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INOVAÇÕES PEDAGÓGICAS *ONLINE* ENQUANTO ÉTICA EDUCACIONAL: FORMAÇÃO MEDIADA DA IDENTIDADE JUVENIL EM EDUCAÇÃO SEXUAL

ONLINE PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATIONS AS EDUCATIONAL ETHICS: YOUNG PEOPLE'S MEDIATED IDENTITY WORK IN SEXUALITY EDUCATION

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Resumo: Como uma contribuição ao campo mais amplo da ética educacional, o presente artigo examina a sexualidade como parte integral da formação identitária e as adaptações ao ensino remoto como uma importante ferramenta. Por meio de uma abordagem multi-metodológica, que integra etnografia e análise de conteúdo, investigamos o vínculo entre identidade e mídia digital e sua importância para o bem-estar social, emocional e sexual de crianças e adolescentes. Examinamos o estudo de caso da inclusão no currículo escolar de um programa de educação sexual integral (*Our Whole Lives/OWL*) durante os anos críticos à construção identitária. Porém, as restrições de isolamento social impostas durante a pandemia de Covid-19 interromperam os usuais processos sociais pelos quais muitos jovens amadureciam, exacerbando as dificuldades já existentes em oferecer educação sexual (uma arena importante para a formação identitária), uma vez que muitas escolas e organizações comunitárias deixaram de priorizá-la ou até de ensiná-la durante esse período de crise. Procuramos entender como a formação identitária de jovens através da mídia social pode se beneficiar de inovações pedagógicas usando recursos digitais para a educação sexual. Os resultados incluem a formação identitária de jovens no contexto da mídia social, a alfabetização midiática, recursos online, o uso da mídia social para a divulgação de conteúdos, a contestação de estereótipos, e o pensamento crítico e ético. Articulando esses resultados, o nosso trabalho mostra como as inovações tecnológicas podem fazer uso de ferramentas digitais no enfrentamento de desafios emergentes graças às modalidades de aprendizado remoto. Em conclusão, reunimos nossos *insights* em forma de diálogo, oferecendo uma análise do conceito de 'co-responsabilização solidária'.

Palavras-chave: Aprendizagem Remota/à Distância; Pedagogias Digitais; Educação Sexual Abrangente; Adaptação Tecnológica; Abordagem Crítica e Ética

Abstract: Contributing to the wider field of educational ethics, this work examines sexuality as an integral part of identity formation and remote educational adaptations as an important delivery mechanism. Using a multi-method approach with ethnography and content analysis, the article probes the important linkages between identity and digital media for young people's social, emotional, and sexual well-being. The article examines the case study of offering Our Whole Lives (OWL) comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) curricular adaptations during critical years for identity work. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the typical social processes through which many young people had come of age were disrupted by lockdowns and stay-at-home orders. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing difficulties of offering sexuality education, an important arena for identity work that was further compromised when many public schools and community

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organizations deprioritized or ceased teaching it during this time of crisis. This research examines how young people's mediated identity work may benefit from pedagogical innovations using digital resources for sexuality education. Findings include young people's identity work in relation to social media presence, media literacy, online resources, media messaging, contesting stereotypes, and ethical and critical thinking. Across these findings, the research shows how pedagogical innovation can harness digital tools to meet emergent challenges thanks to modalities offered by remote learning. The article closes by bringing these insights together to put them in dialogue with an analysis of the concept of "compassionate co-accountability."

Keywords: Virtual/Remote/Distance Learning; Digital Pedagogies; Comprehensive Sexuality Education; Pedagogical Innovation; Educational Ethics

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND: SEXUALITY IDENTITY WORK AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Late 2019 and early 2020 marked the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. In attempts to stymie the spread of the virus and the deaths it was causing, schools and other public and private entities across the United States shuttered their doors beginning in February (Decker; Peele; Riser-Kositsky, 2020). Schools transitioned traditional curricula to online delivery platforms, and not without difficulties, as instructors and students had to rapidly learn digital skills, impacting especially those students who were digitally marginalized (Robinson; Moles; Schulz, 2023), initiating a new period of study for scholars of youth and digital media to which additional attention is needed in understudied areas including identity and relationship formations, digital cultures, and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) (Pinsky, 2022).

