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Positively Sexual:
An Autoethnographic Account of Sexual Culture and Education in Southeast Idaho

By Kassandra McFarland

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To the Graduate Faculty:

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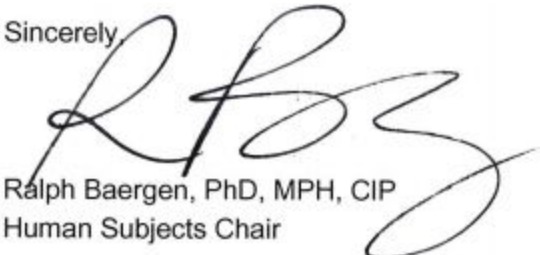

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Abstract

Trends and observations related to my brief experience as a sexual anthropologist are presented using an autoethnographic methodology to narrate the lived experience of becoming more sex positive. Using the theory of sex positivity, the potential benefits of positive sex education techniques are presented concerning the effects of parental communication and formal sex education policies. This is then presented and compared to my experiences teaching a college-level sexual anthropology course and survey data concerning the content of high school sex education is used to postulate how this perspective can be used with sex negative populations, to overall illustrate the applicability of positive sexuality theory.

Introduction

Elementary Research

As social scientists there are times when our work elicits such a strong emotional response that we are faced with a decision. Do we uphold our detached academic integrity or break that boundary and interact with our subjects on a personal level?

At this point in my career as a Master's level student I have been in the field three times and have faced that ethical, academic decision three times. The most poignant case occurred at an elementary school. I study sex education and was there observing the yearly maturation class concerning puberty. At age nine or ten, boys and girls are separated into different classrooms and made aware of the upcoming changes to their bodies. I sat on the periphery of a classroom with a handful of mothers as a nurse from the local health department described mood swings, hair growth, body odor, and finally menstruation. A majority of the girls, about fifty of them, giggled and remained overall, lighthearted. However, sitting directly in front of me was a blonde little girl shaking in her desk. Her knees were pulled up to her chest, her arms grasping them tightly. Her eyes were wide and fearful. But no one else seemed to notice her. Observing this, I paused.

I remembered being that little girl not that long ago. I remembered being angry and upset as I learned that my body was going to do painful, uncontrollable things to me and there was nothing I could do about it. But I had learned about puberty as it happened, long before it was covered during maturation day. This caused me to wonder, had this little girl been told about these topics before or was it all new? Was her first

exposure to these drastic, and sometimes terrifying, biological changes happening in a crowded room full of unfamiliar adults and other children?

As I pondered what this situation must have been like for her, I felt a heaviness in my chest. My heart hurt. I wanted to give her a hug and tell her everything was going to be okay, but I could not. It would have been unprofessional and inappropriate. I was not a parent. I was there as a researcher, an observer, and expected to maintain a certain level of rectitude. So I did, as she remained bundled up and fearful in her desk.

As the nurse continued it was clear that at least one of the children was more affected (or perhaps traumatized) than the others. Unlike the blonde girl I was observing, a majority of the girls seemed almost lackadaisical, bored with another day of school. This was something familiar I had noticed in teaching my own college-level sexual anthropology class. Some students were unperturbed. Comfortable with sex, they were happy to discuss class materials while others were apprehensive or embarrassed. Some had never received a formal sex education or even heard the word “penis” said in an institutional setting before. Their backgrounds and perceptions of sex were astonishingly diverse, depending on their upbringing and previous exposure to sex education.

Maturation day is sometimes a child’s first exposure to sexual topics, personally or institutionally. Their experience of that day can influence their future beliefs and perceptions about sex, as can any other experience, be it one’s first kiss, a show on television, or a conversation had with parents. This diversity of experience and sometimes juxtaposition of conflicting discourses present a methodological and

pedagogical quandary: how to research and teach a topic that is inherently personal with influences so amorphous.

Sexual enculturation and education, in its broadest sense, is how individuals become sexually literate and interact appropriately in their varied sexual cultures (Ross 1981). This process continues during social and personal changes in the lifespan and is influenced by numerous social and cultural factors. Populations create and perpetuate their sexual culture and norms through formalized educational programs, media exposure, communication with parents, friends, and romantic partners and also garner opinions through personal beliefs and experiences. As a result sex education, and sex research more generally, has many diverse and often fluctuating components. All these domains have the potential to create positive or negative sexual views and beliefs. Therefore, in order to provide a more comprehensive discussion about the effect of sexual enculturation, local culture, and sex education, a variety of methods are used in this project. Research will be presented in both qualitative, narrative, and quantitative forms.

Part one describes the broad process of sexual enculturation by portraying my personal background being raised in a conservative, Mormon area and includes research concerning the effects of parental communication on early sexual education. Therein, I also critique objectivist goals of emotionally detached academic-scientific inquiry by showing how the background and personal preferences of the researcher influence their research choices. In particular, how my absent sex education propelled my interest to research alternative sexualities.

Part two provides an overview of the sex education landscape in the United States and describes my experiences teaching a college level sexual anthropology course. My observations in teaching a sex-positive anthropology of sex course in a relatively sex-negative (defined in Part One) culture will be used to illustrate the potential benefits and effects on both the students and myself. While no quantitative data exists to substantiate the sex-negativity in Idaho, personal examples will be used to illustrate potential evidence. It is these experiences which provide the impetus and reasoning behind the research discussed in part three.

Part three presents materials and statistics gathered from a survey concerning the content of high school sex education. This data is then contextualized by demographic and cultural factors to show the contingency of sex education policy and potential factors which may intervene with successful policy implementation.

The goals of this research project are threefold: first to explain and narrate the lived experience of becoming sex positive. Second, to illustrate the potential benefits of a positive sex education. And finally to postulate how this perspective can be used with sex negative populations. Overall, trends and observations related to my brief experience as a sexual anthropologist will be used to illustrate the applicability and potential usefulness of positive sexuality theory, which constitutes the main area of analysis as this provides a more holistic and useful approach via autoethnographic method.

Methods & Background

AutoEthnography

Autoethnography is a methodological process in which one's own personal life is used as a presentation of the social facts that they embody. Experiences are analyzed in their cultural context and presented to provide narrative examples of larger social phenomenon. In other words, the researcher analyzes personal experience to understand cultural experience by retroactively selecting experiences and evidence to analytically frame them within the research literature and culture in which they write (Ellis 2011; Johnson 2009).

Context is going to be of prime importance in this methodology. In my case, I am doing this analysis from the perspective of a white, lower-middle class female coming from a small, religious community in southeast Idaho. I am also writing from the perspective of a master's level sexual anthropologist interested in sexual diversity, that is, the variety of sexual practices and behaviors found cross-culturally and as an educator interested in sex education. I have been a teaching assistant for four years and taught a sexual anthropology course of my design for two semesters.

Structural and personal background is also necessary to contextualize my position and viewpoints concerning sex. For example, Idaho has an abstinence-based sex education program. My high school sex education consisted of a two day portion of the health class curriculum and was taught by the school's wrestling coach. It consisted of an overview of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and a quick discussion about waiting to have sex until marriage. As a sexually active teenager, not only was this information too late, and also irrelevant, it was a source of resentment and disillusionment. A model for one particular form of sexuality--heterosexual, monogamous, coupling--was

presented. Not being heterosexual, or monogamous, my early sex education failed at providing any sense of relationship or sexual navigation, let alone practical information. It functioned to relegate myself, and others like me, to a sexual subculture, to be described, that defied the dominant cultural norm. This anger and disillusionment felt from the juxtaposition of self and the dominant culture lasted up to my college education as an anthropologist. Before that point, I did not understand why discussions of sexuality were shameful or embarrassing for my parents or teachers and why my sex education was so poor. As is shown throughout this narrative, the merging of these two identities, self and anthropologist, has made more explicit the cultural functioning of my particular social background and helps explain why sex was a taboo topic in my culture.

As a qualitative methodology, autoethnography challenges canonical research protocols. In contrast to more quantitative, scientific studies, this practice acknowledges the social embeddedness of the researcher and their perceptual influence on research outcomes. Personal experience affect a researcher's choice of topic and methodology, their interpretation, and their conclusions. All data are filtered through a researcher's opinion, background and education. Additionally, simply by their presence, the researcher affects the outcome of events and material presented along with the comfort and disclosure of participants. This method acknowledges that the researcher has a significant effect on research observations, in this case, that there are personal, professional, and cultural reasons I chose to study sex and personal, professional, and cultural experiences that influence my conclusions and viewpoints.

Autoethnography also attests that research is a political, social, and individually conscious act (Ellis 2011) with conclusions reaching far beyond a particular study. I am, in part, motivated to pursue sex research to provide information that I have found retrospectively would have been beneficial during my adolescence and to share that with others. Rather than being neutral and value free, this writing is self-consciously value centered (Ellis 2011). My personal and academic intentions are to provide data and settings where positive sexuality can be discussed and evaluated. A number of negative experiences has induced a sense of empathy, which we will see, invigorates my sense of purpose to advocate for more robust sex education policies. Additionally, a number of positive personal experiences have inspired a desire to promote positive sexuality as beneficial in people's lives. A responsible study makes such influences and objectives explicit. Individual motivations, personal experiences and values thus become part of the representation of the writing of self and others (Ellis 2011).

