Acknowledgements for the Works Presented

Chapters 1-5 of this thesis were published elsewhere. Chapter 1 was published in 1997 in the *Journal of Moral Education*, with the encouragement of Prof. Jan Steutel and his good friend and colleague, Prof. Ben Spiecker. Chapter 2 was first published as an opinion piece in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and later developed as a theoretical article published in *Sex Roles*. The editor of *Sex Roles*, Irene Frieze, saw the potential of the piece to provoke discussion among feminist psychologists and others, and invited a response from several prominent feminist psychologists. At the time, only Dr. Zoe Peterson responded. Her response was published and I was permitted a response to her response which was published at the same time, both of which are referred to in Chapter 3. Behind the scenes and through email, Zoe Peterson and I discussed the problematic format of a point-counterpoint discussion and made the decision to try to work out the theoretical differences between us in a single piece. Chapter 3 represents this joint effort to discuss female adolescent empowerment. Again, Irene Frieze saw the potential of this sort of piece to provoke discussion and invited several feminist psychologists to respond. This time, five prominent international feminist psychologists wrote responses to the joint piece: Sarah Murnen; Laina Bay-Cheng; Rosalind Gill; Nicola Gavey; and Deborah Tolman. Their responses were extremely thought-provoking and some of my thinking in response to these efforts appears in the Introduction of this thesis. In the fourth and fifth chapter, I discuss adolescent female sexual empowerment in the context of sex education curricula. The fourth chapter, on pleasure discourse within sex education curricula, was published more recently and contains an analysis that I undertook with then PhD students Kelly Graling and Kara Lustig. This article, “The use and misuse of pleasure in sex education curricula” was published in 2012 in *Sex Education*, and focuses on pleasure because theorists have reasoned that teaching about pleasure and particularly female pleasure is an antidote to repressive forces such as sexism and heterosexism in society. The fifth chapter, although written before Chapters 2-4, was published in the *Harvard Educational Review* in 2010 and is situated nicely before the conclusion as it is my second effort, after Chapter 1, to outline a sexual ethics curriculum. Chapters 2-4 represent work on female adolescent sexual development that explains the change from 1997 (when Chapter 1 was
published) to 2010 (when Chapter 5 was published). It’s possible to see in “Towards a sexual ethics curriculum: Bringing philosophy and society to bear on individual development” that I focus more on a positive sexual ethics and have dropped, to some extent, the stronger focus on teaching to prevent sexual deviance that was more a part of Chapter 1. The “Conclusion” of this thesis attempts to further improve on the fifth chapter. For the conclusion, I integrated recent work published in *Sex Ed for Caring Schools* (2013b), the book that presents my sexual ethics curriculum which is available online, as well as a piece recently published in *Educational Theory*. I attended the Educational Theory Summer Institute in Champaign, Illinois in August of 2012 and the comments on a paper by the distinguished attendees there as well as the written comments by Cris Mayo, Josh Corngold, and Paula McAvoy greatly influenced my thinking and writing in the Conclusion. My graduate students who worked on the sexual ethics curriculum and who are currently teaching it in a Boston public school are also to be thanked for their continuing contributions to my reasoning about adolescent female sexual development and its relation to sexual education. They are amazing people who keep me grounded in feminist studies, psychology, and reality as I attempt to provide for them the new philosophical perspective I am acquiring.
Introduction

The Discourse of Desire

In this introduction to the five articles that this dissertation comprises, I would like to consider Fine’s (1988) early call for a different kind of sexual education for girls. In doing this I will review the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of her view, a view that informs the five papers presented. At first I will focus on discourse as it applies to an understanding of adolescents, adolescent sexuality, and female adolescent sexuality. I then move on to explore the idea of adolescent female sexual empowerment with corollary ideas of desire and embodiment of desire from a phenomenological perspective and to question whether sexual empowerment for adolescent girls is an aspect of “morally good sex.” When I pursue this question, I first define morally good sex and review various philosophers’ thinking on this matter. I then look into the relationship between morally good sex, empowerment, and adolescent well-being. I end by discussing how, once these qualities and aspects of “good sex” are uncovered, they can be integrated into the sexual education curriculum. I leave for the conclusion of this dissertation a fuller discussion of how and why sexual education should incorporate lessons regarding morally good sex for adolescent females and at that point will also discuss what future research is needed.

Michelle Fine’s 1988 piece on sexual education, “Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire,” is one of the most cited and appreciated pieces in the feminist psychological and educational literature. When it was a new contribution to the field of adolescent sexuality and sexual education, it helped to legitimize discourse (a way of constituting knowledge and reflecting power relations in society) as an area of study among psychologists and educators with regard to sex and sexual education. It also encouraged a line of theoretical writing on desire, pleasure, and embodiment with regard to female sexuality.

In her 1988 article, Fine pointed out that sexual education for adolescent females was focused on danger and victimization. She argued that schools through their discourse around sexuality positioned students as potential victims of sexual activity and in doing so interfered with adolescent girls’ opportunity to build strong and positive sexual selves. She wrote that opening up discussions of desire and helping girls to find their critical voice would enable them to be sexual subjects, not sexual objects. Fine stated that the “absence of a discourse
of desire, combined with the lack of analysis of the language of victimization, may actually retard the development of sexual subjectivity and responsibility in students” (p. 49). The school, she concluded, could be a place where female students could be offered “access to a language and experience of empowerment” (p. 50) which would enable them to experience “entitlement rather than victimization; autonomy rather than terror” (p. 50). She also noted that even when taught about victimization, the girls were never taught that they could fight back against exploitation and victimization.

When Fine makes the argument for a sexual education that includes desire, she notes that adolescents want to talk about what makes sex fun, enjoyable. She and other feminists after her make a case for why it is both prudent and essential to girls’ wellbeing, that they acknowledge desire, get to know their bodies better and in less of an objectified way. Their argument is that in so doing, they will be less likely to be coerced into sex, more likely to say no when they do not want to have sex, and thus to act autonomously, preventing pregnancy, STIs, and heartache. And Fine and other feminists also believe that there is something morally good about sexual education that prevents objectification and abuse. Thus, the kind of sexual education that enhances girls’ well-being will also be a morally good sexual education. Fine and other feminists believe there is a moral reason for including a discourse of desire (and pleasure) in sexual education, and that is to redress the moral wrongs of societies that would suppress female sexuality through the socialization of girls in a way that prevents their individual development and flourishing to the fullest. Thus, promoting an education that includes pleasure sends a message to girls about their worth and their capacity to develop into full, active, and agentic sexual subjects.

**Discourse and Discourse Analysis**

Fine used discourse analysis to uncover what discourses were available to shape the coming to subjectivity of adolescent girls within the educational system. Discourse theory holds that words, gestures, and symbols accomplish social tasks in social contexts (Slocum-Bradley, 2009). Deriving from Foucault (1972) who did not describe a method, discourse analysis is an interpretive strategy of looking at statements for what they do, rather than only at what they mean; that is, what function they serve (Graham, 2011). The objective is, in some cases and in Fine’s in particular, to figure out how language constructs
identities. Thus, the language used in sexual education courses and among the proponents and detractors of various kinds of sexual education does more than just suggest a way of being to adolescent girls; together they construct them as disempowered potential victims.

While a discourse analysis can include a variety of strategies, some closer to linguistic analysis and others closer to a sociological analysis, the goal for some strategies is to identify (using texts or conversations) “institutionally supported and culturally influenced interpretive and conceptual schemas (discourses) that produce particular understandings of issues and events” (Bacchi, 2005, p. 199). In this way, certain discourses support the status quo of institutions and persons with power and privilege in a culture. Fine’s aim was to examine how sex bias and patriarchy, as cultural institutions, produce an understanding of girls’ sexuality that was delivered to them through a discourse which then functions for girls as if self-chosen.

This framing of what is happening in the sexual education classroom as well as society for girls also presupposes a view of identity and self that is not fixed or authentic but fluid. Like social constructionism, a theory that has its roots in American sociology, Foucault’s theory as well as discourse theory share the view that what is “out there” is always filtered through and shaped by language. All of these theories, whether social constructionism, Foucault’s, poststructuralism, and discourse theory, argue against a “solitary, bounded individual who stands apart from the social and cultural surround” (Magnusson & Marecek, 2012, p. 28). All of these theories hold that facts are not stable but situated in time and place. Thus, not only the adolescent girl, but the idea of what is meant by sex, and what is meant by sexual education is not fixed but constructed socially and historically.

The question, thus, as Carlson (2012) puts it, coming from a Foucauldian perspective, is “how has power produced certain truths about adolescent sexuality, and what are the effects of these truths on the production of the adolescent body as a body of desire in contemporary culture” (p. xvi). We can begin by exploring simple truths about adolescence and proposing what power might underlie these truths. For example, the discourse around adolescent sexuality is that it is a time of vulnerability due to what is commonly referred to in the United States as “raging hormones.” The discourse also describes them as newly sexual; but this narrative can be challenged by alternative discourses and stories (mostly suppressed stories) of childhood sexuality that are included in
anthropological and qualitative research (Bagley, 1997; Lamb, 2002; Martinson, 1994). The power underlying such conceptions comes from a strongly biological view of human beings, one that supports biology as a primary explanatory tool for social behavior. A second source of power that underlies this view is one that supports laws and regulations regarding childhood and adulthood. To picture adolescents as undercontrolled, positions adults as the ones who are in control of their bodies. And the state’s (legal) discourse around the time at which sexuality begins, serves to regulate who can and can’t be sexual by the state. Children cannot be sexual, because they are too young. Moreover, if we acknowledge children as sexual, their sexuality disrupts an idea of innocence that supports adult control. While this writer can certainly see the protective nature of this discourse, it also serves to regulate adolescent sexuality in ways that support a status quo sexuality and makes invisible and deviant the kinds of sexuality that falls without.

Discourse about the problem of childhood and adolescent sexuality is tied to other sources of power, some that have come and gone. For example, the strong psychoanalytic movement in the 1950’s in the United States influenced the narrative of adolescence as a time of heightened vulnerability through its understanding of the process of containment of libido and its suggestion that the task of development was sublimation and compromised expression of Eros and libido. Evolutionary theory privileges reproduction as the aim of sex and most likely is another contributor to the dominant narrative of “raging hormones” emerging in adolescence. Rather than seeing evolutionary theory as just another theory, we can see it as a discourse that has served to repress women and which privileges heterosexual sex. Also, the privileging of heterosexual male sexual desire is reflected in narratives of adolescent sexuality in the belief that adolescent males have particular difficulty controlling libido. This discourse provides both a rationale and an excuse for less than civilized sexual behavior. Taken together these four themes (raging hormones, newly sexual at adolescence, reproduction driven, and male sexual desire as difficult to control) comprise the social construction of adolescent sexuality. This is not to say that biology does not play a part in adolescent sexuality, but the discourse around the biology shapes a culture’s understanding of the bodily experiences that occur.
The biological discourse around childhood sexuality, a discourse that has considerable power given the place of doctors and medical experts in Western modern society, positions hormonal development as the force behind sexual development (Buchanan, Eccles, & Becker, 1992) and sexual identity (Bailey, Dunne, & Martin, 2000; Byne, 2007; Weisfeld, 1999). Even philosophers have joined in to give biology primacy: “Sexual desire is also powerfully inelastic, one of the passions most likely to challenge reason, compelling us to seek satisfaction even when doing so involves obvious physical and psychological dangers” (Soble, 2002, p. xxiii). With regard to children, the standard theory is that children are asexual and become sexual around age 12. This narrow view of what is sex, sexual drive, sexual interest, sexual thinking, and sexual feeling makes invisible childhood sexual experiences or positions them as deviant or “just practice” (Lamb, 2002; 2006b).

Not only adolescent sexuality but also adolescence can be explored through the variety of discourses that position adolescence vis-à-vis adults. Some have argued that because there are cultures in which girls and boys marry at puberty, the concept of adolescence may not exist except as a form of discourse that suggests a stage. G. Stanley Hall, the father of developmental psychology in the United States, is credited with bringing about the idea of adolescence as an era to study. More recently, the term “tween”, used to refer to girls between the ages of 8 and 13, was invented by marketers to create a broader market for teenage products (Lamb & Brown, 2006). It can also be seen in these two prior examples (of both terms “adolescence” and “tween”) that certain people or institutions have the power to construct through language ways of seeing individuals. In the first case, a white man who earned his doctorate at Harvard and who because of this was able to become a leader in the new field of psychology, had power to label certain experiences about individuals. While this does not mean he was wrong, from a Foucauldian perspective, he is neither right nor wrong but simply exercising privilege to define others; and because of his power, he is edging out other possible ways of looking at a phenomenon. In the second case, marketers who have access to billions of dollars as well as a variety of media use this word, “tween”, to influence people to make purchases that can define who they are and support the use of the word “tween”.

The discourse around female adolescent sexuality also positions females as newly sexual at puberty and in danger of a variety of problems. In addition to the danger of pregnancy and male aggression noted by Fine (1988), girls have
historically also been seen in danger of weak restraint in the face of male persuasion, and in danger of becoming wild, throwing morals to the wind, as in the case of juvenile delinquents. This discourse represents girls’ sexuality as fragile and in need of protection but this discourse also assumes a white and middle class, able-bodied adolescent subject. In contrast, when girls are marked by any other characteristic, whether immigrant, Black, Latina, Asian-American, disabled, or poor, the discourse around their sexuality changes. These girls are presented as “other” and the discourse around their sexuality serves to protect the discourse of purity around white girls. For example, black teenage girls are presented as hypersexual or victims to Black males’ bestial and uncontrollable sexuality (Collins, 1990; Tolman, 2002; Wilson, 1986; Wyatt, 1997).

From a Foucauldian perspective, how the mainstream institutions in the culture represent female adolescent sexuality and how adolescents conceive of themselves as sexual beings are closely related. What adolescents believe is right, empowering, healthy, and responsible are closely tied to available discourses, discourses that work in such a way that an adolescent girl who endorses a view believes she has chosen that view on her own, even if such a view makes her feel bad or that her behavior is wrong. For example, if a female adolescent believes she is a slut for having sex with multiple partners and she is “bad”, she often believes this judgment to be her own and uninfluenced by outside forces; however, this belief is part of a self-regulatory system that exists within a context in which patriarchy still exists. To the extent that patriarchy exists and has power to influence, it contributes to girls’ self-definition. The word “slut” exists because those who have power to determine girls’ beliefs about their sexuality maintain their power as long as she thinks this way (Brown, 2004).

There is no deeply authentic sexuality that a girl can discover independent of systems or power; however, according to Foucault, sources of power are everywhere and there exist counter-discourses and resistant strategies that complicate a girl’s sexual self-definition. While she may regressively call herself a slut, (as discourse can produce a compliant subject who actively engages with the culture regarding what it means to be female and sexual), she may also through self-reflection and critique avail herself of other discourses that are reactive to and provide alternatives to the status quo. Counter-discourses are discourses that are supported by or support individuals in their critique of and separation from mainstream sources of power that are damaging. While they
may have their own regimenting power over individuals, and while they may be taken up as part of mainstream discourse (co-opted), they also hold open the possibility of movement and change away from the status quo. The idea of female empowerment is one such alternative discourse that initially had the potential to work against a then mainstream discourse regarding passive female sexuality, but it has come to have its own regulatory influence on girls and has been co-opted to serve more regressive and mainstream discourses (Gill, 2008). In this way, counter-discourses provide girls a way out of the dilemma of always conforming to a mainstream discourse.

