LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX EDUCATION

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With support from Talia Kieu
Presentation objectives

- Provide background on importance of sexual education
- Illustrate project methodology
- Describe the preliminary theme identification
- Discuss significance and lessons learned
- Look at future research and implications
Project beginnings

Spring 2018

● Completed an OpEd assignment for women’s health class
● Focused on how a lack of knowledge on sexual violence and sexual harassment (SVSH) adds to experiences of trauma caused by it
● Proposed sexual education as a means of prevention

Fall 2018

● Thought about ways to study sex ed as a means of SVSH prevention
● Considered working with local high school freshman and collaborating with teachers
● Looked at comprehensive sexual education (CSE) for middle and high school students
We aimed to capture UC students’:
1) Understanding of sexual violence and related terms
2) Opinions of the social sphere contributing to SVSH prevalence on campus
3) Feelings about resource prevention and response efforts from campus administration and resource centers

Data collection began in January 2019 at UCLA, UCSB, and UCSD with cultural consensus modeling, individual interviews, and focus group discussions.

Working on the UC Speaks Up project provided us with the infrastructure to create our own research project.
Let's Talk About SEX [Education]

- Framed project within the #MeToo Movement over the past three years
- Saw a rise in conversation about prevention of SVSH
- Noticed a lack of research on sex education in connection to SVSH
- Recognized that sex ed is a hot topic in communities, but hoping research to support comprehensive approaches could change policy
Background research

- The first (and only) campus climate study, conducted at Berkeley revealed that 16.8% of undergraduates experienced sexual assault since coming to their university¹

- Santelli et al. (2018) identified historical risk factors of sexual violence (e.g., demographics, adverse childhood experiences) and found Columbia University students who received formal education about how to say no to sex before age 18 experienced less penetrative sexual assault in college²

- WHO Recommendations On Adolescent Sexual And Reproductive Health And Rights assert that adolescents have the right to sexual and reproductive health information and resources which is truthful and empowering³

- UNESCO describes comprehensive sexual education as essential for young people’s health and wellbeing ⁴

- NEW: Policy brief from Planned Parenthood looks at the potential for comprehensive sexual education as a preventative method for SVSH⁵
Let’s talk about SEX [education]

**Project Aims**

a) To capture the pre-college histories and formal / informal exposure to sexual education

b) To assess whether this exposure to has informed students’ experiences of consent, interpersonal communication and sexual decision making while in college

**Long Term Goals**

a) Explore protective factors that undergraduates may already possess upon matriculating into college

b) Contribute to the field of violence prevention and education through research focused on comprehensive and rights-based sex ed
Research methods

- 300 UC students were recruited via social media campaigns, flyering, and social networks and were asked to participate in a survey.
- Based on survey responses, participants were selected to participate in in-depth interviews. Students were selected based on key responses to their:
  - Personal demographic factors
  - Where they attended secondary/high school
  - Sexual education experiences
- 59 IDIs were conducted at three campuses UCLA (n=20), UCSB (n=20), UCSD (n=19) from August to December 2019.
Research methods continued

Interviews were scheduled and conducted in-person at locations which allowed for complete privacy. Locations were agreed upon by both interviewer and participant beforehand.

Participants received a $25 Visa gift card for their participation and were given a SVSH-campus and community resource guide which they, or someone they know, could utilize to receive support.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed with participants’ consent.

Data is being analyzed for themes.