This methodology has been described by several authors as arising from the “crisis of representation” (Clifford & Marcus 1986) or “crisis of confidence” of postmodernism (Ellis 2011; Spry 2001). Intersectionality, spatial-temporal diversity of norms, and the realization that each individual perceives reality differently, has led to an understanding that the construction of “truth” is contingent. All scientific data are subject to bias. Autoethnography, as a recent response, attempts to mitigate the downplay of bias by showcasing and contextualizing the observer to the same extent as the actors (Bochner 1997).

Some researchers also discuss a feeling of emancipation in assimilating multiple aspects of themselves (research scientist, teacher, spouse, etcetera) into the culture in which they study. Spry (2001) argues that for her, autoethnography was a release from the social scripts acquired through familial and cultural discourses which shaped her identity. By using a dialogical look of the self as “other,” she was able to generate critical agency in her life and experiences, resulting in a therapeutic healing for herself and providing a template for others. At the same time, autoethnography privileges insider perspectives that could otherwise be overlooked by providing detail and emotional experience. It was Bochner (1997:9) who noted that the “academic world was long on conceptualizations and short on details, long on analysis, short on experience.” In other words, traditional theories construct a reality that is consistent, stable, and ordered while experience presents a world that is contingent, ambiguous and altered by chance (Bochner 1997). Autoethnography lies on the boundary of both worlds and attempts to balance both theory and practice. While theoretically grounded, the practice also allows room to acknowledge those extra-methodological factors that influence analysis.

This is a more subjective epistemology that may use positivist evidence and theories to create a more robust explanation of social phenomenon. It is not within the scope of this paper, or my intention, to argue whether one method is better than another. Rather, it is acknowledged that each method is capable of answering different kinds of research questions. For this particular study, insider perspectives are necessary to understand sex-negative enculturation.

A primary, and most useful, function of this methodology is to generate empathy through understanding. Sexual practices and diversity in general can be a highly contentious area where individuals have differing moral and ethical stances. A primary goal of positive sexuality is to promote peacemaking through the encouragement of inclusivity and acceptance of varied sexualities (Williams et al. 2015). Peacemaking requires empathy and understanding of the other when attempting to accommodate high amounts of sexual diversity.

To that end, this project will facilitate communication between sex positive and sex negative populations that could otherwise remain unaware of the taken-for-grantedness of positive sexual discourse and education and its effects on daily life and personal development. Therefore, in adding to the small but increasing literature of sexual autoethnographies (Blinne 2012; McFarland & Williams 2016; Thomas & Williams 2016), my hope in this narrative disclosure is to illuminate characteristics that readers may use in evaluating their own enculturation and when analyzing differing values and beliefs of populations and individuals, this should prove especially relevant in sex education courses. Excerpts of my sexual experience, both professionally as a sex educator and personally as a sexual being, have been narrated to highlight potential commonalities of human experience, their relation to culture, sex negativity, and ideally, to highlight the theoretical and practical benefits of sex positivity.

Positive & Negative Sexuality

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual health as “a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and

respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence” (2006). Utilizing this definition, sex-positivity, or positive sexuality, is a theoretical framework which emphasizes sexuality as part of healthy and normal development and can be conceptualized as, not only the absence of disease or violence, but the presence of self-efficacy and fulfilment. The essential criteria of the framework are fairly simple: sexual acts are consensual and risk is properly managed. Additionally, a primary goal is to accept and understand all sexualities, as there is no true sexual “normal.” Socio-historical variables have significant effects on a given culture's sexual morality and ideals. Indeed, diversity is the most appropriate way to contextualize sexuality across cultures (Popovic 2006). While being more than simply a pro-sex stance, positive sexuality promotes acceptance of diversity, encourages individuals to find and voice their empowerment and a significant emphasis is placed on sexual decision making and consent (Williams et al. 2015). The sex positive perspective in particular can illuminate how adolescent sexuality can be developmentally normal, increase sexual self-efficacy and self-esteem, and teach students how to better navigate pleasure and consent; leading to more psychologically and physically healthier adults (Collins 2009; Harden 2014; Russell 2005). Conversely, sex negativity is a suite of characteristics embodied in both individuals and institutions that conceptualizes sex, and other related activities, as unacceptable, deplorable, shameful or unhealthy. Although it exists on a spectrum, sex negative societies generally have a narrow range of appropriate sexual behaviors and limited sex education and communication (Williams et al. 2015).

Researchers have directly or indirectly explored the impact of sex negativity from several different theoretical and methodological perspectives, especially as it pertains to the marginalization of sexual minorities and discriminatory or harmful messages perpetuated in traditional sex education curriculum. (Elliott 2010; Hutzler 2016; Rubin 2014; Weitzman 2009).

Positive Sexuality as a Research Tool

Sexual anthropologist Gayle Rubin is one of the seminal scholars who provided a framework through which to evaluate the social evaluation of varied sexual practices. In *Thinking Sex*, she discusses how western society places sexual relationships and activities into a hierarchy. Those sexualities toward the top are conceptualized as virtuous, while those at the bottom reflect vice. She lists monogamous, heterosexual, reproductive, and coupled intercourse (among others) as the “Charmed Circle,” those behaviors that laws and social norms reinforce with rights and privileges (Rubin 1984). Sexual behaviors lying outside the “Charmed Circle” include S/M, pornography, casual sex, and homosexual, promiscuous, and group sex. Her model provides a tool to designate sexual behaviors as more or less socially acceptable.

Similarly, societies can be conceptualized as more sex-positive or sex-negative based on many factors including acceptability of sexual discourse and practices, access to sexual health information, and perceived morality of sexual acts, among others. Positive sexuality provides some explanatory power when making comparisons between societies

sexual attitudes and behaviors. Positive sexuality can also be a useful conceptual, anthropological tool when evaluating populations attitudes toward sex and the ways in which gender relations, sex education, and social expressions of sexuality are managed.

The United States can be thought of as more sex-negative compared to other developed nations such as Sweden, the Netherlands, and Germany in relation to health outcomes, cultural discourses around sex, and the acceptability of sexuality in public (Weavera 2007). This difference is reflected in health outcomes such as America's noted failing sex education system and high rates of STIs, and teenage pregnancies when compared to many European nations. Additionally, the permissiveness of nudity and sexual discourse varies between these countries. Looking outwardly, some cultures are very sex positive and encourage or are otherwise open about discussing sexuality. For example, in Sweden it is not uncommon for parents to allow their teenagers to have their first sexual intercourse in the safety of their own home with informational access to their parents (Schalet 2011).

Sex positive research still remains in its seminal stages but cultural indicators such as the legalization of gay marriage, the increase in alternative sexuality support networks, and the boom in sexuality coalitions, are increasingly pointing to a multiplication of more positive, liberal attitudes in the general population of the United States (Newport 2015; Russell 2005). Thus, there has been an increase in research pertaining to the benefits of comprehensive sex education and, more broadly, the advantages of sex positivity in addressing structural oppressions such as racism, sexism, ageism, and discrimination inadvertently taught in traditional sex education programs

and discursively reproduced in society at large (Connell & Elliott 2014; Bay-Cheng 2003).

Many social institutions perpetuate norms concerning acceptable sexuality. Anthropologically, kinship structures often delineate familial and incest lines, potential marriage partners, and establish inheritance. Religion reinforces norms similar to those expressed by family structures and governments sanction which relationship and family formations, in their view, are ideal (Ross 1981). These institutional sanctions concern at their center, sex and its regulation, which is often managed through discourse, or grand narratives. Much of culturally transmitted knowledge and the propagation of social institutions are done so through language. Language is one of the primary ways that culture collectively imparts meaning and values. Indeed, “language and its use is increasingly being understood as the most important phenomenon, accessible for empirical investigation in social and organizational research” (Alvesson 2001:4). There are a multitude of discourses concerning sexuality, as it is a topic of major social significance. Foucault (1999) states that discourse, the ways in which a topic is, or is not, discussed, control perception. He argues that changing power relations implemented a new regime that censored sexuality and made inappropriate discussions of sexuality in certain contexts or between groups, such as between teacher and pupil. Members of a society are exposed to a variety of sexual messages and individuals then reiterate the dominant discourse to positively or negatively sanction certain topics. Discourse is one of the primary mechanisms shaping sexual scripts and norms and also may act as a major contributor to the confusion which sometimes surrounds sexuality. Adding to the

disorder, any discussion of sexuality and sexual cultures is going to be time and place specific. Even within one country, such as the United States, sexual values, beliefs and appropriateness can vary from state to state and even city to city. As a result any conclusions reached by sex researchers have a limited or regional scope. This research hopes to provide a starting point to address the following: what are the dominate sexual attitudes in American and Idahoan culture and what effects do these discourses have on individuals and society as a whole?

Part I:
Anthropology and Culture

One of the most prominent anthropologists to analyze the interplay of societal form upon the individual was Margaret Mead. Using evidence from her fieldwork in Samoa, Mead asserted that adolescence was not a universal time of unrest but rather that societies construct and delineate the expectation of what life events, such as puberty, should be like. She used the comparison between adolescent strife in the United States and the lack thereof in Samoa to illustrate culture's coercion in influencing individual behavior and perception (Mead 1978). The implications of Mead's work were staggering to the field and shocking to the general public.

Her premise: even something as commonplace as adolescent strife or as basic as the emotions of "love, fear, and anger, take different forms under different social conditions" (Mead 1928). Culture is the intervening factor which influences the perception of experience. Sexuality, like many other domains, is heavily influenced by culture.

