

# Sex Squad: engaging humour to reinvigorate sexual health education

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## ABSTRACT

The Sex Squad is a collective of US-based college students, who create and perform monologues, scenes and musical parodies for ninth graders (ranging in age from 13 to 15). The Sex Squad is the central element in the *AMP!* programme for adolescent sexual health, developed at the University of California – Los Angeles in collaboration with the HIV/AIDS Prevention Unit of the Los Angeles Unified School District. In this case study, grounded primarily in arts-based approaches to sexual health, we, the founders, draw on our own experiences with, and critical reflections on, Sex Squad to make a case for including humour in sexual health education. In particular, we are committed to investigating how the arts can radicalise sexual health education, to increase its effectiveness, but also to reinforce sex as a valuable and pleasurable aspect of the human experience.

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## Introduction

The scene is familiar, if somewhat stereotypical: a class of high school students fidget behind their desks while their teacher, standing at the front of the room, drones on about sexual health—blah, blah, blah. Finally, unable to tolerate the sound of the teacher's monotonous voice, one student picks up a smartphone and texts, 'OMG. How can sex-ed be so boring??? UCLA Sex Squad, we need you!!' In an instant, the door to the classroom bursts open to reveal a throbbing, dancing and singing throng. The beat is straight off the radio, from Macklemore's popular top-of-the-charts hit, *Thrift Shop*, but with freshly reinvented lyrics sung by a young college student:

I'm gonna get some facts

Gotta bunch of condoms in my backpack

Sex Squad taught me all about protection

This is gonna be awesome (UCLA Sex Squad 2013)<sup>1</sup>

This scene epitomises the wild energy of the Sex Squad, a young people's sexual health education programme based in the USA, which is the centrepiece of *AMP!* – an Arts-based, Multiple-intervention, near-Peer education aimed at ninth graders (13–16 years of age). The

*AMP!* intervention consists of four segments: a performance by the Sex Squad; Rehearsal for Real Life (participatory theatre scenes focused on condom negotiation); Positively Speaking (one or two HIV-positive people sharing personal stories); and an art-making activity led by health teachers in the classroom.

Sex Squad, the memorable centrepiece of *AMP!*, is a regular academic course that counts towards graduation at the University of California, Los Angeles. In any given year, the Sex Squad might appear in up to 10 large public high schools, while also adapting its performances to be shared in digital format via the Internet. In this case study, grounded primarily in arts-based approaches to sexual health, we, the founders, draw on our own experiences with and critical reflections on Sex Squad to make a case for humour in sexual health education. In particular, we are committed to investigating how the arts can radicalise sexual health education, to increase its effectiveness, but also to reinforce sex as a valuable and pleasurable aspect of the human experience.

### **Humour and participatory theatre in the classroom**

From the start, we align ourselves with South African performance artist and AIDS activist Pieter-Dirk Uys, who in 2009 led an influential workshop at UCLA that offered laughter as a tool for meaning making and sexual health education (Uys 2002, 1). Laughter is an embodied experience, critical to our identity and sexuality, which, when framed and harnessed, can help us to ‘engage in critiques of normative (hetero)sexuality and even particular socially constructed sexualities’ (Trethewey 2004, 37). When students are encouraged to laugh about their fears related to HIV, and other taboos surrounding sex, they develop the capacity to explore their concerns. If the ‘bogeyman’ wears a clown nose, he no longer intimidates us. Conversely, research has shown that fear tactics in sex education are patently ineffective (Beasley 2008). Given the choice between laughter and fear, we choose laughter.

