

**BLENDING VOICES. STRENGTHENING LIVES.**  
2020 ATSA Conference | Friday October 23 | POSTER

**Heart Training:  
A Newly Developed Sex-Ed Model for Youth with Problematic Sexual Behaviors**

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This workshop will begin with a summary of the research regarding sex education and its use in treatment models for adolescents with problematic sexual behavior (APSB), or the lack thereof more precisely. This context forms the theoretical framework for the presentation of a newly developed model of healthy sexuality psychoeducation training for use with these youth. The HEalthy Adolescent Relationship Training (HEart) Workshop introduces a comprehensive and useful summary of a newly developed 9-week curriculum. The workshop will incorporate the use of both lecture style and interactive teaching and learning activities to facilitate audience engagement and demonstrate how the curriculum can be used in applied clinical, residential, and/or correctional settings.

Social scientist Karl Popper (1902-1994) is infamous for saying ignorance is not merely the absence of knowledge, but the refusal to acquire it. Let us not add injury to ignorance by denying youth in our care the ability to acquire such knowledge by the use of inadequate, at best, and ineffective and harmful, at worst, human sexuality curricula which have little to no research support (Dwyer & Boyd, 2009). Not in this moment, as we find ourselves in the midst of a burgeoning social movement in which we are yet again questioning gender norms and redefining masculinity for the first time, and certainly not within the context with which we work as members of ATSA. Peggy Orrenstein's groundbreaking new book, *Boys & Sex*, beautifully illustrates that without active forces (including parents, educators, advocates, treatment providers, and/or religious institutions) intervening to educate our boys, then the media (including music, pornography, pop culture, social media, peers, etc.) will do the job for us. Tragically, this job will be completed with what research has shown to be detrimental effects. Orrenstein (2020) goes on to conclude that our task then is to educate our boys, that is, to provide them with the knowledge to acquire a more healthy and realistic portrayal of sexual relationships and the consequences associated with violating these boundaries. We, as members of ATSA, treatment providers and researchers alike, have even more responsibility in this task. In many ways, we may be called to over educate our boys in these settings, particularly correctional and/or residential facilities. And yet the state of research in this area and with these populations is quite lacking. The availability of evidence-based models designed specifically for use with these populations and in these settings is, sadly, even more lacking.

We know men who operate out of a sense of frustration & entitlement account for more sexual assaults than most other subsegments of men and/or boys (Orrenstein, 2020). These are the boys in our care often – the socially isolated, the socially rejected, the boys who still have normal sexual needs to fulfill and meet, but who often lack the social skills and social frameworks needed to accomplish these key adolescent developmental tasks (Barbaree & Marshall, 2008; Seto & Lalumiere, 2010). Worse yet, not only are they not being taught healthy sexuality by the so-called “active forces” described above which should be intervening, rather we know they are more often being socialized in the dark corners of the internet to which they have either been forced or have sought as place of refuge possibly (Orrenstein, 2020). This is the context that sets the task before us, the “active forces” of researchers and treatment providers working with APSB. With the lack of available resources identified above, this can leave many treatment providers in these settings

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feeling lost, not sure what signifies best-practices in this area and how to find these curricula for use in their programs.

In 2017, ATSA published treatment recommendations for working with APSB which highlights the need for healthy sexuality training. Beyond that, more broadly, the recommendations suggest the general treatment milieu take a wholistic approach with a socioecological framework including individual, family, and group therapeutic formats. Based on the current state of research detailed above, it would appear very few, if any, healthy sexuality curricula designed for use with these types of youth in these settings would meet this high standard of care. A lack of curricula specific to this population leaves most treatment providers using a standalone comprehensive sex education curriculum designed for use in general populations and typically designed to be used in educational settings. While these curricula have been well-researched in the settings there designed for, they have not yet been well-researched for use with APSB in residential and/or correctional settings. Furthermore, these curricula often lack information about sex laws and lack nuanced, if any, discussions on harmful masculinity, rape myths, consent, pornography and its effect on sexual behavior and attachment, and masturbation, all of which would be critical elements for a curriculum designed specifically for use with APSB.

The current workshop will present such a curriculum as well as preliminary results from a pilot study implementing the model at a residential facility for adolescents adjudicated for illegal sexual behavior. Results from group qualitative surveys and pre/post-test assessment of students' acquisition of skills and knowledge from the group will be presented. Attendees will be given the skills and basic framework to begin implementing and testing results at their own facilities. Future directions for incorporating group psycho-sexual education specifically for family sessions to increase family involvement will be discussed.

**Kelli R. Thompson** is an Assistant Research Professor and Director of the Juvenile Delinquency Lab in the Department of Psychology at Auburn University. Her current research interests include the developmental pathways of delinquent behavior and the assessment, treatment-related outcomes, and public policy issues facing justice-involved youth with illegal sexual behavior problems.