Cultural and Religious Influences

Culture is what teaches individuals how to predict and respond to others behavior and imparts beliefs and values visible in generated behavior. The shared symbolic meaning of emotions and behaviors tie a society together, through what Durkheim terms, social cohesion (1895). Society is a group of interdependent people who share a culture that molds and controls individual behavior (Haviland et al. 2007). Control behaviors are embodied as social facts; rules that exist in a society before an individual is born. They are coercive in influencing social conformity which often binds groups together through a common sense of identity.

Religion is a powerful superstructure (Harris 2001) in which societies share a sense of identity and formulate concordant worldviews. A subculture in the United States which shares an impressively strong sense of shared identity and heavily enculturated ideology is the church of Latter Day Saints (LDS), also known as Mormons. They have an influential and pervasive religious culture most firmly established in the western United States, particularly in Utah and Idaho. Growing up in southeast Idaho, I received from my parents a culture strongly influenced by the church and its teachings. My parents and grandparents all came from a traditional Mormon background. I was raised in the LDS faith but am no longer practicing or affiliated with the church.

Belief in the Bible as the word of God unites this group and many of their practices. 91% of Mormons say the Bible is the direct word of God (Pew 2009). Their gender roles follow traditional models of husband as head of household and wife as

mother and caregiver. Traditionally, according to church teachings, sex is for reproductive purposes and should only be done in marriage. This dynamic places an important role on nuclear family organization and church ideology places a heavy emphasis on marriage and family. As a consequence Mormons marry at a higher rate, (71% to 54% of the general population) and have larger families with three children or more, at a rate of 21% compared to 9% (Pew 2009). This emphasis on the family is most strongly recapitulated by group norms concerning marriage and monogamy. Although the early church practiced polygyny, it has been outlawed by the governing body of the church since 1890 (Linford 1964).

Even though historians (Bullough 1976; Coontz 2006), sociologists and other social scientists (Emens 2004; Engels 2010; McPherson 2006), psychologists (Conley 2013) and anthropologists (Albanesi 2007; Alesina 2011; Barker 2009; Becker 1985; Betzig 1993; Burton 1982; Conkey 1984; Murdock 1967; Ortner & Whitehead 1981; Rubin 1986; Ryan 2011; Weiskopf 1980; Wood 2002) have all discussed monogamy's role in Western history, thought, and society, monogamy has a pervasive cultural discourse but remains only one of many possible relationship configurations. However, certain groups, such as those in the LDS church, are enculturated to accept that monogamy is an inherent human characteristic and, in some cases, the only morally acceptable relationship configuration.

Idaho and Utah share similar cultural milieu around the Mormon tradition therefore statistics from Utah are presented as it has a higher per capita demographic of the LDS population. The importance of marriage is reinforced in childhood primary

programs, youth programs and group teachings. Consequently, Utah has the youngest median age at first marriage for men and third youngest for women (Life After Mormonism 2011). “Few things are more revered, reinforced and urged in Mormonism than Celestial Marriage” (Life After Mormonism 2011). Mormons accept a view of the afterlife that consists of three levels, the highest of which is the Celestial Kingdom. Marriage is performed in an LDS temple and the couple is sealed for eternity. An interview is required to have access to the temple. Adherents are asked whether they have had sexual thoughts, masturbated or had any sexual activity. If they answer yes to any of these questions they can be denied a temple recommend and stigmatized by the community. Marriage provides the only group sanctioned context within which to have sex, or any other form of sexual release including masturbation or fantasy.

Official policies of sexual behavior in the church are particularly strict. To illustrate, a church text used to impart standards known as “For the Strength of Youth” advises that “one should not do *anything* that arouses sexual feelings” (Viegas-Haws 2015, emphasis is mine). Unchaste fantasies and thoughts are to be avoided. Women are taught it is their responsibility to moderate men’s sexual thoughts and behaviors by dressing modestly. Women are not supposed to wear clothes that show the shoulders or mid-drift, or skirts above the knee. Conventional gender appearances are also strongly encouraged. This includes recommendations about the number of piercings allowed in each ear and that men keep short hair cuts and are clean shaven. Men who do engage in sexual behavior must interview with the bishop and repent so that they are able to go on a mission, a two year long service rendered to the church proselytizing nationally or

abroad. Sleepovers, “pillowtalk,” and “petting” are warned as problematic activities that can lead to unchaste thoughts and behaviors. Youth often find ways around the church teachings. For example, while “petting” is discouraged, it is not institutionally defined, leaving room for some exploration. Additionally, a focus on reproductive, marital relations places a preeminence on vaginal sex. Verbal sayings such as “Stay moral, go oral” or the idea that anal sex does not count as sex because there is no chance of conception (Wheelwright 2015), illustrate ways cultural norms are adapted. But, some adherents believe “sexual transgression is a sin second only to murder” (Wheelwright 2015).

The particular responses to sexual transgressions vary, but when I was growing up, a seventeen year old girl in my church ward was kicked out of her house and ostracized by her family for becoming pregnant. She violated the sanction of avoiding pre-marital sex and was disowned by her family and the community. Another problematic sexual transgression perceived in the Mormon community involves homosexuality. “Two-thirds of Mormons (68%) say homosexuality should be discouraged rather than accepted by society” (Pew 2009). In the most extreme views, homosexuality is not natural. In 2015 the church put out an official position that labels homosexual, married couples as “apostates” and forbids baptism to their children (Knoll 2016). In Utah, suicide is the leading cause of death for individuals age 10-17, more than double the national average. This spike may be a result of the church's anti-LGBT policies (Knoll 2016) and the sometimes pervasive social pressure which inhibit people in coming out as gay. Another prominent characteristic of sex negativity is a general

discomfort in discussing sex and an aversion to related topics. Mormon ideology promulgates an ideal of married, heterosexual sexuality. There is little room for discussions of sexualities or practices outside this model. With a particularly narrow definition of acceptable sexuality, many aspects of sexual information may not be discussed by parents or church members. Some potentially negative consequences of inadequate access to sexual materials and a lack of positive discourse may be evidenced by pornography rates, high rates of STDs and sexual violence.

Utah has the highest per capita rate of pornography subscriptions and ranks first in Google searches for pornography addiction, “dwarfing every other state by double digits” (Viegas-Haws 2015). There has also been a quickly increasing rates of STDs in the state. Chlamydia, syphilis, HIV and gonorrhea rates have all risen and gonorrhea cases are 40 percent higher than in the same period last year. Commentators explain this increase as a lack of education. Utah’s sex education policy is abstinence only (Chen 2016). Utah also has increasing rates of sexual violence (Wheelwright 2015) and the state’s rape rate has been higher than the rest of the US since 2000, 67.7 compared to 51.9 (UDH 2017).

Religious ideals are evident in common cultural responses to sexuality in this area and can thus be analyzed as a proximate indicator of sex negativity, i.e. not allowing fantasy or masturbation. One of the most prominent characteristics of sex negativity is a general lack of sexual discussion and an aversion to related topics. Mormon ideology promulgates an ideal of married, heterosexual sexuality. There is little room for discussions of sexualities or practices outside this model. With a particularly narrow

definition of acceptable sexuality, many aspects of sexual information may not be discussed by church members or parents.

Parental Communication

Sex education and enculturation often begin in familial settings. An analysis of how sexuality is addressed about by parents, including the morality and practicality of information, should illuminate a potential explanation for one of the many factors that influence sexual experience. Several aspects of parent/child communication have significant effects on the future sexual behaviors of men and women. These include gathering information from both mothers and fathers, openness in sexual communication, and the messages inherent in different types of sexual discourse. More often, although there is not much research concerning Mormons and this topic specifically (see Malan & Bullough 2005), American sexual discourses are often categorized as negative, awkward, embarrassing or crass. Even children cite embarrassment as the main reason they are uncomfortable discussing sex with their parents (Wilson 2010). The behavior and reluctance of parents also reinforces that discussing sex is something to be uncomfortable about. A key behavioral distinction in parents is the differential communication techniques exhibited between mothers and fathers.

With both their sons and daughters, fathers are less likely to communicate about sex than mothers (Wilson 2010). They also think they have lower levels of effective communication skills and lower expectations that talking to their kids will have a positive outcome. Daughters are more often talked to by parents but are also warned of harmful

consequences and face more disapproval of sex than sons. Mothers do more of the sex education but are also more likely to have negative attitudes toward teen sex than fathers (Wilson 2010). However, discussion with parents has been shown to reduce the likelihood of initiating sexual intercourse at a young age (Ogle 2008). As for the content of sex education, discussing boyfriends and girlfriends is the most comfortable topic while intercourse is the least comfortable. Details and topics concerning pleasure seem to be the most difficult to discuss. But, open discussion has been shown to be positively linked with the ease in which young people can discuss sex with a prospective partner, specifically voicing their needs and desires to negotiate safer sex (Ogle 2008).

The most often named criterion for good sex education is openness, but what does openness mean exactly and what constitutes its boundaries? After interviewing a sample of parents and their teenagers, Kirkman et al. (2005) found that openness has many meanings and is constrained by the society in which the family belongs. Openness is most commonly thought of as a willingness to answer questions. Secondly, it can be an open mindedness to changing circumstances with the implication of being non-judgemental. Children also vocalized that they did not want their parents to “spotlight” a topic by covering it harshly or in too much detail. Personal or private experiences were to be avoided and content is matched to the perceived maturity of the child. Communication is constrained by social mores and parents often reiterated viewpoints articulated by schools and the larger community. The main attribute of positive sexual enculturation then is openness, which is perhaps better conceptualized as a willingness to talk about subjects (Kirkman 2005).