During the uneven transition to digital learning and operations during the pandemic, many schools and community organizations paused or ceased sexuality education programming due to difficulties with distance learning modalities, decreased personnel, and re-prioritization of other issues (Rolleri Insignares; Bass; Taverner, 2021, p. 439; Scriver, 2023, p. 370; Cahalan; Carpenter, 2023). Not only was sexuality education in U.S. public schools deprioritized during the pandemic, but many schools have not offered evidence-based, developmentally-appropriate, and medically accurate sexuality education due, in part, to a politically charged climate, mis/disinformation, and a dearth of teacher training and funding for health education programing (Rolleri Insignares; Bass; Taverner, 2021, p. 439; Cahalan; Carpenter, 2023; Szucs *et al*., 2022).

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However, other educational programs, such as the one in this study, forged ahead into the digital realm to meet the needs of young people as the pandemic progressed. This work was imperative as it not only pushed back against the demotion of sexuality education, but also provided a lifeline for young people's identity work during a time of great crisis. Given that sexuality composes part of young people's identity formation (Goldfarb; Lieberman, 2016, p. 218), these efforts to "go digital" were vital for young people as CSE is key to overall social, emotional, and sexual well-being, including leadership, communication, empowerment, and relational skills, school-based outcomes, and other agentic capacities and skills (Ediae; Chikwe; Kuteesa, 2024; LaVanway, 2023; Goldfarb; Lieberman, 2021). Therefore this research, delineates how offering digital opportunities for CSE based on the OWL curriculum provided benefits crucial to helping young people form identities as ethical sexual agents. As we will see, moving CSE online in appropriately curated experiences can provide positive benefits for young people's overall health, well-being, and relationships to others (Lameiras-Fernández *et al*., 2021; Scriver, 2023).

Moreover, given rapid technological advances, especially young people's sexualties and relationships co-exist within the digital sphere in ways that reproduce and challenge "normative" conceptions of identities including gender, sexuality, relationships, and other intersectional and related aspects; the on- and off- line identity spheres bleed into or commingle with one another. The digital cannot be divorced from socialization processes for most youth in advanced economies. The internet and related technologies are integrated into the everyday lives and identities of contemporary teens with 96% reporting daily internet use, 95% reporting access to a smartphone, and nearly twice as many teens reporting "almost constantly" being online when compared to 2014-2015 (46% verses 24%) ("Teens and Internet," 2024). Teens recognize positive and negative aspects of such online connectivity and smartphones. For instance, around two-thirds of teens note smartphones enable creativity and the cultivation of interests while 31% say these same devices hinder the development of healthy friendships and 42% believe smartphones inhibit learning social skills (Anderson; Faverio; Park, 2024). Scholars studying young people, identity, and digital cultures have long recognized how digitally mediated activities are critical to understanding how young people engage in

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identity work (Marôpo; Sampaio; Miranda, 2017; Cover, 2019; Tsaliki, 2022; Hällgren; Björk, 2023).

Thus, there is a need for CSE curricula to include discussions of digitally mediated spaces as well as digital/media literacy vis-a-vis identity work. Topics related to ethical digital engagement might include young people's frequent use of social media, online etiquette and safety, more pernicious verses more inclusive online spaces, the trustworthiness of various information sources, dating and relationships in the digital era, the accessibility of sexually explicit content – and how each of these may reproduce and/or challenge social norms – and more (Rolleri Insignares; Bass; Taverner, 2021; Marston, 2020; Marston, 2022; Levine, 2017). Indeed, some sexuality educators responded to the pandemic by incorporating topics related to sexuality and technology (Cahalan; Carpenter, 2023).

Though the pandemic has presented additional obstacles for CSE, it has also offered opportunities for pedagogical creativity, including curricular changes and using digital platforms for opportunities for young people to grow in their identity work. Digital and blended learning regarding human sexuality has already shown promise (Lameiras-Fernández *et al*., 2021; Olamijuwon; Odimegwu, 2022; Marston, 2022; Levine, 2017; Oosterhoff; Müller; Shephard, 2017). Exploring how a particular CSE curriculum, *Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education* (hereafter OWL), addresses digital technology-related topics and was adapted to the pandemic is therefore fruitful for educational administrators, instructors, and communities committed to providing CSE in the digital age and in times of crises for this critical facet of youth identity formation.