With good reason, educators are often concerned about the disruptive role of humour in the classroom, but a recent study suggests that humour has a positive effect (Allen 2014). To be sure, humour can be used by students to subvert the curriculum and reinforce gender roles. Every teacher has experienced the disruptive jokester in the back row. On the positive side, however, humour can also be used to relieve monotony, reinforce information retention and reduce discomfort about a sensitive topic. Going a step further, Trethewey (2004) suggests that laughter has the power to open counter-hegemonic dialogue, that it can be a means to productive disruption. Building on Uys and Trethewey’s work, we posit humour as a tool for bringing students back into a critically conscious sexual health dialogue. Further along in the case study we share examples of students using comedy to challenge accepted gender norms and other issues that ultimately get in the way of young people taking a proactive role in their sexual health.

Along with laughter, a key Sex Squad strategy comes from the participatory theatre tradition known as Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal 1985), or TO. This humanist form of theatre was created by Brazilian theatre director and theorist Augusto Boal and is characterised by the audience entering into the action to actively push back against oppressors and oppressions (Ledwith and Springett 2010). In TO, there are no passive spectators. Instead there are ‘spect-actors’, actively engaged in a dialogue to re-imagine reality (Blair 2010). Cohen-Cruz (2010) argues that TO allows those with no apparent power to experience agency. In a context where the contours of sexual health curricula are determined at the state and school

district levels (Bridges and Hauser 2014), where students have little to no say in what they will learn, TO offers the potential for students to reclaim agency in their education. Laughter plus agency makes a potent cocktail.

The knowledge created in a TO workshop is considered a microcosm of action to be taken in the real world, a rehearsal for real life struggles (Cohen-Cruz 2010). Given that health class is meant to prepare students for navigating sexual health in the real world, TO offers a way for students to investigate and test out their own developing ideas and identities.

In Boal's popular technique known as Forum Theatre, audience members are encouraged to think how things might be different, by entering a scene to replace the actors, thereby rehearsing strategies for responding to oppressions. Boal writes, 'In the Theatre of the Oppressed, reality is conjugated in the subjunctive mode ... [W]hat if I were to do this?' (2006, 39). This *what if* holds enormous potential for sexual health pedagogy. Students develop the tools to critically analyse their social setting, fraught with structural inequalities, and step into various situations to imagine how they might respond in a number of sexual health situations. In addition, for young people navigating their own transforming identities, the subjunctive mode of TO may also offer a liminal space to explore different identities, in relation to sexual orientation or to gender identity and expression.

### The structure of *AMP!*

Incorporating theories developed by both Uys and Boal, *AMP!* is a new approach to sexual health education designed by the UCLA Art & Global Health Center in collaboration with the HIV/AIDS Prevention Unit of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).<sup>2</sup> *AMP!* is targeted to public school ninth graders in LAUSD, serving high percentages of African-Americans and Latinos, as an augmentation of the state-mandated sexual health curriculum. The programme has also been adapted for the US South with Sex-Ed Squads at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and Emory University in Georgia. It is designed to affirm human sexuality and assist in the retention of information about HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), leading to increased self-efficacy with regard to sexual health.

In Los Angeles, *AMP!* is delivered by UCLA students, participating in a pair of ad hoc classes offered within the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance, and by HIV-positive speakers from a group called Positively Speaking, managed by the LAUSD HIV/AIDS Prevention Unit. High schools where *AMP!* is delivered already have accredited health teachers in place, but they also have demonstrated a need for supplemental education (as assessed by the Prevention Unit) (Table 1).

*AMP!* uses what is commonly called in the USA a 'near-peer' approach. University students aged 18–22 enrol in the Sex Squad course in order to create and deliver programme components to high school students only a few years younger than themselves. Sex Squad members learn about sexual health, create performance material, and gain practical experience

**Table 1.** *AMP!* programme outline.

Component	Content	Deliverers
Sex Squad show	Educational performance	University students
Rehearsal for Real Life	Forum Theatre for condom negotiation	University students
Positively Speaking	HIV-positive speakers	Speakers' bureau
Bringing Safe Sexy Back	Video followed by student-made performance/art	High School health teachers

as sexual health dialogue instigators during the Fall of each year, and then they perform in Los Angeles high schools during the winter months.

