ABSTRACT

Sexuality education in schools in urban India today is often perceived as ‘promoting promiscuity’, leading to ‘experimentation’ and being ‘detrimental to society’. The State and religious groups believe that sexuality education is against ‘Indian culture and values’. This heady cocktail imagines a ‘depraved’ adolescent – especially adolescent boys – at the centre, one who needs to be taught ‘restraint’, ‘abstinence’ and whose ‘natural tendencies’ are sought to be controlled. Adolescent boys are imagined to possess ‘uncontrollable sexual urges’ while adolescent girls are imagined as victims of these ‘urges’. Various organisations have advocated for comprehensive sexuality education which includes information about the body, sexual and reproductive health and rights and identities. But is that enough? Can there be a way to imagine sexuality education outside the binaries of abstinence/‘Indian values’ and comprehensive sexuality education? Simultaneously, can there be a way to rethink adolescent male sexuality outside the ‘uncontrollable urges’ paradigm? Putting these concerns together, I ask in the dissertation: how can rethinking adolescent masculinities in middle class Mumbai reveal to us the limits of sexuality education as we know it today?

I uncover the limits of sexuality education by a) examining State, feminist, Christian and sexological materials on sexuality education in Mumbai, b) by exploring adolescent male romance and its affective registers, c) by examining adolescent male sexual knowledge and d) by understanding the regulation of romance in school spaces. These allow me to point to how the feminist, Christian, State and sexological discourse, while making important contributions to the curriculum, are limited in their approach. The feminist discourse brings to the fore the social and political context of sexuality education, stressing on a Rights-based discourse; the Christian organisation brings in an extensive discussion of romance and love; the State discourse brings in the scientific and the moral discourse and the sexological discourse, while located

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1 The State has always had a conflicted relationship to sexuality education. As I shall discuss in the later sections, sexuality education has been banned in various states in India citing that the curriculum will corrupt youth and is against ‘Indian values’. In the United States, the State has been promoting sexuality education based on abstinence until marriage, as opposed to comprehensive sexuality education. Comprehensive sexuality education includes information on the body, contraception and sexual and reproductive health. It takes into account the sexuality of the adolescent and does not advise them to abstain until marriage.
within the scientific, crucially brings in a discussion of sexual pleasure. The research chooses to engage with the discourse of desire, arguing that there is a ‘missing discourse of love and romance’ within the curriculum. Examining retrospective narratives from twenty young men and reading cinematic texts, I a) re-conceptualise adolescent male desire, centring experiences of failure and ‘negative’ affects to a project of sexuality education and b) rethink the knowledge gap between the official and unofficial discourses around sexuality education, aiming to decentre the official discourse as most legitimate. Examining narratives from seven teachers and young men and women, I argue how sexuality education might be counter-productive if student romance is regulated in school spaces.

The research is located at the intersection of sexuality studies, education, masculinity studies and cultural studies. With masculinity studies beginning to contribute to our understanding of gender relations, I bring the question of masculinity to bear upon that of sexuality education. While the dissertation deals centrally with sexuality education, it does not directly address schools. Rather, it locates sexuality education in Mumbai within the complex web of the middle classes, consumerism, postfeminism, romance, adolescent masculinities and cinema.

I have interviewed twenty adult men between the ages of 18-27 because of the ethical considerations of interviewing adolescents on sexuality. Memory played a key role in their narratives. I have also interviewed three young women’s interviews, one NGO person and seven teachers. Methodologically and theoretically, I borrow from queer and feminist theory, cultural studies and discourse analysis.