Data will be disseminated to appropriate campus entities, including student groups and administrators when completed.
**Participant demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students who participated in Qualtrics survey (n=300) n (%)</th>
<th>Students selected for IDI (n=59) n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>17 - 40 years</td>
<td>18-40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>86 (28.7%)</td>
<td>18 (30.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>207 (69.0%)</td>
<td>37 (62.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender/Nonbinary</td>
<td>7 (2.3%)</td>
<td>4 (6.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Orientation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual or Mostly Heterosexual</td>
<td>231 (77.0%)</td>
<td>39 (65.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>44 (14.7%)</td>
<td>11 (18.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual or Mostly Homosexual</td>
<td>22 (7.3%)</td>
<td>8 (13.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Participant demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Students who participated in Qualtrics survey (n=300) n (%)</th>
<th>Students selected for IDI (n=59) n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>86 (28.7%)</td>
<td>11 (18.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>91 (30.3%)</td>
<td>24 (40.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a/x</td>
<td>59 (19.7%)</td>
<td>8 (13.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>9 (3.0%)</td>
<td>3 (5.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>7 (2.3%)</td>
<td>2 (3.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one</td>
<td>42 (14.0%)</td>
<td>8 (13.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6 (2.0%)</td>
<td>3 (5.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living w/ a disability?</th>
<th>Students who participated in Qualtrics survey (n=300) n (%)</th>
<th>Students selected for IDI (n=59) n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>20 (6.7%)</td>
<td>5 (8.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>279 (93.0%)</td>
<td>54 (91.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Student Attended High School in</th>
<th>Students who participated in Qualtrics survey (n=300) n (%)</th>
<th>Students selected for IDI (n=59) n (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>86 (28.7%)</td>
<td>18 (30.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside of CA, but in US</td>
<td>207 (69.0%)</td>
<td>37 (62.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside of US</td>
<td>7 (2.3%)</td>
<td>4 (6.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where/when student first received sex education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home with parents</td>
<td>46 (15.3%)</td>
<td>10 (16.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary school</td>
<td>109 (36.3%)</td>
<td>22 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior high</td>
<td>81 (27.0%)</td>
<td>15 (25.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>48 (16.0%)</td>
<td>8 (13.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College (2-year or 4-year institution)</td>
<td>7 (2.3%)</td>
<td>1 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never received sexual education</td>
<td>9 (3.0%)</td>
<td>3 (5.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Some students declined to respond to all questions; therefore, some columns do not add up to 100%
● Students learned about sex education from some unlikely sources:
  ○ Popular media shaped opinions and expectations of intimate relationships
  ○ Storytelling, such as graphic novels or fanfictions, provided education
● Students expressed what was good and what was bad in their sex education:
  ○ Communication around consent felt protective to students
  ○ Stigma in sex education is harmful
● Specific student populations had unique responses when asked about their sex education experiences:
  ○ LGBTQ students need less heteronormative and inclusive sex education
  ○ International students have equally diverse pre-college experiences of sex education compared to American students, but need more tailored and culturally inclusive programming while transitioning to college
"Sex is definitely a taboo subject. It has become more openly discussed between me and my extended family. It's definitely a no, like you don't talk about sex until you have a kid. But with my parents and I, we have a kind of open discussion about sex, but when it comes to having sex, other 20-year old, it's still a very no, like no no, because that's kind of the like following the religion. I follow Hinduism. And just the general culture that Indians grow up with is that sex is not supposed to be talked about, and sex is only meant for after marriage."

"Don't do it basically. And then maybe when you get married, [my parents and I] kind of talk about it in cryptic ways, but never super directly. My mother tried to have the sex talk with me when I was in seventh grade, and I remember it very clearly, and she tried to do it with like, starts talking about cats, and the whole time, I was just screaming. I'm like, please, don't talk to me about this. I already know. We covered it in school. I know how sex work. You don't have to do this. And then ever since then, it just kind of been the same kind of thing of like, don't have sex. Pretty much that's how they view it."

"Of course, everybody knows how it works before your parents tell you. So I tried to like kind of get my mother to tell me because again, like sex is such a taboo, it has always been such a taboo in my house."

"Like in my family, we just...we don't talk about sex or just relationships or anything like that. There's like this unspoken rule that I'm not supposed to date anyone ever until I get married."
"At the same time, I feel like maybe [my education on consent] wasn't clear enough, coming from the type of place I’d do culturally, like I'm not supposed to like, like outspoken, and stuff like that. So, I want more information on how I could get around to saying no, rather than just being like no, get away from me."

"Fifth grade, I definitely wasn't [ready to receive sexual education], which is why my parents took me out of boarding school, because once they found out I was learning all this, they’re like, you're not ready for it."

"I don't believe in God, most of my parents’ don't-have-sex talk were just like because God said no. I guess that's the only thing I can think of, is just so make it religious, and don't make it shameful, and just not serious."