Students are recruited from the entire UCLA campus. A four-question application is posted throughout campus, passed out in classes, distributed on social media and emailed to various student groups. Students are asked to describe their artistic backgrounds, why they want to join the group, and the boldest thing that they have ever done. Students then send their brief responses via email to the instructor and the staff of the UCLA Art & Global Health Center, who collectively select the students. Members of the Sex Squad are chosen based on their passion for sexual health activism (as demonstrated by their responses), their apparent ability to speak to urgent issues facing high school students, and how their voice fits into the ‘choir’ of the group, i.e. do they have a story that cannot be told by anyone else.

Though new material is generated each year from the stories in that particular group, fidelity is maintained by ensuring that key topics are covered. These comprehensive sexual health topics were arrived at by the Art & Global Health Center through years of dialogue and reflection with community partners. While the topics are set, the students have the freedom to decide how each one will be explored. Source material comes from the students’ real lives, coaxed to the surface through theatre games and the creative process (Table 2).

After the material is created, all programme elements are vetted by the LAUSD HIV/AIDS Prevention Unit before being shared in high schools. The Prevention Unit (funded by the US Centers for Disease Control) has responsibility for maintaining effective HIV education within the district and supporting teachers to deliver health education. While high school health curricula in the USA are set by state policies, as well as by local school boards, the Prevention Unit is responsible for vetting additional material provided by any outside organisations seeking to cover HIV (and related topics) during the school day. As such, the head of the Prevention Unit views Sex Squad scenes and offers insights and a list of changes required in order for the performances to be permissible in schools. While this can sometimes feel like a form of censorship, the vetting process is an absolutely crucial component of *AMP!* In addition to providing valuable and influential feedback to Sex Squad members about their scenes, the support of the Prevention Unit makes teachers feel much safer when they invite *AMP!* into their classrooms, knowing that the district has officially sanctioned this material. Should a parent express concerns about a particular sexual health discussion, the teacher, rather than having his or her job be on the line, can refer that parent to the Prevention Unit, whose job it is to support the teacher, dialogue with the parent, and explain that the programming conforms to district guidelines. The Prevention Unit also has access to ongoing quantitative and qualitative research on the programme, which shows significant changes in knowledge and attitudes, of a sort that most parents would heartily approve of.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2.** Sex Squad guiding topics.

Topic	Description
Sexuality and sexual health	Sex-positivity, LGBT narratives, bullying
Communication and healthy relationships	Stigma reduction, consent, unhealthy relationships, talking about sex with family and friends, negotiating safer sex
Gender	Gender inequity, normalising female sexuality
HIV/STIs	Testing, transmission, stigma reduction
Contraception	Contraceptive methods, abstinence, stigma reduction
Media literacy	Awareness of media bias and inaccuracies

## Sex Squad concept and process

At the core of the Sex Squad is a celebration of storytelling in its multiple manifestations, with a high value placed on the experience of both sharing and hearing stories. Contextualised within an educational setting, this mutual sharing creates an engaging space for student-driven learning, encouraging university students to view themselves as advocates for sexual health, both within circumscribed friendship networks and within wider communities. The end result for Squad members is the affecting experience of watching their efforts exert an impact on the world around them. As Rossman points out, '[A] key law of social transformation (is): whoever works with others to create a context of change is himself transformed by that process, gains new consciousness and perspectives' (1972, 30). From our internal monitoring and evaluation, we have found that in addition to shifting high school student attitudes (Dunlap et al. [forthcoming](#); Grewe et al. 2015), the *AMP!* programme makes an especially substantial impact on the college students who deliver it (Dunlap, et al. [forthcoming](#)).

