

Lack of The Separation of

Church and ~~State~~ School

Frau Gothel, tell me why it is that my clothes are all too tight. They no longer fit me.

Rapunzel Rapunzel, I should've given you comprehensive sex ed and a condom!



By Ellian Cox

To start off, you can believe whatever religion you want. I don't care, nor should anyone else care what YOU do with YOUR life! When I talk about Christianity in this, it is in no way a criticism of ALL of Christianity, but rather a portion of Christians who call themselves 'evangelicals' or 'fundamentalists'.



So, what is purity culture?

You know about it, even if you don't know it by name. It's a subculture of right-wing, evangelical Christianity where the 'biblical' stance on sexuality is that abstinence or chastity is mandatory before heterosexual marriage. It views men as being unable to control their bodies and pits women as the sexual gatekeepers of men's 'insatiable' sex drive. You can guess how this funnels into rape culture, and the hypersexualisation of women's bodies- right? Overall, it is rife with sexism and all other forms of bigotry and promotes a culture of shame and guilt over one's own body. Other religions have their forms of purity culture, often using different terminology. In the West, our culture of purity is shaped by Christianity.



Unlike comprehensive sex ed (CSE), abstinence-only sex ed (AOSE) isn't medically-backed. The Kaiser Family Foundation defines it well, stating that it "teach[es] that abstinence from sex is the only morally acceptable option for youth, and the only safe and effective way to prevent unintended pregnancy and STIs. [It] generally do[es] not discuss contraceptive methods or condoms unless to emphasize their failure rates."

What is

Abstinence=

It was hyper-aware of all kinds of physical contact, scaring people into thinking that any little touch would 'lead you down a path of temptation'. On that line of thinking, masturbation was also considered bad, as well as fantasizing or any sexual thoughts.

Only Sex

Ed?

The key to AOSE is fear- getting people to fear their sexuality, which only makes things worse, and gives people an unhealthy relationship with themselves, and others.



The History Lesson You Didn't Ask For



The organized version of AOSE that we see in public and private education systems alike in the Western world originated in the nineties and was constructed as a response to the AIDs epidemic, and rising rates of teen pregnancy. It advocated for remaining celibate until marriage, which included no kissing, and even no hand-holding (there were very specific types of hand-holding that were allowed between couples versus not allowed, ex. pancake hand-holds).

It discouraged condom use, downplaying its efficacy, and of course never actually taught about anything outside of basic sex between a penis and a vagina.

This helped to further stigmatize minorities, especially gender and sexual minorities.

It was and is pervasive. It was all over TV, Disney kid stars talking about 'purity pledges' and not wanting to date, but rather wait until they're older to date for marriage. In fact, there was federal funding (\$50-75 million annually) provided for AOSE programs in the US for over two decades now.

- Only acceptable sexual activity is within a monogamous, heterosexual marriage between Christians
- Men have no control over sexual urges (women are responsible for their sexuality)
- Biological essentialism (ex. Women being submissive is biologically inherent)
- Pronatalism, Quiverfull movement
- Anti-divorce
- Pro-forced-birth/Anti-choice/Anti-abortion
- Wives must give their husbands sex whenever they want (marital rape doesn't exist)
- Modest attire, slut-shaming (specifically and usually towards AFAB folks)
- Women are the property of men in their lives (father, later given to husband)
- Anti-contraception

Purity Culture

(Some of) The Pillars of

Even though many of these things aren't explicitly taught in ROSE classes, these are some of the beliefs of purity culture that inevitably funnel into what is being taught.

Fun fact: I had a youth pastor that taught us that virginity was like when white people first discovered pineapples. He said having a pineapple was a status symbol, that people wouldn't eat the pineapple, but rather display it as a sign of wealth.

Virginity was the same. If you had it, it meant you were better than others, of a higher status. Yeah, my relationship with pineapples has been forever scarred.

Gross...

RIP Freud



you would've loved purity balls

It Hurts Some More Than Others



When a person thinks of a 'pure woman', what immediately comes to mind is a white woman- even when women of colour are asked the question (Natarajan et. al, 2022). The concept of 'purity' in the West is synonymous with whiteness. That's what's always been considered the 'purest'. So, anyone who isn't white is considered less pure, less valuable.

