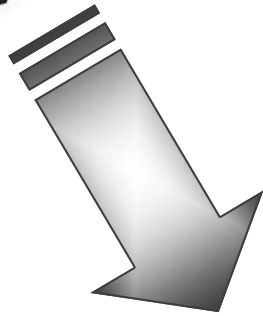


WHY US?
LEFT BEHIND AND DYING



Video Curriculum Modules



**Lesson 4: HIV –
Views of Black
Sexuality**

LEARNING WAS NEVER LIKE THIS

Lesson 4: Views of Black Sexuality

Standards:

Health:

1.12.1

1.12.2

1.12.8

2.12.2

2.12.3

2.12.5

2.12.7

2.12.8

7.12.1

8.12.1

Science:

7.1

7.5

Skills Practiced and Gained:

1.1—1.7

2.1—2.4

Overview

Views of black sexuality are often driven by stereotypes, ignorance and fear. Unfortunately, most people in the United States formulate their views through exposure to mainstream media which tends to foster historical



stereotypes and to create new stereotypes—thus perpetuating ignorance and fear. In reality, we all have more in common in terms of sex and sexuality than most people believe. More importantly, we need to understand what these misconceived views mask—for example, sexual networks which act as super highways for HIV. The video module, “*Views of Black Sexuality*,” deconstructs the misconceived views while examining the more important social factors leading to the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Key Concepts

Stereotypes about sex and sexuality

Stereotypes about the sexuality of different groups of people

Social determinants of health

Common myths about HIV and AIDS

Materials for Activities and Educator Background Knowledge

The major activities for Lesson 4 are discussions generated from the video modules and other resources you choose to include (e.g. newspapers, magazines, clips from TV shows or U-Tube, etc.) A summary of two articles on black sexuality can be found at the end of this lesson module as *Reading 4.1*.



Procedure

Part I

View “*Views of Black Sexuality*” video module. After viewing the module use the following questions to facilitate group discussion or give the questions as prompts for journal entries.



Discussion / Journal Questions

- 1) What new information did you gather from the video module?
- 2) How do views of black sexuality contribute to the high rates of HIV/AIDS in African and African American communities?
- 3) What other questions or comments do you have?

Part II

Myths about various groups thrive even today in the United States. These myths continue to influence peoples beliefs because they are entrenched in history, mass media, and social and cultural pressures. Of course, these myths are not supported by facts and data but work on innuendo and falsehoods. The following activities, Activity 4.1 and 4.2, facilitate discussion about myths and can lead to the deconstruction of these myths. The activities should be done one after the other.

Activity 4.1

Examine myths about black sexuality tendered in the video module and myths or views not offered.

- 1) Have workshop participants or students name/list views of black sexuality and the inherent myths tendered in the video module [for example, black people have more sex than other racial groups (view) hence they have less impulse control (myth)]. Are there views of black sexuality that were not included in the video module?



Part II (continued)

Activity 4.1 (continued)

- 2) Have participants/students brainstorm about why and how these views and myths became entrenched in our communal psyche—come up with various examples from the video module and other resources (newspapers, magazines, historical texts, etc.) that you provide. How do these views and myths contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS?
- 3) Have participants/students examine examples and facts that challenge these myths (research, e.g. Blacks don't have any more sex than other ethnic or racial groups, documented comparable behaviors, e.g. fraternities and sororities in comparison as predominantly White groups that exhibit high sexual activity and other risk behaviors, etc.)
- 4) How does the deconstruction of these views and myths potentially help in stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS?

Activity 4.2

Using the same process in *Activity 4.1*, have participants/students examine other views and myths about various groups. These views and myths can be about anything however now may be a good time to look at views and myths that contribute to the spread of particular disease in a particular group. Another suggestion is to examine views of sexuality in other groups that may contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS in that group.

It may be helpful to break up the larger group into small groups to examine different myths and share findings in the larger group.

Examples of views or myths may be:

- There are more Black women on welfare.
- Most East Asians are immigrants.
- Latinos do not care about education.
- Women don't have leadership skills.
- Etc.



- 1) Have workshop participants or students name/list views and myths.



Part II (continued)

Activity 4.2 (continued)

- 2) Have participants/students brainstorm about why and how these views and myths became entrenched in our communal psyche—come up with various examples from resources (newspapers, magazines, historical texts, etc.) that you provide. Why are these myths created? Who benefits from these myths? Who has influence over the existence of these myths?
- 3) (Optional) How do these views and myths contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS or another disease?
- 4) Have participants/students examine examples and facts that challenge these views and myths.
- 5) (Optional) How does the deconstruction of these views and myths potentially help in stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS or another disease?