By sharing their personal stories, the college students stand in solidarity with their high school audience members. They make a case for the value of vulnerability, having shared challenging and personal stories from their own lives. This subverts the predominant ethos in traditional health classrooms, where sharing the personal experiences of the educator is seen as either irrelevant or perhaps even inappropriate or illegal. Sometimes these stories are humorous, but sometimes they are starkly serious too. (Not everything the Squad Squad does has to be funny.) The creative workshop, like the performance work the Sex Squad ultimately performs, oscillates between applauding humour and celebrating vulnerability.

Crucially, the workshop training always begins with mirth. Within minutes of meeting each other, the students are split into small groups, tasked to create a performance piece in five minutes that must include:

- one song
- one dance
- one joke that is not funny
- one hidden condom that gets revealed, and
- one compulsively humping character

This exercise typically sets off peals of laughter and establishes an important foundation of the class: that a conversation about sexual health can be funny and enjoyable. Students are physically and creatively active, collaborating in a way that uses silliness to transgress social norms. Joy and pleasure are constructed as shared parts of the human experience, appropriate and productive to discuss and experience, especially in an academic setting where sexual pleasure is being analysed. These exercises are especially critical for students of subjects such as mathematics or biology, for example, who do not identify as artists. They learn right away that they must 'kill their inner critic', the annoying internal voice that says they don't have anything important to offer on a given topic. The students create community amongst themselves through the shared experience of making art, rather than making community first, and art second.

In this playful and creative territory they are then encouraged to observe and be critical of socially constructed definitions and to imagine how they might collectively be able to change perceptions of normality. Students challenge traditional gender roles by deconstructing heteronormative patriarchy, and use humour and theatre to creatively build a queer, feminist, co-learning space to reimagine cultural norms (Butler 1990, 1998) (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Members of the UCLA Sex Squad and current director Lakhiya Hicks (top right) before an on-campus event.

After the initial meetings the instructors ask Squad members, 'what are your urgent questions about sexual health', and 'what do you need to talk about?' Responses to the latter question range from how to talk about sex with parents, peers or doctors, to gender roles and rape culture, testing for HIV/STIs and pregnancy, sexual equality and hetero-privilege. We transcribe every idea on a large flipchart, which becomes the road map for the entire creative process, inspiring various improvisational and generative theatre exercises.

Oftentimes, new Squad members are unable to fully articulate research topics that are important to them. Rather than wait for inspiration to strike, we might forego the list-making and simply dive into making a scene, depending on the creative process to reveal core issues.

### ***Sex-Ed 101***

To provide a frame for the creative process, students receive sexual health and HIV training from our university or community partners in public health, through which they learn basic information about STI transmission and prevention, as well as the socio-historical context of HIV and current trends in diseases. Importantly, this is an opportunity to pose technical questions. Having basic knowledge about disease progression and prevention is vital to build the confidence of Squad members as discussion leaders. During this process, the college students are also critically deconstructing the health curriculum that high school students receive, beginning to imagine how to remake it.

Ultimately, we recognise that technical knowledge is only one part of sexual health education, and is only valuable in dialogue with the knowledge Squad members already have about their own lives and social contexts. Textbook information becomes important only when Squad members are able to incorporate it into their own nuanced sexual health narrative. For example, rather than lecture on the five fluids that transmit HIV (blood, breast milk, vaginal fluid, pre-cum and semen), we create a 'sexaphonic choir'. Squad members are split into five groups, each one corresponding to a fluid, and they each have to come

up with a physical gesture and a way of singing that becomes an emblem for their fluid. At a cue from the conductor, they 'perform' their fluid as a group, ultimately contributing to a loud and ridiculous song (Figure 2).

This exercise seeks to shift culture and normalise sexual health language by encouraging students to shout 'vaginal fluid' and 'semen' at the top of their lungs. It also incorporates physical movement as an embodied, enjoyable and hilarious means to break apart stigma and make the five fluids more memorable (Figure 3).



**Figure 2.** Students in the Sex Squad perform the 'Sexophonic Choir', singing out the five fluids that transmit HIV along with the ninth grade audience at a Los Angeles High School.