Because of chattel slavery, black women's bodies were objectified and dehumanized, their personhood erased, and their bodies were more "rapable". Their bodies are sexualised far more than a white woman's, and the standards of beauty for women within evangelical circles are Eurocentric, often leaving women of colour out of this circle of 'perfection'.

Because of this, the negative impacts of purity culture fall heavily onto them because of racist ideas about beauty, sexuality, and personhood. Because the idea of a 'pure, ideal woman' is white, it subconsciously reinforces the idea that women of colour cannot be this- making them undesirable, demonized, and shamed.



Qualitative Effects



Do you remember 'pancake-handholding only' being a rule in the Bible?

No, but new rules are getting added to the English version every day!

- Shame around sex, body, self, relationships, or sexual assault
- Undereducation on bodily functions, what's normal/abnormal and needs to be checked up on medically
- Lack of education on how to have sex in a safe environment
- Lack of education on healthy relationships
- Slut-shaming
- Pushes rape culture ideas
- Stigma around intersex people (forcing the idea of a sex binary is what feeds into the practice of mutilating intersex newborns)
- Stigma towards minorities because of lack of education on the diverse nature of cultures, biology, and sexuality
- Not recognising sexual abuse (and thus not knowing to report it)
- Stigma around being a victim of sexual abuse
- Sexual suppression and stress around sex
- Stigmatisation around sex work and sex workers

Quantitative

Effects

Stanger-Hall & Hall (2011) analysed the US states and their policies on sex ed, and then analysed their statistics on birth rates, abortions, and similar factors, while considering other variables such as race, gender, and class among other things.

The level of AOSE was positively correlated with both teen pregnancy and teen birth rates, indicating that abstinence education in the U.S. does not cause abstinence behaviour. Teens in states that prescribe more abstinence education are actually more likely to become pregnant. Abortion rates were not correlated with abstinence education level, but with fewer pregnancies, there are fewer abortions.

0 = 'no mention of abstinence being the primary method to approach sexuality'

1 = 'abstinence is mentioned as the best form of birth control' but all other topics are touched upon properly

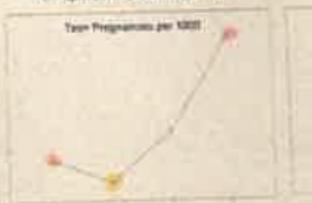
3 = 'abstinence-only is the only option presented to youth in classrooms'



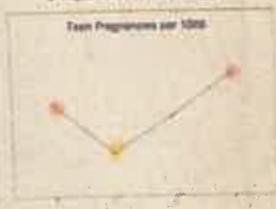
A. Adjusted for Median-Household Income



B. Adjusted for Education (%SAT)



C. Adjusted for Ethnic Diversity

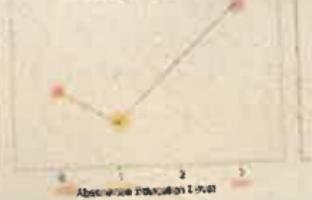


Estimated Maternal Mortality

Teen Births per 1000



Teen Births per 1000



Teen Births per 1000



Abstinence Education Level

Abstinence Education Level

Abstinence Education Level

What's the Alternative?