The characteristics listed above are commonalities shared by large groups in America and many families perpetuate similar ideas as they teach and talk to their children about sex (Dailard 2001; Eisenberg 2010; Elliot 2010; Feldmen 2000; Ogle 2008; Walker 2001; Wilson 2010). These discourses have far reaching effects that have the potential to promote social inequality and contradictory messages. For example, it is common in parent-child communication for parents to avoid the mechanics of sex and to focus on morality. They wish to impart moral lessons before they discuss the basics of sex. Additionally, masturbation, sexual diversity, and pleasure are covered to an even lesser extent due to their perceived uncomfortableness. Therefore, children are made aware of the moral and value laden aspects of sex while the biological and logistical aspects are overlooked. Often, sexuality is framed, especially to daughters, as dangerous or risky. Messages such as “don’t have sex, you *will* get an STI or become pregnant” are some of the most common. This discourse of sexual risk and danger shapes how parents educate their sons and daughters but other cultural pressures also influence sexual discourse (Elliott 2010).

Anthropologically, America can be described as hyper-individual, with social norms reared toward independence training (Elliott 2010; Haviland 2007; McPherson 2006; Parigi 2014). In relation to parent-child sexual communication, many parents feel that it is primarily their responsibility to guide their children’s sexual enculturation and therefore, it is their fault should that education fail. According to Elliott (2010), many parents tend to conceptualize their own children as asexual and other children as hypersexual in the way they conceptualize and discuss their children. If their children are

innocent, this means that other children are either predators, abusers or trappers. Their children can then fall victim to sexual manipulation or gullibility, while their own agency or self-determination is rarely discussed. This discourse casts some teens (the instigators), as personally responsible, while portraying their own children as vulnerable receivers of sexual action. By blaming the other, society and the institutions that affect them are absolved of the responsibility of teen sex while it becomes the parent's duty to address and control their adolescent's sexuality (Elliott 2010).

By educating children differently on the basis of sex they are taught that boys and girls are fundamentally different, that they have different expectations. Daughters receive much more negative information than boys, if boys receive any at all (Elliott 2010; Ogle 2008; Wilson 2010). Additionally, the topics not spoken about by parents create a sense of secrecy or taboo, making education that much more uncomfortable or unfamiliar to children. Familial education presents a micro or more individualistic view of sexual enculturation and illuminates one aspect that affects sexual experience.

Cultural and Personal Influences

Although the material presented above was gathered from national surveys or localities other than southeast Idaho, the patterns and forms of parental communication are generally similar. Following church rhetoric, my mother emphasized the importance of marriage and following Elliot's (2010) a/hypersexual dichotomization of child versus other enculturation, my father cast males as sexual instigators. Mechanics were avoided, while the morality of sex was heavily emphasized.

In their defense, sometimes ritual displacement is an effective way of handling emotions or insecurities rather than confronting issues outright. If guilt is a common characteristic associated with Mormon sexual ideation (Life After Mormonism 2011), then it may be assumed that Mormon parents may feel guilt or embarrassment in discussing sexuality with their children. In relation to sexual enculturation, church is a ritual where parents can displace and replace sex education responsibilities with a pervasive lack of direct acknowledgement of sex, and instead replace education with a symbolic reinforcement of acceptable sexual behavior, the dominant LDS discourse being heterosexual, monogamous marriage. A limited repertoire of sexual options discourages individual expressions alternative to the norm, disempowering homosexual and non-monogamous members. In this case, the church places a dominating structure over young women which emphasizes purity, chastity, and modesty. Being non-monogamous necessarily violates the LDS edict of purity because they define purity in relation to sexual exclusivity.

Early on, I knew my feelings about sex and relationships relegated me to a sub-culture. While I had never full-heartedly participated in Mormon religious practice, my parents and peers reinforced common cultural constructions, particularly the importance of marriage and family. It was often discussed how fun having children and getting married would someday be. As a teenager, maybe in part as a result of rebellion against the church, I intentionally violated the sanction against premarital sex. Soon afterward I discovered my proclivity for both sexes. At one point I found myself unethically managing both a boyfriend and a girlfriend. Without any sex education or

substantial parental communication, I had no idea what I was doing or how to navigate these relationships, but I enjoyed and also feared them. Monogamy was the dominant culture norm and I was not heterosexual or monogamous. Even then I knew what the potential ramifications of publicizing such behaviors could bring, further exclusion from my peer group, judgement, and perhaps intervention. For me, the most troubling punishments were the internalized social sanctions: those of shame. I felt that something was wrong with me, that I was being an unchaste, unholy woman and that I should feel ashamed. But, rather than discontinue my relationships, I hid them. I kept secret my girlfriend and non-monogamous desires.

Culture is dynamic and adaptable but Mormon sexual culture was and still is incredibly strict. Violating social norms is not without its consequences. The emotion I felt most saliently was shame. Indeed, “the mechanism that causes the trauma most typically is shame” (Collins 2015). Shame is an individual's response to an internalized sanction violation. Shame is produced by the reaction of the larger society, shame for having to keep the sexual relationship secret. Shame is the master motive of social control (Collins 2015). In this case violation of the sanction of heterosexual, married, sexual relations against the intense social pressure to do so.

In describing social facts and their coercion, Emile Durkheim elegantly states, “even if they conform to my own sentiments and I feel their reality subjectively, such reality is still objective, for I did not create them, I merely inherited them through my education. If I do not submit to the conventions of society the ridicule I provoke, the social isolation in which I am kept produce in an attenuated form the same effects as

punishment” (1895). Negative social evaluation, ostracism, and isolation are potential cultural responses to those who flout social conformity sanctions. Disagreements within dominant discourses create subcultures, groups unlike the primary culture in some way.

Privileged and Alternative Sexualities

Important to understanding the issues that surrounding non-monogamy, a familiarity with the deeply held conviction of monogamy is necessary. In LDS culture and current Western society more broadly, monogamy is the privileged relationship pattern upon which American economic and social life is structured and heterosexual coupling is the dominant rhetoric that concerns sex and marriage.

Cross-culturally, materials from the *The Ethnographic Atlas* show that out of 1,231 societies, only 186 stipulate monogamy as the primary, or only, form of marriage organization. Polygyny is the most common marriage pattern worldwide (Murdock 1967), but in the United States multi-partner marriages are illegal. The federal government privileges married couples by providing positive legal, economic and sanctions. Married couples receive numerous rights that other relationship arrangements do not. These include legal, professional, familial and employment rights. Legally married couples can file their taxes jointly, which gives them access to many financial breaks and benefits. They can inherit their spouse's estate, set up trusts, receive social security or medicare from their spouse, and they are entitled to more public assistance. Married couples are able to receive insurance from their spouse's employer, and take retirement plans or bereavement time upon their spouse's death. Socially, married couples

have rights to their partners bodies after death, a right to visitation in hospitals and jails, they can file for adoption, and supply immigration benefits for their spouse (Human Rights Campaign 2015). In light of the prevalence of heterosexual, monogamous marriage in Western society, alternative sexualities will here be defined as any configuration that differs from that. Non-traditional couples may have access to some of these benefits, depending on jurisdiction, but many still are denied these rights or they face serious opposition in attempts to fulfill them. However, research is showing that monogamous marriage may not be the permanent and all-pervasive institution it is portrayed to be.

Responses to Monogamy

Although the United States recently legalized same-sex marriage, cultural discourse often makes the assumption that the sexes in a couple should be and normally are a man and a woman. This is part of an assumption known as heteronormativity: the belief that biological sex, gender identity, and gender expression match cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity. Another often tacit assumption about typical relationships is that the heterosexual couple is monogamous. This is known as compulsory monogamy. There are two distinctive types of monogamy. Super-monogamy is the belief and practice of having one intimate and sexual partner throughout life but is often unachieved. Serial monogamy is the relationship practice that permits only one sexual partner at any time, but divorce and infidelity create a situation in which several partners may accumulate throughout life.

Monogamy may be a cultural ideal, but it is often unrealized. Marriage rates overall have steadily dropped since the 1960s, when 72% of the population was married, compared to 52% currently (Pew 2010). Those who do marry nowadays face a 40-50% chance of divorce, with subsequent remarriages having a higher probability (APA 2015) and although estimates vary widely, infidelity rates may be as high as 25% in the United States (Wiederman 1997). Infidelity is also the most cited cause for marital dissolution in over 150 societies (Betzig 1989). Another trend of interest, which illustrates the changing definition of family, is that since the 1940s the percentage of unwed women who gave birth to children has steadily risen and is currently at 30% (Shattuck 2011). These statistics may reveal an underlying dilemma in the function and structure of family and marriage and also illuminate the possibility that monogamy may not function to fulfill all of the emotional and sexual desires of individuals, that is; all people may not be, or desire to be, monogamous.

My sexual identity and sex more generally remained a taboo topic in my life until I reached college. It was a particularly alluring area to study because I had very little exposure to it in my high school education and local culture. Learning about sexual diversity in my anthropology courses was exciting because they defied traditions and beliefs I thought were common around the world. But it was not until I took a Sex Crimes course designed around the theory of positive sexuality that I discovered the terminology and theoretical research around my own sexuality.