**Figure 3.** Sex Squad students incorporate pleasure into a performance discussing safer sex.

Reducing the stigma associated with the mere discussion of sexual health and HIV is a critical goal of the Sex Squad. Meeting HIV-positive individuals to learn about their lived experience is a key strategy for accomplishing this. Many Sex Squad members report decreased HIV-related stigma simply by meeting people living with the virus, seeing the range of experiences of positive individuals and having the opportunity to ask questions that can be answered without judgement (Dunlap et al. [forthcoming](#)). The experience is a profound step towards students understanding how HIV is a part of their community.

## Script creation

The majority of the performance-making process takes place during a full weekend retreat on campus. Students convene on a Saturday morning and do not go home until Sunday evening. In between, they play games, create and develop scenes and then camp out together in the dance studio in order to do it all again the following day. Like summer camp, the weekend inevitably turns out to be a great deal of fun, a crucial element for group bonding and for the process of creative inquiry (Figure 4).

Over a 48-hour period, the Squad creates the script for a 40-minute performance by working in small groups on scenes, gathering feedback from peers and facilitators, and then going back into small groups to incorporate new ideas. Squad members also have the opportunity to present individual performance pieces and incorporate these into the group process and script, a draft of which we assemble by the end of the weekend.

The challenge for groups involved in script creation is always how to remain faithful to the spirit of play that so powerfully informs the early part of the process. As facilitators, we want to encourage the laughter from the warm-ups to continue, even as students address serious topics. We often find that students who initially embrace the invitation to be silly



**Figure 4.** Sex Squad members create sexual health superheroes during their weekend-long creative retreat.



and creative go into a more sombre place once the focus turns to the topic of sexual health and HIV. This seriousness is in part a result of the stigmatised way that we talk about these issues, and it is exactly the thing that the Sex Squad is working to deconstruct.

Reintroducing laughter into the conversation at this moment is emblematic of the Sex Squad's pedagogy. We remind the group that embracing humour sets our group apart from traditional approaches. Laughing at currently accepted norms is a form of challenging them, and allows the Squad members room to reimagine the world around them. In the past, students have used humour to affirm a diverse understanding of pleasure, including female and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) pleasure; challenge pedagogical norms; and push the class to become a queer feminist space for conversation and action. Examples from past Sex Squads illustrate this point.

Recently, one group of students decided to create a condom demonstration that highlighted female sexuality and took a proactive approach to contraception that acknowledged pleasure. Their song, written and performed by female members of the cast, remixed the popular song *Royals* by Lorde.

I wanna put a condom on your flesh  
 I wanna make your hair a mess, it makes me horny  
 But I put a value on myself  
 So if you wanna have sex, then use protection  
 So I'm talkin' bout  
 Flavored condoms sittin' on my nightstand  
 Pinch the tip and roll it on your little man  
 We don't care, we wanna be safe everywhere (UCLA Sex Squad 2015)<sup>4</sup>

At surface level the song is a bawdy and humorous song about wanting to use a condom, and sharing some of the basic steps for how to do so. In between the lines, however, it is also a bold declaration of female pleasure, both normalising and championing its existence and challenging traditional gender roles. The women singing are active subjects in the narrative who describe their own desires, sexuality and values. The women are both pursuing their own pleasure and actively maintaining their own sexual health. It is the women in the narrative who have the condoms, rather than recreating the stereotype that is the 'man's responsibility to bring them'. The song is a creative attempt by the UCLA students to respond to the persistent denigration of female pleasure noted in Fine (1988). By talking about 'female horniness,' the song introduces the idea that a positive, pro-active female sexuality can be a part of safer sex practices. The limitation of the song is that it presents a specifically heterosexual narrative, with female Squad members singing to a male character. While the piece challenges gender norms for women, in and of itself it does not push back against heteronormativity.