The idea of freedom in postmodernism has been hotly debated. Nussbaum (1999) suggested in her critique of postmodernism that postmodernism removes all freedom from the individual. MacKenzie (2009), however, explains how Nussbaum’s critique of Butler and Foucauldian discourse theory is misguided. She writes that Foucault’s insight was that power relations are both constraining and enabling, that they provide “both limits to and conditions of possibility for action” (p. 347). She argues that from a liberal ethics position, freedom from power is always good; however from a Foucauldian position, one can never escape relations of power so the only path to freedom is an understanding of these relations of power. She writes that for Foucault, freedom is not an essential freedom from powerful external sources but an “agonism of a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle” (Foucault, 1982, p. 222). Butler has revised this idea to explain how the state of being open to the way in which any ideal or ethic is formulated through competing claims to power is in itself a kind of freedom. The alternative, the “totalizing concept of the universal will shut down rather than authorize the unanticipated and unanticipatable claims” (1995, p. 41). In other words, an essential universal is antidemocratic in that it shuts out competing claims. When the subject is open to understanding and seeing various counterclaims to any idea, she is free, or rather, freer. Butler argues that universality must always be described in a particular context and the usefulness of universals lie not in its unquestionable authority but as a “site of insistent contest and resignification” (1995, p. 40). Butler argues that competing articulations of the universal resignify what counts as a universal claim, and thus undermine it in various contexts. This seems to me the only possible stance one can take towards universal ethics, that they are subject to resignification in a variety of contexts. Even mutuality, which I will set out as an ideal later in this dissertation, can be seen as a fluid ideal, particular to certain contexts, and
available to contradictions and exclusions as it is worked out. This is not the same as saying universals are relative, but only that they get worked out differently in different historical periods and in different circumstances. MacKenzie summarizes Butler’s idea that universality is an open-ended contest, a project and a process of working on and going beyond the current conception of universality. These ideas of freedom and universality will be taken up again in a later section.

The Idea of Adolescent Female Empowerment

In the article that has become Chapter 2 of the dissertation, I began with a history of feminist interest in female sexual empowerment in relation to all women as well as adolescent girls and wrote about how desire and pleasure was the focus of an emancipator or liberatory (Freire, 2007) sexuality for women. During second wave feminists’ attempts to reclaim sexuality for women, the objectification of women was named as a problem. One answer to this social and interpersonal problem was the opposite of objectification, the subjectification, if you will, of women through getting to know their bodies and their bodies in relation to their desires. Second wave feminists like Linda Phelps wrote in 1971 that women were alienated from their bodies via men’s objectification of them and that objectification was more than just a problem of men whistling at women as they walked down the street. It was a practice that deprived women of autonomy and subjectivity. For second wave feminists as well as those who came after in the field of psychology, sociology, and philosophy, to know one’s own body and desires was the beginning of a process of sexual self-actualization (becoming a subject; appreciating oneself; and feeling entitled to pursue desire.)

The feminist interest in sexual empowerment also arose as a response to growing knowledge about sexual victimization. Second wave feminists began to understand rape and sexual abuse in the context of patriarchy and male ownership of women’s bodies, framing it also as an attack on women’s sexual autonomy. Sexual empowerment was then envisaged as the right to say no. And this right, over time, was extended to employees (in sexual harassment laws) and even wives. Feminists continue to see sexual empowerment in adolescent girls as enabling them to distinguish between choice and coercion (Thompson, 1990; Tolman, 2002).

Both objectification and sexual victimization were aspects of a general view of women as passive, and the valuing of passivity rather than agency and
assertiveness in women. Discourses around female sexuality represented it as receptive. Women who were assertive or who desired sex were labelled as "nymphos" or too male-like. Thus the feminist project regarding female sexual liberation required a more active sexuality from women, one that would permit them to have desires, act on them, and not be condemned for such. That would be sexual freedom.

This historical background most likely influenced the feminist psychologists of the past three decades to focus on desire as the sine qua non of sexual subjectivity and liberation. It could undo objectification, sexual victimization, and female passivity. But in Chapter 2 I critique this use of the term "desire" as working in other ways than its original purpose which was to mark a healthy and empowered sexuality for female adolescents. I believe that the empowered and desirous girl that feminists have written about is idealized and that her imagined unambivalent sexuality makes her out to be an empowered "supergirl." I also wrote that there was something wrong about an ideal that reified the positions of object and subject, and, I later argued, and will do so in this introduction a bit later, that mutuality in sex might be a requirement of a new and empowered female adolescent sexuality. I suggested that the ideals of sexual empowerment for adolescent girls might play out differently for girls of color who have not always been pictured as passive but instead voraciously sexual. And there were two additional critiques that I developed which I now summarize in the next few paragraphs. The first is the idea of experiencing pleasure as a sign of empowerment. The second is the idea that experiencing pleasure is connected in some way to morally good sex.

One of the more important criticisms I made centers on what has become of the idea of pleasure working in the service of empowerment. I suggested that the current ideal of the sexually empowered teenage girl that is represented in feminist literature is one that closely resembles what I referred to as the "power porn sexualized female" which is an image extensively marketed to girls and women today. This latter point spurred on a group of commentaries on female adolescence, one of which (Chapter 3) I co-authored with Zoe Peterson, the author of the commentary responding to the initial piece, Chapter 2.

I had initially argued that an approximation to the power-porn sexuality that adolescent girls seemed to want to incorporate in their newfound liberated sexuality, one that third wave feminists supported, was one that was not empowered at all, but revisited early forms of objectification, only now self-
chosen. In a Foucauldian sense, the girls’ sexuality was positioned through a dominant, heterosexual ideology of what was pleasing sex to men (sexualities in which they performed a pornographic like sexuality as in lap dances or pole dances). I described this as a situation in which the girls believed they were empowered in that they were enacting a scenario that gave them a kind of power via a male gaze, and that they even might feel empowered, but that they actually did not have power in any sense other than the power to attract attention.

Peterson responded that experimentation has to be considered as part of development on a path to empowerment and suggested I was too harsh on adolescent girls. We explored that idea together (Chapter 3), attempting to incorporate the idea that girls are struggling with all that the culture offers with regard to what contributes to empowerment and that feminists are posed with a problem to either see girls as dupes of culture or working within available discourses to construct something that feels authentic or actually empowered when reproducing pornographic varieties of sexual performances.

The five authors of commentaries in response to Chapter 2 contributed to this discussion in a variety of ways. One suggestion was that girls themselves are ambivalent about some of their more pornographic performances (Gavey, 2012), and some wrote that, for the most part, empowerment is not something that should be an individual project but something that connects the individual to a greater movement where feelings of empowerment are connected to broader entitlements for girls and women (Bay-Cheng, 2012; Gill, 2012; Murnen & Smolak, 2011; Tolman, 2012). None responded to a particular criticism in Chapter 2 in which I described the third wave inspired, entitled, sexually empowered adolescent as not only enacting a kind of sexuality that revisits the objectified woman of male fantasies, but also representing empowerment in a stereotypically male way. This kind of sexuality, one associated with men, assertiveness, conquest, selfishness, and pleasure, was one that women had been deprived of and one that men could enjoy. The age-old double standard got in the way of women and girls enjoying what could be called a more selfish or “me”-oriented sexuality. If women were having sex for the pleasure of sex, they were sluts; if men were, they were conquerors or studs. To be empowered meant to be in charge of one’s sexuality, to know one’s desires and act on them, to celebrate one’s desires, and be motivated to please oneself. (While female sexuality earlier had been oriented towards pleasing “him”, as many an analysis of women’s magazine articles have supported, the new female sexuality was
self-motivated.) I pondered in this article whether the newly empowered female adolescent was being asked to choose between an older, demeaned version of female sexuality, (passive, hesitant, other-directed), and a newer more male sexuality, one that was out for one’s own pleasure and which I found morally problematic.

In a way, the new sexuality, when shown to be a very familiar version of male-stereotypical sex, still addressed inequality. It supported a right to have sex for women and girls whenever and with whomever they wanted, like men and boys did, without repercussions. It was an attitude that came from a liberal egalitarian perspective. But while equal rights is an important underpinning to morally good sex (which I will discuss later in this dissertation), this kind of sex might not actually be sex that is morally good for girls and might not have been or be morally good sex for men either. Thus I began to consider, after women and men attain equal rights and privileges to sex, and this is not to say that at present they have, what kind of sex, in Western culture, at this time, might be morally good. I do not intend to have a heterosexist bias or to imply that the question of morally good sex should apply only to heterosexual couples. But the issue with female empowerment vis-à-vis their relationships with men is an important start to this question.

There are three ways to examine possible female empowerment. The first is the political and social empowerment that Fine and McClelland (2006) as well as Bay-Cheng (2012), Gill (2012), Tolman (2012), and Peterson and Lamb in Chapter 3 discuss, all of whom bemoan the fact that the idea of empowerment has become something personal and not connected to a political movement. In this perspective, political power might mean that an adolescent girl has access to abortion, contraception, and sexual education because this power is understood in a context in which this knowledge has been withheld from her and prevents her ability to give valid consent and to construct an identity outside of regulatory norms. The second way to examine empowerment is through the lens of individual rights. Is a girl empowered to say no? That is, can she give valid consent and what are the constraints that might prevent this? For example, does she have the psychological capability as well as the social circumstances in her background to enable her to give or withhold consent in a situation? There is a third way to view female adolescent empowerment and it is one connected to the individual girl and relates back to the notion of desire. As indicated earlier, the ability to own one’s desire, feel it, be in touch with it, has been related to
empowerment in the first and second ways above. However, this final notion of empowerment through desire has been a subject of debate. In the next section I discuss the idea of sexual empowerment as embodiment before I go on to discuss the role empowerment must play in morally good sex.

**Embodiment as the Connector of Desire to Empowerment**

As described already, for many theorists the idea of desire and girls’ ownership of desire has been linked by feminists to empowerment (both the personal feeling of empowerment for individual girls and a more global meaning of the word, linked to women’s rights). It is important to discuss this connection to understand in what ways adolescent girls’ performances of porn-power sexuality may not be truly empowered.

When feminists discuss “desire” in relation to sexuality, they discuss feelings of entitlement to desire, to pleasure and to want sex and/or another human being. To desire makes a girl a subject, and not only an object. An object is that which is desired while a subject is one who does the desiring. Possessing desire, even if not acted upon, also indicates an “in-touchness” with who one is and what one wants and this “in-touchness” (something more than self-awareness) also makes one a subject. An object does not, presumably, have feelings; a subject does indeed have feelings, and awareness of feelings is a starting point for acting on them.

Feminists connect this feeling, this internal state, with a physical state called embodiment (Tolman, 2002; 2012). Embodiment refers to the connection of desire with one’s physical state, an “in-touchness” that is felt and exhibited in the way one experiences one’s body as it is present in the world. The opposite of embodiment would be dissociation. According to the International Society for the Study of Dissociation (2012) it is a “word that is used to describe the disconnection or lack of connection between things usually associated with each other. Dissociated experiences are not integrated into the usual sense of self, resulting in discontinuities in conscious awareness.” Dissociation and numbness are qualities associated with girls who have been abused or women who have not been permitted to be sexual (Herman, 1992). Indeed, the causes of dissociation are often external to the person herself, as in trauma or structural features of the society she lives in. It has been argued that the old-fashioned “diagnosis” of “frigidity” in United States housewives in the 1950’s and 60’s was actually a reference to a form of dissociation born of a repressive society.
Lamb (2004). Thus to embody desire is to connect the internal experience of wanting to the bodily sensation of it. To this extent, it is connected to well-being in so far that those who do well psychologically and physically are integrated people (International Society for the Study of Dissociation, 2012), connected in a holistic way, where feelings, physical sensations, and experience connect, and a person is not alienated from herself, her experience, or her body which may be the case with objectification (Nussbaum, 1995).

Phenomenological philosophy can shed some light on the relationship of embodiment to subjectivity, well-being, and even empowerment, and is somewhat different than the Foucauldian perspective. Reviewing first the Foucauldian perspective, it is clear that from the Foucauldian perspective, girls’ sexual identities are pieced together through available discourses, some regressive and some resistant to mainstream sources of power. Girls who enact a kind of empowered sexuality that resembles pornography are thus “constructing” their sexuality through regressive discourses, discourses controlled by and which benefit the porn industry, mainstream media, and patriarchal views of women’s value. From this perspective, there are certain discourses that support and maintain oppressive regimes and some that support resistance to such. But morally bad discourses are not discourses that support relations of power (because with Foucault, one can never escape relations of power); there are some relations of power that are more harmful than others in certain contexts and to certain people. There are a number of competing and alternative discourses that permit wiggle room for girls but access to these is a matter of culture, context, and care of the self. It is important to remember that in the myriad of discourses available to girls, some will be resistant to mainstream and institutionalized discourses, for example a same-sex discourse of empowering sexuality, or one that resists reproducing feminine/masculine roles.

A phenomenological perspective, however, offers a different view, one which can supplement rather than replace the Foucauldian view. From a phenomenological perspective, the connecting of body with mind and experience becomes a resource and a foundation for girls’ felt sense of empowerment, one that contributes to their well-being. It is a felt experience that would undermine their embodying the porn-power discourse.

Feminists have argued that girls who enact a porn-power form of sexuality do not have this embodied experience, this holistic ideal where
experience, desire, and physicality are merged in a way that is self-affirming. The performance of a porn-power form of sexuality is said to be inauthentic (Thompson, 1990; Tolman, 2002). Discussions of authenticity and inauthenticity take us out of the realm of discourse theory. It’s not a term Foucault has used but he does discuss “techniques of the self” and “arts of existence” which describe reflective and voluntary practices whereby individuals seek to transform themselves (Foucault, 1984/1992). And Foucault does argue that the essential component for acting ethically in the world is freedom.

Two arguments are levelled at the performance to support the accusation of inauthenticity with regard to sexual feelings and identity: that the performance is inauthentic because it is not for her benefit but for another’s; and that it is inauthentic because she doesn’t experience bodily pleasure herself. Turning to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002), the phenomenological perspective shows us that the body is understood not as a starting point for understanding human events, but that it is intertwined with what it encounters. Merleau-Ponty stated “the world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself” (1945/2002, p. 474), meaning that there is no observing ego or self outside of the world, no clear separation of subject and object, that perception begins with a body situated in this world. De Beauvoir also expresses the idea of a body-subject that is intertwined with the world (Heinemaa, 1997). As such, the girl who performs the power-porn version of empowerment is not someone who enacts and represents the power relations or ideologies that support those who have power, but one whose very sexuality is always made up of a mixture of self and world.

The idea that the self is always an expression of the world around it (and the world around it always expressed in the self) seems to not give girls the possibility of any subjectivity that does not support society’s more pornographic kind of sex. That is to say, it would seem that one can’t imagine an empowered sexuality in girls or in their bodily experience until the world outside of them empowers them. Iris Marion Young described this dilemma in her piece that captured the imagination of feminist psychologists. In her essay “Throwing Like a Girl”, she described the lived and felt bodily experiences of girls throwing a ball and the structural gendered injustice that underlie the experience. She dissected the way in which girls throw a ball, the way they neglect to put their full body into the throw, protecting themselves so to speak from harm and harmful gazes, and picturing themselves throwing as if from outside their own bodies. She describes this activity as a deeply ingrained gendered practice that
derives for patriarchal society. Girls, she says, living in objectifying societies, learn to not only experience their movements from within but to watch themselves from outside of themselves. Bartky (1990) also describes this as self-surveillance. Girls’ self-consciousness doesn’t permit them to fully engage in throwing given they must also make sure that from the outside, by someone else’s gaze (an imagined male gaze), they look good in terms established by men. Young goes on to say that living in a society in which there are always possible intrusions to girls’ sexuality, not only in the form of the male gaze but in the form of unwanted touch on to rape, girls develop a bodily experience of self-protection. This bodily sense of being is second nature to them although deeply from structural injustices. And, what’s important to this rendition of female bodily felt experience, is that girls will own this outcome, “throwing like a girl”, by referring to some essential part of being female or from their own weakness or poorness at sport.

It may be useful to consider Iris Marion Young’s comments regarding the problem of philosophical commitment. She decries the problem in philosophy of having to commit to one point of view, “Once you accept a few ideas, you are committed to dragging along a whole set of other ideas because, it is thought, they are systematically connected through logical implication.” In this spirit, I return to the Foucauldian view connecting it with Young’s phenomenological view and do not see them as contradicting one another. Both of these social theorists would argue that girls performing the porn-power version of empowerment are acting in such a way that reinstates their subjugated identities and as such, are not free nor empowered in any sense of being free except that they perceive themselves as making a choice to do so. Phenomenologists might argue that freedom and authentic subjective development might be offered to those who do not live under social constraints, and Foucauldians would argue that freedom is something that comes from the care of the self, through reflective practices and at times the embracing of counter-discourses that would undermine hegemonic ideals of femininity and female sexuality. From the Foucauldian perspective, there will always be power relations, but freedom comes from the recognition of such and the work on the self to critique these.