Polyamory and the Focus Group

Polyamory (poly) is the practice of maintaining multiple, consensual romantic and/or sexual partnerships at one time. The term "polyamory" first appeared in the 1980s but the practice has its roots in the "Free Love" movement of the 1960s and the Sexual Revolution of the 1970s (Weber 2002). The percentage of polyamorous individuals that live in the United States is difficult to measure because many people do not overtly identify as polyamorous; they may be unidentified or they may fear the social stigma commonly attached to their sexuality. Nonetheless, at least 3.4% of the population, roughly eleven million people, are polyamorous (Rubin 2014) yet no reliable demographic data of these populations are available. However, readings from scientific journals, case studies, and polyamory websites indicate that any configuration can exist regardless of age, ancestry, or sexual orientation (Cox 2013; Weber 2002). Therefore, an exact demographic description is almost impossible; there may be any number of individuals and gender identities involved.

There are many cultural explanations as to why the public may be uncomfortable with polyamory. America has a tumultuous view of homosexuality, evidenced by the struggle for equal rights and gay marriage. Discriminatory and legal issues in the homosexual community significantly overlap with polyamorous concerns as well. Relationships with more than two individuals inherently contain homosexuality or bisexuality. For example, a triad of two women and one man could contain lesbian sex and group sex. In the United States, marriage is often defined by a numerosity requirement, that is, a union contains only two people and the exclusivity requirement, that the couple is monogamous (Emens 2002). There is, undoubtedly, a formidable

monogamy bias in the laws of the United States. There are 1,138 federal rights based solely on marital status (Defense of Marriage Act 2004).

To get a better idea of the makeup of polyamorous groups and to satiate my own desire to find and communicate with others like myself, I arranged a focus group to gather data for my bachelor's thesis. After obtaining permission from a local polyamory community group to come and observe their session and pass out a questionnaire, I dutifully gathered a clipboard and matching pens for my first professional excursion into the field.

Thirteen individuals participated in the focus group. They held a variety of occupations but most had some form of higher education and all were non-religious. A majority of focus group attendants cited frustrations with monogamy as a primary cause in their decision to become polyamorous. Many respondents described feelings for multiple people, and desire for sexual variety as important variables in their choices.

Overwhelmingly, the focus group attributed their polyamory to a desire for independence and a propensity for communication and problem solving. The continued function and well-being of most relationships are dependent on consistent communication, this is exacerbated in poly relationships with the addition of more partners. This navigation includes the understanding of yourself and your partners; in other words, to remain conscious of one's lovers' needs, boundaries, and desires. Every topic that was discussed in the focus group was always related back to communication; if there is an issue in a relationship they resoundingly said "Talk about it!" The focus group concluded that most issues could be solved with communication.

The focus group and much of the literature state increased communication is essential in polyamorous relationships, without it transgressions or boundary violations could easily occur. Consent is the ubiquitous requirement in polyamorist relationships; without consent uncondoned relational and sexual behaviors could be considered infidelity. Optimally, every partner is aware of, at the very least, the existence of their partner's partners and consent is given upon each relationship creation.

They also stated that the primary purpose in creating the group was to bring together the community to crowd-source information and create new sexual scripts. Sexual scripts are standardized viewpoints or prompts commonly reiterated by social groups. Culturally, individuals with similar views often accumulate into peer groups. In the process of belonging to a sub-culture, individuals are able to release tension and also reinforce their identity through solidarity with others, in this case navigating hardships and discussing possibilities to better manage non-monogamous relationships. Social solidarity arises from the shared beliefs and values of its participants. Identity is formed, in part, from this process inasmuch as common attitudes reinforce population and group self-identification (Haviland 2007).

To have the opportunity to meet and discuss non-monogamy in a community who felt similar was humanizing both for myself and for the participants in relation to my broader area of study. For so long I had felt like a sexual outsider but simply by being exposed to similar individuals, caused a feeling of basal acceptance and understanding that I had never felt before.

On a professional level, the focus group provided a sense of reality within the theories I so heavily delved into and invigorated a sense of purpose in my academic pursuits. These people were living through what I perceive to be injustices. One woman described how her own family tried to take away her children when they discovered she had a boyfriend and a husband. Another man explained that after coming out, his business partners attempted to push him out of the organization and delegitimize his rights of ownership in their shared company. These were the most dramatic events shared within the group, but everyone agreed they had experienced some form of discrimination.

Due to its relatively dramatic response against dominant social norms, polyamorous groupings are often targets of varied forms of structural stigma and discrimination. Structural stigma is the negative impact of cultural norms and institutions on individuals. Experiencing stigma is connected to chronic stress, and mental and physical health risks (Nearing 2000). As a whole 43% of poly people report personal experiences with discrimination (Nearing 2000). Research into the social perception of polyamory has found that poly relationships are viewed as less acceptable, less sexually satisfying, lower in quality and more sexually risky than monogamous relationships (Conley 2012; Hutzler 2016). But qualitative and demographic research has found none of these assumptions to be true.

Research has found that exposure to the term and knowing someone who practices polyamory is positively related to positive poly attitudes (Hutzler 2016). Teaching students about alternative sexualities, like polyamory, can facilitate what was described in Allport's 1954 Contact hypothesis, that contact with an outgroup facilitates

learning which decrease prejudice (Allport 1954; Hutzler 2016). Many misperceptions may be a result of a lack of exposure or confusion about poly.

Practitioners often feel they have to justify their lifestyle as viable, with similar emotional, committal, and relationship responsibilities as monogamous marriages. Comparisons of monogamous and polyamorous marriages found that there is no significant difference in marital stability, happiness, and longevity between the two arrangements (Rubin 1986; Rubel 2014). Quality measures have found that poly couples report more emotional intimacy, are just as happy in the relationship as monogamous couples, are more likely to get tested for HIV, to practice safe sex, and to discuss sexual safety (Conley 2012; Cox 2013). However, poly is still viewed by the broader culture as negatively as infidelity and common conceptions hold that poly people are immoral and untrustworthy.(Burris 2013; Hutzler 2016). These attitudes expose the public's deeply held view of polyamory as sexually deviant and indeed, a paramount issue polyamorists must is the label of deviance (Knapp 1975). The connotations of homosexuality, promiscuity and group sex, place polyamory categorically outside the “Charmed Circle” (Rubin 1984).

It is no surprise then that polyamory is relatively unknown in Idaho and to the general public more broadly. This lack of discourse causes what Collins (2015) termed as “repressive ignorance.” One must be aware of possibilities to embody them. Even though I was exhibiting polyamorous behaviors as a teenager, I was unaware of the concept and was thus, without access to information and navigation techniques related to the practice.

Repressive ignorance also affects many others with alternative sexualities.

Alternative sexualities are loosely defined as any behaviors, identities, and communities that stand in contrast to socially and culturally dominant sexualities. In the United States, the dominant sexualities are heterosexuality and monogamy. Alternative sexualities are rarely included in formal sex education programs. For example, in 2015 LGBT sexualities were covered in a positive manner in only 5% of millennial's sex education curricula (GLSEN 2014). The inclusion of polyamory in sex education policies would, most likely, be even less accepted. In the local Mormon culture and American culture, monogamy is a valued symbolic form, explaining the absence of alternatives to it. Until the symbolism of that construct is open to reevaluation, the policy environment concerning sex education will continue to privilege some sexualities over others.

My Understanding

Anthropology has enticed me with diversity and adventure, while sex research was a result of my personal relationship with it. Growing up in a sex negative area provided me with little or mixed sexual messages. While not all bad, there were a number of harmful experiences which have been written about elsewhere (McFarland & Williams 2015), including sexual, social confusion. Feeling and exhibiting a desire for non-monogamous relationships in a strictly monogamous culture made me feel like an outsider and sexual deviant for a number of years. It was not until a college sex course presented research and information about polyamory was I aware that there were communities of like-minded individuals. I was not alone and I was not deviant.

This personal reaffirmation ignited a chain of questions that ultimately broke down to the question: why? Why did I feel wrong for my desires? Why was I not aware of these possibilities until college? Why was my sex education so poor in terms of my needs as an individual, living outside the cultural norms?

It was the combination of anthropology and sexual studies which provided some of the most thorough answers as to “why.” I felt wrong for my desires because my sexual enculturation had taught me that sex was a sacred act, to be done only in marriage, with one person. The conflict between that cultural expectation and my desires had severe consequences, including emotional pain and personal sexual repression. Understanding these phenomenon independent of myself is what anthropology provides.

Learning that my culture’s views were a result of specific historical and cultural origins was for me, important in the process of healing and forgiveness. The reason I was not aware of many sexual possibilities until college was because no one in my culture knew about them either. Just as I had received negligible sex education, both from parents and school, so had my parents and their parents before them. In my family, my father was educated out of the same home-health book from 1897 that his father was educated from. Having limited access to new materials, or any social need to change a functioning system, norms are perpetuated. My sex education and more broadly, sex education generally in the United States, was poor because historical and cultural sex negativity remained a cultural norm. Sex has throughout history went through varying levels of obscenity and in the United States sex stayed relatively obscene. Christian, Puritan ideals drive morality politics and halt sex education policies in the face of

overwhelming evidence as to the efficacy of comprehensive and sex-positive sex education.