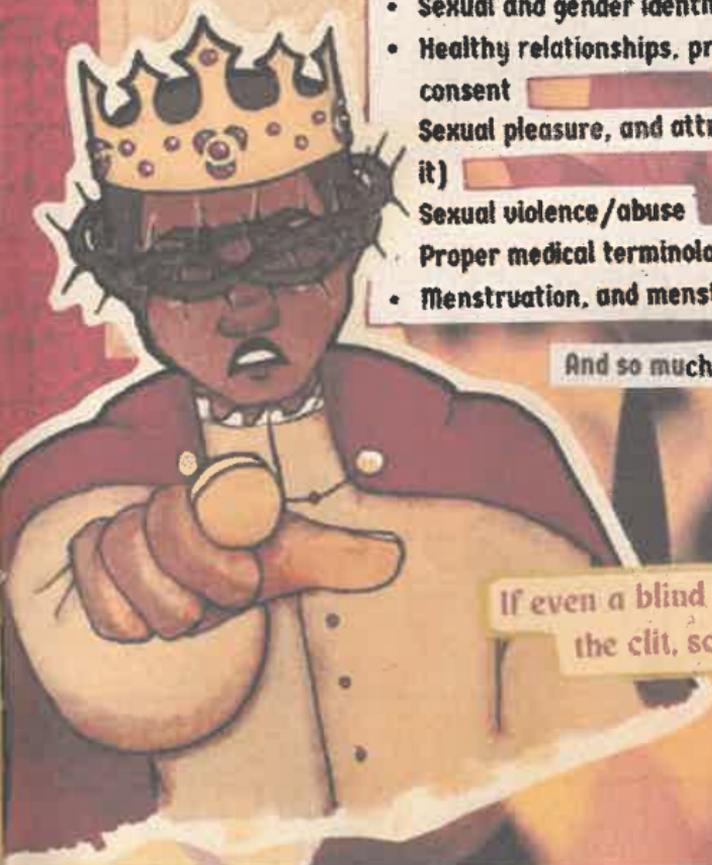
Hint: it's science!

The alternative is simple: while mentioning abstinence as an option is good in an educational setting (as shown by the 1 level in the previous study), it cannot be the only thing taught, and what is needed is a medically-backed approach to sexual education. CSE aims to cover a wide range of topics, including but not limited to:

- HIV/AIDS, STIs, infection treatments and prevention
- Puberty
- Pregnancy, birth control, contraception, and fertility
- Sexual and gender identities and their diversity
- Healthy relationships, proper communication and consent
- Sexual pleasure, and attraction (and the lack of it)
- Sexual violence/abuse
- Proper medical terminology for anatomy
- Menstruation, and menstrual health

And so much more!

If even a blind prince can find the clit, so can you!



Comprehensive Sex-Ed

Larkin et al. (2017) looked at what Toronto kids and parents wanted out of the sexual education offered in public schools, and the answers were telling. To summarize, both parents and kids felt the education on sexual health was lacking, and they wanted comprehensive sexual education!