In some sense, in Chapter 3, I reviewed this debate. The debate centers around the issue of embodiment and if a girl feels she is empowered and has a bodily experience of being empowered, is she authentic? Peterson took more of a phenomenological viewpoint in saying that the embodied sexual feelings girls
were having when enacting pornified versions of sexuality were helpful and contributory to a freer sexuality that could be theirs later. She argued for a view of sexual development suggesting that those feelings, albeit enacted in problematic ways, were sparks of resistance, sparks of subjectivity towards a freer sexuality. In retrospect, I see that my own argument was more Foucauldian in that without self-reflection and analysis of the power relations enacted in their more pornified expressions of sexuality, girls and young women were merely reenacting power relations that were harmful to them. The embodiment they may have felt served to confirm that the power relationships were not harmful to them in the same way that a slave who might enjoy the feel of hard labor is still a slave and that enjoyment may undermine future acts towards freedom.

Peterson was arguing that, phenomenologically speaking, the girls were experiencing what they were doing as experimentation and play, even choice, and thus these feelings would be of good use to them on their journey towards empowerment. While I agreed that play and experimentation are healthy parts of developing sexuality, she wondered whether girls were constrained in their experimentation by hegemonic discourses that were objectifying and focused on pleasing men. Even if those girls performing the power-porn experience felt sexual feelings, (feelings that even suggested a connection between desiring and physical pleasure), a closer look would reveal those sexual feelings most likely derive from imagining oneself a good object for the male viewer, an object of his desire, and so would represent the physical feelings of “I’m sexy, I’m sexual” connect the desiring girl to the part of herself that desires to please rather than a sexual desire.

Given a history of women’s sexuality that prevented women from experiencing sexual feelings, it is important to look more closely at the role of physical responsiveness in the enacting of a porn-power sexuality and whether it could be an indication of a healthier or more empowered sexuality. Physical responsiveness does indeed seem to be important in that women are free to be sexual, to have sexual feelings, in structures that have prioritized men’s sexuality. But in the world of power relationships, it may be wishful thinking that physical responsiveness can lead to a fully subjective and embodied sexual being. If we understand embodied desire to mean something more than physical responsiveness, then we can also understand that performing a lap dance for the football team might answer just one small desire, the desire to be admired and objectified, and that this desire privileges the desires of someone else, or is a
kind of a false desire in that it is based primarily on pleasing a man within a heteronormative structure that helps to maintain inequality between the sexes. The physical sensation felt is not connected to a more agentic desire but felt only in relation to the pleasing of someone else. Thus the physical sensation does not meet the requirement of a more holistic connection between desire and felt sense that embodiment requires.

While the phenomenological perspective might permit us to see the possibility of a more agentic desire in girls, a sexuality that is authentic in the sense it is felt deeply and physically and supports girls as subjects of their own desire, phenomenological writers also warn us that the “felt sense” or experience of embodiment is also expressive of and constrained by the way their bodies are permitted to exist in society. As Iris Marion Young argued (Dhanda, 2000), too much focus on female subjectivity distracts from the political problems caused by structural injustice. She even proposed that gender itself was a feature of structural injustice rather than an individual identity. Implicit in Young’s analysis is that without the impediment of inequalities and problematic political structures that impede girls’ empowerment, their bodies will feel different in action and at rest, and most importantly, in sexual experiences. Phenomenology holds out the promise that if structural constraints were absent or changed, a more authentic sexuality, a freer, unfettered one might emerge. To the extent that girls’ physical responses (in sports or in sex) are hampered by social inequalities, the concept of an authentic desire, unhampered by such is held out as a possibility, and we must consider that the experiencing of physical desire, in a certain way, can indeed be linked to empowerment. This certain way in which physical desire must be felt must be tied to a sense of agency and, as I will explain later, mutuality. When girls can reflect on power relations, express sexuality with agency rather than a presumed agency that is actually in response to male desire, their sexual expressions no longer incorporate societal structures of inequality.

In the end phenomenology doesn’t bring to the discussion what I hoped it would bring, but introduces a complementary way to understand the social and power relations that are enacted in adolescent sexuality as it can be expressed today. And phenomenology adds to the Foucauldian sense of the reflecting subject who can choose counter-discourses that resist the mainstream discourses, a felt sense of subjectivity that is reflected physically.
Morally Good Sex

I will return to “desire” and authenticity with regard to girls’ well-being later. At this point I want to consider the ethical positions that are implied in many of the conversations about empowerment for female adolescents. For example, as noted above, the proposal that girls should have as much sexual freedom as boys with regard to sexuality suggests a principle of equality that comes from a liberal human rights perspective. But here I want to examine not the ethics that already underlie various pleas for sexual empowerment for girls, but instead what ethics *should* underlie sexual empowerment. To address this question, I turn first to the question of what is ethically/morally good sex. And in this section, I attempt to continue to integrate a Foucauldian discourse perspective that complicates the matter of what can be called moral. From a Foucauldian or discourse analytic perspective, any “shoulds” need to be analyzed from the perspective of what sources of power any moral injunction might serve and to what end. Do the discourses available to adolescent females about empowerment stem from the status quo or from subjugation or a combination of both? Can they be transformational? Or are they only or partially regressive?

It is important to first consider whether it is ethical for adolescents to participate in any sexual activity with another person and I turn to Steutel’s (2009) argument first. Steutel, coming from a liberal ethics perspective which orients itself in the idea that individuals should have autonomy in determining their lives, claims that adolescents do not yet have the competence to give valid consent so the liberal sexual ethics perspective leads to an illiberal view of adolescent sex. Citing Wertheimer (2003) and Archard (2000a), he states that from the liberal sexual ethics perspective, consent must meet two conditions: it must be voluntary and the parties must have enough information to offer consent. Two additional conditions that would make sex morally acceptable are first, that it doesn’t harm innocent outsiders, and second, that it should not be unnecessarily offensive. Steutel goes on to interrogate the position of the adolescent vis-à-vis moral rights and responsibilities. He considers that the age at which adolescents reach puberty varies, as does their judgment, and writes that from a standpoint of liberal sexual ethics, one can only conclude that sex that involves adolescents ought to be forbidden. He then goes on to argue this is problematic in a consequentialist way because surely such an ethic, rather than encouraging ethical practice of sex would be harmful to the overall interests of
adolescents and their development. He acknowledges that from this utilitarian perspective, consent described so strictly will cause more harm than good. He goes on to point out that if sexual contact is voluntary and an adolescent has the requisite information to protect themselves, only one further criterion needs to be met and that is that they need their parents’ permission. In summary, because adolescents are not adults and cannot give valid consent in the strict sense of the concept of consent, and because we grant them a certain degree of sexual experience and experimentation, the criteria we should use to assess if their activity is ethical is whether it was engaged in voluntarily, whether each individual had the information needed to volunteer (e.g. wasn’t deceived), and has a parent’s tacit or explicit approval. Tellings (2009) argues with Steutel in his conceptualization of adolescence, pointing out that adolescents are not children and in many societies are granted autonomy and held responsible for a variety of decisions, but that this is modulated along with development. Another argument that could be made is that in some cases, parents’ disapproval is unethical and when it is such their tacit approval is unnecessary (for example, if parents believe that same sex sex is wrong but heterosexual sex is permissible) – but that argument is for another paper.

I have two concerns with the arguments of both Steutel and Tellings. First, both rely on the legal definition of adolescent, although acknowledging that adolescents have different abilities. For example, Steutel does not make exception regarding parental permission for those adolescents who are more mature than others. As I noted earlier in this manuscript, these categories are products of culture and vary considerably across cultures; the judgments themselves are not always based on developmental theory of the time but on political gain. Otherwise, why would 18 year olds in the U.S. be able to vote, be able to be drafted, but not be able to buy liquor?

My second concern is with their framework which privileges the autonomy of individuals. Both are primarily concerned with the choices that adolescents make vis-à-vis themselves, and Steutel, in particular, with parents saving adolescents from making imprudent decisions. Autonomy, from a Foucauldian perspective, is a social construct, a bit of discourse itself that has the power to privilege certain groups over others. That is, those individuals from cultures that value autonomy less and roles more, or those who do not have the means and/or social support to act autonomously (given the constraints, for example, of poverty), may be disadvantaged in a context that privileges
autonomy as a measure or reward of adulthood. Thus when we examine the
rights and responsibilities of adolescents from outside a liberal ethics
perspective, one which has been critiqued to privilege an individualistic and
justice-oriented approach, it is possible to see that valid consent, and
information, are both self-focused criteria, rather than other-focused. Does an
individual know enough about other people not to harm them? Does the
adolescent have the maturity to take the other person into consideration? These
are questions that are just as important as questions regarding how prudent the
adolescent might be taking care of him or herself. Philosophers working within a
liberal sexual ethics model that emphasizes consent may also presume an
idealized adulthood of grown-ups who can consent without encumbrances that
interfere with the validity of consent (Sandel, 1998). In short, this framing of
what is morally permissible is too narrow legalistic and unpsychological with
regard to that which interferes with valid consent (see Wertheimer, 2003).
From a practical perspective, there are ways in which all sexually acting individuals
are subject to ideologies and practices, through discourse, that might be
damaging to themselves and those with whom they have sex. These ideologies
and practices might not interfere with consent, but they may interfere with
strictures that would be important to morally good sex. And if not harming self
or other is one criterion for morally good sex, valid consent, the criterion for
morally permissible sex, does not go far enough.

Ethically “good” sex can be distinguished from two other kinds of “good”
sex. There is a nonmoral categorization of how good sex is in terms of how
pleasurable, fun, satisfying, and even well-performed it is (Soble, 2002).
According to this categorization of good sex, bad sex would be sex that is
boring, without passion, unsatisfying, or poorly performed, with no moral claims
attached. Although the determination of whether sex is good or bad, on an
individual level, is perceived as an individual matter of taste, there are cultural
prescriptions conveyed to individuals by which they come to understand what is
“good” sex and which no doubt influences their perceptions as well as their
satisfaction. For example, an adolescent who has grown up watching movies in
which individuals kiss in a way American teens call “sucking face,”
aggressively with mouth full open, a simple closed mouth kiss might be
perceived and feel unsatisfying and unerotic, as if she were kissing her
grandmother. Although a sexual and physical attraction might be present, this
perception of what is a good kiss will surely enter into her perception of the
interaction. This categorization of good sex, thus, can be highly subjective, incorporating individual tastes, shared cultural experiences, and cultural ideologies expressed in discourse. An example of the latter, there is a discourse that refers to brief sex as “bad” sex, bad meaning unpleasurable and not meeting expected performance standards, although there is most likely variability in what kind of sex is considered “brief”. Still, the sex is not good or bad in any moral sense unless purposely bad in order to hurt someone else. In that particular case, it isn’t the sex that is bad per se but the intention and the harming of another that makes the sex “bad” in the moral sense.

The second way that sex can be good is that it can be prudent to participate in and practice sex in certain ways that have been established to prevent pregnancy, STIs, and even heartbreak. Prudent sex and morally good sex may have some connection in that today’s discourse around health and prevention has moral overtones. With regard to obesity, for example, those who do not take care of their health by eating right and exercising are often labeled as lazy and irresponsible. Critics of the neoliberal approach to health care argue that such a perspective, that the individual is morally responsible for his or her own health, takes the pressure off of the state to supply the means and structure for people to make healthier choices.

“Good” sex can finally also refer to that which is morally right, not wrong. In Chapter 1, I attempted to spell out the ways in which sex between adolescents might be morally good. In this article I suggested something beyond what Archard (2000a) described as the primary publicly accepted ethic that underlies sexual education, mutual consent (supported by adequate information and choice). That ethic is grounded in liberal ethics and summarized above in the section on Steutel’s work and in his work with other colleagues (Steutel, 2009; Spiecker and Steutel, 2004; Steutel and de Ruyter, 2011) as sex that includes autonomy (or, self-determination) and valid consent. While Steutel and De Ruyter differentiate between sexual ethics that are morally permissible and morally ideal (that which makes sexual relations “morally excellent or morally perfect” (p. 82)), I argued and will argue below and in the conclusion that sex that is mutual, caring, compassionate, and that considers the other person as well as the self, should be required for morally good sex. Their criteria for morally permissible sex, (because so much harm can come from morally permissible sex) do not actually meet the requirement of what is ethically permissible. This idea is based on early work by Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings that not only re-
introduced the notion of care into ethics, but also introduced the idea of care into moral and educational theories of the 1980’s. Steutel and de Ruyter (2011) write of something similar and state that sex that is loving and caring towards another person, reciprocal sensitivity, is a moral ideal but they argue that it is not morally required and secondary to valid consent. When I write about “mutuality”, however, I have in mind something different than the loving and caring acts Steutel and de Ruyter write of. I agree that the loving and caring acts that they write of may not be morally required for morally permissible sex but I define mutuality defined in a different way, not as expressing loving, caring acts but as a caring attention to the other (Murdoch, 1970). This I believe is quite different and should be considered as a moral requirement for both morally permissible and ethically good sex.

Caring attention to the other, that which I am arguing is a criterion for morally good sex, is explained by Blum (1994) who cites Iris Murdoch’s The Sovereignty of Good: “that the central task of the moral agent involves a true and loving perception of another individual” (p. 12). He describes what she calls “loving attention” such that this attention is responsive to the other person’s particularity, with regard to his or her needs. This attention means not permitting one’s own needs and desires to interfere with the appreciation of the other. Even with strangers, this loving attention can be extended in that the one who acts morally attempts to “understand the other person’s good” and acts from a “genuine and direct regard” for that good (p. 13).

Mutuality, however, doesn’t only focus on caring attention to the other. Caring for the self must also be an aspect to mutuality in sexual relations but not in the sense of the typical contract wherein any individual is responsible for whatever he or she contracts for him or herself. The care ethic presupposes an encumbered self (Sandel, 1998) or self that is tied up with others’ lives (MacIntyre, 1981), whose treatment of self has repercussions for others. Thus care for others is interwoven with care for self and not simply one extends to the other and the other reciprocally extends to oneself.

In what I’m calling a weak, or more accurately, an incomplete version of what is needed to have morally good sex with someone else, the focus is only on autonomy and valid consent. Underlying these requirements are principles of justice and fairness and perhaps respect and honesty, which Blum (1994) refers to as an impartialist view: “that our commitments and projects derive their legitimacy only by reference to this impartial perspective…that the impartially
derived 'right' takes moral precedence over personal 'good’” (p. 14). This view, according to Blum, is not only impartialist but “impersonal” in that knowing the other person in his or her particularity adds no dimension to the moral obligations one has to that person. The morality extended to others must be impartial, impersonal, objective, and able to be applied universally. For example, from a Kantian perspective, respect for persons as “ends in themselves rather than a means to an end” obligates a person not to use another person. Curtler (2004) proposes it is a “necessary condition for any ethical action” (p. 44). A corollary notion to respect for persons is that all people have rights simply because they are persons. Coercion denies someone else their rights and consent respects their rights. A second underlying principle to this focus on morally good sex is the notion of fairness to others. This principle is somewhat contained in the principle of respect for persons (Curtler, 2004) but adds to it that we treat others in the way that we would like to be treated and that we “apply the same standards to and have the same requirements of all persons” (p. 52). And finally, within this rights/autonomy/consent version of what underlies morally good sex, a corollary principle is one that is a rule utilitarian perspective that one should adopt rules regarding morally good sex that if applied to the majority would increase their happiness (Curtler, 2004; Mill, 1863). In this way, the freedom to pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life is a moral right because it is a rule that if adopted would increase everyone’s happiness.

Virtue ethics provides an alternative or supplementary view to the rights-based view above, in that it takes into account the particularity of people and leaves room for an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982; Murdoch, 1970; Noddings, 2002). Someone who is acting ethically in terms of the definition already laid out with regard to valid consent and autonomy might also be acting in an uncaring way (and thus unvirtuous way as well). Philosopher Virginia Held writes that “Caring, empathy, feeling with others, being sensitive to each other’s feelings, all may be better guides to what morality requires in actual contexts than may abstract rules of reason or rational calculation, or at least they may be necessary components of an adequate morality” (1990, p. 332). An ethic of care makes primary relationships and obligations to particular people. The ethic of care presumes corollary obligations and responsibilities to others such as honesty, fidelity, concern, carefulness, and compassion. While respect for persons might include honesty, these other ethics (fidelity, concern, carefulness,
and compassion) show that something more than valid consent and autonomy comprise morally good sex.