Part II

Anthropology and Sex Education

In Ortner and Whitehead's 1981 volume *Sexual Meanings*, they delineate two methodological realms commonly used in researching sex and gender. The first, a "culturalist" approach, illuminates the inner logic and structural relations among cultural symbols. To do so, symbols are explained in relation to the social world in which they function. The second approach, a sociological one, looks at how broad social orders tend to generate cultural and individual perceptions of sex. This method shows how actors operating in specific institutional forms, normalize and "make natural" aspects of social life. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive but rather they approach methodological questions from a bottom-up or top-down approach. Each method begins by analyzing what *meanings* are given to sex and gender symbols. Those symbols are then *contextualized* to postulate if a symbol is part of a broader set of symbolic meanings or is a particular in ordering social relations (Ortner & Whitehead 1981:4-6).

While part one employed the cultural approach, this section uses the sociological approach described above to analyze positive and negative sexual narratives presented in formal sex education programs. Since formal programs are a primary structural area of sexual enculturation, it is essential to understand how they generate attitudes about sex.

Sex Education

Formal sex education policies and content have been heavily researched (i.e. Bay-Ching 2003; Berglas 2014; Bleakley 2006; Connell 2008; Constantine 2007; Dailard 2001; Doan 2012; Eisenberg 2008; Ferguson 2008; Glenn 2006; Hilton 2007; Ito 2006; Santinelli 2006; Schaalma 2004; SIECUS 2015; Stranger-Hall 2011; Weavera 2007). The literature concerning sex education, particularly the failing health and educational outcomes of abstinence-only curricula are monumental; consisting of large amounts of data and peer reviewed research supporting the fact that not only do abstinence courses fail to reduce teenage pregnancies or lower the rates of sexually transmitted infections, they may exacerbate negative health outcomes by not providing adequate information for adolescent sexual decision-making, i.e. instruction on how to properly use contraceptives or avoid pregnancy (Eisenberg 2008; Glenn 2006; Ito 2006; Santinelli 2006; Schaalma 2004; Stranger-Hall 2011; Weavera 2007). A large collection of work using nationally representative samples that has repeatedly found that Americans prefer comprehensive sex education over abstinence-only sex education. Bleakley et al. (2006) surveyed 1096 individuals and found that 82% preferred comprehensive education. They also found that abstinence only education had the highest rate of opposition voiced by about 50% of respondents (See Eisenberg 2008 for similar results). However, the federal government continues to fund abstinence only education at staggering levels. In 2008 the allocated budget for these programs was \$176 million (SIECUS 2015).

Although a public institution, sex education programs in the United States can, and often do, promote a morality based or non-evidence based curriculum (Bay-Cheng

2003; Bleakley et al. 2006; Connell et al. 2006; Dailard 2001; Elliott 2010). Bay-Cheng puts it most succinctly when she states, sex education in the United States often presents sex as violence, sex as victimization, and sex as morality (2003).

Teaching Positive Sexuality

During my bachelor's degree I was presented with the opportunity to create a college course as an independent study. It could be on any topic I chose and it would require me to design lectures and presentations, create assignments, find readings and create exams, in essence, to treat it as if it were a real course and present my progress as I continued. Having recently taken the Sexual Crimes course and already having a personal proclivity for the subject, I jumped at the opportunity to study content of my own choice.

For two years I designed a course about sex and anthropology. The eight principles of positive sexuality were key theoretical elements used to design the course. The primary learning objective of the course was foremost to instill a sense of positive sexuality in students who were otherwise unaware or previously uncomfortable with sexual material.

A majority of my experience as a teaching assistant was in the Introduction to Biological Anthropology course covering primatology, human evolution, mating systems, and general biology. This provided a useful background as I designed the first section of the course. It began with human evolutionary biology, mating systems, attractiveness,

and sexual reproduction, and as I immersed myself in the literature, adding animal reproduction, endocrinology, human sexual response, and orgasm to the curriculum.

The latter part of the semester was devoted to the historical and cultural theories of sexuality and gender with an emphasis in my personal research background with alternative sexualities. My affiliation with positive sexuality, experience with the focus group, and my own research all combined to the summation of the class being heavily focused on gender roles, alternative sexualities, sex education and sex negativity.

Although I had spent years developing it, I was still shocked when offered the chance to implement and actually teach the class. The prospect of teaching had only been hypothetical as I designed it. Even more pressing, I had only given class lectures or spoke publicly, a handful of times. I felt comfortable with the content but had little experience with public speaking. Terrified, I took the opportunity.

Three months later, after having prepared lecture materials and registered the class, it was the first day of spring semester 2016. I had arrived at the classroom an hour early to practice my discussion and get a feel for the room. Breathing deeply and furiously twirling my fidgeting rock, I readied myself to begin something I had spent years designing. After a very tumultuous beginning, full of trips, stutters, and vocal pitch changes, the course progressed. My presentation became more comfortable and the students seemed engaged and voiced that they were enjoying class.

Since this class was being taught for the first time I repeatedly gave the students surveys about their motivations and perceptions of the content. The main reason students reported they took the class was to learn about sexual diversity. In anthropology,

learning about sexual diversity challenges preconceived sexual notions because practices can defy traditions and beliefs individuals may think are common around the world. My students were delighted, as I had been, to read about how the Warao have a ritual practice of suspended relations, where all adults are encouraged to have intercourse with tribe members other than their spouse; or that the Baniwa have a gradual process to become married, where marriage is as simple as moving one's hammock into another's hut, and divorce is as simple as removing it (Ryan 2010; Valentine 1991). The most exemplary and opposite cultural characteristics I found in another culture were that of the Mosuo of China (Li 2013). They are a matrilineal society where female sexuality is especially open. Men live with their sisters and parent her children. Upon maturation women are given a "flower room" with access to the street. Nighttime sexual liaisons are always permissible, as long as the man is gone by morning (Li 2013; Ryan 2010). Many stated that this section was their favorite portion of the class and acknowledged in their evaluations that "it challenged some of [their] previous views."

The second reason students said they took the class was to become more comfortable talking about sex. Students and educators alike may feel uncomfortable or hesitant to discuss sexuality of several reasons. They may be personally or morally conflicted about the topic, fearful of the possible personal and professional repercussions or ill versed in the topic depending on their background and previous exposure to sexual material. For some students this was their first exposure to formal sex education and, in some cases, their first time discussing sexuality in a public setting. There were several other characteristics that students reiterated or that I observed during the course of

teaching. Many concern navigating shame and embarrassment. Some students explained that if the teacher is ashamed or embarrassed about a topic this would deter them from wanting to ask questions. In a similar vein, an extensive use of euphemisms can indicate an avoidance or embarrassment of the topic. The trick was to remain respectful but blunt and unabashed at the same time.

Since open communication is an essential way to create a sex positive environment, students were given multiple formats through which to freely discuss sexuality and class materials. With time students developed a comfort with class discussions. In reviews they exclaimed that “I can talk about sex without blushing now!” and “I was not comfortable with sex at all before entering this class. I feel more comfortable with it now than I ever have.” Many students stated they felt more comfortable discussing their own sexuality and had a better understanding of others behaviors, facilitated in major part, by providing and analyzing narrative and personal examples of sexual diversity and practices. A handful of students described how the class helped them feel more comfortable to question or develop their own sexuality. In particular several women voiced that the class helped them accept or express their interest in female homosexuality or bisexuality. Research by Laumann (1994) corroborates this effect in other sex education courses.

Implementing Sex Positive Education

Even though several of my students expressed a greater acceptance of homosexuality for themselves, the goal of positive sexuality courses is not to change

students' personal morals or advocate that they adopt alternative sexual practices but rather to encourage acceptance and understanding of others sexual behavior. Research has shown that students' perceptions change when classroom environments are open minded and respectful (Baugh 2014). Acceptance increases. This is achieved through several mechanisms, the most important of which is the conscientious use of language. Word choices that imply heteronormativity or compulsory monogamy have implications which may discourage students from expressing their sexuality or encourage their empowerment to freely make sexual choices and opinions (Baugh 2014; Davis 2005). Assuming heterosexuality and monogamy ostracizes those who are not and limits discussion to a "one right way" bias. Courses about sexuality are difficult to teach in part because the topic is inherently personal and in part because sex education, no matter the area focus, can contain aspects related to sexual health behaviors.

The ultimate purpose of health education, in this case sex education, is to encourage voluntary actions conducive to well-being (Schaalma 2004). In regard to sexual health there are significant differences in health outcomes between the United States and other developed nations. Comparing policies and health outcomes between different countries can provide an international perspective and potential templates for sex education programs. In Ferguson et al. (2008), sex positive and sex negative attitudes and health outcomes are correlated to sex education policies in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is often recognized for its unique approach to adolescent sexual health. Sex education is comprehensive and explicitly described as a "sex positive environment." The attitude toward adolescent sexuality is realistically pragmatic and acknowledges

adolescent sexual activity as a part of normal development. Consequently, the Netherlands has low rates of teen pregnancy and high rates of contraceptive use.

Sexual experience is similar between teenagers in the United States and the Netherlands. Both populations have very similar rates of vaginal, oral, and anal intercourse, about 50% of 15-19 year olds have engaged in these activities. Sexual activity may be similar but contraceptive use is not. Dutch teenagers report using dual method birth control and condom with first intercourse more than American teenagers. Dual methods are used 43% of the time by Dutch teenagers and 13% of the time by American teenagers. The pill is used 59% compared to 17% and those using no method are 7% in the Netherlands compared to 26% in the U.S. Additionally, teen pregnancies occur at a rate of 12.8/1000 compared to 41.2/1000 (Ferguson 2008).