Finally, as the literature review indicates, while valuable, studies to date do not adequately address remote sexuality education curricular adaptations, particularly related to youth identity work. There is a need to examine facilitator curricula, pedagogy, delivery, and reception as well as online resources for virtual education (Scriver, 2023; Cahalan; Carpenter, 2023) as part of educational ethics that advocates for ethical approaches, policies, and practices in schools and beyond. Sexuality education scholars have argued that offering CSE is a human rights and ethical imperative given that it is key to human development. To help meet these needs, this article examines how OWL educators pivoted to offer versions of OWL in digital spaces

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in response to the pandemic as a public health emergency. As the analysis makes clear, social media presence is an important vehicle to share information and resources, including those that can help mitigate emotional discomfort when discussing sexuality with young people. At the same time, social media is important to critically analyze as part of media literacy as is awareness of media bias. Because self-conceptions develop through self-reflection and relationships with others, and both of these can be impacted by media messaging, it is crucial to critically and ethically reflect on stereotypes about sexuality and the body. Based on the analysis of probing the contours of OWL, I close this article by theorizing what I call "compassionate co-accountability." This conceptual framework helps explain the success of pedagogical approaches taken by educators and engendered by CSE curricula such as OWL in facilitating identity work.

2 DATA AND METHODS

The data for this article comes from a larger body of data based on ethnographic participant observation and content analysis. While the emphasis in this article is on digital resources, the data here is based on long-term participant observation in which I was formally trained as an instructor in the OWL program and taught the curriculum formally as an instructor to young people in the age range specified in this research. My ethnographic data collection included participant observation and informal interviews with young people, their parents, and other educators and members of the organization. In addition, I undertook a secondary methodological strategy of content analysis during the pandemic in which I compared pre- and post-COVID content and pedagogical techniques, particularly their digitization. This multi-method approach thereby gives me ethnographic authority (Clifford, 1983) to analyze first-hand accounts of the impact of the program on young people's identity processes, as well as the digitization of OWL pedagogies.

3 CASE STUDY

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Researchers familiar with OWL have noted it as one of the most inclusive and affirming CSE curricula (Perry n.d.; Lopez, 2011; Moles, 2016). The OWL series includes seven different curricula, including grades K-1, 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12, followed by young adults, adults, and older adults. There are varied numbers of workshops available for the kindergarten through middle school curricular components as follows:

Curriculum	Number of Workshops
K-1	8
4-6	10
7-9	25

Ideally, treatments of OWL would be based on a content analysis of OWL's elementary and secondary school levels, that is, the kindergarten through high school components. This choice reflects the focus on youth and identity formation, although adult sexuality education is also important. Readers who are not familiar with education in the U.S. may note that education for young people is called Kindergarten to 12th grade education or "K-12" that is free and open to all through what in American English is called a "public school education" system. The U.S. grade school classification system consists of primary, middle, and secondary education for children approximately five to eighteen years old. Children begin with elementary school, first attending kindergarten, followed by first through fifth or sixth grade. Middle school or junior high is fifth or sixth through eighth grade. High school is ninth through twelfth grade (see https://www.ed.gov and https://www.gao.gov/k-12-education).

Looking ahead, once the updated version of grades 10-12 is released, future analysis will wish to include it. The version released 25 years ago does not accurately reflect the technological changes which have occurred over the last quarter century. As this indicates, there is a fruitful opportunity to proceed with a similar analysis for grades 10-12 upon release that takes advantage of this article's examination of grades K-1, 4-6, and 7-9.

Related content and materials reviewed are those also created by OWL experts and available online, including websites; webinars; videos; documents; online posts (X,

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Facebook); and additional curricular updates. This content analysis serves a two-fold purpose: to examine how OWL covers topics related to youth identity work in the digital age and ethics as well as how it has been adapted for distance learning using technology, which is already central to how young people explore their identities. The analysis uses ethnographic thick description (Geertz, 1973) to offer detailed ethnographic data on OWL as a comprehensive curriculum, as well as how OWL addresses digital-related topics relevant to youth sexuality followed by how it pivoted during the COVID-19 crisis.