Steutel and de Ruyter argue that morally permissible sex may not be morally ideal. In their view, “care for the needs or desires of the other party should not be taken as a necessary condition of morally permissible sex between adults” (p. 83). Valid consent is all that is needed for sex to be morally permissible. In this way, compassion is something supererogatory, that which goes beyond the call of moral duty. And an individual who consents to sex that may harm him or her is having morally permissible sex. Steutel and de Ruyter certainly advocate for sex that is more than permissible, sex that is “profound” and/or “more demanding” in its requirements for the treatment of the other (p. 83), but do not go far enough to say that sex that does not take into consideration the other person in a reciprocal and sensitive way is not morally permissible. From a perspective of Murdoch’s “loving attention to the other,” care is a component of ethically permissible sex and not just ideal.

I want to argue that mutuality in sex is a concept that incorporates both the justice and care perspectives. Mutuality includes valid consent, fairness, respect for persons, caring, sensitivity to another’s feelings, and concern. Without an understanding of the other and what is going on for him or her before, during, and after sex, there can be no deep mutuality but only reciprocity which is, again, a form of just interaction (I do for you what you do for me in a fair and just manner). Mutuality implies the loving or in the very least caring attention to the other and his or her needs. If a sexual partner were suffering, empathy, sensitivity, and concern are her or his due from a moral perspective. But why would this only apply to one who is suffering? The loving attention to people in all their humanity could form the basis of an empathic feeling with the other. We need not let go of the ideals of justice but attach them to the foundation of loving attention to the other. For without justice, the individual may unjustly only care for the other, and not herself. Underlying the capacity to extend loving attention may very well be the capacity to take care of one’s own self and to know one’s limitations, and even desires.

My goal is to also be able to suggest an ethical sexual practice that would work not only for those in love or who know each other well but also for those who might have just met. So the question must be asked, to what extent can a person know another person he or she just met in order to extend the loving attention that is at the foundation of ethically good sex from a virtues and caring
perspective? Perhaps, knowing the other person well is not required but instead a loving attention to their humanity and an openness to them as human beings with desires and vulnerabilities. In this sense, love itself may not be required, but a warm, tender, and open feeling to another’s vulnerabilities. This kind of openness to another’s vulnerabilities might lead to a person saying no to another person who gives valid consent.

Finally, I want to throw into the mix of what is morally good sex an idea that I do not wholeheartedly ascribe to but which must be acknowledged here, the idea of ethically good sex from a political standpoint. Fine and McClelland (2006) expand the notion of desire to “thick desire” making the point that adolescent female sexuality and public policy are enmeshed. Rather than discuss what would make sex ethical when practiced by adolescents, they examine the social structure under which adolescents make decisions and engage in sex. These authors make the point that in the United States, where a neoliberal moralizing discourse around reproductive freedom and “personal choices” is omnipresent, ethically good sex is not a personal matter. They argue that inequities such as racism, problems in health care, and college, as well as access to sexual education, interfere with the true freedom to make a personal choice.

*Morally Good Sex, Adolescent Girls’ Well-Being, and the Place of Desire*

If we now take as our starting point morally good sex as defined by mutuality because mutuality can encompass both foundations of justice and Murdoch’s loving attention, we can return to the question of adolescent girls’ well-being and the place of empowerment and desire.

As noted earlier, the idea of empowerment was key in early feminist views concerning women’s sexuality and the idea that women’s sexual activity should be treated similarly to the way men’s sexuality was treated. It was central to the notion that women should be given the space to develop their sexual agency (to not always be an object) and they deserve the freedom to act in sexual ways without judgment or repercussions. Thus, the version of empowered sexuality, one that is consistent with a porn-power version of sexuality, can be supported from a justice perspective in that girls are consenting to present themselves as objects within a system that gives them rewards for doing so. While it can be argued that the broader culture creates only those circumstances in which girls who act in arguably demeaning ways get those rewards, the girls
themselves act with knowledge of those circumstances and reinterpret such acts as empowering and their choice.

When girls reinterpret such acts or positions as a choice they are making, they are in effect saying that choice supersedes oppression, as if the very act of making a choice speaks to the freedom they have to act in a different way. But choices can be constrained choices and the question we must ask then is to what extent the constraints regarding this choice are strong enough to make their choice less free. We need also ask to what extent when they make their choices are they making choices that may be harmful to themselves and/or others so that their free choice violates the second aspect of morally good sex which is sex that is mutual.

In answer to the first question, to what extent are girls’ choices to enact this form of sexuality, problematically constrained, I answer in the following way. To the extent that girls today have many options for sexual ways of being (if indeed they do), all of which have ample rewards (if indeed this is true), such a choice is unconstrained. To the extent that positioning themselves in demeaning or subservient ways vis-à-vis men gains them greater rewards than not doing so, these choices are encumbered and less free.

This would be true even for the girl who has sexual feelings in this porn-power position which I have discussed above as not truly representing an embodied sexuality. To the extent that their sexuality is constrained by sexism in society, in reference to the Young view that the body itself reenacts in its felt sense the oppression of a society, the feelings girls have in their body in enacting a demeaning or porn-powered kind of sex, whether pleasurable or not, are constrained by a pleasure that is circumscribed. Thus even the girl who gets pleasure out of performing a striptease not only because of the psychological pleasure they get from the attention she receives from others but also the physical pleasure in her body, e.g. arousal, is not empowered by the choice nor the feeling of pleasure because both constrain the girl to only get these rewards and this physical pleasure by pleasing someone else, in the service of someone else’s desires. (And this is why physical pleasure cannot be a signifier of ethically good sex.)

Thus girls’ choices may reflect valid consent and meet criteria for autonomy that Tellings (2009), Steutel (2009), and Steutel and de Ruyter (2011) indicated and which was reviewed above. But from an orientation that holds mutuality to be required for ethically good sex, their choices, supporting as they
do practices that have been associated with harm to women, even exploitation, does not meet the criterion of care for others and mutuality. It may be reciprocally pleasurable sex, but not mutually caring. Regarding the second criterion for morally good sex that I have proposed, that which makes sex mutual (involving caring if not loving attention to self and other), the girl who enacts a porn-power performance of sexuality seems not to be engaging in ethically good sex in two ways. She does not seem to be offering loving attention to another and if the criterion of mutuality is applied, then the one-way performance of porn-power versions of sexuality for girls does not pass the test. In fact, one can argue that a performance that is porn-inspired, that emphasizes performance at the heart of the sex, evoking porn images rather than expressing oneself in more complex ways, undermines the idea of sex as the extension of loving attention to the other. To the extent a girl permits herself to be used as a tool for someone else’s pleasure, she is not engaging in ethically good sex because it is not mutual. Girls shouldn’t see themselves as bodies for the pleasure of other people because in doing so they participate in a non-reciprocal and insensitive, possibly harmful act with respect to their developing sexuality and identity. Moreover it contributes to a power structure that continues to contribute to their lack of freedom and to their needs and desires, taking a backseat to the needs and desires of men.

A secondary argument I’d like to pursue here is whether or not girls in their personal choices should be responsible to other girls? To the extent that girls belong to a category, a gender category or class, of sexual beings, their enactments have effects on other girls and women in general, as well as on those on the receiving end of performances. Hypothetically speaking, if a famous actress were to publicly say that some women like to be beaten, it would be ethically wrong to use her position to express a view so harmful to women although she might have the right to say whatever she likes in public. She would have a responsibility not to. In an earlier piece about forgiveness and abuse, I argued that women’s public forgiveness of their victimizers might have deleterious effects on other victims and thus should be kept more private (Lamb, 2006a). If the way one treats oneself has implications for the treatment of all people, but especially with those with whom, through oppression, one has been linked, then girls enacting this controversial sexuality, one that seems to say “objectification can be fun”, may be harming other women. The care ethic does not presuppose an individual apart from her surroundings unphased by her
actions or reactions towards others. The individual is encumbered (Sandel, 1998) and her life is tied up with others’ lives (MacIntyre, 1981), such that her treatment of others has repercussions for self and for others. Thus, are there not obligations of solidarity and membership to a group, particularly one’s gender, that come from the embedded character of their lives (Song, 2007)? In this case, the participation in exploitative acts by any adolescent girl, while she may be a consenting partner, fails to live up to an ethic of care insofar as one’s own experiences contribute to an overall understanding of acceptable practices.

Taking this broader view of more global ramifications of personal acts, and a responsibility for solidarity, we need to consider that girls who enact a porn-power form of sexuality may also affect the wellbeing of all girls in their quiet support of the porn industry. These acts are tied to exploitative industries that enter into the hearts and mind of a society quite without its bidding although the industry would like to propose that they are responding to a need (Dines, 2010). While pornography may speak to some human need, pornography and sexualized media contain a myriad of sexist representations of women and girls that have become normalized and these representations do not relate to any common human need to view sexually exciting material. The normalization of demeaning representations is what makes girls feel as if they are freely choosing such. And it’s the normalization of it that calls for a resistance by individual girls. The Foucauldian idea of “care for the self,” an idea I expound on later in this dissertation, means taking account of one’s power effects on others. This kind of “care for the self” introduces the idea that girls by not participating in this kind of sexuality have an effect on themselves but also on other girls.

Thus, even if let’s say a middle class girl with opportunities, talents, and supports that permit her to play at being a porn star can shrug it off in a year or so and succeed in graduate school or wherever life takes her, and if it doesn’t affect her body and soul in any permanent way, the ethical position for her to take is to examine how her privileged position permits this and how her enacting this kind of sexuality may have ramifications for others less privileged, for gender relationships, and for the men to whom the performance is directed. This may seem like a tall order for an adolescent girl, however the development of a care for the self in the Foucauldian sense necessitates at least a beginning awareness of how one’s own acts contribute to power that may harm others.

I want to make an exception here with regard to when the enactment of what I’ve been calling porn-power representations of sexuality may be less
harmful and ethically permissible. It seems to me that when two (or more) people who generally extend loving attention to each other or who participate in sex with the intention of bestowing loving attention on self and other also decide to “play at” being or acting pornographic, then this attitude of being and interacting changes the sense of the porn-power performance. That is to say, it seems to me that one can play at being demeaned or demeaning in the context of a relationship that is mutual in terms of self-care, other-care, and equality. The notion of play in itself suggests that such a play-acted relationship is not real and is fun precisely because it goes against the norm. For example, a homeowner could not say to her housekeeper, let’s play for a day that we are back two hundred years and you are my slave as I ask you to do various chores. The starting relationship is unequal and to play like that would be demeaning to the one asked to be the slave. However, in a relationship of equality, mutual care and loving attention, one can play at being a “slave” to another because it’s temporary and doesn’t disrupt the underlying equality and mutuality of loving attention although one can imagine circumstances in which even play changes a relationship’s dynamics. Is it possible, in the spirit of experimentation and play that an adolescent female finds herself enacting an imitation of a porn star for the mutual benefit of her and her partner in sexual activity? It is possible, however, given the context of the present society in which this play is engaged, it appears as if the enactment of oppression, even in a playful way, supports it for the individual girl and contributes to overall objectification and/or demeaning of girls or women. So, can an adolescent couple “experiment” with relations of inequality only to discover the ideologies of society as expressed in their private experience? Of course, and such play would be morally permissible. But to the extent that it is harmful and not reciprocal and not sensitive, it is not. Girls living in a culture that bombards them with images of sexuality inspired by pornography do have choices. Through care of the self they understand their own power and privilege with respect to institutional power and men and other girls and women. They can monitor their acts with regard to issues of justice (consent) as well as mutuality (loving attention to self and other). And they can engage in reflective practice that examines the meaning of cultural forms of sexuality for themselves and others, considering issues of exploitation of self and all women.

I return once more to the hypothetical example that might be useful is the case of two people who have just met agreeing to have sex with one another. In
the liberal sexual ethics view, if these two people can provide valid consent, no more is needed for ethically permissible sex. But for ethically good sex, each needs to make enough of an effort to know the other so that loving attention to another human being can prevent exploitation or harm. The drunken teen who consents to sex does not give valid consent because she or he is drunk. But the teen in grief or teen going through a hard time needs that loving attention from the other as well for the sex to be morally good. For the sex to be mutual, and not just a series of reciprocal acts exchanged under valid consent, the one who is not encumbered by grief might need to understand, in the very least, the grieving person’s state of mind so as to make a best guess with regard to whether the ensuing sex might be helpful or harmful, or neutral with respect to that person’s current state. The condition of mutuality as a loving attention to the other doesn’t require a psychological evaluation or a personal history. But it does require attention to motives, emotions, and states of mind that might interfere with the sex being mutual.

Mutuality thus is the concept that best expresses what an empowered and healthy sexuality looks like in that sex that is mutual must involve both consent and caring. It is the kind of sex that orients a person towards a partner’s self and not just body. Mutuality before sex means a basic knowing and understanding of the other as a person with a history, a current state, emotions, and other encumbrances. Mutuality during sex must mean that both partners are interested as much in what the other person experiences and what they share together over servicing the other.

If this seems inconsistent with a Foucauldian view of sex produced by discourse, there are philosophers who have taken up this very point. As mentioned earlier, MacKenzie (2009) reconciles Nussbaum’s critique of postmodernism with Butler’s response, and Cordner (2004) points out that although Foucault argued against universals, calling the search for universals “catastrophic” because of their normalizing imposition of disciplinary power, there is still a possibility that Foucault supported a kind of universalism. Foucault, in later years, began to sound less as if he believed that all thinking was a product of discourse. He began to discuss a “care of the self” that asked of people self-mastery in relation to ethical principles without fully explaining where these ethical principles derived from. “Care of the self” in these later works was differentiated from knowing oneself, knowing oneself becoming associated with the self as a project. Caring for oneself seemed to include
mastering one’s behavior with regard to self-chosen ethical principles while at the same time analyzing such principles for their relation to power and discourse. It is as if he argues that the ethical subject is a philosopher always considering “what enables, conditions, and limits the subject’s access to the truth,” a truth that is unknowable because it changes depending on context. Cordner argues, explaining Foucault’s point of view, that it is possible to formulate ethics from a universal concern for common humanity without generating a universal code. This common humanity, about which he speaks, stands independent from the variety of features of human beings that philosophers have highlighted as important for ethical decision making (linguistic capacity, ability to reason, ability to reflect, etc.) Instead there is a “depth of humanity” and “moral acknowledgement of the other” that defines our common humanity, and this, Corder argues, does not straightjacket us into universal behavioral norms. Indeed, the criterion of mutuality that I have set forth here is not one that prescribes specific behaviors, but seems to fit with Corder’s “moral acknowledgement of the other” and connection with humanity.

In the spirit of Butler who argues that every universal must always be held under the light of analysis in terms of context and power (MacKenzie, 2009), I end this introduction by self-reflexively noting that the idea of mutuality as an ethical universal for sex has come about in a context of male privilege. It is important to consider from a discourse methods perspective whether mutuality would even need to be suggested in a different context and whether in other cultures or other times mutuality would be inherent in a definition of sex and not an “add-on.” It is also important to question whether mutuality is too demanding a criterion for ethically good sex in a time in which the purpose of sex is not reproduction but often entertainment. Does this criterion demand of sex more meaning than it should? And might this demand for more meaning or care of the other in sex serve a more regressive ideology of sex in marriage or abstinence education? Might it echo Christian urgings to negate self-strivings and think of the other, a perspective Foucault argued was against pleasure and repressive to some sexualities? Might this demand for more mutuality undermine sexual development of adolescents through experimentation, and, in this way, support institutions and ideologies that infantilize adolescents in order to control and regulate them? These are the kinds of nuanced questions that disrupt any simple understanding of moral permissibility of sex between two parties with unequal standing in a repressive context. The curriculum I present in the conclusion of
this dissertation invites students to examine norms and explore exceptions. It also presents sexual education as ethical education.

