

Free analyzing sex education from the perspectives of four different disciplines ...

[Education](#), [Teaching](#)



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Sex education is a contentious issue that emanates from the ideological personal-political divide of sex and sexuality. As a form of state intervention, sex education emanates from policies that encourage schools to include it in their respective curricula. Understandably, sex education in the foregoing regard has cause considerable tensions from various sectors of society, particularly those with conservative ideologies such as religious and certain civil society groups. Yet, in the quest of state actors to pursue certain policy goals such as mitigating overpopulation, reducing cases of rape and sexual harassment, preventing the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases and overcoming other sensitive issues pertaining to the treatment of topics on sex and sexuality as taboo, sex education provides a formidable push. This study lays out the varying theoretical perspectives of four different disciplines of human study: anthropology, evolutionary theory, public health and sociology. A concise yet thorough review of the existing literature straddling across the aforementioned disciplines provides the various issues

and concerns encircling sex education, particularly its implications in family and societal relations, and state-society tensions on the issue of state intervention in an arena greatly perceived as personal.

Perspectives from anthropology

Anthropologically, sex and sexuality are perceived in light of social influences. Sex education, under the anthropological discourse, discusses the various ways in which society shapes sex and sexuality (Ross & Rapp, 1981). Anthropology addresses sex and sexuality in sex education by emphasizing that what is typically deemed as intimately personal is actually connected to a string of social processes. Ross and Rapp (1981) noted that social constructions inevitably influence the ways in which sex and sexuality are biologically manifested, in turn manifesting cultural differences. With that, among the various social influences on sex and sexuality sex education must ensconce, all of which are culturally different, mostly circle on “ family contexts, religious ideologies, community norms, and political policies” (Ross & Rapp, 1981).

Ross and Rapp (1981) emphasized the impact of psychoanalytic theory in explaining how individuals gain conceptions on sex and sexuality based on the formation of their personality “ as a product of the social experiences of love, hate, power and conflict generated in families.” A basic understanding of psychoanalytic theory requires no further than recognizing that the experience of an individual with his family has a formidable bearing on the way he perceives sex and sexuality. Nevertheless, such a concept has not failed to attract criticisms from feminist revisionists, who highlighted the

effect of patriarchal structures on female parenting as an impetus of “unconscious relations of dominance” (Ross & Rapp, 1981), which is touted as a cause of perpetuating female suppression across generations. Significantly, feminist revisionists sought to emphasize that sex education, in itself a product of state policy, would transform gender relations in respect of the foregoing. Such leads to the premise providing that anthropology regards psychoanalytic theory as not the ultimate influence on sex and sexuality, as power relations revolving around gender, class and race also serve as attendant influences. Given that, Ross and Rapp (1981) enumerated the following contexts included within what they called “the social embeddedness of sexuality”: kinship systems, policy and community regulations on sex and sexuality, and national and international systems. Kinship systems, given the foregoing regard, are deemed to have weakened in influence due to movements to liberate sex and sexuality among individuals. However, sex and sexuality both remain influenced by social constructs, this time by national and international systems. The policies of national and international systems have since helped influence the way individuals think about sex and sexuality, with perhaps among the prominent outputs being sex education. In that case, anthropology deems sex education as a creation of a social influence on sex and sexuality – national and international systems, which derives from policy and community regulations and transcends from kinship systems (Ross & Rapp, 1981).

Perspectives from evolutionary theory

Sex education, within the context of evolutionary theory, arises from a combined sociological and biological application of evolutionary theories, which mainly contains strategies related to certain attendant issues – in this case, looking for the right partners – mating, according to Buss and Schmitt (1993). As per hypothesis, individuals – men and women alike, have since developed various psychological processes on long and short-term mating strategies. In that case, it is very important to emphasize on the importance of changes in the ways in which men and women mate, as framed within the sexual strategies theory, which emphasizes on factors that encompass, but not limited to, the following: value assessment of mate, investment on parents, certainty of paternity, accessibility to sex, estimation of fertility, and perceptions on commitment. Thus, according to sexual strategies theory under evolutionary theory, men and women mate based on what their long and short-term strategies are, shaped by their preferences and goals (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). In that respect, it is safe to assume that sex education helps shape the ways in which men and women mate, although perspectives from evolutionary theory raise important concerns on its policy-driven nature. As a product of policymakers subscribing to specific party ideologies, sex education is susceptible to political agendas that may not really match the value-systems individuals have on sex and sexuality. Conservative and liberal notions of sex education, particularly seen in the abstinence-contraception debate, may account for biased notions on sex and sexuality designed not to educate individuals in a balanced and open-minded manner (Planned Parenthood, 2014). Therefore, it is important to take into account

what evolutionary theory - with its due regard to changing contexts, can provide for shaping sex education. At best, sex education under evolutionary theory must equip individuals the capacity to assess matters on sex and sexuality without urging them to believe just a limited set of value-systems (Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