Closure

Activity 4.3

Sometimes, people internalize myths and stereotypes. Members of particular groups may feel that they must behave in a manner which maintains these myths and stereotypes. Use the following questions to facilitate discussion or give the questions as prompts for journal entries.

- 1) Are there myths or stereotypes that you feel you must uphold? What are these myths or stereotypes?
- 2) Are these myth or stereotypes based on your ethnic, racial, gender, sexual orientation, or other group identity?
- 3) From where or from whom does the pressure to uphold these myths and stereotypes come? What are the positive and negative consequences to resisting the pressure?
- 4) Do other peers feel this same pressure? Who share these pressures, and who don't?
- 5) What might be the advantages of upholding these myths and stereotypes? What might be the disadvantages?



Reading 4.1

Race Matters. Black Sexuality: the Taboo Subject (Cornel West).

<http://www.uic.edu/las/afam/courses/aast201/>

- Americans are obsessed with sex and fear of black sexuality.

The obsession is motivated by the search for stimulation and meaning in a fast paced, market-driven culture.

The fear is grounded in visceral feelings about black bodies and fueled by sexual myths of black women and men.

According to these myths, the blacks are viewed as either having sexual power over whites or as harmless.

- Even if the number of white Americans to interact sexually *on an equal basis* with black Americans is increasing, the fundamental challenge of human interaction remains unmet.
- Demythologizing of black sexuality is connected with devaluation of black people. Slavery, institutionalized terrorism (segregation), lynching, etc., were aimed to devaluating black people and install white supremacy. Thus, white supremacy ideology is based on the degradation of black bodies to *control* them through *fear*. Demythologizing is necessary because the self-inflicted hatred and self-contempt cause many black Americans to love their own bodies.
- Acceptance and reevaluation of the black beauty and value. This gradual process took place in black social spaces (churches, mosques, schools, fraternities and sororities) and not only affirmed black humanity by supporting damaged black egos but also preserved their sanity. With other words these settings provided opportunities for black love to stay alive. One exception: black institutions *refused to engage a fundamental issue- black sexuality*.
- *Reasons*: black institutions put a premium on black survival in America. A Faustian pact was made and that assured black survival on the margins of American society.
- Social scientists have long acknowledged that interracial sex and marriage *is the most perceived source of white fear of black people*. Fear is weakness and white fear of black sexuality is a basic ingredient of white racism.
- Black sexuality is a taboo subject because *it is a form of black power over which whites have little control*. On one hand, black sexuality among blacks does not include whites and on the other hand, black sexuality between whites and blacks is founded on ground desire. This reason is very often ignored, dismissed or denied by Americans in public and laws have little control over it. *Thus, this taboo issue is rather a compromise having as purpose silencing talk about black power over whites*.
- Black male sexuality differs from black female sexuality because the black male has different self-images and strategies of acquiring power in the patriarchal structures of white America and black communities. Due to a society obsessed by sex and also to the Afro-Americanization process of white youth, the black male is viewed as desirable sexual partner versus female.



Reading 4.1

- Power is acquired by most young black by stylizing their bodies in such way to reflect their uniqueness and provide fear in others. This is a form of self-identification, resistance in a hostile white culture and maybe the reflection of a defensive system.
- *Reflection of the major stylistic option which is machismo-identity is a cause for most black gays to be marginalized in a white America and penalized in black America.*
- The status of the black lesbians is even more dramatic. *One reason is the degradation of black female heterosexuality and mainly lower economic status.*
- Consequences of challenging the taboo subject will result in sterile acknowledge and tragic psychocultural facts of American life (AIDS is one aspect).

Hearing Voices: Unearthing Evidence of Homosexuality in Precolonial Africa (Cary Alan Johnson)

Interpretation of an Akan maxim: Everyone has the right to pursue their unique destiny, and no one is a lesser person.