Chapter 1: Sex Education as Moral Education: Teaching for pleasure, about fantasy, and against abuse

Abstract
This paper argues for an integration of moral education and sex education curricula. In such an integration, the primary values that would be taught would not be those relating to specific sexual behavior but those relating to the general treatment of human beings, suggesting that sex that involves coercion or exploitation as well as sex that causes harm is wrong. Sex educators must take as their goal the prevention of abuse, not by placing responsibility on girls to avoid victimisation but by teaching boys how to express themselves sexually in moral – that is, considerate and respectful – ways. The paper discusses differential gender role socialisation and why integration of such material must be a part of every sex education curriculum. The paper also discusses how physical pleasure is not only a biological phenomenon but one that is culturally constructed, the discussion of which would be important to sex education. Finally, teaching about fantasy as well as sexual “deviance” (in terms of the moral behaviors discussed above) may be the most important aspect of sex education to prepare or retrain boys to be "good" sex partners rather than perpetrators of abuse.

Educators and theorists have seen sex education and moral education as separate enterprises for several decades, although there are obvious overlaps between the two. While there may have been good reasons to separate the two (e.g. to avoid the kind of curriculum that would impose a rigid system of moral injunctions on children who had a very small knowledge base to begin with), the time for their merger may be near. Already there are several areas in which the two enterprises share interests and goals. One common goal of moral educators and sex educators is the integration of their “curricula” into the whole process of education. Both moral and sex educators have argued that a “special class”

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1 This chapter was first published as Lamb, S. (1997). Sex education and moral education: Teaching for pleasure, about fantasy, and against abuse. Journal of Moral Education, 27, (4), 301-316. It is used here with their permission.
approach is not enough, that moral and sex education can be and need to be incorporated into the entire curriculum. Moreover, various schools of moral education would seem to fit neatly into a sex education curriculum. The kinds of moral education curricula that emphasise individual decision-making seem readily applicable to issues of sex and sexuality, as do aspects of curricula that have been called “values clarification” and “character education”.

In spite of the obvious ways in which these two curricula could work together, the obvious problem or fear regarding their merger would be that sex education would become moralistic rather than morally related. The danger would be that we would not be able to agree on which sexual behaviors are moral or immoral, wrong or right, and thus we would have to throw up our hands and simply return to the neutral attitude that characterises sex education today and from which moral educators are now departing (Ryan, 1986; Lickona, 1993). While some have argued effectively that even this “neutral” perspective contains hidden values (e.g. girls must protect their virginity; getting pregnant before one is married is wrong; a passive role for boys is unmasculine), the overarching style that is aimed for in sex education is one of neutrality.

Although it may seem that we could never agree on values relating to sexual behavior, as Amitai Etzioni has argued we as a culture do share values and aspirations that are not difficult to uncover (Etzioni, quoted in Berreth & Scherer, 1993). Taking a communitarian approach, as he does, we might discover that many of us would agree that sex that involves coercion is wrong, that sex that involves the exploitation of a person younger or less powerful and more dependent on an older, more powerful person is wrong. We would also agree more generally that sex that involves harm to another whether physically or psychologically would be immoral.

Given these basic values it might seem that sex education would then simply be abuse prevention. However, such an approach would have a narrow view of the potential sexuality of children and adolescents as only concerned with not becoming a victim. Such an attitude would deny children knowledge of sex as pleasure, which would be and is especially damaging psychologically to females, who have been systematically deprived of this knowledge and prevented from gaining experience that would help them see themselves as sexual subjects and not objects, as people who can seek out sexual pleasure and who have a right, equal to men’s, to this pleasure (Fine, 1992). Such an attitude would also give children and adolescents the false idea that perpetrators of such
harm are distant and abnormal “others” and that the potential for immoral sexual acts (sexual acts that are coercive and cause harm to others), lies with others and does not have to be examined as a possibility within oneself. This is a particular danger to boys, who receive ample socialisation that encourages sexual coercion as a normal part of sexual development (Edley & Wetherell, 1995; Denborough, 1996; Lamb, 1996; Pleck, 1989; Thorne, 1989).

To combine sex education and moral education would not have to mean teaching certain values relating to particular sexual acts but, instead, could mean a broadening of the entire enterprise of sex education to deal not only with anatomy, reproduction and disease or pregnancy prevention (Haffner, 1992), but also to include gender role socialisation with regard to interpersonal behavior, the role and construction of physical pleasure in our lives, aspects of sexual deviance and a focus on fantasy as well as sexual behavior.

Moral education in all of its forms involves reflection, whether a child is asked to look inward to find values or inward to examine his or her behavior in relation to presented virtues. To add moral education to the sex education curriculum would ask children to reflect on themselves as sexual human beings. To do this, educators would have to acknowledge children as sexual beings. At present, sex education in the grade school curriculum is taught more as an introduction to the sexual life – as if life prior to this transition has been asexual.

To reflect on themselves as sexual beings would also mean reflecting on the cultural pressures to be this or that kind of sexual being and to reflect on one’s fears about, outrage at, and compliance to these cultural sexual norms. Such an approach would of course involve “denaturalizing” sex and sexuality; that is, uncovering the constructed nature of gender.

Each of these topics, gender role socialisation, aspects of deviance, the construction of physical pleasure and the importance of fantasy, will be discussed below but, first, I would like to present the reader with two examples I have published elsewhere (Lamb, 1996) of “normal” (in the sense of “typical”) sexual behavior that is also “immoral” so that we might use these examples in our discussion of sexual education curricula. I add to these two a new example of extremely immoral and deviant sexual behavior as a contrast and to make comparisons.

**Not So Unusual Encounters**
The first example is of a 13-year-old girl going up an escalator alone in a department store. Behind her and moving up past her on the escalator is a group of teenage boys. As the group passes her, one of the boys reaches over and grabs her breast, cheering or laughing about it at the same time. In the more typical version of this story the girl looks embarrassed, she asks “why me?” and begins a lengthy self-examination; she is shaken, and looks around to see if anyone else has noticed. Meanwhile, the boys have reached the top of the escalator and the boy who grabbed the girl’s breast beams with prestige. He is congratulated; he has “won” something. Neither he nor the other boys notice the girl’s reaction. She is already gone in their minds.

A less typical reaction on the girl’s part would be thus: she grabs his hand as he reaches towards her breast and yells into his face “Fuck you!” Her stance is one of “How dare you do this to me!” She is no longer invisible, the boys are made to see her, and the actor appears humiliated in front of his friends even if only briefly.

In the second example, a teenage boy is feeling down and bored. He is depressed but does not know it exactly, only to say and feel vaguely that he is bored, “nothin’ to do”. His 10-year-old stepsister walks into the kitchen and he impulsively sticks his hand down her pants and underpants to “cop a feel”. He was not thinking of her specifically, nor of any other girl.

Perhaps he was thinking about problems he was having at school or with his girlfriend, or perhaps he just was not thinking; but the stepsister’s reaction is to remain frozen and silent until a few months later when she goes to a ‘friend’s slumber party and reveals to her peers what happened. In treatment, when the father was interviewed, he says he cannot understand why his son did this to his sister; “Why couldn’t he just grab some girl in the hall at school? That’s what I did when I was his age.” When asked what happened to him when he did that, he replied that he had been suspended but it was unfair, because the girls he did this to were all “sluts” anyway.

Now, if you will, picture a third, more difficult example: that of Jeffrey Dahmer, but at a younger age. Jeffrey Dahmer is the serial murderer who sexually raped his victims (all male), cut them up to preserve them in his refrigerator, and even ate parts of some. While psychologists outrage us when they say things such as “he in a sense was an incredibly lonely person who believed that nobody would elect to stay with him” (Becker, quoted in Sleek,
1994), it would still be important for us to imagine him at an earlier stage when these acts might have been preventable.

Imagine his first deviant sexual thought. Who among us would argue that this fantasy should be or should have been treated neutrally? Even those who argue most strongly about separating fantasy from behavior might have wished that someone, some concerned therapist perhaps, could have had access to this boy at the time of his first sexually deviant fantasy. Was his fantasy wrong? Well, not exactly, just as psychoanalysts would argue that the fantasies we may have had about killing our parents are not wrong. Yet philosophers have argued that we are responsible for our characters if we have had signs or have allowed aspects of our personality to develop that might indicate that we would act immorally in the future. Even if one was to argue that fantasies cannot be called moral or immoral, it is important to recognise that we do have moral reactions to our fantasies and they do cause us guilt. The typical reaction would be for the therapist to inform his or her client that understanding our fantasies and realising they are just fantasies helps us to become and remain psychologically healthy. Had there been a place where Dahmer could reveal his fantasy life so that it could be examined in terms of what kinds of cultural pressures and constructions were feeding it, as well as what such a fantasy says about the person’s humanity and development, would Jeffrey Dahmer have grown up to do what he had done?

These examples bring up core sexual and moral issues that are not dealt with in sex education today. Sex education does not address the norms of gender roles that would predict the coercive and entitled acts of the boys in the first two examples and the passive self-deprecatory responses of the girls. Sex education does not address the way in which sex for boys is constructed as an assertive act which often involves impulsivity, coercion, esteem building in the eyes of one’s peers, and inattention to one’s partner. Nor does sex education address how sex, sexual coercion and sexual fantasy can be used as a coping mechanism for negative feelings in adolescence. The moral problems involved are those we as a culture could all agree on: lack of empathy for the other person and feelings of entitlemment to the bodies of girls (issues of care and justice, respectively, and both totally embedded in our culture’s gender socialisation practices).

Gender Role Socialisation

The two more typical examples above show sexually coercive acts, both of which are immoral in that they cause harm to their victims, but neither of
which would be punishable legally in and of themselves. They are not extreme and while not necessarily “common”, they are common enough to exemplify the way gender role socialisation sets up the perpetration of harmful acts as well as responses to these.

Others have argued eloquently for sex education to include sex equity education (Greenberg & Campbell, 1989; Sears, 1992; Trudell, 1992; Whatley, 1989) and have pointed out that to teach children about sex reinforcing double standards and sex role stereotypes is wrong and dangerous (Whatley, 1989). This paper goes further to examine the abusive acts that stem from dangerous forms of gender role socialisation and centres the discussion on the importance of this kind of sex education (one that includes issues of sex equity) for boys, in particular. This is not to say that sex equity education is not enormously important for girls also, but that sex educators have not incorporated into their efforts a serious treatment of the way sex and aggression are co-mingled in our society. Nor have they dealt specifically with the way some, perhaps many, boys are in some sense “set up” to express sexuality in aggressive or coercive (and thus immoral) ways.

There are basic differences in sex role socialisation that put boys at risk of becoming sexually coercive in adulthood. These differences have wide support in the research literature and “denaturalise” that which we would see as biologically determined. Indeed, Whatley argues that eliminating biological determinism is one of the most important goals for a sex equitable sex education programme (1989).

General differences in patterns of socialisation make boys more susceptible to acting out in sexually coercive patterns when adolescents and adults. One study of Chicago adolescents found that the topics teenagers wanted to be covered in sex education classes most were birth control, abortion and, most importantly, how to handle sexual feelings. Patterns of socialisation teach boys and girls different methods of coping with sexual feelings, as well as different methods for working out difficulties in dyads, examining feelings of entitlement and expressing various emotions.

Boys are less “trained” in empathic interpersonal problem-solving by virtue of the tendency of boys to play in groups rather than dyads and resolve disputes via rule-making rather than concern for the feelings of another (Gilligan, 1982; Thorne & Luria, 1986). Research shows that grade school boys approve of violence towards girls much more than they approve of violence
towards boys (Heusmann et al., 1992). From a very early age they are given a greater sense of entitlement in the world. Mothers will resolve property disputes between toddlers more often in favour of their own child if their own child is a boy, not a girl (Ross et al., 1990). This entitlement is reflected, for the child, in the adult world that rewards men with more financial and status privileges.

Many have commented on the gendered socialisation of emotions (Hochschild, 1988; Lutz, 1990; McLean, 1996). Boys have been socialised to be less accepting of emotions such as sadness and tenderness (McLean, 1996), as well as less able to recognise such emotions in others. In fact, males are more likely than females to recognise anger in photographs of people whereas females more likely than males to recognise all other emotions (Rotter & Rotter, 1988). This lack of awareness of negative affect (apart from anger) gives boys less room for the development of coping mechanisms to deal with bad feelings. While it has been argued that girls’ overawareness leads to a ruminative style of thinking, making females more vulnerable to depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990), it is also possible that boys' lack of awareness regarding emotional states makes them more vulnerable to coping with negative affect by acting impulsively and in angry ways.

These kinds of patterns are discussed in two important articles on gender role socialisation. Two social psychologists, Thorne and Luria (1986), observed grade-school children in the playground for several months. The games they observed conveyed a sense that cross-gender contact was potentially sexual and contaminating and that girls were defined more sexually than boys. They described how heterosexually charged rituals such as “boys chase girls” were played out, reinforced and named; and how girls and boys were socialised to see each other as members of “opposing” groups. Of interest to socialisation for abusive behavior is the description of boys’ groups in interaction. They wrote that boys’ play revealed a pattern of building to an intense, aroused state in which rule transgression is particularly exciting and where it is not uncommon for another to get hurt. They were likely to excuse their actions by saying “When you get excited you do things you don’t mean”.

A similar anthropological study of two kindergarten classrooms found that in one class boys discriminated against girls regularly through verbal harassment and put-downs. Boys controlled one another by deriding any behavior of other boys that was friendly toward the girls (Goodenough, 1990).
Psychopathology shows the strongest delineation of sex role development gone awry in the preponderance of depression in adolescent girls as well as the preponderance of impulsive disorders in boys (Cohen et al., 1993). The impulsive disorders of boys deserve particular attention, not only in clinics but in sex education classes. When boys have a problem with impulsivity, coupled with a lack of empathy or inability to see the other as a human being or an equal, there is a dangerous set-up for acting out sexually.

In sum, this brief examination of gender role socialisation draws attention to issues that must be addressed in sex education if one is to take a “moral” view, a view that sees the purpose of sex education as not only to inform but to help young people self-reflect on patterns of gender and character that make them more or less vulnerable to acting out sexually. It is now common knowledge that most perpetrators of rape are men and that at least a third and up to a half of the perpetrators of sexual abuse are adolescent boys (Showers et al., 1983; Farber et al., 1984; Rogers & Tremain, 1984). Moreover, research on attitudes shows 25-30% of college males state some likelihood that they would rape if they knew they could get away with it (Briere & Malamuth, 1983). Boys are at particular risk to act out sexually and if this is not addressed as a part of sex education, it is unclear where in the process of education this risk can be explored.

Aspects of Deviance

While sex educators have attempted to deal with teenage pregnancy and venereal disease as expressions or products of deviant sexual behavior, the “deviance” implicit is either the act of having intercourse before marriage or having unprotected intercourse (and just how deviant these behaviors are seen is dependent on the population being offered sex education and how conservative or liberal the curriculum is). Even without introducing new topics into the curriculum, much could be done to make even the teaching of these aspects of sex education more gender equitable; educators could emphasise how pregnancy may be harmful to both male and female adolescents or teach equal responsibility for birth control.

Sex educators also deal with deviance by discussing coercion in dating situations, as well as more extreme forms of coercion such as sexual abuse and rape. When such an education is offered it is aimed at girls to prevent them from
becoming victims. However, sex education is missing the point if it does not deal with actual perpetration of coercive acts.

How can we teach boys not to perpetrate? How is such a curriculum accomplished? This is a particular area in which moral educators may have something to say. Education regarding gender role socialisation is a first step in preventing abuse and victimisation. The second needs to be direct work in the area of good sex, sex that is not coercive, exploitative or harmful to another (see Spiecker & Steutel, 1997, for a more comprehensive definition of such).

Within decision-making models of moral education, discussions about what makes “good sex” might be helpful to young people. It is entirely possible that students would disagree on some aspects of “good sex” (e.g. how early one is to have intercourse) while agreeing on other aspects (e.g. it is important not to hurt people). Even a “teacher neutral” attitude that usually accompanies decision-making models of moral education (Ryan, 1986) might be beneficial in helping students to reach their own conclusions about what is “good” vs “bad.”

However, a teacher neutral approach has its limitations. Take, for example, case described in LaCerva (1992). The author describes an incident in which a 6-year-old boy kisses a 6-year-old girl very hard against the mouth. The girl, Tameka, usually a talkative girl, is silent but the entire class has become involved, one child saying “He raped her!” Tameka says she did not want to be kissed. The teacher tries then to create a “nonrepressive environment where (the students) can talk about these issues openly and nonjudgmentally”. LaCerva writes, “It is the teacher’s view that what happened was not an issue of morality, a matter of inherently good or bad behavior, but was a social issue – sex roles and sexuality are socially produced and organised” (p. 125). She works with the class so that the problem is now the “class’s problem” and not Tameka’s and in the discussion the boys express opinions consonant with the gender socialisation practices discussed above: they thought “they could do whatever they wanted to the girls as long as no one was around”. Tameka remains silent and never tells her mother about the incident.