4 SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR IDENTITY WORK

OWL has adapted to the digital age by maintaining a social media presence on Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter) with fairly frequent posts on sexuality-related topics and OWL events as well as by updating the curriculum series itself (see https://www.facebook.com/ourwholelives/ and https://x.com/ourwholelives). There are different purchasing options for each curriculum, including a looseleaf version that enables corrected pages and updates to be incorporated on an ongoing basis instead of waiting for an updated version of a full curriculum to be released in a book-format. These updates and other helpful resources are found on the "Our Whole Lives Facilitator Resources" webpage. The grades K-1 curriculum explains that "families have different preferences for viewing and sharing information," so OWL provides a digital format for take-home activities which "makes the material accessible to those who use screen readers or other accessibility software, as well as those who may prefer the format for other reasons" and these resources are either "emailed each week or posted at a secure online location and a link to them sent out by email" (Solo; Miller, 2024). This curriculum also provides helpful online resources for caregivers, as do the other curricula in the series that also include online resources for youth.

OWL begins to address identity work by taking an ethical approach to explore gendered and biased media messages in the grades 4-6 curriculum as a follow-up HomeLink assignment to the first workshop, "Sexuality and Values" (deFur; Johnson, 2023). The assignment poses questions for parents to ask their children to foster dialogue about what kinds of people they want to be and activities they engage in and

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why. The second workshop, “Images in Popular Culture,” and HomeLink assignment aid students to develop their media literacy skills for probing their identities by using an intersectional lens to reflect on media representations of sexuality—including racialized, gendered, and able-bodied ones—as well as how their personal sexual values may differ from media portrayals. Media is broadly defined to include “all the tools people use to communicate in order to learn, keep informed, socialize, play, etc. Some examples are books, movies, video and online games, TV, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms” (deFur; Johnson, 2023, p. 22). Workshop three, “Body Image,” and the HomeLink assignment incorporate critical discussions of media depictions of bodies, how these might affect self-esteem, and how to build and/or maintain a positive body image, which can be critical to positive identity work.

Addressing a major period of rapid change for young people, it is noteworthy that workshop four, “Changes of Puberty,” instructs facilitators to advise youth that if they do not feel comfortable talking to an adult about bodily or other related changes in how they see and experience themselves, they may consult online educational sites or support groups such as “Scarleteen (scarleteen.com), the Genderqueer and Non-Binary Identities website (genderqueerid.com), or Mermaids (mermaidsuk.org.uk)” (deFur & Johnson, 2023, p. 40). By normalizing these identity options, the OWL curriculum provides healthy spaces for young people to engage in deep and reflective identity work.

In the eighth workshop, “Decisions and Actions,” participants continue to critically think about their self conceptions in dialogue with various media and other messages about sexuality that they encounter, as well as how this media messaging might relate to their own sexual decision-making. This unit includes critical attention to sexually explicit images. Workshop nine, “Consent and Peer Pressure,” facilitates student dialogues about different forms of on- and off- line communication, and practice responding to various scenarios that might arise. There are opportunities for discussions of, and helpful advice for facilitators related to, media and technology in other workshops if participants raise the issue or it prompts further discussion of their self-identities.

The curriculum for grades 7-9 offers an optional activity to reflect on how media messaging affects self-conception beginning with the very first workshop, “What is Sexuality?” (Wilson, 2024). Participants create a collage using magazines in teams and then reflect on the sexuality-related messages they found, including gender, sexual, racial, and able-bodied ones. Workshop six, “Body Image,” offers at least two different optional activities from which to choose where participants “investigate media messages about beauty, attractiveness, and body image,” such as digitally enhanced images in advertisements and other media sources (Wilson, 2024, p. 88). In the twelfth workshop, “Healthy Relationships,” there are opportunities to reflect on power dynamics, signs of health or unhealth and expectations around sharing online communications with a partner and posting pictures of others online. There is also an optional activity in which participants discuss film representations of characters’ relationships and their levels of health. Workshop thirteen, “Relationship Skills,” provides an optional activity, “Tech Communication Challenge” that compares in-person to digital communication for an imagined break-up. Exploring these topics and hypothetical scenarios are critical for intentional identity formation.