"I mean- well, yeah, just because [my mother] had a very biased way of looking at it and I think that's a good way to describe it. She had a very biased opinion about it. She demonized it, basically, she condemned it. So yeah, so she would teach it through that very specific lens of saying, “Don't do sex. You'll fuck up your life,” basically."
Theme 3: “coming to America”

“So, I remember this workshop, online workshop thing we all had to do before coming to school was think about it. And it talked a lot about alcohol and drugs, and sexual harassment, sexual violence. And sexual violence, that was the first time I heard of sexual violence, but that was really good information, because obviously through movies and stuff, I was terrified of frats, because I was like, oh, there’s definitely like I’m going to get. I’d heard a lot of stories about rape incidents in universities, and stuff like that, so I was really scared of that, but having all that knowledge about it was really interesting”

“So again, yeah, coming to an American college, I knew that it was supposed to be a very promiscuous place. Then I found out it's not as much as I thought it was.”

“People lose their virginity in high school, it's very common. I don't know. I feel my exposure to western views on sex is mainly from TV and shit. So, that's kind of the message that you get, is people having sex on prom night, and the guy coming in, those kind of stories.”
Significance

Across cultures, students brought up parents as a significant influence on their sexual education, whether or not parents ever explicitly spoke on the subject. Students viewed the parental, religious, and cultural stigma at home as unhelpful in their relationships and transition into adulthood.

- CSE should involve parents in the conversation to bridge what students are learning at school and at home, demonstrating to these key role models why sexual education is important in the development of empowered adolescents.

Within an increasingly globalized world, international students’ perceptions and feelings in regards to sex and relationships also undergo acculturation as they navigate different cultures at home, at school, in their community, and online.

- SVSH- focused university resources and programs for international students should recognize the complexities of students’ upbringings and their experiences of assimilating to life at American universities.

Through popular media, students have developed notions of what sex and relationships are and should be in American universities which don’t necessarily reflect the reality of life in college and the experiences of their peers.

- Sexual education programs in secondary school and universities should include topics on media representations, dispelling myths, and preparing and empowering students for situations they might face.
Study limitations

- Recall bias from participants
- Hesitation to speak on sensitive topics
- Findings may not be applicable to all US colleges and universities

Lessons learned

- Screening participants thoroughly
- Conducting quality checks on interviews
- Outreach skills are important in any sector, research included
Future directions

● Research
  ○ Quantitative studies on comprehensive sexual education vs. “traditional” sexual education; measuring attitudes and behaviors
  ○ Research with survivors and perpetrators and sexual education histories

● Intervention and Implementation
  ○ Designing interventions that involve parents
  ○ Improved sexual education curriculum materials in primary/secondary school
  ○ Universities creating more culturally-inclusive prevention programming
  ○ Universities offering for-credit courses on these topics
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Annjelika Slate (UCSB)
UC San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health
UCGHI Center of Expertise on Women’s Health, Gender, and Empowerment
Citations

1 NORC at the University of Chicago. “FINAL REPORT, University of California, Berkeley, MyVoice Survey”. 2018.


Thank you!

Questions, comments, or feedback?
Can contact me at cwenzel@ucsd.edu
Results predictions

- Few formal exposures to consent and partner communication
- Feelings that pre-college sex ed did not prepare them for sexual relationships in college
- Beliefs that sex ed curriculums are out of date
- University level resources and programming are underfunded and underutilized
- Little to no discussion with peers about consent
Quantitative findings

Sexual Education History

- Sexually transmitted infections (n=223): 74%
- HIV and AIDS prevention (n=206): 69%
- Sexual and reproductive health (n=189): 63%
- Birth control (n=148): 49%
- Consent (n=130): 43%
- How to say no to sex (n=110): 37%

Credit: Britnie Bloom
Quantitative findings

Sex ed has helped you navigate: Personal Boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sed ed has helped you navigate: Consent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Credit: Britnie Bloom
Significance

Students received sex education from a variety of sources; however, they had differing opinions on its impact.

- Some students entered college without receiving any formal sex education, relying solely on friends and the media to obtain information on sex and sexual health questions.

Few participants expressed complete satisfaction with their education and shared many ideas of ways to improve current curricula.

- Many participants emphasized how there should be more discussion on how sex impacts social/relationship dynamics and that lessons are presented in ways that are applicable to real life scenarios.

Students think consent is important, though they may not always know how to define it or put it into practice (24).

- Students believe knowing more about consent and being exposed to it earlier would result in fewer cases of SVSH and healthier and more long-lasting relationships.

The effects of SVSH are vast and long-lasting, including depression, sexual risk behaviors and suicidality.

- Many students, including LGBTQ+ students, indicated they had experienced SVSH in their lives and think having better access to CSE could have helped.