In this case, where patterns of gender role socialisation and gender identity are dealt with well through class discussion, and the aspect of social blame is given its due, there is an important component missing: that is, even on the admission of the teacher, the moral component. Someone was hurt by the act. Another person had made a choice, however much influenced by social factors. The hurt person is left abandoned, perhaps even silent because of self-
consciousness and self-blame. Clearly, these children could benefit from some discussion of why what the boy did was wrong and this kind of discussion seems supremely important because it may be unclear to these first-graders: is it wrong because the teacher caught him?; is it wrong because he is obnoxious?; is it wrong because the kiss was “hard”?; is it wrong because Tameka did not want to be kissed?

Also clearly, some reparation or attention needs to be paid to the “victim” who has become lost in this discussion. In the teacher’s eyes the community is the victim which, in part, is true and a reasonable perspective to take, but one which cannot stand alone. Individual harm to Tameka needs to be addressed. Thus moral education as a part of sex education would not only take a social approach but a particularistic approach orientated towards individual care (Blum, 1994).

A second problem with a valueless approach to sex education is that students in class discussion may, in the end, agree to a libertarian perspective in which “each individual is the ultimate judge of his or her own behavior, and what is ‘right’ for one person may be wrong for another” (as described in Carlson, 1992). What is wrong with the libertarian view is that it sees individuals as too separate, the sexual activities between two people as private. As difficult as this may be to understand, what happens between two people is only private in a very restricted sense of the word and indeed affects society as a whole. The specific behaviors (in situ) are private, but they are represented in public discourse and social patterns outside “the bedroom” where values are imparted, reproduced and enforced.

Thus, when we teach young women what “rape” is, when we define rape as something different from a stranger jumping out from behind a bush at them, women may begin to judge acts that formerly they saw as “consensual” as now “nonconsensual” (Kelly, 1988). In redefining certain behaviors in this light, we teach a value; when we define some acts as rape and others as not, we in effect condone or disapprove. We can teach these kinds of values to boys as well as girls. Indeed we must.

The difficult aspect about teaching children or adolescents about sexual violence is not only that we must teach boys about their potential to be perpetrators in addition to teaching girls about the potential to becoming victims and the social history behind these potentials; but that also we must take care not to draw distinct lines between coercive and non-coercive sex. We cannot draw
distinct lines between the two. Social and sexual patterns are arranged so that it is difficult for partners to make judgements about what is coercive and what is not. While there will be a clear delineation that sex educators can, at times, set forth certain behaviors, there will also be hazier distinctions that warrant discussion. For example, what forms of persuasion to have sex are coercive? Is all persuasion bad? What kinds are bad and why? If we call “pressure” to have sex immoral, then what kinds of gender role expectations are we reinforcing. Why are some kinds of “pressure” coercive and other kinds not?

There has been great debate about “consent” which I do not have space to address here, but would like to comment that the problem regarding how to define consent is a problem for men and women alike and cannot be discussed without reference to power dynamics between men and women in our culture. Consent is as culturally defined, as is sex. As Whatley points out, “While progressive educators seem sensitive to allaying anxieties about inappropriate erections, wet dreams, and penis size, they ignored the issues of power and control...” (1988, p. 81).

Abuse of power is a clear moral wrong and perhaps the clearest “wrong” when discussing issues of sex and sexuality. While a virtues or values approach might emphasise such positives as generosity, concern for others’ welfare and pleasure, consideration and carefulness, the most clear prohibition is “do no harm”.

The intermingling of sex and violence in every aspect of the media calls for a preventative approach with young people. While I advocate a strong focus on abuse and victimisation in a gender equal way (the potential to victimise as well as be victimised) as well as a morally aware way, it is clear to me also that we cannot focus on abuse and victimisation at the cost of pleasure.

The Denial of Pleasure

Sexuality is a part of children’s social as well as private lives from very early in life. While most accounts of children’s sexuality have dealt with fantasy (as in traditional psychoanalytic theories) or masturbation (as in Kinsey’s early studies), more recently researchers have examined the social-sexual aspects of children’s lives. Children engage in sexual play with other children from as young as 3 years of age (or when they begin playing with other children in imaginative ways) through the grade school years. Some of this play involves genitals and much of it draws on gender role patterns visible to children through
television, films and the adults in their lives. This play, reported retrospectively by adults, is remembered as pleasurable and private. That is to say that parents are not privy to it. When parents discover children at play, the children became ashamed and embarrassed (Lamb & Coakley, 1993).

Children’s sexual play is a place where they learn social qualities of being a sexual human being. It is also one of the only areas where adults do not have much direct input. Perhaps the pleasure experienced, by boys and girls alike, derives from the sense of equality and privacy demanded by such play.

However, in adolescence, gender role socialisation becomes more rigid. Many have commented on how adolescence for girls becomes a time of “shutting down”, losing self-confidence (Gilligan, 1990; Pipher, 1994). There have been excellent critiques of how modern sex education curricula portray girls as either prey or reproductive machinery, never addressing the possibility of female desire. Critics have argued that the implicit message for girls is one that denies pleasure in sexuality as well as subjectivity. The argument has been that boys are portrayed as sexual subjects, as “expressers” of sexuality, whereas girls are portrayed as recipients or as victims rather than as active sexual agents (Fine, 1992; Rury, 1989; Whatley, 1989). This argument is well taken and will not be reviewed extensively here; but what has received less attention is that the portrayal of boys as sexual agents and pleasure seekers is very limited.

Pleasure for boys is defined as limited to the genitals or to the act of assertion. There is a denial of a sort of full-bodied pleasure one can imagine is possible; instead, pleasure becomes associated with simple penis stimulation. Writers on men and masculinity have described how men’s physical pleasure has often been constructed around a punitive and aggressive attitude toward the body. Smith (1996) argues that men take a hostile view towards their bodies. He examines metaphors young men use to express going out drinking: “get blind; get paralytic; get wasted”. He asks us to imagine how many men we know would speak comfortably about nurturing their skin with moisturiser? Men who respond to hugs or are physical with other men run the risk of being taunted as homosexual; and there is what Smith calls an “ethos” equating strength in men with turning off the body to sensation.

This view of pleasure makes boys grow into heterosexual men who will not be fulfilling their own sexual potentials. One could even add to some list of moral virtues regarding sex the idea that respect and love for one’s own body (not only another’s) is a goal of sex education. This view of pleasure may also
make men more likely to be poor sexual partners for women. Research consistently shows women complain that their husbands do not engage in enough foreplay and that while women would like more foreplay, men crave more action (Hire, 1987). While this complaint has been discussed as due to biological differences, that men, because they are more quickly aroused, concentrate their energy on their genitals, and women need longer foreplay to become aroused, such an explanation confounds biology with gender role expectations, defining women as less desiring and men as more assertive.

Alex McKay, a Canadian sex educator, speaks of his sessions with high school boys (McKay, 1996). When left alone with them he opens the floor and asks them to ask him questions. Invariably they ask him, “How do you turn on a girl?” While this request may seem other-focused, it is at best girl-friendly. Most likely, what is behind the question is an implicit belief that it is hard to turn on a girl and that “turning on a girl” is an accomplishment that enhances one’s prestige as a “man”. If the boys were to be taught not what to do but how to know if a girl was turned on, he would be on his way to a kind of sexual experience that focuses on the other person. He would also be given important training in not misreading cues. One of the main problems with rapists is their tendency to “read into” and distort cues that women give them: e.g. a smile becomes equivalent to an invitation to have sex (Bondurant, 1994).

The Importance of Fantasy

While critics of current practices in sex education have bemoaned the fact that curricula have been concerned almost exclusively with biology, reproduction and virology (Haffner, 1992), and suggested the inclusion of topics such as homosexuality and sexual pleasure (Sears, 1992), few have called for education regarding fantasy. Perhaps educators have felt that fantasy is untouchable because it is so private; yet is not sexual behavior as private? Perhaps this judgement that fantasy is too private extends to a notion that educators should not tamper with the deepest thoughts of an individual, that teachers are not therapists; but is this not precisely the area in which the self can be connected to education? In fact, sexual fantasy probably occurs much more frequently than sexual behavior at many stages of life. Although sexual fantasy is not ostensibly “social”, it is an interior production of the social in many ways. If we can tap the fantasy life and invest in it the way we do actual behavior, we
as educators might more closely influence the development of the children we teach.

Fantasy is pleasurable. In fact, the support of fantasy by sex educators would not only give a positive perspective on pleasure for both sexes (without advocating the controversial subject of masturbation), but give adolescents permission to view themselves and think of themselves as sexual beings apart from their actual experience. Fantasy, when encouraged, allows the adolescent time for self-reflection about who they are and who they are becoming, separate from the messy and often confusing jumble of events in situ.

Fantasy tells us about ourselves and in particular the social meaning sex is having for us. Educators can encourage adolescents to look to their fantasies to uncover what they are internalising from the media, their parents’ relationship and the world at large, and to examine what areas need further exploration. If a young girl’s fantasies, an educator might say, are almost always about being admired, swept away and ravished, the teacher might be able to point out how this fits with stereotypical female roles, and wonder what it would mean or feel like in one’s fantasy to take a more active role.

Fantasy is also a way to tap into sexually harmful practices before they happen. I once saw a client who, at 11 years old, began to have fantasies about holding a gun to his teacher, making her undress and tying her up. He was concerned about his fantasy and, luckily, therapy provided for him a place in which the “horrible, unspeakable truth” could be examined (see Miller, 1995). Researchers tell us that we may all have “deviant” sexual fantasies at some time or another, fantasies involving coercion or being coerced, and so we must be careful not to call this boy’s fantasy wrong or morally “bad”. This fantasy indicates something about him and his associations, that sex and aggression are being connected, that he may feel powerless with respect to his teacher, that a way of feeling powerful is connected, for him, to violence and sexual humiliation. These are important associations to explore. In the exploring of these, they become “normalised” (to the extent that we see these associations in some fairly constant form in movies today), as well as “particularised” (why is he feeling so powerless in relation to his teacher and how can that be addressed?; also, does he have some sexual feelings for his teacher and is that a problem in some way?). The discussion of such a fantasy would of course involve the recognition that to do such a thing would be immoral, but to think
such a thing is an interesting door to his own self-exploration as a developing social-sexual human being.

The group “Parents Anonymous” was begun by parents who had had bad experiences being parented themselves and found themselves taking it out on their children. They wanted to find a way to help parents at the end of their rope before they struck out at their children. With all the newly formed services for victims that have arisen in the past three decades (hotlines for women being battered, child sexual abuse and rape), why have none developed for perpetrators or to prevent possible perpetration? When a perpetrator thinks of an act, plans an act, and is about to commit an act, and then wants assistance to restrain him from doing the act, to whom would he turn? Most incarcerated rapists say that they know what they did was wrong and believe that the most effective prevention strategy a victim could use would be to point out to them at the time that what they were doing was wrong (Groth, 1979). It is as if perpetrators are begging for some moral “other” to restrain them.

Concluding Thoughts

Why do most rape and sexual abuse relapse prevention programmes that occur in prisons around this country involve sex education? This is because many perpetrators are poorly informed about human sexuality and hold attitudes and myths that reflect this lack of information. Experts agree that their lack of information reinforces their avoidance of consensual sexual relationships and contributes to their viewing their victims as objects and not people (Green, 1995).

In each of the three examples cited earlier, victims were treated as objects and not subjects. While many feminist efforts have been undertaken to help females not allow themselves to become or be treated as objects, not enough effort has been given to the raising of social-sexual boys to avoid treating others as objects. This core value must not be left implicit in sex education and is precisely where sex and moral education will overlap.

To this end I make the following suggestions, some new and some building on other theorists and educators before me. Sex education must take as its moral injunction the diminishment of violent sexual behavior in our culture. To do this sex educators must:

- Speak of sexual pleasure in more gender equitable ways.
- Teach sexual pleasure as something beyond genital stimulation.
o Encourage and support sexual fantasy.
o Teach about gender role socialisation patterns and speak of the harm to each gender such patterns cause.
o Have open discussion about harm and consent.
o Teach values such as consideration, carefulness, concern and care as healthy sexual practice.
o Encourage the discussion of deviant patterns of fantasy and practice, where they arise from, what they might say about the individual and how an individual might deal with them.
o Discuss how to cope with negative affect in ways that do not make sex central as a coping mechanism; discuss how sex can be used to address bad feelings (through, for example, power assertion or avoidance).
o Teach alternative coping mechanisms.

Many of the suggestions above may seem unrelated to sex education in particular; but, to the extent that sex involves a reproduction of gender hierarchies and power dynamics, to the extent that it involves emotional development as well as the development of moral behavior, these recommendations are warranted.

Etzioni has argued that the foundation for all good behavior is controlling one’s impulses (Berreth & Scherer, 1993) and sex education has taken this narrow moral view. A more positive approach would emphasise capacities or virtues (both behavioral and emotional) such as empathy, the ability to take the other’s perspective, concern for the other and self-reflection. Through the expression of these virtues, we as a culture and community could come to some agreement about sex education’s merger with moral education.
Chapter 2: Feminist Ideals for a Healthy Female Adolescent Sexuality: A Critique

Abstract

This paper explores the ideals of healthy sexuality for teenage girls in the U.S. proposed by feminist theorists and researchers. Current ideals emphasize desire, pleasure, and subjectivity, and appear to be a response to three historically problematic areas for women and girls: objectification; abuse and victimization; and stereotypes of female passivity. There are, however, several problems with using these qualities as markers of healthy sexuality. This essay discusses these problems, including the rigid dichotomizing of subject and object, the idea that desire, pleasure, and subjectivity may have different historical meanings for girls from diverse backgrounds; and that using pleasure as a gauge for whether sex is “good” has moral implications that may undermine other important goals of feminism.

Within academia and academic writing there has been a growth of interest in female adolescent sexuality, almost large enough to rival the media’s concurrent interest (e.g. Painter, 2002). Some of this scholarly interest stems from concern in the U.S. for public health with regard to pregnancy and STD prevention. In addition to the public health focus, however, a number of articles and books have had a more political focus and are devoted to describing a female adolescent sexuality that opposes an oppressive sexuality handed down in sex education curricula and in media teenager girls consume. This more political focus was the framing argument in Fine’s article, “A Missing Discourse of Desire,” a piece that launched this discussion in 1988. Since publication, a number of feminist theorists (myself among them), educators, and researchers have taken up the subject of desire in female adolescent sexuality and have attempted to describe a healthy sexuality (and sex education) for girls that would emphasize desire, subjectivity, and pleasure. The word desire is used to describe sexually embodied feelings and to suggest girls similarly to boys in wanting sex. Subjectivity, contrasts with objectification and is used to describe girls’

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2 This chapter was first published as Lamb, S. (2010). Feminist ideals of healthy female adolescent sexuality: A critique. Sex Roles, 62(5/6), 294-306 and is reprinted here with the permission of the publisher.
ownership of their desire. And pleasure, is often used synonymously with desire, but generally indicates that girls, like boys, can feel and want pleasure in sex. (More detailed definitions specific to individual theorists appear below.) Advocating a sexuality based on desire, subjectivity, and pleasure appears to be a response to three historically problematic areas for women and girls: objectification; abuse and victimization; and stereotypes of female passivity. I review these problematic areas, explain how a sexuality based on desire, subjectivity, and pleasure is a response to them, and then pose several warnings about our use of these qualities as markers of a healthy sexuality for teen girls.

Fine began this discussion with regard to healthy sexuality by writing in “The Missing Discourse of Desire,” that young women were positioned in sex education courses as potential victims of male sexual aggression. The girls she interviewed told her that their sex education only focused on the negative aspects of sexuality and that the adults around them overwhelmingly taught them that sex was dangerous. Fine’s hope was that through a more comprehensive and positive sex education, girls could experience “entitlement, rather than victimization; autonomy rather than terror” (p. 50). Fine further suggested that denying sexual desire might “actually disable young women in their negotiation as sexual subjects” (p. 42). She wrote, “Trained through and into positions of passivity and victimization, young women are currently educated away from positions of sexual self-interest” (p. 42).