OWL dedicates workshop fourteen, “Sexuality, Social Media, and the Internet,” to aiding critical and ethical thinking around online and social media experiences and “how to behave in an informed, intentional way that will allow them to have fun and stay safe” through a variety of activities (Wilson, 2024, p. 221). The following workshop fifteen, “Bullying and Witness Responsibilities,” continues the conversation of online ethical behaviors by directly addressing cyberbullying as a topic, including intervention strategies. In workshop seventeen, “Partnered Sexual Activity,” participants have opportunities to critically examine various media messages of partnered sexual activity. Workshop eighteen, “Consent Education,” offers an optional activity to explore themes of consent in songs as well as potential responses to requests for unclothed photos of a partner. The twentieth workshop, “Pregnancy, Parenting, and Teenage Parenthood,” provides an optional activity for participants to reflect on their views of how the MTV show, Teen Mom, depicts teen parenting through question prompts. Workshop twenty-two, “Contraception and Safer Sex,” has an optional activity to create a public service announcement related to contraception for their peers. Overall, OWL provides ample

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opportunities to critically think about the intersections of identity work, ethics, sexuality, relationships, and the digital sphere.

5 OWL ADAPTS TO THE PANDEMIC WITH REMOTE LEARNING RESOURCES AND MODALITIES

While some OWL facilitators suspended their teaching due to a myriad of pandemic-related concerns and challenges, others were able to shift to distance learning (Cahalan; Carpenter, 2023, p. 558, 562, 554). After a temporary pause, OWL experts provided digitally accessible directions and guidelines for modification and supplementary resources to allow for a version of the program to resume online for facilitators able to do so. OWL experts launched the "OWL (Our Whole Lives) Taking Flight" YouTube webinar series that now includes 40 publicly available videos (at the time of writing) beginning in early June 2020. These webinars directly address how to offer online versions of the curriculum as well as how parents can address human sexuality with their children to support them in their identity work. The series is designed for OWL trainers, facilitators, and caregivers. It opens by discussing the challenges, opportunities, concerns, questions and suggestions for restarting an OWL program that has been affected by the pandemic. While the webinars in general (and other resources analyzed) are tailored to United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalist Association congregations and members—since these religious organizations developed OWL and are where it has mainly been taught—the advice and resources are applicable to and/or can be modified for, secular settings. The curriculum is designed for use in both secular and faith settings as both are spaces where young people engage in identity formation.

An example webinar is, "K-1 Revisions & What to Do While We Wait: OWL (Our Whole Lives) Taking Flight," which addresses updates to the K-1 curriculum and how parents at home can customize suggested resources. These resources include websites such as amaze.org which offers videos and resources for parents to gain skills and confidence to discuss sexuality or share with their children. In another webinar, "New Ideas about Intimacy During a Pandemic: OWL (Our Whole Lives) Taking Flight," viewers

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gain ideas about how to converse with young people for whom social media is a key component for dating, maintaining, and ending relationships.

Additional sexuality-related topics addressed by the YouTube series include (but are not limited to) racial justice, gender-based language and violence, trauma-informed sexuality education, contraception and STIs, sexual health, consent, pleasure, how to frame dialogues around relaunching OWL programs and trainings in person versus online adaptations, how to build safe and inclusive spaces, how to engage OWL curricular values on remote communication platforms, what worked and what did not in virtual and in-person settings, addressing advocacy in the face of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, disability inclusion, inclusive resources, online resources, ongoing curricular revisions and updates for various age cohorts, current events and social trends, the importance of continuing education for sexuality educators, child safety and mandatory reporting, sexual identity, transgender youth and gender diversity, mental health awareness, reproductive justice, parent orientation tips, and more. Another shorter OWL video series, "Under Your Wing," debuted in early February 2022 specifically for parents of young children to assist with teaching about bodies, gender, body boundaries, families, how babies begin, pregnancy, babies, and disabilities. All of these foci implicitly model different identities and the nature of growth in identity formation across the life course.