Learning objectives in Dutch sex education programs place a heavy prominence on “interactional competence.” This involves discussing and navigating sexual aspects of “assertiveness, communication, personal norms and values, asking for help and decision-making” (Ferguson 2008). Activities focus on establishing personal boundaries and communicating those when sexual experiences occur. Materials do not tell young people what to do but rather encourage individuals to think about what they want in advance and develop the skills to communicate and maintain those boundaries” (Ferguson 2008). A primary difference between Dutch sex education and American sex education is that Dutch materials talk about the pleasurable aspects of sexual behaviors. Materials from the main education program used in the Netherlands, *Long Live Love*, state that, “before you have sex with someone else it is important that you first discover

your own body. That way you know what you like” (Ferguson 2008). It encourages self-exploration and knowledge before partnered activity. This previously established familiarity with sexual exploration helps to up sexual negotiation with partners. One learning objective in particular, typifies the difference of emphasis of American heterosexual sex education and Dutch openness. “Students can indicate that pleasurable sex is much more than just sexual intercourse” (Ferguson 2008). They are referring here to an expanded definition of sexual behavior that is sexual activity being more than penile-vaginal intercourse. In contrast, in 2003, only 9 out of 52 sex education websites had an expanded definition of sex (Bay-Cheng 2003). While the authors warn that it is unrealistic to use the same policies in other nations, their approach can be used as a model to create rights-based approaches to sex education.

Rights based sex education initiatives are gaining momentum around the world with youth advocates, programs and youth themselves, arguing for holistic, positive sex education (Russell & Singler-Andrews 2003). They posit that access to accurate, nondiscriminatory sexual information is a human right (Berglas 2014). Research overwhelmingly illustrates that individuals want to and are eager to learn about sexuality but cultural and political factors are impeding the implementation of such programs (Bay-Ching 2003; Berglas 2014; Russell 2003; Schaalma 2004).

Part III

Sex Education Policy

As it currently stands, the United States is unique among developed nations in not having a policy on adolescent sexual health or a nationally cohesive sex education

curriculum (Santelli et al. 2006). The implementation of sex education policies currently enacted in the United States allows for individual states to set their own sex education guidelines, which the states often leave to local school boards. District school level decision-making creates an especially disparate policy landscape.

Cultural attitudes and value beliefs are also apparent in legislative differences between states concerning the content of sex education courses. There is a range of policy and educational outcomes across the country and indeed different states stipulate different policy goals and teaching requirements. For example, only 19 states require medically accurate information to be presented and only 33 states require students be taught about HIV/AIDS (NCSL 2015). State statutes also complicate matters at a regional level. Title 33, chapter 16 of Education- Courses of Instruction, Idaho's policy on sex education in schools, states that:

"The legislature of the state of Idaho believes that the primary responsibility for family life and sex education, including moral responsibility, rests upon the home and the church and the schools can only complement and supplement those standards which are established in the family...Major emphasis in such a program should be to assist the home in giving them the knowledge and appreciation of the important place the family home holds in the social system of our culture, its place in the family and the responsibility which will be there much later when they establish their own families." It states sex education programs should include "understanding sex and its relation to the miracle of life, including knowledge of the power of the sex drive and the necessity of controlling that drive by self-discipline" (Education 1970).

The LDS Church's influence is visible in Idaho's sex education policy which emphasizes a focus on the family and personal control of the sex drive. This piece of legislation has not been revised since 1970 (Education 1970). As would be expected, Idaho has an abstinence only sex education policy. However, at present, national abstinence only education programs are increasingly losing their foothold and states are opting out of federal abstinence funding (SIECUS 2015). This cultural shift is becoming further exaggerated by an increase in secular-rational values and more liberal sexual attitudes (Newport 2015). A discrepancy exists between public opinion, which is overwhelmingly in favor of comprehensive education and currently enacted policy i.e local school boards determining sex education. This discordance is usually explained in terms of morality policy.

Morality Policy

Morality politics is described as the process whereby individuals, and coalitions of individuals, share a strong ideological and moral belief about a topic which guides their political decision making. Sex education, and sexuality more generally, is an extremely controversial topic, often characterized as hotly debated and extremely acrimonious due to political actors arguing over first principle beliefs, that is, their personal views of right and wrong in regards to proper behavior and lifestyle choices. Therefore, when childhood and adolescent sexuality issues surface in regard to sex education and reproductive health policies, morals and value beliefs hold a preeminent

position in parents and lawmakers decision making capabilities (Doan & Williams 2008). Sex research, and particularly sex education, is a sensitive area to investigate as a result. Additionally, while there exists numerous academic studies on the topic, consensus on these issues has yet to be achieved.

Morality politics complicate policy analysis, as do gaps in available research data. While national surveys give credence to the mounting desire for comprehensive education, their drawback is precisely that they are national. Being a pluralistic society, there exists a wide variety of attitudes and ideological beliefs in the United States. Subsequently, while representative of the country as a whole, national samples can misconstrue policy desires and sexual attitudes of small towns and regional expressions of sex education policies where policy decisions are created and actually implemented.

Legislative inconsistency complicates the cultural environment and policy implementation while at the same time promulgating varied and contradictory discourses about sex. Regional attitudes towards sex and the minutiae of opinions people hold in relation to sexual topics is still being researched, and even further obscured when working through a sex-positive framework. In a climate of sex negativity, which typically describes many areas in the U.S, even discussion of sexuality may be taboo or inappropriate. Some of the most hotly contested topics involved in sex education concern masturbation, fantasy and sexual acts.

Research Study

A common response by students who took my class was that they wished this type of material was taught earlier in junior high or high school classes. While I agreed, I knew from observing the variety of responses to my class and my own experience with sex education in Idaho, that to implement these topics in high schools would be a monumental task. In no small part, due to the fact that there are many differing viewpoints about what is sexually appropriate to teach to teenagers. On top of that, I knew what is considered appropriate would vary by region and that there was little to no research in the literature about the specifics of desired sex education by region. Therefore, I created an anonymous survey to look at how parents categorize and rate sexual topics with a questionnaire that focused on the desired educational outcomes they have for their high school aged children; specifically which topics they want their children to be taught in a sex education course. To investigate varying levels of sexual topic acceptance, the survey listed forty sexual topics, starting with basic aspects of puberty, the biological aspects of sex including conception, then progressing to relational health such as communication and consent, then sexuality itself from intercourse to LGBTQ sexualities. The last sections become more controversial, including sexual violence, fantasy, fetish/kink and alternative sexualities. Finally aspects of sex and culture such as gender roles and sexual diversity finish the survey.

The survey was placed on the website “Survey Monkey” and networked by my friends and family, providing a pilot, convenience sample. The population sample consisted of 168 individuals including 142 women and twenty-six men with a median age of twenty-seven. The majority of respondents (142) were Caucasian and overwhelmingly

agnostic or nonreligious (122). 105 out of the 168 were also college educated. A large portion of individuals were liberal and democratic, while a small portion identified themselves as anarchists or libertarians (18). Table 1 represents significant demographic results.

Table 1
Significant Demographic Results (n=168)

Marital Status	Income	Education		
Married	84	\$0-20,999	29	High School 57
Divorced	10	\$21-50,999	67	Bachelors 50
Nvr Married	42	\$51-71,000+	70	Masters+ 29
Political Views		Party Affiliation		
Liberal	91	Democrat	40	
Moderate	39	Independent	71	
Conservative	29	Republican	18	

Topic Acceptance

Table 2 shows which topics parents selected their high school aged children be taught. Unsurprisingly, basic topics such as “puberty” and “anatomy” had high level of acceptance, but interestingly, not complete acceptance. The alternative topics, such as sexual diversity, relationship styles and fetishes/kinks had low proportions of acceptance as would be expected. Only eight topics had less than ten participants who do not want their children taught the following: hormonal changes, physical changes, menstruation, anatomy and STI’s. While sexual violence may be assumed to be a more controversial topic to be covered in high school, less than ten people disagreed with harassment, sexual assault and rape to be taught about in a sex education course.

Table 2. Topic Lack of Acceptability

Topic Acceptance Totals n=168	Topic Taught?	
	Yes	No
1- Hormonal Changes	159	9
2- Physical Changes	159	9
3- Menstruation	159	9
4- Body Image	157	11
5- Anatomy	161	7
6- Conception	156	12
7- Fetal Development	144	24
8- Birth	149	19
9- Postnatal Care	126	42
10- Fertility	132	36
11- Adoption	128	40
12- Communication	157	11
13- Relationship Health	157	11
14- Dating	145	23
15- Sexual Decision Making	144	24
16- Marriage	118	50
17- Consent	154	14
18- Alternative Relationship Styles	100	68
19- Intercourse	143	25
20- STI/STD's	160	8
21- Abortion	136	32
22- Contraception	153	15
23- Abstinence	141	27
24- Masturbation	122	46
25- Pleasure/Orgasm	123	45
26- LGBTQ Sexualities	132	36
27- Gender Identities	132	36
28- Fantasy	83	85
29- Fetishes/Kink	71	97

30- Alternative Sexualities	116	52
31- Harassment	162	6
32- Sexual Assault	161	7
33- Rape	159	9
34- Gender Roles	142	26
35- Sexual Diversity	138	30
36- Pornography Literacy	108	60
37- Law and Sexuality	119	49
38- Media and Sexuality	137	31
39- History and Sexuality	122	46
40- Art and Sexuality	117	51

Religious Comparisons

A major hypothesis of this research was that different populations would vary in the amount of sexual topic acceptance. When religion is used as the key distinguishing variable, several important results were discovered. Keep in mind Mormons are very politically conservative. They are considerably more Republican than any other major religious tradition, including members of evangelical Protestant churches (Pew 2009). Six-in-ten Mormons identify as conservative, about three-in-ten (27%) say they consider themselves moderate and only one-in-ten identify as liberal. This is in stark contrast to the general population, in which roughly a third identify as conservative (37%), a third as moderate (36%) and 20% as liberal. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of Mormons say they identify with or lean toward the Republican Party (Pew 2009).