The idea that girls may be in more danger for suppressing desire than in expressing it was taken up by theorists Debold (1996) and Tolman (1999; 2002) who along with Fine saw the suppression of female sexuality as echoing general oppression of women and who connected the control of female sexuality to patriarchy (as did Rich, 1983, and other second wave authors earlier). For example, Debold and colleagues wrote that “When sexual desire is truncated, all desire is compromised – including girls’ power to love themselves and to know what they really want” (Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1993, p. 211). For Debold and co-authors, sexual desire reflects girls’ self-esteem, entitlement, and general health. Tolman (2002) concurs that not feeling, recognizing, or being permitted to experience sexual desire might put girls in danger or at risk.

Tolman further and explicitly connects desire to sexual subjectivity and agency. In Dilemmas of Desire, desire becomes the sine qua non of sexual subjectivity: “developing sexual subjectivity is at the heart of the adolescent developmental task of becoming a ‘self-motivated sexual actor’” (Tolman, 2002,
Bay-Cheng (2003) joins Tolman (1999; 2002) in connecting sexual desire with sexual agency which she operationalizes as “the ability to advocate for one’s interests in the sexual arena” (p. 65).

For these theorists, sexual subjectivity is also connected to a certain kind of physical presence related to pleasure and sex. Tolman (2002) warned against desexualizing “girls’ sexuality, substituting the desire for relationship and emotional connection for sexual feelings in their bodies” (p. 5). She also expanded on what embodied desire might look like, describing it as a connection with one’s own body and bodily feelings (2002; 2006). In her *Dilemmas of Desire* (Tolman, 2002), this embodied desire means the ability to feel and name sexual feelings connected to genital experiences, to orgasm, whether alone or with another person. She and others have suggested that the internalization of norms of femininity prevent experiencing this embodied desire as these norms create pressure on girls to disconnect from their bodies, (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006; Tolman 1991; Tolman & Debold, 1994; Tolman, Impett, Tracy, & Michael, 2006). Using philosopher Young’s description of full-bodied participation in sports as a model for female sexuality (Young, 1980), Tolman writes that embodied sexuality is deeply related to authentic relationships and sexual subjectivity. In Fine’s 2005 reflection piece on the 15th anniversary of “Missing Discourse,” she corroborates the idea that sexual agency and subjectivity is connected to embodiment, remarking that back when she wrote “The Missing Discourse” she was “dreaming of desire full bodied” (p. 54, Fine, 2005).

Some empirical work has also been done on the notion of sexual subjectivity as a means for preventing harm to girls, connecting subjectivity to body esteem. For example, Horne and Zimmer-Gembeck (2005; 2006) use a multi-dimensional measure of female sexual subjectivity (defined as “the perceptions of pleasure from the body and the experiences of being sexual” (p. 28)) to explore whether female subjectivity was related to self-esteem and happiness. Their measure of sexual subjectivity, the Female Sexual Subjectivity Inventory, was designed to measure sexual body-esteem, sexual desire and pleasure, and sexual self-reflection. They found that a higher level of sexual subjectivity was related to a higher level of self-efficacy in condom use (in heterosexual girls), higher level of sexual self-awareness, and a lower level of sexual anxiety. In a second study they found that those girls who had had experienced sexual intercourse early (before the age of 17) were more likely to
have higher sexual body-esteem and felt a higher sense of entitlement to sexual pleasure from their partners compared to those who had sexual intercourse at 17 or older or never at all.

Tolman and colleagues (Impett et al, 2006; Tolman et al, 2006) also conducted empirical research in this area which showed that internalizing conventional ideas about femininity, inauthenticity in relationships, and body objectification were all associated with diminished feelings of sexual self-efficacy (i.e., a girl’s conviction that she can act upon her own sexual needs in a relationship). They were also associated with not using protection/contraception with regard to STDs and unwanted pregnancy.

In addition to empirical researchers working on sexual subjectivity, those who would reform sex education, in the United States and elsewhere, also advocate subjectivity, desire, and pleasure (Allen, 2007a, 2007b; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Carmody, 2005; Kiely, 2005). Bay-Cheng (2003) describes SBSE (School Based Sex Education) in the U.S. as saturated with morality and fear-based messages and asks for a more sex-positive approach in her work. Kiely (2005) examined the “silences” in Irish Sexuality Education programs to reveal a curriculum that almost wholly emphasizes the negative consequences of sex. For girls in particular, these negative consequences were physical disease and psychological vulnerability.

Other feminist researchers working towards better sex education have noted that not only is female desire an unsafe topic in school curricula, but non-heterosexual desire (both female and male) is absent, controlled by governmental policies as well as self-censorship by teachers (Harrison, Hillier, & Walsh, 1996; Rasmussen, 2004). Rasmussen (2004), in her discussion of “wounded identities,” suggests that the disavowal of certain kinds of pleasures in school sex education is harmful and an “ethics of pleasure” could counteract labels used to identify sexuality. An “ethics of pleasure,” she writes, would complicate identities and emphasize “an individual’s agency in their own conduct and pursuit of pleasure, while concurrently acknowledging the power relations that operate to constrain discourses of pleasure” (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 456). Using the Foucault phrase “ethics of pleasure,” several other theorists (Allen, 2007a; 2007b; Carmody, 2005) describe sex education that would depart from pathologizing non-heterosexual sexualities could open up “new possibilities for being and understanding sexual subjects” (Allen, 2007a, pp. 583-584).
Allen, also writing about sex education, asks that the New Zealand government relinquish the disease and pregnancy prevention focus of sexual education (2007a) and move towards a “pleasurable pedagogy” (2007b). She writes that pleasure is central to human existence but that it is often understood as a luxury or a topic that “seems flippant” given more serious topics in young people’s sexuality. She joins U.S. theorists in asking that young people be recognized as “sexual subjects whose sexuality is viewed positively and as legitimate” rather than as a problem to be managed. Pleasure is for Allen a way towards acknowledging sexual subjectivity. And silence about female pleasure may fail to convey a sense of “personal empowerment and pleasurable entitlement to young women” (p. 252, Allen, 2007b). On the other hand, Allen’s interviews on sexual pleasure (2007b) with teens in New Zealand show them understanding pleasure to mean orgasm rather than the “embodied” pleasure theorists believe might be helpful in combating oppression. This may be also true for U.S. teens.

The state of sexuality education in the U.S. has brought forth some of the more passionate and political writing about desire and pleasure. For example, Fine in 2005, writing on the political impediments to speaking of pleasure in the public sphere wrote that it even “threatens job security” (p. 54, Fine, 2005) (referring to when U.S. Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders was removed from office for discussing masturbation). In her 2005 reflection piece, she noted that the current era is a time “when pleasure is almost outlawed, dangerous and privatized” (p. 54), when pleasure is also “commodified” (p. 57). Perhaps because of the more recent commodification of adolescent sexuality that stands in contrast to the restrictive laws about teaching sexuality, Fine and McClelland (2006) further developed the idea of desire, calling it “thick desire.” Lest the concept of desire be interpreted too narrowly to mean young women expressing lust, they proclaimed that young people are “entitled to a broad range of desires for meaningful intellectual, political and social engagement, the possibility of financial independence, sexual and reproductive freedom, protection from racialized and sexualized violence, and a way to imagine living in the future tense” (p. 301). Connecting all kinds of freedoms to sexual freedom, they situate sexual well-being for teenage girls “within structural contexts that enable economic, educational, social, and psychological health” (p. 301).

The theorists and researchers of female adolescent sexuality whose work I describe above picture a sexuality in which girls learn to be subjects, not objects,
recognize feelings of desire, and to experience pleasure while living in a culture that acknowledges their entitlements and offers them protection from economic, social, and personal harm. Clearly, pleasure and desire, often used synonymously, have been useful concepts to counteract regressive and oppressive anti-sex forces, particularly as these impact the sexual development of girls. There are, however, several problems with using these qualities as markers of healthy sexuality: focusing on female subjectivity may reify the dichotomy between subject and object; notions of desire, pleasure, and subjectivity may have different historical meanings and context for girls of color; using pleasure as a gauge for whether sex is “good” has moral implications that may undermine other important goals of feminism; a healthy sexuality that includes all these elements may be unrealistic to achieve; and the kind of sexual person who feels pleasure, desire, and subjectivity may be ironically similar to the commodified, sexualized, marketed teen girl that is also problematic for feminism. Before exploring these problems in the construction of a healthy sexuality for teen girls, I want to discuss the history behind this vision of female sexuality and what problems relating to female sexuality such a vision is meant to address.

*How Did this Vision of Healthy Sexuality Come About? What Is It Responding to?*

An adolescent female sexuality that involves subjectivity, desire, and pleasure is an answer to three problems that still plague women today in the U.S. and internationally. These problems (harms to women) that an idealized version of teen sexuality seems to address are: objectification of women; abuse and victimization; and stereotypes of female passivity.

*Desire, Pleasure, and Subjectivity as a Response to Objectification:*

Acknowledging and supporting women’s subjectivity, pleasure, and desire can be seen as an antidote to the objectification of women which years of empirical and qualitative studies suggest is harmful to both women and girls. The American Psychological Association’s Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (APA, 2007) summarized a number of studies that measured the effects of objectification on adult, college-aged women, and high school-aged girls. They reported that exposure to and endorsement of sexually objectifying images (often described merely as “narrow beauty ideals” although such ideals are often
objectifying) can affect self-esteem and body image, and can lead to depression and eating disorders or to self-objectification which in turn leads to depressive symptoms, cognitive impairment, and lower self-esteem (APA, 2007; Durkin & Paxton, 2002; Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Hawkins, Richard, Granley, & Stein, 2004; Lucas, Beard, O’Fallon, & Kurland, 1991; Rivadeneyra, Ward, & Gordon, 2007; Tolman et al, 2006).

Of course, objectification of girls and, for that matter, of anyone can be seen as harmful for other reasons that don’t lend themselves to empirical studies. There may be moral reasons, such as one should never treat another person as a means to an end (Kant, 1785; Nussbaum, 2000), or that rampant objectification appears to have some connection to the second sex status of women globally (Nussbaum, 2000). However, the charge of the Task Force report was to examine scientific evidence that suggests that sexualization is harmful.

Concern about the effects of objectification on women is not new. Second wave author Linda Phelps wrote in 1971 of the alienation caused by objectification, stating that the opposite of the powerless alienated person is the “healthy self-actualizing human being” who “moves through the world as an autonomous source of action” (1971, p. 176, as reprinted in Baxandall & Gordon, 2000). In this piece, “Death in the Spectacle”, she asks, “How do women tolerate a situation in which men control and define the experience of sex?” (p. 178).

More recent theorists continue to describe women as subjected to scrutiny, defined by their bodies and appearances, and constituted as bodies for consumption (Bartky, 1990; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Gill, 2006; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Through objectification they are denied their autonomy and subjectivity and are treated as objects, fungible and violable, denying that they are ends themselves, not means for another’s use (Nussbaum, 2000). Research noted earlier has shown that having an objectified image of oneself or of women in general does affect how one sees one’s body and oneself as a sexual person (e.g., Horne and Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005; Impett et al, 2006; Tolman et al, 2006; Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2006). Thus, given the longstanding concern about objectification and what it means for women and girls, it is understandable that a new sexuality would require a vision of subjectivity and desire, an emphasis on girls experiencing the pleasure rather than giving someone else pleasure through their bodies or performances. It is also understandable why sexual subjectivity has been taken up by third wave
theorists along with current feminist academics (some of which who do not identify themselves as third wave) as an alternative to objectification and has come to mean a position that defies any strictures, feminist or oppressive, that seek to control and define what girls can or can’t wear, look like, feel sexual wearing or doing (e.g. Edut, 2003). (There will be further discussion of this later in this paper.)

*Desire, Pleasure, and Subjectivity as a Response to Abuse and Victimization*

Picturing a sexuality that is about desire and pleasure also is described as an antidote to the effects of victimization and the constant situating of teen girls as potential victims (Fine, 1988). In the 1980’s, as a feminist voice brought to light the widespread experience of victimization of girls and women through sexual abuse, rape, and harassment, women became aware of the effects of such violence on their psyches and bodies. Sexual violence like no other act makes a woman into an object for another’s use. This was described in the second wave by Brownmiller who in 1975 wrote that rape is a “victorious conquest over her being” (1975, p. 197, as reprinted in Baxandall & Gordon, 2000). At that time, Griffin also wrote rape is an “act of aggression in which the victim is denied her self-determination” (1977, p. 66, as cited in Gavey, 2005). Perhaps this is why even verbal accosts on the street were defined as “Little Rapes” (“Little Rapes,” 1977, reprinted in Baxandall & Gordon, 2000). Rape wasn’t considered a personal tragedy but an instrument of oppression (Gavey, 2005).

The acknowledgement of the pervasiveness and harm of sexual violence was very powerful and came in some ways to define women’s sexuality (Gavey, 2005, Lamb, 1999). Because of the new way that rape and sexual violence was viewed and depicted in essays like “Rape: The All-American Crime” (Lindsey, Newman, & Taylor, 1973 reprinted in Baxandall & Gordon, 2000) or in Brownmiller’s declaration that all men are potential rapists (Brownmiller, 1975, reprinted in Baxandall & Gordon, 2000), radical feminists argued that there could be no mutuality in heterosexual sex, and the alternative must be female-only communities or political lesbianism (Gavey, 2005).

More recently, empirical and theoretical work in psychology has shown that abuse and victimization harm girls in numerous ways but in particular in terms of their developing sexuality. The sexually abused girl may grow up taking on the perpetrator’s perspective, viewing herself as good for nothing but sex (Herman, 1992). The refusal of perpetrators to respect boundaries may also
result in difficulties asserting boundaries or impaired self-protection (Classen, Palesh, & Aggarwal, 2005; Quina, Morokoff, Harlow, & Zurbriggen, 2004). The recognition that sexual violence objectified and harmed women, contributed to seeing girls and women as always or often potential victims. As noted earlier, Fine commented on this in her 1988 piece when she suggested in sex education courses, girls were positioned as potential victims of male sexual aggression. Her hope was that through a proper sex education, girls could experience “entitlement, rather than victimization; autonomy rather than terror” (p. 50). Her depiction of a healthy sexuality was one in which the ability to desire meant that a girl had a sturdy enough sense of self and entitlement that would enable her to protect herself against sexual violence and/or protect herself from a society that seems to tolerate such violence. Thompson (1990) also pointed out the connection of desire to abuse and victimization: “In an uninformed and undesirous state, girls find it hard to distinguish choice and coercion, and they aren’t at all certain of how to make such a distinction” (p. 345).

Desire, Pleasure, and Subjectivity as a Response to Stereotypes of Female Passivity

Another way that the concept of desire seems to undo the wrongs against girls and women is in the way it works against a stereotyped notion of sexual passivity. Proponents of the desire, pleasure, and subjectivity view of healthy sex for teen girls infer in their writing that it is equally as important for a woman or girl to have sex and to have pleasure as it is for a man or a boy. The concept of “desire” also is used to undo the double standard where a guy is applauded for his lust and a girl is shamed and called a slut (Tolman, 2002).

The notion of female passivity as opposed to male agency permeates much of our understanding of gender differences and has been associated with greater freedoms and privileges for men, particularly if they are white middle class men who not only are imagined as more agentive but more in control of this agency (Hollway, 1995). Mohanty (1991) wrote of the binary positioning of masculine and feminine sexualities in a way in which the feminine was always the less powerful, less sexual, and with the most to lose. As this applies to the world of teen sexuality, teen boys, particularly, heterosexual teen boys, masculinity theorists point out, have been pictured as agents, choosers, actors, ready to go, unconfused about their wants and needs, out for pleasure,
demanding, and entitled (Kimmel, 2005; Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Pleck, 1981). Until recently, teen girls’ sexuality has been pictured as more hesitant and fragile, full of chaste longing but not sexual in that down and dirty way that boys’ sexuality has been represented. And girls who show some sexual agency risk being described as sluts (Attwood, 2007; Brown, 2004; Lamb, 2002; Tanenbaum, 2000; Tolman, 2002).

