How Gay and Bisexual Men Compensate for the Lack of Meaningful Sex Education
Joseph M. Currin, PhD1; Randolph D. Hubach, PhD, MPH2; Andre R. Durham, MEd2; Katherine E. Kavanaugh, MS2; Zachary Vineyard2; Julie M. Croff, PhD, MPH2
1Texas Tech University; 2Oklahoma State University

Introduction
The information shared in schools on sex education in the USA is highly variable depending on the state and sometimes city in which a student lives. Sex education is mandated in 24 states and the District of Columbia (DC), and HIV education is mandated in 34 states and DC (Guttmacher Institute 2017). However, the information shared with students varies widely depending on the socio-political environment of the state. The result of this variability is that some students receive little to no pertinent information on sexual health and sexuality, especially on information pertaining to sexual minorities (Estes 2016). The lack of inclusive sex education that discusses all aspects including same-sex behaviors and relationships, can lead to a higher number of higher risk sexual behaviors (e.g. condomless sex) among gay, lesbian and bisexual (LGB) students (Blake et al. 2001). Yet in many socio-politically conservative states in the USA, like Oklahoma, instructors are prohibited from discussing same-sex behavior except that it is “considered responsible for contact with the AIDS virus” (Guttmacher Institute 2017). The current study sought to assess the quality and type of sex education that was offered to gay and bisexual men who grew up and currently reside in Oklahoma, a socially and politically conservative rural state. Oklahoma has been identified as a state that does not provide basic equality to gay and bisexual men (Human Rights Campaign 2017). This environment presents a unique opportunity to assess how gay and bisexual men compensate for the lack of inclusive sex education and sexual health information in a socio-politically conservative environment.

Methods
• An online survey of 112 gay and bisexual men who live in Oklahoma were prompted to provide a few statements about their experiences with formalized sex education. The majority of the participants (58, 51.8%) reported receiving no formalized sex education. While not specifically prompted, 42 of the 58 (72.4%) provided statements indicating how they compensated for this lack of formalized sex education.
• To assess how similar men compensated for the lack of effective formalized sex education, 20 gay and bisexual men currently residing in a socially and politically conservative state completed a semi-structured interview that explored their experiences with formalized sex education and alternate ways to compensate for lack of information provided.
• Participants were eligible to be interviewed if they were born male, were proficient in speaking English, were over the age of 18, and identified as a man who has sex with men.
• Interview data from this study were analyzed using a qualitative approach to inductively identify and interpret concepts and themes that emerged from the interview transcripts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Results
Theme 1: Discussing Sex is Shameful and Stigmatizing (n = 18)
I think for me personally it was that my parents never talked to me about sex. Umm, just like never. There was just never anything to be talked about … I think that’s where it’s – for me it’s like it’s always been this weird thing that’s never been talked about. And so I’m like, ‘How do I talk about it?’

Theme 2: Inadequate Sex Education When Provided (n = 11)
I went to a private Christian school so it was just kind of one of those things, that it was just assumed that you weren’t having sex.

Theme 3: Motivated to Seek Alternate Resources for Sex Education
Subthemes: From Peers (n = 12), Internet and Other Visual Media (n = 6)
I wasn’t for the internet; I would have never known anything. It was – oh my god, it would have been porn! Yeah, The internet and in person!

Discussion
• Gay and bisexual men seek out other forms of sexual health information to compensate for the heteronormative and AQUIM sex education they received as students living in Oklahoma, a predominantly rural and socially conservative state. This includes peers, information available on the internet, television programs, and pornography.
• The hesitancy to discuss same-sex behavior and sexual health topics within the home and classroom due to the cultural environment creates barriers which last into adulthood. This is only exacerbated by the lack of sexual health programming available in socially conservative rural states of the USA.
• As gay and bisexual teenagers mature into adults, they are faced with navigating sexual experiences with less accurate information than their heterosexual peers, thus increasing the potential risk of HIV/STI transmission.
• Sexual health information in the education system in these socially conservative, rural areas are often heavily influenced by religious and political leaders (Blinn-Pike 2008) and therefore make wholesale changes unlikely at this time.

Providers can help make accurate information available by:
1. Conducting trainings for providers and educators on the importance of comprehensive sex education
2. Training peer educators to provide sexual health information gay bars and other venues
3. Using push notification on geolocation dating applications and websites to help individuals find locations for free condoms, HIV/STI testing sites, and delivering online sexual health information

Funding Statement
The research results discussed in this poster were made possible in total or part by funding through the award from Project number HR16-022, from the Oklahoma Center for Advancement of Science and Technology.

Sociodemographics (N = 20)
• Race/Ethnicity: White (16), Native American (1), Black/African American (1), Chose not to identify race (1)
• Education: HS Graduate (3), Some College or Tech School (6), Undergraduate Degree (7), Graduate Degree (4)
• Relationship Status: Single (13), In a Partnership (3), Married (1), Divorced (1)
• Sexual Orientation: Gay (19), Bisexual (1)

Email: joe.currin@ttu.edu
Twitter: @JoeCurrin4Real
Lab: http://currinlab.wordpress.com