



Race, Justice, and Sexuality Education with Youth of Color

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RISKY LESSONS: SEX EDUCATION AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

ethnographic study of
middle-school sex education in wake of
abstinence-only legislation





Young People as an Oppressed Group

Adultism

Sexism (Heterosexism & Homophobia)

Classism

Racism

How do our notions of race play out in our teaching, intentionally and subconsciously?



Color-Blind Racism

- allows “whites [to] enunciate positions that safeguard their racial interests without sounding ‘racist.’”
- “explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics”

Bonilla-Silva 2006, 4



Color-Blind, Neutral, *and* Racialized

children having children

babies having babies

teen mothers

at-risk youth

urban youth

inner-city youth

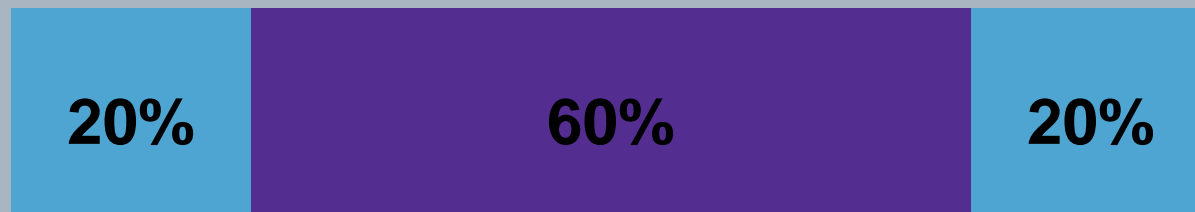


Color-Blind, Idealizing, *and* Racialized

Among the teens was a white, seemingly middle-class, high school girl who told the audience that she was “insult[ed] that educators think we are too weak and stupid to resist temptation. . . . [I] am very proud to say I am a virgin.”



Color-Blind, Rational, *and* Racialized





Color-Blind, Rational, *and* Racialized

Tammy Reynolds, a white conservative Christian mother, invoked the 20–60–20 divide during our interview: “You’re gonna have, out of 100 percent of your students, you’re gonna have your 20 percent [who] are gonna do it no matter what you tell ‘em. And that’s true. I mean, *you* know those kids. *I* know those kids.”



Color-Blind, Compassionate, and Racialized

I'm talking about all of those children in community housing areas. Children [who are] in sixth and seventh grade, pregnant. And many times they're not pregnant by children of their age, [but] by older men. I'm talking about mothers who allow men to come into their homes and impregnate their children. I'm talking about mothers who are basically not role models.

Elaine Adams, African American school board member

Risky Lessons, 61



HIFY Making Racism Visible





What is HIFY?

Health Initiatives for Youth is a multicultural organization whose mission is to improve the health and well-being of underserved young people through innovative youth leadership, popular education and advocacy, in pursuit of multi-level social change.

Services

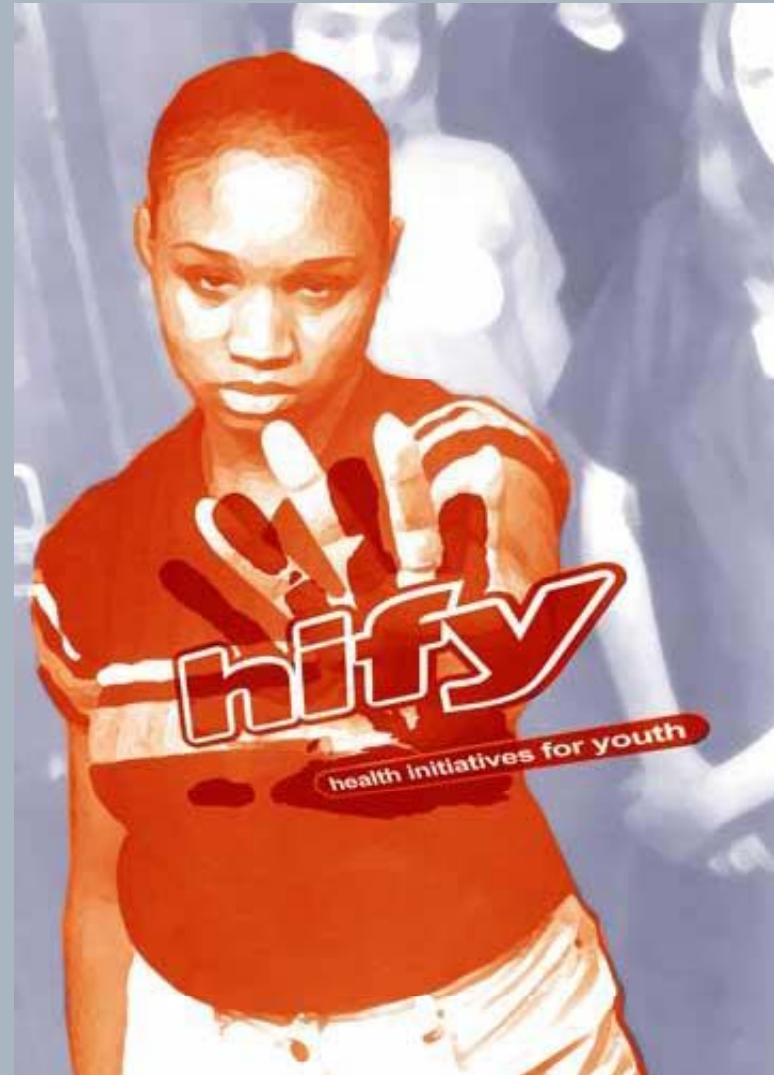
- Comprehensive health education
- Training of trainers for peer educators and youth leaders
- Provider trainings and youth development coaching
- Youth-generated publications and digital media
- Leadership retreats