Perspectives from public health

The realm of public health regards the issue of sex education as both a policy and gender problem. State intervention is perhaps the most pressing matter on sex education, given as it aims to mandate schools via public policy to develop suitable curricula that would accommodate its instruction to students (Planned Parenthood, 2014). The gendered discourse of sex education has ideological roots, which in turn help characterize the approaches of governments throughout time on the shifts in family and sexual relationships, which can either be responsive or inactive. Thomson (1994) emphasized the importance of viewing generational changes in approaching sex education, given the increasing regard for change in socio-sexual relations and health risks in the form of sexually-transmitted diseases (STD). Numerous tensions, therefore, arise in the field of public health on the issue of sex education, straddling across the following concerns: health, manner of control, and the authoritarian-pragmatic debate in approaching issues on sex and sexuality. The foregoing has been discussed by Thomson (1994) in her study of the changes in contemporary sex education policy in England and Wales, from the time of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher up to 1993. Thomson (1994) found that moral rhetoric imposes a significant

importance on educational practices in sex education. It is notable that morality is not just simply taught via educational instruction, given that individuals have developed their own sense of “ what is fair from unfair.” Significantly speaking, such individual conceptions of morality vary differently from the perspectives held by politicians, who are also moral agents in themselves. Addressing power must be the key goal of sex education in order to resolve matters on moral autonomy, with respect to the foregoing. Moral autonomy allows for the expression of “ outrage, resistance and oppression” on social matters pertaining to personal experience and cultural diversity, which in turn could help shape viewpoints on sex and sexuality that are instrumental to the delivery of sex education as a policy agenda. In that case, it is highly important to emphasize that sex education does not, and can never effectively impose morality on sex and sexuality prescriptively. Rather, sex education must focus on delivering “ participatory and empowerment methodologies,” as Thomson (1994) noted, that involves individuals in perhaps the most creative manner in order to imbue a strong understanding on matters related to sex and sexuality. In that sense, it is importance to apply the foregoing to delivering sex education as a public health agenda in order to prevent health risks related to the lack of awareness on sex and sexuality, the most significant of which being the spread of STDs, particularly HIV/AIDS. Public health must also work continuously towards revising the emphasis on protectiveness in characterizing individuals on sex and sexuality, as seen in the way in which women are portrayed as generally uninterested in sex and men as more sexually active in nature (Thomson, 1994).

Perspectives from sociology

Sociological notions on sex education mainly concern the constructs individuals hold on sex education vis-à-vis that of the policymakers who mandate teachers to design curricula on sex and sexuality. It is important to understand that such a conflict, as may have been reflected in other perspectives provided by the three other disciplines of human study, places sex education under great controversy. Sex education, as noted by Buston and Wight (2001), is a subject that is not provided by policies with any standard form of training and therefore without any standard curriculum format, particularly in examinations. Another sociological concern raised by sex education highlights the roles of teachers as providers of guidance, while being committed to the subjects they teach. Given the varying viewpoints of sex education, it is difficult for teachers to become true guides to their students if they end up having biased thoughts on sex and sexuality. Therefore, sociological perspectives on sex education have to consider the following factors: the priorities of the senior management team and their choice of teachers, selection of a teacher that would specialize in developing the programme for sex education, consistency and unity of teams of teachers assigned to teach sex education and the personalities of each teacher (Buston & Wight, 2001). It is also noteworthy to emphasize that public policies may also guide the direction of sex education, although as noted by Buss & Schmitt (1993), policymakers must be prudent in addressing the issue not by making it as a platform for their political agenda largely driven by ideologies. In that regard, it remains crucial for policymakers to take on a participatory approach involving all stakeholders

on designing viable programs for sex education that can be subject to standardization. Additionally, it is important to understand how policymakers and stakeholders alike address various ambiguities in sex education. Lewis and Knijn (2003) both assessed the debates on sex education in two different nations - the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (UK; specifically England and Wales). The controversy of sex education in both nations is a factor for comparison, yet the findings of Lewis and Knijn (2003) have distinguished the Netherlands as more successful in providing messages on sex education that are articulate and resolving issues on ignorance on sex and sexuality compared to the UK. A sociological explanation provided by Lewis and Knijn (2003) rests on the fact that sex education debates in the Netherlands is focused more on consensus-making in addressing issues, whereas the UK have emphasized more on ideological clashes that offered little to no solutions at all. In that sense, it is crucial to note that addressing sex education issues requires a unified stance that focuses more on consensus-making.

Conclusion

Sex education is a highly contentious issue that, while seeking to resolve matters regarding sex and sexuality among young children as a matter of reaching policy goals like the prevention of overpopulation, rape and sexual harassment and the spread of STDs, among many others, touches on different kinds of diverging viewpoints on morality. As a potential political tool of policymakers, sex education can be subjected to biased influences that may be too conservative or liberal in nature, to the extent that it may

not sit well with the moral judgments held by individuals on sex and sexuality. Addressing such issues on sex education therefore requires the perusal of theoretical perspectives of different disciplines of human study: anthropology, evolutionary theory, public health and sociology, for the purpose of this study. As noted in all four disciplines of human study, it is important to approach matters on sex education in a manner where guidance, not ideological biasing, must be used as the key to providing students with formative knowledge on assessing sex and sexuality, from the policymakers down to teachers and their media of instruction.

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