Table 3: Topic Counts by Religion	
Average # of Topics Chosen for Children	
LDS:	23
General Population:	30
Nones:	34

Number that Chose No Topics to be Taught

LDS: 2

General Population: 1

Nones: 2

Number that Chose All Topics be Taught

LDS: 0

General Population: 11

Nones: 27

In this study, averages were taken of the total number of topics that were positively selected, making the maximum total possible forty. This was done for the LDS population, the “None” population (those that have no religious affiliation) and the general population which consisted of all other respondents. Consistent with popular assumptions, the LDS population chose less options compared to the general public and the “None” population chose more options compared to the general public. There was one discrepancy found after counting the number of individuals who chose zero of the forty options. The LDS population accounted for two of those responses, the general population for one and the “None” population for two. The cause of the LDS and general population choosing none of the potential topics could easily be explained in light of religious convictions. On the other hand, the rationale as to why the “None” population would chose none of the topics is an exciting area for future research. Overall this research shows that there are significant differences in populations’ acceptance of sexual topics.

Culture Specific Policy

As Table 3 and the resulting discussion show there is a difference in the educational desires for sex education between Mormon and non-religious parents.

Implementation of sex education courses requires accurate research, but the social and political context of where programs are implemented also strongly affects their success or failure. It was Maynard (1990) who recommended that policy researchers allow a flexible strategy more capable of adapting to local difficulties and contextual factors when considering successful policy implementation. For adolescents, legislators, school authorities, and parents affect the access of sex education classes and other aspects such as condom availability. Therefore, the key to successful policy implementation lies in understanding that different populations are going to require different intervention techniques. Schaalma et al. (2004) suggests to sexual health promoters that they need to 1) continue to conduct and share results of needs assessment research and 2) target those who can change the policy context. In terms of sex education and the format of educational review boards, those who can change sex education policy are the parents and those who fill positions on local school boards. The first step to accomplish this goal then, is to figure out what parents want taught to their children. It is only after the fact that geographic and demographic specific policies can be made. The final step would rally the help and implementation of parent empowerment programs which encourage them to act politically and demand their wants be met in sex education curricula (Schaalma 2004).

Conclusion

Specializing in sexuality and using positive sexuality theory as a guide, has given me the confidence to first, acknowledge, accept, and navigate my own sexuality, but more

importantly, given me the tools to help others manage theirs. Reed (1976:1) states, “any teacher or educator of sexuality education must gain a positive attitude or feeling toward his or her own sexuality before attempting to teach in this highly sensitive area.” This project has helped facilitate that self-acceptance. Without the anthropological contextualization my experiences and preferences would have remained unexplained and ill-understood. The openness I have seen grow in myself and in a few examples of my students corroborates the broader research on the effects of positive sexuality.

The most salient bits of evidence concerning how important and necessary positive sex education is in sex negative areas comes from the content and mass of questions I receive as a sex educator. The amount alone speaks to the desperate need. When I share my field of study, students, friends and even family have all sought opportunity to ask me a multitude of questions. The content illuminates the lack of education and also the interactions of sexual scripts and discourses on individuals. Questions usually break down into three general categories. The first is related to biology. Questions include how sexual arousal works or relate to events happening to their bodies as they become sexually active or mature. I think this shows the direct lack of education that, structurally, policy and education are missing. Additionally, people often ask me questions relating to sexual dysfunction and ways to improve their performance in the bedroom. I feel that this illuminates a discordance between popular discourses of sexual voracity in men and a lack thereof in women, and reality. It necessitates the push for accurate, medical sex education, that anthropology can provide with a life-course or ontogenetic perspective.

The second most common type of question I receive, and the one that makes me the saddest, essentially breaks down to “Am I normal?” People perceive disjunctures between their sexuality and that of others (Pariera 2013). Some worry if a practice is abnormal and some worry that they are not meeting perceived social standards of sexually active men and women. Many are seeking definitional confirmation of what their feelings and practices even are and look for validation in the scientific literature or from community groups in reassurance that they are not alone. My personal life followed a similar trajectory in relation to polyamory, but I am only one of many examples. Students have had a similar need concerning their homosexuality or bisexuality, their sexuality fluidity (Diamond 2009), their kinks and in their personal relationships. Positive sexuality simplifies the bulk of these questions by promoting acceptance and maintaining a simple criteria by which to evaluate sexual acts and behaviors, are they consensual, are they risk managed? Beyond that, it provides a framework with which to assure and humanize people that they are normal and any feelings that they may have are justified.

The final question, and the one that I receive the most commonly is: how do I teach my children? The answer is very simple, but the process is not. It starts with providing resources for both parents and children first, but the answer to this question is an anthropological one. If there is a legacy of bad, inaccurate sex education in the United States, how can parents be expected to have the knowledge to accurately educate their children? If parents were raised in a sex-negative environment where discussions of sexuality were shameful or uncomfortable how can they be expected to be comfortable with discussing sex with their own children? It begins with changing policy, a more

tangible aspect of culture. But more importantly it begins with us. Parents teach their children that sex is uncomfortable by recapitulating social norms they were enculturated with. Educators perpetuate this by avoiding or moralizing sex education. Culture imprints this in the way that we talk about and share sexual messages. Stop imparting and embodying negative messages. Start sharing and providing positive messages. Start by making sex education accessible, accurate, culturally sensitive, and relevant. Culture is dynamic.

Several researchers (Anderson 2015; Gagong 2011; Galinsky 2011; Hensel 2011; Higgins 2011; Menard 2009; Williams 2015) have found that positive sexuality is associated with greater sexual satisfaction and self efficacy. Physical and physiological sexual satisfaction is associated with psychological satisfaction (Menard 2009). Sexual activity is also associated with lower levels of depression (Gagong 2011). What is most important for sexual educators is that positive sexual attitudes, that is higher levels of sexual self-esteem, assertiveness, comfort and openness with sexuality are correlated with less risky behavior enactment, more negotiation for safer sex and an increased, and less guilt-ridden, capacity for sexual satisfaction (Gagong 2011; Galinsky 2011; Hensel 2011; Higgins 2011; Menard 2009; Rostosky 2008).

While evidence has been provided that positive sexuality corresponds to better health outcomes and sexual self-efficacy, it does not follow that standardized sex positive principles will work equally well in different populations. Indeed a great way to offend someone is to question or attack their sexual attitudes. The goal of this work is to bring people together, not divide them. The arguments throughout this paper have not been

intended to prove that one form of sexuality is better than another or that Mormon sexuality is wrong or misguided. Rather, the arguments are intended to show that there exist a multitude of sexual needs and backgrounds. Sexual diversity is the norm, not homogeneity.

Therefore, it should not be argued that sex positivity is categorically better than sex negativity. To use the positive to negative classification most productively is to allow it to establish the bounds or contingency of different sexual attitudes, not to bombard others with sexual advice and viewpoints they did not ask for. Instead, positive sexuality delineates which discourses and practices are seen positively or negatively and may provide an explanation as to why that can then be adapted to provide culturally specific messages already consonant with the beliefs and values of the group under study. If the intended goal of positive sexuality is to encourage open communication and peacemaking, then this includes sex negative populations as well. For example, to accomplish policy implementation in southeast Idaho would take more research into what Mormons find sexually appropriate or not. Presumably, such a program would have a heavy emphasis on abstinence and family planning. The difficulty then becomes how to find a balance in presenting a range of sexual behaviors while at the same time containing messages that a majority of Mormons can agree with, which is going to necessitate a large amount of discussion between parents and policy implementers.

The ultimate position of this thesis, and why discussing these topics in a meaningful way necessitates cultural and personal divulgence, is that contingency affects the dynamic of every situation. The type of sex education a culture provides is contingent

upon its history and the values of its member just as the needs of students in a sex education class depend on their background and unique sexualities. If we are attempting to promote acceptance and understanding of all in a pluralistic society, sexual diversity needs to be understood as normal and benign. Instead of judging practices in and of themselves, “a democratic morality should judge sexual acts by the way partners treat each other, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion and the quantity and quality of pleasure” (Rubin 1984:15).

There are a number of future directions this research could take. After further survey and attitude collection, conversation could begin between those in the Mormon hierarchy, the community and sex educators in local schools to create an updated sex education policy. Anthropologically, attitudinal data and positive sexuality theory could be used to further analyze difference in sexual experiencing between cultures. Are some groups more straight-forward, more aggressive, more casual about sexual topics than others? Finally, stories like this one can combine with others to create a broader narrative about the effects of sexual enculturation on individuals. For an aspiring sex educator this means continuing to embody the principles I believe in and becoming a positively sexual anthropologist and educator. Anderson (2013:213) puts it nicely when he says, “The more sexual health researches explore these areas, the greater the opportunity to positively transform sexual health behavior and attitudes. Those working on these topics have the power to change perceptions about what is normal, good, health and healthful in the sexual realm, revising or even rewriting the ‘sexual scripts’ that inform how people behavior and how they ascribe meaning to their sexual experiencing.”

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