What is HIFY?

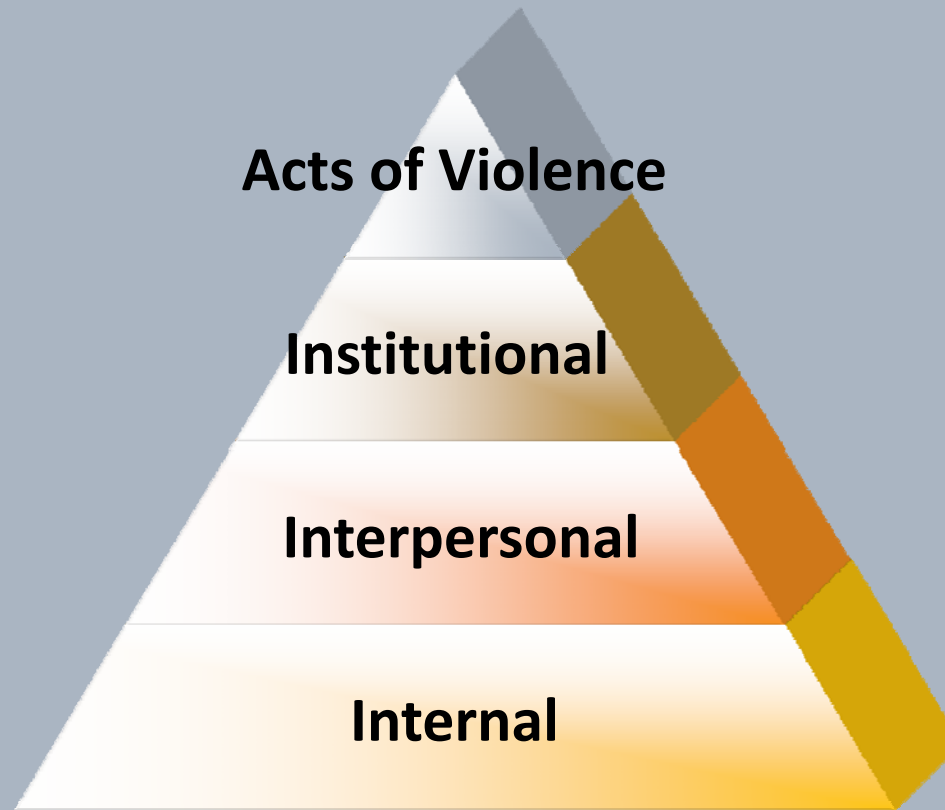
Philosophies

- Harm reduction
- Anti-oppression
- Positive sexuality
- Youth development





Pyramid of Oppression





Pyramid of Oppression





HIFY's Approach to Sexuality Education

Positive Sexuality

Advocates For Youth

*Sex is a natural, normal, and healthy part of being human –
of being a teen – of being alive!*

Good Vibrations

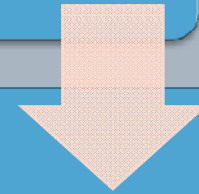
If it's Safe, Fun, and Consensual . . . it's all good!



Race, Justice, and SAFE

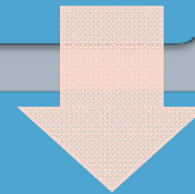
Conventional Belief

- Brown skin linked to violence, aggression, and irrationality.



Lesson

- Sexual desires and expressions must be contained.



Consequence

- Limited seeking of services/support.



Race, Justice, and SAFE

HIFY's Belief

- Relationship violence and aggression reflect and maintain broader inequalities, including racism.



Lesson

- Effective negotiation in intimate settings with attention to structural conditions.



