

How Sexual Attitudes are Formed:

The Association between Different Sources for Sexual Education and their Relationship with Sexual Shame

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Introduction Background

Sexual health is an important aspect of overall well-being, as it is tied to physical and mental health (Aicken et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2019). This relationship is especially pertinent among college students who are at the age of emerging adulthood when they are experiencing substantial freedom for independent exploration (Arnett, 2000).

Sexual health education is generally taught to adolescents in high school (ages 14-18 years) and has been shown to have a direct effect on their behavior (Leung et al., 2019). Yet, all college students have not received the same amount of sexual health education due to unequal mandates for sexual education curriculums across the U.S. (Rabbinette & Enriquez, 2018).

A large percentage of young people utilize the internet for health information, specifically sexual health information (Escoffery et al., 2005).

Attitudes are determined by beliefs, which are formed based on perceptions of oneself in comparison to others and possible consequences of actions. Attitudes are likely to be in line with the positive or negative outcomes expected to occur due to the sexual behavior (Bleakley et al., 2009). Sexual shame occurs when one thinks negatively of themselves in comparison to what they believe they "should" be doing.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: I hypothesized that those who received more formal education will utilize the internet more for sexual health information.

RQ1: How does formal sexual education relate to attitudes about sex among college students?

RQ2: How does self-sexual education on the internet relate to attitudes about sex among college students?

RQ3: How do different sources for formal sexual education, and different platforms for internet self-sexual education relate to attitudes about sex among college students?

Methods

Participants were 308 individuals recruited through the online survey platform Prolific. Individuals were eligible if they met 2 criteria:

- Currently undergraduate students attending four-year colleges or universities in the United States
- Aged between 18-25 years.

Compensation of \$1.59 was provided to those who completed the survey

Study Design A 10-minute survey was composed of four portions: demographics, formal sexual education, self-sexual education on the internet, and the Kyle Inventory of Sexual Shame (KISS). Mean scores were calculated for each section and sub-section.

Results Key Findings

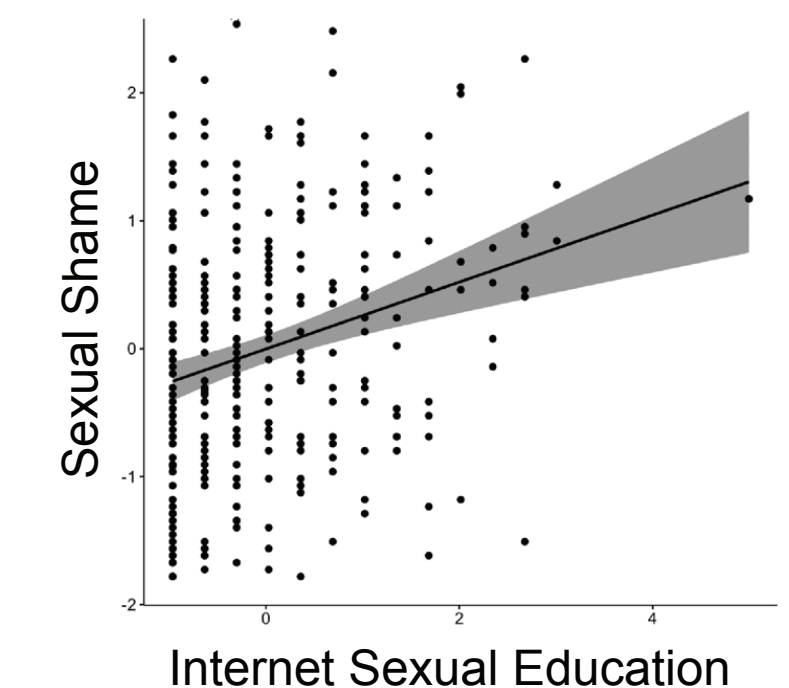
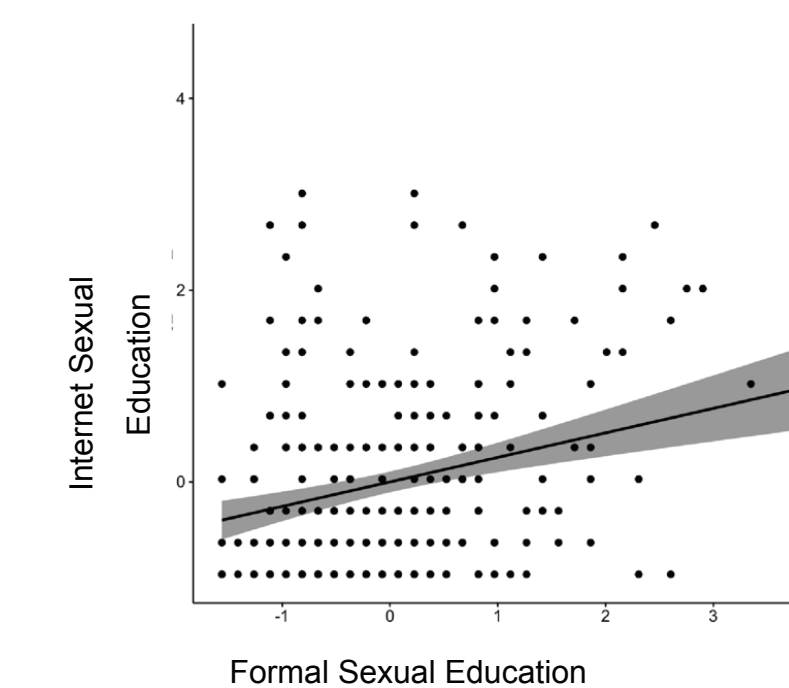
By utilizing Pearson correlations and linear regression models the analysis determined the following:

- A significant positive association between formal education and self-sexual education on the internet.
- No significant correlation between formal education and sexual shame.
- Significant correlations between every source for internet sexual education and shame.
- A significant association between total sexual education and sexual shame.
- Sexual experience was found to have a significant association with both self-sexual education on the internet and attitudes about sex when used as a covariate in the linear regression models.

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Internet	Regression model assessing the association between internet and formal sexual education			
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	-0.27	0.77	-0.35	0.73
Formal Education	0.15	0.03	4.53	<0.001
Family SES	-0.09	0.07	-1.45	0.15
Age Years	0.04	0.03	1.28	0.20
Sexual Experience	0.12	0.05	2.52	0.01
R ²	0.085			
F	8.06			

Shame	Regression model assessing the association between sexual shame and internet sexual education			
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	3.3	0.69	4.81	<0.001
Internet Education	0.27	0.05	5.43	<0.001
Family Ses	-0.08	0.06	-1.47	0.14
Age Years	-0.02	0.03	-0.63	0.53
Sexual Experience	-0.16	0.04	-3.82	<0.001
R ²	0.11			
F	10.5			



Discussion

H1: an increase in formal education may lead students to be more curious about other sexual health topics and the internet is the most available, reliable, and safe space to find the answers to such questions (Nikkelen et al., 2019; Osei Asibey et al., 2017).

RQ1: Formal sexual education may have an unanticipated and indirect association with sexual shame by promoting more sexual health information seeking online. To overcome this potential negative effect, providing information about internet use for sexual health self-education in formal sexual education curriculums seems like a highly beneficial step. Increase media literacy could help students overcome the factors influencing sexual shame and lead to improved physical and mental health.

RQ2: The sexual health information people are finding online may contain imagery or language about gender roles and social cues that has the power to influence participants' sexual beliefs and attitudes (Clarke et al., 2014). Future research should analyze sexual information platforms, or analyze the potential imagery presented on such platforms and study the social cues utilized by sexual health sources.

RQ3: it is not clear how specific sources may effect sexual shame differently. However, parents/guardians appear to be a potentially-beneficial source for sexual health education if they teach a large number and variety of topics.