Another Forum Theatre scene does, however, by exploring pleasure and condom negotiation in an LGBT context. In this example, two teenage male characters are about to engage in consensual sex, but one of them, the older one, does not want to use a condom. The younger character, with less structural power due to his age, struggles to maintain the mood and convince his partner that they should use a condom. The scene is set up so that audience members can jump into the dramatic action and replace the younger character, as he tries to advocate for his health in the sexual experience.

The scene affirms the sexuality and desires of the younger male character, as he tries to pursue sexual pleasure and sexual health. While the Squad acknowledges that abstinence is

the right of any individual to choose, in this particular instance the character does not choose to be abstinent. While not being told whether to engage or not to engage in sex themselves, audience members who enter the aesthetic world of the scene are tasked with imagining themselves in that situation, exploring strategies for helping the protagonist pursue his dual goals. The expectation is not that an audience member will find a solution guaranteed to work every time (no solution does), but that the theatre exercise will spark an ongoing dialogue about how pleasure and sexual health can coexist, especially when the protagonist in the scene is dealing with someone who has more structural power than she or he does.

Extending that theme is this choreo-poem in which a female student challenges the gender double standard that makes it difficult for young women to advocate for themselves. She asks,

Tell me if I'm wrong but is there a sign over my head? Does it say, 'Please grab my ass as I pass, and thrust your genitalia at me?' Oh no, it says, 'Yes, I'd love it if you devalued me as a human.' What if I walked around grabbing every cute guy's dick yelling out, 'DAMN! That bulge is *FIIINE!*' It's funny right? I think so too. I can't go a few feet, conversations, computer clicks, or radio stations without having my worth as a female depreciated. I'm not enough or way too much and it's hard to find my worth in between.

I'd like to think I'm an empowered woman, but sometimes it's just so hard to love myself. Can you really blame me? If I'm being told to not love myself, how am I supposed to protect myself? (Mojarro 2013, 21)

In this poem, the performer asks a crucial question about empowerment, connecting self-love with self-care. She raises critical consciousness around the hypocrisy and double standard of sexism while advocating for female equality. She uses humour to point out the unfairness of what men and boys can 'get away with', and then boldly shares her personal journey to find her own power in a social system that seems to work against her. The research shows that she is not alone in this struggle. Young people's sexual behaviour has been shown to be strongly influenced by social forces, with gender expectations exerting a particularly large impact (Marston and King 2006).

## Challenges in delivering the programme

We have encountered a wide variety of challenges in implementing this programme, some of which remain ongoing. Early on, for example, we realised that the participating artists and public health professionals speak different languages, which can easily lead to misunderstandings and conflict. Our solution has been to hire a unique team member, with a background in the arts *and* a master's degree in public health, who serves as a 'translator'.

The consistent repeatability of *AMP!* has been a major concern for the public health camp. How could we measure the efficacy of the programme if the material keeps changing from year to year, or from location to location? The need for consistency is why we developed the thematic checklist, to make certain that key topics are covered regardless of the fact that the scenes and stories are ever-changing.

Even if the themes are consistent, how can we truly represent all points of view equitably on stage? Staff members handle Squad recruitment efforts and choose its members, thereby determining whose stories will be told and whose identities will be represented. This subjectivity has a large impact on how well certain topics are covered and, no doubt, greatly affects the character of the programme. Subjectivity aside, if queer communities and communities

of colour are under-represented at host universities, what is the likelihood of students from those communities coming forward to join the Squad? Along those same lines, one can be completely 'out' about one's sexuality with friends and close family members, while still finding it very difficult to perform one's sexuality in front of an audience.

Then there are the administrative hurdles, such as how to gain access to a particular health classroom if the teacher's attitudes are not aligned with the programme, or how to earn buy-in from cautious administrators. These challenges recur daily, which is why the support of the LAUSD HIV/AIDS Prevention Unit is so crucial. Their stamp of approval opens doors.

