Glee’s “Sexy” Episode Scores on the POZ Safer-Sex-O-Meter

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This week’s episode of *Glee* was epic. Not in terms of song-and-dance razzle dazzle--the casts’ performances of “Afternoon Delight” and “Animal” did little to blow my mind--but rather surprisingly in the sex education department. The POZ Safer-Sex-O-Meter went off the charts with this episode, aptly titled “Sexy.” The hit show originally marked a measly 1 out of 10 on our meter because of its disgraceful display of teenagers rampantly doing the deed wholly unaware of the associated consequences. But this week, the show took a turn toward a perfect score with its interpretation of the meaning of sexy.

Watch the episode:

In the recent episode, substitute teacher Holly Holliday, Gwyneth Paltrow’s recurring role, fills in as McKinley High’s health and wellness teacher. The fired up (and sexed up) Holliday teaches the kids about using condoms--noting that they help prevent HIV and pregnancy--by whipping out a prophylactic and that old standby for a phallus: the cucumber. Unfortunately, her class of pubescent pea-brains can’t grasp the metaphor and end up panicked they’re getting STIs from their salads.
Sure, the ignorance is heightened for comedic absurdity, but unfortunately it’s also grounded in the reality of today’s high school, where comprehensive sex education is far from the norm. Without a proper education, kids are as gullible as the show’s character Finn, whose (cheating) girlfriend last season told him she got pregnant from a sperm-contaminated hot tub--and he believed her. By addressing safe-sex methods as well as healthy attitudes about sex, a television program as popular as *Glee* could slow down the climbing rates of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, among adolescents.

The “Sexy” episode also presents many different set-ups in which parents, educators and peers alike try to talk about sex. Opposed to Ms. Holliday’s argument that abstinence is a valid choice but as realistic as telling a lion to be a vegetarian, the school’s guidance counselor, Mrs. Emma Pillsbury-Howell, tries to reinstate the celibacy club. The germ-phobic Emma herself is the shining star of the club, proud to be a 30-year-old virgin despite having gotten married in a quickie Vegas ceremony four months earlier. Sure, her choice for chastity isn’t ideal from the perspective of teenagers with raging-hormones (or from most sane adults for that matter), but at least the show portrays that option.

In fact, Emma’s not the only virgin hesitant to hop in the sack. Kurt, the openly gay kid, has no clue what’s going on, and who would blame him? Anti-gay verbal and physical abuse at McKinley High led him to transfer to an all-boys private school with a zero tolerance of bullying. But because of oppression and loneliness--along with the fact that there’s no teacher to talk about the ins and outs of same-sex

intercourse--Kurt has become uncomfortable with even the slightest mention of anything sexy. Kurt's also-gay BFF notices this issue and urges Kurt's working-class father, Burt Hummel, to have "The Talk" with his son. It's an awkward task, but dad meets the challenge, explaining the birds and the bees as emotional rather than mechanical and relaying to his gay son the importance of self-respect, safety and overall readiness for intimacy. Certainly, this father-son interaction breaks ground as a prime-time first--one that hopefully inspires other parents to talk with their children in such a loving way.

It's refreshing to hear Ms. Holliday's frank sex talk--like spelling out to Emma that the song "Afternoon Delight" isn't about enjoying cake but rather sneaking out for a "nooner." The same goes for listening to Mr. Hummel joke that Kurt's 30th birthday present to himself should be to lose his virginity (obviously wrapped in rubber). These lines are endearing and funny, and more important, they stick in viewers' minds, making the topic of sex education more accessible and normal. Following the first season's disregard of sex education, it's good to see the show take responsibility and use its influence to educate while it entertains.

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