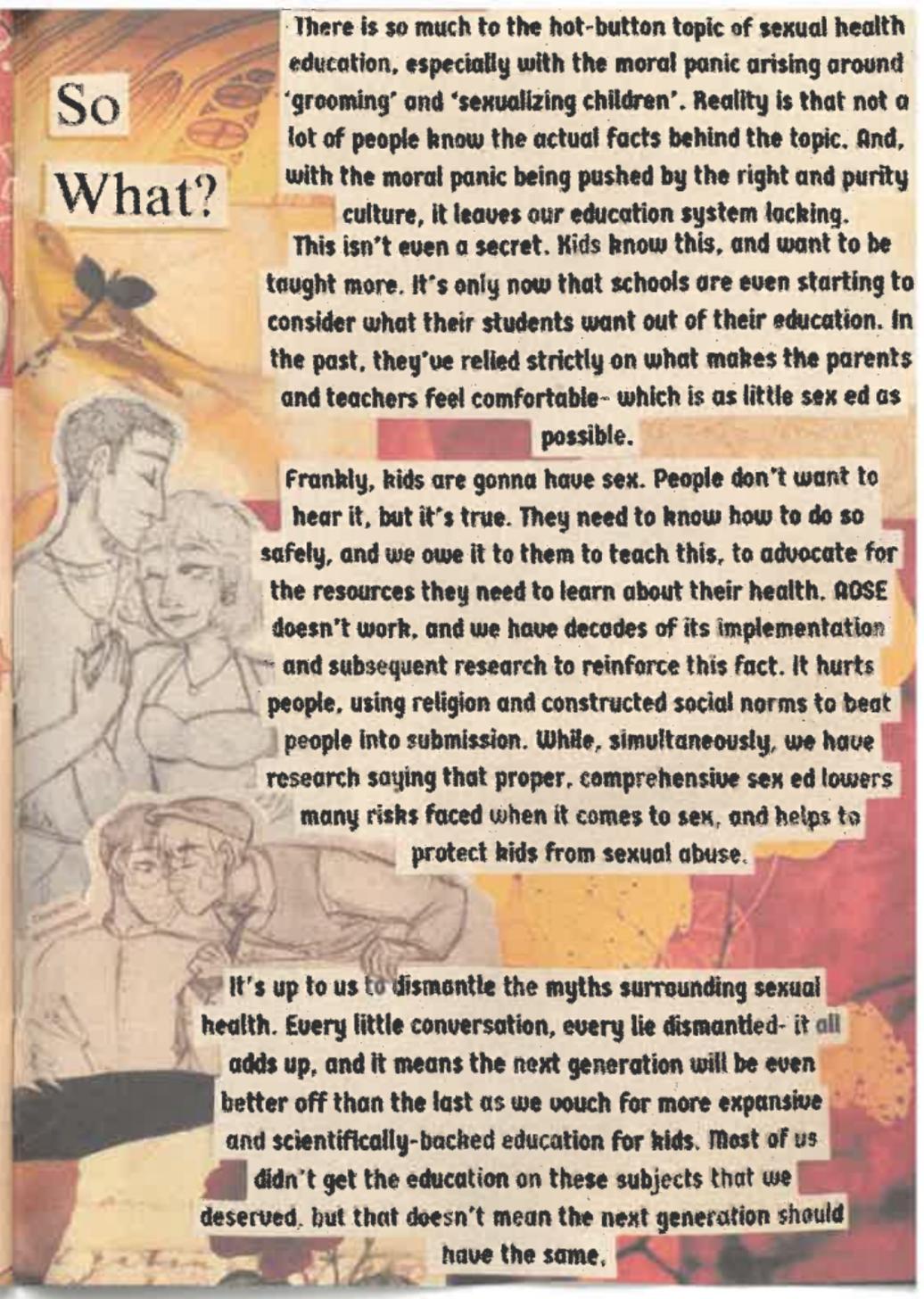
Students' responses showed a disconnect between what they're being taught, and what they want to learn. The biggest complaint in their education was AOSE prioritizing making students fear their sexuality.

Queer students mentioned their desire to learn about LGBTQ+ identities, which was never in the curriculum before. This lack of education leads to queerphobic bullying, which disadvantages queer youth, and makes them high risk for all sorts of violence against them, and mental health challenges.

The results of this study were presented to the Toronto school board, where they used the students' wants to reinvent the curriculum to better educate students on what they ask for! Students WANT to learn, and including their voices is necessary in order to fill the needs they have of their education system!

It's what kids and parents both want!





So

What?

There is so much to the hot-button topic of sexual health education, especially with the moral panic arising around 'grooming' and 'sexualizing children'. Reality is that not a lot of people know the actual facts behind the topic. And, with the moral panic being pushed by the right and purity culture, it leaves our education system lacking.

This isn't even a secret. Kids know this, and want to be taught more. It's only now that schools are even starting to consider what their students want out of their education. In the past, they've relied strictly on what makes the parents and teachers feel comfortable- which is as little sex ed as possible.

Frankly, kids are gonna have sex. People don't want to hear it, but it's true. They need to know how to do so safely, and we owe it to them to teach this, to advocate for the resources they need to learn about their health. AOSE doesn't work, and we have decades of its implementation and subsequent research to reinforce this fact. It hurts people, using religion and constructed social norms to beat people into submission. While, simultaneously, we have research saying that proper, comprehensive sex ed lowers many risks faced when it comes to sex, and helps to protect kids from sexual abuse.

It's up to us to dismantle the myths surrounding sexual health. Every little conversation, every lie dismantled- it all adds up, and it means the next generation will be even better off than the last as we vouch for more expansive and scientifically-backed education for kids. Most of us didn't get the education on these subjects that we deserved, but that doesn't mean the next generation should have the same.

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Bibliography



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Breaktime with my co-creator, Archimedes (the moral support)