- African scholars have asserted that homosexuality is a Western phenomenon and not an indigenous element of African culture.
 - The purpose of this article: 1-male homosexuality has long existed within African culture (not imported but rooted in traditional African social patterns) and 2-male homosexuality and bisexuality have been viewed as acceptable sexual alternatives.
 - Knowledge of homosexual tradition in African cultures is limited by the lack of material but oral history and written documentation (mainly European and American) account it.
 - Metraux have stated that lesbian behavior in Africa was *abnormal but accepted and tolerated* on Easter Island (Blackwood, 1986).
 - Judith Gay noticed in a study of sexual play among girls and young women in Lesotho that *these relations stress privacy because of the fear of being stigmatized by outsiders* (Blackwood, 1986).
 - Among Sebei culture, homosexual behavior was considered sokoran (*illegal taboo*), but made no effort to deny transvestitism .
 - Male homosexual behavior in Africa is divided as follow:
 - 1-Type 1: between adults and youths (initiatory)
 - 2-Type 2: between men and biological males who have ``female`` or ``feminine`` male status
 - 3-Type 3: between men of different races or classes
 - 4-Type 4: between mean of equal age, status and class.
- ◇ Male-wives/ by-wives
Institutionalized intergenerational sexual contact among men is as old as civilization itself and was documented by Greek, Chinese and Byzantine materials.
- Type 1 behavior is typical to Zande, Swahili, Arab/Bantu and Siwi cultures where men and boys participated into this alliances with family approval. Boy-wives were eventually married to women , their former husband paying the bride price.
 - Type 2 behavior was common among the Bara, Bitsileo and Tanala of Madagascar and transvestitism was usual.



Reading 4.1

- *Marriage to men provided instant status and an acceptable in the community for the homosexual male.*
- ◇ **Priests, Witches, and Mediums: Spirituality and the African Homosexual**
In Southern Africa and Uganda, spirit mediums were women and most of men who experienced possession and joined the cults evidenced homosexual orientation. Possessed males dressed as women, often spoke in high-pitched tones and reported dreams that were homosexual in nature. *Membership in a spirit cult or recognition as a skilled medium was a route to social empowerment for men who couldn't or wouldn't follow traditional avenues for marriage or fathering.*
In Tanzania and Zambia homosexual relations between boys and between boys and men were considered *accepted behavior and forcing one against will in such relation was witchcraft.*
- In Nigeria, *homosexuality is cult-oriented* and is making millionaires out of those who belong to it.
- ◇ **Homosexuality and Language in Africa**
Most African cultures use words that Western linguists found equivalent as "homosexual". These words indicate some androgyny characteristics.
In Ghana, where homosexuality was familiar, there are three principles: *okra (life principle)*, *mogya (blood principle)* and *sunsum (personality principle)*. Sunsum is not an entity but a manner of being. A "light" sunsum characterizes a female and "heavy" sunsum is referred to as a female man. Similarly, males with "light" sunsum are the cowards, sexual deviants, retarded mentally are male woman.
In Lango, Nilotic agricultural people, homosexual transvestites are referred as impotents and is believed that they adopted these roles out of necessity.
- ◇ **Same-sex environment**
Traditional African systems did not have facilities for detention but the modern Africa has. These are same sex environment and consensual sex between males, homosexual prostitution and rape are common. Homosexual liaisons occur in South Africa mine camps (type 1 and 2). These relations are quite common and predicated on grounds that "mature men with authority... are entitled to regular sexual activity..." (Moddie 1989,124). These camps provide an environment in which men with homosexual behavior are able to express hidden desires.
Age-group segregation reflects type 4 behavior.
- ◇ **"In the Life": The Emergency of an African Gay Community**
Modern Western assumptions of homosexual lifestyles are antithetical to traditional African values.
The views of African leaders are slowly beginning to reflect changing attitudes toward homosexuality. The application for UN Economic and Social Committee consultative status submitted in 1991 by the International Lesbian and Gay Association was unsuccessful but was supported by Ethiopia and Lesotho.
- Men and women known to engage in homosexual behavior face significant prejudice in Africa. Most African nations have laws that prohibit sexual contact between men.
- In the last 10 years, bars frequented by African male homo/ bisexuals have existed in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Lagos, Nigeria, Nairobi. In North Africa, "hammams" or bathhouses serve as meeting grounds for homosexual and bisexual men.



Reading 4.1

- Gay and lesbian organizations are currently functioning in Ghana, Zimbabwe and South Africa.
- A pivotal role is played by the foreign gays, particularly Europeans and North Americans. The homes of Europeans serve as headquarters for homosexual nexus. Type 3 behavior emerged to service the appetite of an expatriate homosexual elite and the burgeoning tourist trade. However, homosexuality remains heavily stigmatized and those who adhere to it lead secretive lives.