The common thread among all these potential tangents is education about sexual pleasure and desire. Even though pleasure is no longer considered a new idea in sexuality studies, practical resources are scant and theoretical understandings of pleasure are limited, especially those that “move beyond corporeal sensations, heteronormative configurations and bodily acts” (Allen & Carmody, 2012, p. 465). But before conceptual and theoretical developments about sexual pleasure may be adequately undertaken, it is critical to deconstruct the politics that underpin the omission of pleasure and desire in sexuality education. More importantly, there is need to interrogate the politics of including pleasure and desire and how this inclusion is taking shape.
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in various international contexts. This includes careful analysis of inherent socioculturally constructed assumptions, guiding principles, and adult-led versus youth-led discourses that are configured in educational spaces (Allen, 2012; Allen, Rasmussen, & Quinlivan, 2014). Much more needs to be done to develop this complex pleasure and desire arena of sexuality studies conceptually and how pleasure is “put to work” (Talburt, 2009) across time and space.

Certainly the creation, implementation, and peer review process of publishing this lesson plan brings to the fore the many complexities that are part and parcel of our work in the field of sexuality education. The desire for conceptual clarity in the terminology used that is so inherently subjective and steeped with meaning and the political assumptions and limitations within sexuality education discourses, especially those directed at young people, are high among the list. So too are the challenges of knowing that there is no “perfect” lesson plan, and that when attempts are made to push the boundaries of sexuality education through various forms of innovation, it is neither easy or comfortable for many involved. This point is underscored by Quinlivan (Allen, Rasmussen, & Quinlivan, 2014), who cautioned that pedagogical approaches engaging with pleasure require a level of understanding and tolerance of sexuality as affectively messy, ambivalent, and confusing.

In many ways, this lesson plan illuminates the limits of what is and is not possible in classrooms across the globe, and where and how gaps in formal curricula can be filled through extracurricular/co-curricular activities or community-based interventions. Yet it is hoped that such a lesson will find its way into American classrooms and beyond. If sexuality professionals claim there is need to promote more realistic safer sex options and pleasurable aspects of sexuality to balance the disproportionate burden of risk and danger discourses of sexuality that dominate the current sexuality education landscape, we must try to do so through concrete means.

The initial task for the original lesson plan was to create one that would contribute toward delaying first intercourse among young people and/or increase the likelihood of safer sex practices at first and subsequent sexual intercourse. Against dominant sociocultural discourses directed at young people, it was essential to move beyond fear-based tactics about teen pregnancy and STI imagery. It was important to provide a way to more realistically engage young people to assess their own sexualities and their gendered relationships from a developmentally healthy, rights-based perspective that acknowledges them as desirous sexual agents. That is, sexual beings who have themselves requested to learn about, demystify, and legitimize sexual options with or without a partner and with or without penetrative, procreative intercourse.

One difference in the adaption made in this version is the more explicit mention of pleasure throughout the lesson, beginning with the title. The experience of desire and pleasure as a motivation for sexual expression
and in the listing of sexual practices came up in the discussions of all of the previously facilitated lessons. It is long overdue that issues regarding positive aspects of sexuality and pleasure as a component of sexual health and rights move beyond the level of policy or academic debate and come out of the shadows of educational anecdotes. Positive aspects of sexuality should therefore be featured in their rightful, legitimate place in “comprehensive” sexuality education teaching and learning materials in theorized, yet tangible ways (Allen, Rasmussen, & Quinlivan, 2014; deFur, 2012). May this lesson plan serve as a modest example.

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