Another resource created in response to the pandemic is a downloadable PDF entitled, "When You Can't Do OWL—Do This!" updated March 2022. Starting with grades K-1, this document offers guidance for caregivers as primary sexuality educators, including activities, ideas, books and resources as well as links and references to the aforementioned OWL webinars and video series. The document also offers detailed guidelines to adapt OWL for online use for grade levels 4-6, 7-9, and 10-12, including outlines for each workshop with directions to assist facilitators using a distance learning platform. The guidelines also include requiring a parent orientation, establishing a group agreement for respectful online interactions, changing the program name since the modification would not be a field-tested version, shortening the program and session time, focusing on values and decision-making, and online safety and privacy as they relate to young people engaged in learning about their identities.

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In terms of providing caretakers "support and skills to be effective…in their role as their children's primary sexuality educators" and building "comfort in talking about sexuality-related topics" and self-reflection, there is a downloadable curricular guide for facilitators (Slaw, 2021). This guide is for parents of youth in elementary school through high school; it includes detailed instructions for conducting twelve sessions, post-session exercises, and/or conversation starters for caregivers to engage their children at home and suggested resources. While there are opportunities for discussions of sexuality in the digital age to emerge during the sessions, a few sessions are dedicated to this topic. For example, session nine, "Social Media: Integrity in a Changing World," encourages adults to reflect on their own attitudes and fears related to social media, why youth find social media important, and how adults may support youth to engage "social media as an arena that offers children and youth opportunities to learn how to behave thoughtfully, considerately, and respectfully" (Slaw, 2021). An accompanying webinar, part of the "Taking Flight" series, describes the program and provides tips for online use in fostering young people's identity journeys.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

This article provides an examination of how Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education (OWL), a comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) curriculum, addresses identity work, ethics, the internet, and technology in the digital age. It also analyzes how OWL experts provided additional resources and suggestions to supplement and modify the curriculum for distance learning during the pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis exacerbated intersectional disparities, gaps in reproductive care and access, mental health issues, and various forms of trauma—including digital-related traumas—which is why research suggests CSE should incorporate intersectional social justice, reproductive justice, mental health and trauma-informed lenses and approaches (Rolleri Insignares; Bass; Taverner, 2021; Chiaraluce *et al*., 2024). OWL, and the related OWL resources available online, incorporate these lenses and approaches to more or less extents and in various ways.

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Suggested OWL adaptations and resources also align with many of the suggestions in the current literature related to the pandemic and providing remote sexuality education (Rolleri Insignares; Bass; Taverner, 2021; Scriver, 2023). In so doing, the analysis offers an important example of how OWL experts created resources and suggested adaptations to an analogue CSE curricula for the virtual sphere in a time of crisis and beyond. This contribution helps fill an important need as there is limited literature on remote sexuality education curricula, pedagogy, delivery, and reception (Scriver, 2023; Cahalan; Carpenter, 2023).

In addition, the kind of support for identity growth offered by OWL has implications in a number of areas. Two of the ongoing related concerns and challenges for remote sexuality education students and facilitators are privacy and confidentiality due to the uniquely sensitive nature of the topics where identity formation can be particularly sensitive. To be sure, some participants who have access to private spaces in their homes report feeling more comfortable and/or engaged, but for those who do not, the domicile can make engagement with the online content more difficult with the presence of other family members, obligations, and/or online accessibility issues (Scriver, 2023; Cahalan; Carpenter, 2023). Rolleri Insignares, Bass, and Taverner (2021, p. 449) provide helpful techniques for increasing privacy, including headphone use, strategically turning cameras on/off, and opportunities to engage without talking (such as through chats, polls, reactions features, etc.).

OWL requires a parent orientation where caretakers sign confidentiality agreements; however, the suggestion to use parental and/or group agreements could extend beyond the class and parents to include other family members in the home. OWL already provided opportunities to create group agreements around some aspects of the program, which research suggests can engender trust in face-to-face and online groups (Moles, 2017; Moles *et al*., 2024). To help facilitate adequate spaces for self-reflection, facilitators should keep privacy and confidentiality issues in mind, and check in regularly with students about these, and any other concerns or challenges they might have, coming up with flexible and creative solutions when possible. For instance, while some youth might feel more comfortable emailing some of the work, others might feel reluctant if this method lacks security for them. Finally, as digital media evolves, it is

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important that the online program ensures digital privacy standards to the best of its ability.