Consequences

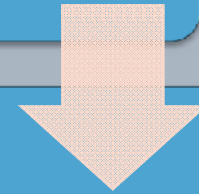
- Greater sense of mutual accountability.
- Strong peer support base for confronting structural oppression.



Race, Justice, and FUN

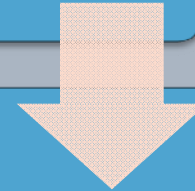
Conventional Belief

- People of color are immoral and predisposed to pleasure.



Lesson

- Sexuality is dangerous and NOT fun.



Consequence

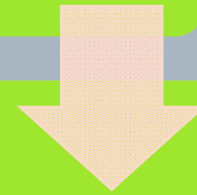
- Shame and limited understanding of pleasure and its connection to health.



Race, Justice, and FUN

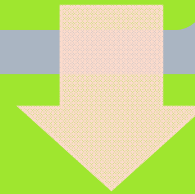
HIFY's Belief

- Sexual pleasure and safe exploration are fundamental rights of all young people, including young people of color.



Lessons

- Exploration of pleasure, boundaries, and risk.



Consequences

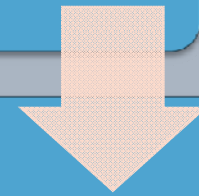
- Respect for mutual pleasure.
- Normalized feelings of curiosity.



Race, Justice, and CONSENSUAL

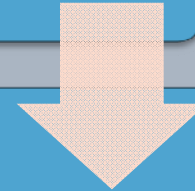
Conventional Belief

- Youth of color rarely say no to sex.



Lesson

- Certain styles and behaviors = asking for it.



Consequence

- Low sense of personal power.



Race, Justice, and CONSENSUAL

HIFY's Belief

- Consent is a two-way process that is fundamental to sexual pleasure and safety.



Lesson

- Young people can use their body intelligence and other strategies to negotiate consent.



Consequence

- Greater sense of being entitled to consent across young people's interactions with oppressive systems, like racism.
- Support for peers negotiating challenging consent situations.



Strategies

- ✓ Examine **your own beliefs** about race and sexuality.
- ✓ Ask young people **questions**, and listen to their answers!
- ✓ As a first step toward offering risk reduction strategies, **validate** the relationships young people are having (booty calls, friends with benefits, homies, etc.).
- ✓ Include **talk of pleasure** and **talk of race** in your education and policy making.
- ✓ Use teaching tools that **highlight diversity** and **encourage cultural sharing**.
- ✓ Introduce the concept of **ALLY**, and model ally behavior in the classroom and debates.



Challenges

- ✓ How can educators, advocates, and policy makers best confront our own **internalized racism**?
- ✓ How do **young people's understandings of race and racism** complicate what's safe, fun, and consensual?
- ✓ What support do we need when being in **the learner mode** leaves us vulnerable?
- ✓ How can we be honest about what may feel like our “outsider status”—gay Black man teaching straight Black men, white person fighting racism—and still be successful **role models** to young people?
- ✓ What **resources** are available to help us take on issues of race and racism?
- ✓ How much is **enough**? How can we confront racism and still provide adequate sexuality education?



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Using Sexuality Education to Teach Social Justice

Condoms

- **Conventional Language:** “This is the female condom. Women can use this when a man has trouble with his condom. It can be used up to 6 hours before vaginal sex.”
- **HIFY Language:** “This is the insertive condom. The receiving partner can use this in their opening (vagina or anus). It can be used up to 6 hours before the penis or toy is inserted. Why do you think it’s important for the receiving partner to have safer sex options?”
- **Lessons Taught:**
 - A challenge to heteronormativity
 - Negotiation skills



Using Sexuality Education to Teach Social Justice

Anatomy

- **Conventional** : “This is what girls’ and women’s bodies look like. This is what men’s and boys’ bodies look like. Who can name the parts? Any questions?”
- **HIFY**: “We have two bodies here that represent the ends of a range. We all fall between this range. We all start with the same parts in our mother’s stomachs, but as we grow our parts take their own path.”
- **Lessons Taught:**
 - Body diversity and appreciation
 - Intersex knowledge



Using Sexuality Education to Teach Social Justice

Pleasure

- **Conventional:** “Sex may feel good, but it causes a lot of trouble. It is not worth it...”
- **HIFY:** “What constitutes sex?” (brainstorming beyond penetration – “what about digital? masturbation? Foreplay and romance?”) “It’s important to explore your own body to find what makes you feel good. It’s also important to talk with your partner. Sex can be a fun experience, but only if you communicate and figure out what works for you!”
- **Lessons Taught:**
 - Pleasure
 - Intimacy Options beyond penetration
 - Right to demand enjoyable sex