## Conclusion

If sex education were not so fraught with taboos – if, for example, it were more like a course in auto repair, a practical subject about which young people require solid information and training – we sexual health educators would not find ourselves in such a predicament. We would introduce the tools of the trade (the sexual health equivalents of the lugnut, the wrench, the jack) and show our students how to keep the 'machine' in working order. Unfortunately sex isn't viewed in such non-judgmental and practical terms, at least not in most of the world, and certainly not in the USA. Instead, it is commonly swathed in so many layers of fear and loathing that practical discussion in the classroom setting is rendered difficult if not impossible. This is true at least in part because of societal discomfort with the notion of pleasure, with the idea that sex is integrated with a wide range of sensory experiences that feel good or bad or indifferent, but that are first and foremost feelings. If we can't acknowledge the realm of sensory pleasure, then how can we learn to (metaphorically speaking) change a tire?

We offer the Sex Squad as a case study to demonstrate how humour and storytelling are being used as engaging tools to support discussions of sexual health, from what could be described as both mechanical and relational points of view. Not all humour is subversive, but when students learn how their positionality affects both the telling and interpretation of a joke, this opens up a new possibility for them: to use humour, consciously, to critically analyse and challenge the systems of power they navigate every day, toward the goal of achieving greater sexual health.

This approach to sex education has several potential implications for pedagogy. The classroom turns university students into the co-creators and deliverers of an arts-based sexual health intervention, in which their learning is framed as valuable for both themselves and the audience members for whom they eventually perform. In doing so, students might better understand their sexual health within a complex societal context, a context through which they move as active subjects with a significant voice and the power to create change. The fact that the class requires Squad members to use their own stories to create sexual health scripts means that the classroom control is shared with students, democratising the educational experience and resulting in more engaged learners.

Forum Theatre, for example, opens intense debate amongst students with differing backgrounds and morals in regards to sexual health. Rather than making it easier to hide or to mollify, Theatre of the Oppressed techniques used by the Sex Squad bring differences to the surface, heightening awareness of society's power structures, so that students might increase their collective critical consciousness.

Exploration of this approach could increase the impact of sexual health programmes targeted to various age groups, in various locations, seeking to creatively encourage critical

consciousness around issues such as pleasure and gender. Because Squad members co-direct the educational and creative processes (which we hesitate to differentiate) with their own questions and urgent issues, the content created is both context- and age-specific. We encourage educators to adapt the Sex Squad concept for their context and to share their findings.

Humour and storytelling offer a pleasurable and pleasure-filled set of experiences through which the feelings and behaviours of sexual contact are negotiated. The *AMP!* programme does not encourage students to have sex, but through laughter and narrative, students claim the chance to play-act their way through the beginning steps of sexual expression, including safer sex practices and the more holistic goal of growing into mature sexual beings.

## Notes

1. <http://artglobalhealth.org/portfolio/bssb1/>
2. *AMP!* has been funded primarily by the David and Linda Shaheen Foundation (for the programme in Los Angeles) and by the Ford Foundation (for *AMP! South*, in North Carolina and Georgia). The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation supports the full range of the programmes. UCLA, Los Angeles Unified School District, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Emory University, and Duke University have all provided institutional support. Additional financial support has been provided by AIDS Healthcare Foundation, City of Los Angeles AIDS Coordinator's Office, The Clarence and Anne Dillon Dunwalke Charitable Trust and Gilead Sciences.
3. Since 2010, *AMP!* evaluation efforts have improved from simple non-experimental pre-post surveys (Sanchez and Johnstone 2010) to quasi-experimental designs with rigorous statistical analysis methods such as Structural Equation Modeling (Taggart et al. [forthcoming](#)). Findings have shown that *AMP!* produces statistically significant changes in HIV knowledge and attitudes regarding safe sex and people living with HIV and AIDS for high school participants. For a summary of the research, see Lightfoot et al. 2015).
4. <http://artglobalhealth.org/portfolio/caya-10/>

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