7 SYNTHESIS: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Related to this, remote education has compounded and exacerbated existing disparities; however, it also has created new opportunities for inclusion, equalization, and stigma reduction, essential components of identity. This is especially important for "traditionally underrepresented groups" where distance learning provides "new avenues for institutional inclusion of particular value for those who suffer the most from bias, stigma, and/or discrimination in face-to-face institutional settings" (Robinson & Reisdorf, 2024). U.S. public schools in general (including pre-schools), and most public school sexuality education programs in particular, reproduce various forms of inequality and bias as well as erase and/or disparage non-"normative" identities (LaVanway, 2023; Lameiras-Fernández *et al*., 2021; Meyer, 2022; Campbell; Löfgren-Mårtenson; Martino, 2020; O'Quinn; Fields, 2020; Moles, 2020, p. 70-71).

There is potential for remote sexuality education to help "level the playing field for students, making the space more approachable and virtual guests feel more integrated into the classroom" (Scriver, 2023, p. 365). More research is needed on how such sexuality education, a critical facet to human identity formation, may provide more inclusive and welcoming spaces, of particular benefit to already marginalized youth.

A silver-lining of the Covid-19 pandemic is breaking open an aperture for new pedagogical horizons, including offering CSE remotely for young people's growth and self-realization. These new opportunities are important given that the U.S. has been embroiled in ongoing political debates over how and what to teach young people regarding sexuality, which has created roadblocks to teaching CSE in public schools (LaVanway, 2023). Yet, there has been consistent overwhelming public support for, at the very least, sexual health education, as well as clear evidence for the effectiveness of, and young people's preference for, CSE (Szucs *et al*., 2022; Lameiras-Fernández *et al*., 2021; Goldfarb; Lieberman, 2021). This research suggests that including media literacy and the ethical use of digital platforms and technology is beneficial, components

that OWL addresses. There is also suggestive evidence for the effectiveness and benefits of remote sexuality education, which is in-line with the ubiquity of technology already integrated into young people's lives (Lameiras-Fernández *et al*., 2021) as the vehicle through which they engage in such critical identity work.

8 EDUCATIONAL ETHICS: THEORIZING "COMPASSIONATE CO-ACCOUNTABILITY"

In addition to showing the inclusive benefits of remote education, the article also highlights that future research is therefore needed that capitalizes on this article's contributions to current understanding of self-conceptualization, self-realization, and other foci in identity formation for young people. To push the field forward in these ways, future scholarship can take advantage of replicable strategies revealed by the analysis of digital media in identity formation for young people. As the findings make clear, social media presence should be analyzed as a vehicle for information and resource dissemination as well as for its impact on self-conception. Related to this, resources important in identity processes are most useful when viewed with skilled media literacy that exposes media bias which promotes stereotypes regarding sexuality, ideal body types, and other related issues.

Young people's self-conceptions develop in dialogue with the self and relationships with others—in both face-to-face and digital settings—such that, across modalities, these relationships can promote healthy identity exploration with what I theorize as "compassionate co-accountability." This concept takes a virtue ethics approach to shaping learning spaces to offer important opportunities for compassion between all interlocutors. Such courage (Moles *et al*., 2024) comes from normalizing a learning environment in which all participants' identities and levels of knowledge are valid. When this is established, all members can feel brave enough to be vulnerable and openly "stumble" as they learn together about self-conceptions, especially salient when exploring sensitive topics such as sexual identity and/or expression.

When this occurs, students and educators are more likely to be willing to make "mistakes" while learning from one another because they know that they will be held "compassionately co-accountable" to one another. That is, they co-construct a learning

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community in which educators and learners can feel supported in their identity sharing and learning because they know that uncertainties, vulnerabilities, and open admissions of lack of knowledge are viewed as apertures for learning. Compassionate co-accountability turns awkward or tense moments into opportunities for growth as young people in particular practice articulating their own questions, identities, experiences, feelings, and even disagreements in ways that are productive for everyone involved.

Future work would do well to map out additional uses of compassionate co-accountability. By normalizing the ability to discuss difficult topics such as sexuality, young people build comfort with uncomfortable topics and shared awkward moments, including how to turn missteps into learning opportunities instead of reasons to "cancel" one another (something young people have articulated being fearful of). "Compassionate co-accountability" is a concept worthy of further exploration for identity work in school, at work, and beyond.

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