Early feminist writing discussed the notion of female passivity and how women are defined by male society’s ambivalence about their sexuality. For them, passivity was also connected to objectification. Phelps wrote that for men, women are “insatiable but we are frigid; beautiful bodies but we must shave them; active man and passive woman” (Phelps, 1971, in Baxandall & Gordon, 2000, p. 179). These early writings also connect passivity to abuse and victimization as can be seen in the sad statement: “As long as female powerlessness is the underlying reality of sexual relations, women will want to be conquered” (Phelps, 1971, in Baxandall & Gordon, 2000, p. 179).

In recent years, Thompson (1990) described a group of teen girls who were not sexually passive. She called them “pleasure narrators” and wrote that for them, “sexual subjectivity (the ability to feel confident in and in control of one’s body and sexuality) shapes one’s ability to be agentic (the ability to act, accomplish, and feel efficacious in other parts of one’s life) and vice versa.” Tolman (2002) also describes a group of “desiring girls” she interviewed. Thompson (1990) and Tolman (2002) noted that these girls were not likely to let sex “just happen” and they took more responsibility for contraception. This position was not without risk, Tolman points out, as some girls were brave and lived life as an agentic and pleasure-seeking teen girl in the open while others could hardly find “breathing room” for their desires and sacrificed authenticity for protection (p. 164).

Third wave theorists along with current feminist academics like Tolman and Thompson also appear to be trying to undo binaries such as the passive vs. active in heterosexual relations (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004; Edut, 2003). Images of chastity, of girls needing to be pursued, of being a container for other people’s fluids or passion, as there to serve or please, are exchanged for images of lust, orgasm, pleasure, and “self-pleasuring” (Gill, 2007) in an era where there has been a widening of sexual attitudes among the young and in general and a greater acceptance of gay partners, more sexual partners, and earlier sex (Jackson & Scott, 2004). If girls have grown up with a message that sex is for
boys and their bodies are for other people’s use, subjectivity, desire, pleasure and self pleasure are certainly antidote.

In spite of third wave and academic feminists’ efforts to undo the binary, the idea of female passivity and the idea that sex is for men live on in women’s magazines, “girl talk”, and romance narratives (Carpenter, 1998; Duffy & Gotcher, 1996; Garner & Sterk, 1998; Kim & Ward, 2004; Tolman, 2000; Walkerdine, 1990). Thus, a discourse of pleasure, desire, and subjectivity may be needed to counteract notions of female passivity that girls may receive through the media today.

Critique of Ideals of Desire, Pleasure, and Subjectivity for Adolescent Female Sexuality

A healthy sexuality for the adolescent female thus must combat objectification, victimization, and the stereotype of passivity. She ought to learn about, understand, and identify desires, feel sexual feelings in her genitals, use full reasoning ability in making choices, be uninfluenced by romance narratives and beauty ideals from TV, books, or movies, pursue her own pleasure as much or even more than her partner’s, and exist always as a subject and never as an object. She cannot be passive, and must be an agent; she ought to know both how to consent and how to refuse sex; and perhaps more importantly, unambivalently know if she wants to consent or refuse (see Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2005 for their discussion on the missing discourse on ambivalence). Beyond her personal sexuality, her desire also ought to be connected to political issues she needs to be aware of. Desire, now called “a stew of desires” (p. 326) in Fine & McClelland (2006), means desire for economic and social equalities and reproductive freedom. There are several problems with this desire as it may play out in girls’ lives.

(1) Does it not sound too idealistic? In this era of the “supergirl” in the U.S. (GirlsInc., 2006), it seems worrisome to be setting out for girls yet another path to perfection. Ideals are all well and good but sex in the West is often treated as something to be constantly improved upon (if women’s magazines are a testament to women’s concerns) (Jackson & Scott, 2004), and sexual fulfillment is seen as a life goal (Jackson & Scott, 2004). This attitude toward sex is indeed taken up into girls’ empowerment groups and taught in the form of girl power, sometimes with little discussion of how the relationship of girl power and sexuality can be problematic (Bay-Cheng, 2003). Sex and
relationships are projects and the teen girl is brought into the culture of adult sexuality with a project to work on: herself; her subjectivity; her pleasure.

If not a personal project, then sexuality, it would seem, ought to be a political project. If the ideals of teen sexuality described above are difficult for girls to achieve, then the newer Fine and McClelland (2006) image connecting political and economic freedom and other socioeconomic systems to puberty seems overwhelmingly so. To be fair, Fine and McClelland may not be suggesting that girls themselves understand how the political invades sexual practice. To the extent that they argue these ideas need to be incorporated into sex education to inform girls’ practice in their own sexual lives, it would seem that they are requiring of girls something adult women still struggle with. It may be important to make clear for teen girls that this idealized politicized sexual practice is rare in the sexual worlds of adults and it is not their responsibility to work it out on our behalf. In fact, sex educators, parents, and politicians have a responsibility to do so on behalf of girls. Thus as a guide for sex education, Fine and McClelland’s socioeconomic view of teen sex is quite important; but as a guide for teen girls, less so.

(2) In addition to the unrealistic ideals of sexuality, another problem exists with regard to the unwitting reification of subject and object positions. When teen girls are encouraged to be subjects not objects, those who advocate this kind of positioning run the risk of presenting only two types of sexual ways of being, object vs. subject which writes neatly onto passive vs. active. And this dichotomy in effect encourages girls to be more “male” in the stereotyped way the culture understands the male/female sexual dichotomy, a dichotomy that does not serve men so well either. (This notion of males being always ready and always active may be sending teen boys to the pharmaceutical companies to artificially create an imagined power-male sexuality in the bedroom, (Matthew, 2005)). If this binary is reified, then the possibility of taking passive roles or the role of the one admired and sexually desired (a form of objectification) is always one of diminished agency rather than a role among a myriad of roles one can take within a complex and changing sexual relationship that is mutual and respectful. In other words, any desire to be physically admired or longed for might then become or be read as enactment of one’s self-objectification when it could have other meanings. In the very least, it will be confusing to a girl with regard to whether or not she is self-objectifying when she finds pleasure in the passive position of being admired, having donned clothes or make-up to achieve
this admiration (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Thus using active vs. passive, subject vs. object as ways of describing good vs. bad sex, suggest to girls that there is only one correct position from which to have sex, the position that has traditionally been associated with men.

(3) A third problem is that whether or not sex is pleasurable may come to mean “good” sex for the teen girl. If the gold standard of whether an act of sexuality is good or not is whether she experiences pleasure, then all sorts of problematic and unethical forms of sex will fall under the category of good sex (e.g. it is wrong and doesn’t make sense to weigh a rapist’s pleasure against a victim’s harm.) Moreover, some experiences of objectification can be sexually pleasurable (Nussbaum, 1995). Those teens that the media seem most worried about today, those who call their lap-dancing and breast-flashing empowered (Levy, 2006) may be feeling a lot of pleasure. Some clinical research says no, that objectifying performances aren’t connected to physical pleasure (Lamb, 2006b); however, if these experiences are pleasurable, would that then make these forms of self-objectification right or good in an ethical or personal sense for teen girls? While the current privileging of pleasure for girls and women as a response to centuries’ long oppression of women that reflected that their own pleasure didn’t count is important, the reverse of this is a problematic position. And while sexual pleasure is a right (WHO, 2004), it is important to be wary of views that describe all pleasures as good and as signifying of freedom, naturalness, or innocence, rather than learned and bound up with power (Kellner, 1995).

There is a secondary problem to making pleasure the gold standard by which good sex is defined and that is, as Harris, Aapola, and Gonick (2000) point out, it supports a view that women and girls are their bodies, that satisfaction with one’s body “becomes integral to a sense of happiness with one’s self” (p. 380). And this is a position that has been harmful to girls over time, producing excessive worry and concern over body image as well as eating disorders. Once again girls are asked to competently understand their bodies, to manage their orgasms, and to ensure all kinds of pleasure for themselves. Experiencing one’s body positively and autonomously thus becomes an act of grueling self-management, requiring expert advice.

(4) A fourth problem is that this idealization of teen sexuality may play out differently for girls of color. Pleasure, subjectivity, voice, and desire, words that evoke a delicateness and specialness about teen girls’ sexuality, unwittingly
also evoke conceptions of a white, middle class, heterosexual femininity that needs to be protected. Historically, this description of sexuality that was fragile and precious was part of a discourse that served to “other” black and Latina women and as hypersexual and present white women in opposition to uncontrollable and bestial male sexuality (Collins, 1990; Tolman, 1996; Wilson, 1986; Wyatt, 1997). Thus, rather than counteracting objectification, passivity, and the culture’s lack of interest in their sexual pleasure, Black and Latina girls must also counteract the music industry’s stereotypes of being oversexed, booty shaking, p-poppin’, shake dancing video vixens or “ho’s” (Sharpley-Whiting, 2007). Tolman wrote of the vulnerabilities in seeking pleasure for girls of color given they are more associated with society’s fears of teen sexuality (2002). In an effort to not reproduce stereotypes, researchers hold out very different examples of Black girls when depicting them as models of sexual agency. Instead of using “pleasure seekers”, they emphasize agentic Black girls as those who show their ability to say no and hold back (Weekes, 2002). Weekes points out that researchers in the past described Black girls as taking a “no-nonsense” approach to male attention and/or sexual harassment (Lees, 1986; Griffin, 1985; Griffiths, 1995). Such constructions of Black girls as refusing to be objects of male desire position them as invulnerable or “superstrong” when they like White girls are vulnerable to victimization (Sharpley-Whiting, 2007) but it also “masculinizes” them and leaves them with an ideal that doesn’t seem to involve sexual experience at all (Weekes, 2002).

(5) A final problem with newer idealized versions of teen girl sexuality is that the hoped for sexually empowered, agentive teen seems ironically similar to the power porn sexualized female we see marketed today in a sexualized form as well as in a purported power feminist form. It is a figure that most certainly derives from a 3rd wave feminism approach (Baumgardner & Richards, 2003; Minkowitz, 1995; Smith, 2002; Wolf, 1993). Bailey writes that 3rd wavers define themselves as resisting limiting and oppressive aspects of 2nd wave feminism, regarding sexuality and personal aesthetics, although their depiction of 2nd wave politics is hotly contested (Bailey, 1997; Baxandall & Gordon, 2000; Chidgey, 2008; Henry, 2004). They view the third wave girl as “a new, robust young woman with agency and a strong sense of self” (Aapola et al, 2005, p. 39; Kelly, 2005). While 3rd wavers welcome multiple imaginings of sexual encounters, partners, sexualities, and ways of being, they also welcome the choice to empower themselves by ironically taking on stereotypically feminine roles and
performing them with panache. In these performances, empowerment is
confused with the idea of choice, mocking femininity with proof of control, and
if a girl or woman seems to be choosing to self-sexualize, then it is considered to
be an empowered decision (see essays in The Body Outlaw, for example, Edut,
2000). While it may be tempting to look to underlying motives of the individual
girl to determine whether her decision is empowered and/or resistant as opposed
to an example of buying into male definitions of female sexuality, this strategy
over-invests in a model of free will and choice in a marketplace of ideas and
images that seek to define and construct girls’ sexuality.

The conflating of the choice to take on traditionally oppressive versions of
being sexy with empowerment has led, as recent journalists and theorists have
written (Levy, 2005; Paul, 2005; Sarracino & Scott, 2008), to a close association
of the sexual with the pornographic. Indeed many of the images today of a
young woman in charge of her sexuality come from the world of pornography
and reproduce very old exploitative scenes of male voyeurism and women’s
victimization and/or oppression (Levy, 2005; Sarracino & Scott, 2008). And this
porn image of sexuality is marketed to younger and younger girls as a teen
sexuality they can aspire to (APA, 2007; Lamb, 2006b; Lamb & Brown, 2006;
Levin & Kilbourne, 2009). In this version of sexuality, a teen girl can feel
empowered by choosing to lap dance, strip tease, strut it, flash it, flaunt it, and
give it away, always in charge though because she’s an autonomous agent who
is having fun. In addition, because she’s choosing, and because it’s fun and even
pleasurable, voyeurs are not exploiters; they’re admirers.

Of course, performing porn acts can feel empowering to girls. The question is
whether feeling empowered and being empowered are the same thing and
whether empowerment is merely a feeling or should be connected to power and
autonomy in other spheres. Feeling emboldened sexually is not the same as
empowered. And if a girl feels empowered, because she has the power to attract
attention and admiration via her sexuality, that may be a kind of power of sorts,
but it’s narrow. That is, it is a feeling of being empowered to be a sexual person.
While it is important for girls like boys to feel permitted, even empowered, to be
sexual – fully human – we must remember that the kind of empowerment a girl
may be feeling when enacting porn images is the power to be sexual primarily
and possibly only through imitating one kind of being sexual, a kind oriented
towards being a sexy object for someone else. When empowerment was first
configured as a goal for girls, it was meant to broaden girls’ options beyond stereotypical paths towards power one of which has been through their sexuality.

*In Search of Authentic Embodied Sexuality*

This fifth problem of the idealized version of a healthy teen sexuality warrants further exploration. One of the arguments against what can be described as a pornified-empowered girl, using the word empowered at this moment ironically, is that she isn’t acting authentically, that her sexuality is not embodied and embodiment, theorists have argued, is necessary for a fully agentic sexuality. It’s a sexuality that appears to them to be grounded in a stereotype of empowerment but that is beholden to marketed ideas of what’s “hot” and “sexy”. Even if she were to be feeling sexual feelings in her body, in her genitals as well as elsewhere, these theorists would most likely argue that it is still not embodied for to perform “sexy” means to take the perspective of the male looking on.

Psychology offers two explanations of why her pleasure-seeking shouldn’t count as agentive teen sexuality. The first explanation describes her choices as heavily influenced by the rewards her community gives her for it; that is, she expresses sexuality through a pole dance (for example) because she’s ruled by rewards in a system that doesn’t support other forms of female agentive behavior (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The system she is rewarded by is patriarchy or a specific male-privileged system that would reward girls and women who perform a sexuality pleasing to them. The second perspective does not present her as looking for rewards from privileged men but as having developed a false kind of subjectivity. This perspective was described generally by the philosopher Althusser (1971) who explained the process in which an individual might believe he or she is acting autonomously but that ideological discourse has recruited them as representatives. Individuals identify with certain value positions that are supported ideologically by systems in power but believe they are the authors of their meaning. Applied to the teen girl, she believes she is autonomous, choosing to be the kind of object that has been defined as sexy by an all-male highly marketed media-influenced audience, just as she believes her choice to wear name brand clothing over generic brands is a free one, but this choice is restricted by discourse and traditional ideologies of what it means to be heterosexual, sexual, and sexy for a woman. She becomes a part of, even a
representative of, the commercial discourse that defines her subjectivity within a framework of choice, equality, and freedom (McRobbie, 2004).

Duits and van Zoonen (2007), however, point out that construing teen girls in these ways, as ruled by patriarchy or the marketplace or dominant ideologies, contributes to the culture’s ability to dismiss girls and women as politically relevant actors. One way to address this problem has been to hold out sexual authenticity against a performative sexuality.

Theorists use the word “authentic” to describe a kind of sexuality that is agentic and embodied (Chalker, 1994; Daniluk, 1997; Kegan, 1997; Lamb, 2002; Lorde, 1984; Martin, 1995 as cited in Welles, 2005; Thompson, 1990, 1995; Tolman, 1991, 1992, 2002; Welles, 2005). When an authentic girl becomes sexual she doesn’t self-sexualize because self-sexualization is a performance (performance is differentiated from authenticity). Instead, she looks within and gets to know her own desires, separate from the marketplace. Impett et al (2006) describe this as sexual self-efficacy, an embodied responsible girl in touch with her own feelings.

In another overlapping discourse of authenticity, desiring is natural and liberatory; the teen girl is returned to or permitted a natural state of being (desirous) in a society that has called desire and subjectivity as unnatural for girls. Foucault warned in The Ethics of Pleasure against using sexual desire to reveal deep identity (p. 377, 1996). But even postmodern theorists like Fine can’t resist a naturalizing discourse about desire: “(desire) insists: it carves underground irrigation systems of radical possibility” (p. 55), and “desire refuses extinction” (p. 55, Fine, 2005). The precious writing depicts girls’ sexuality as some hidden jewel “delicious and treacherous” (Fine & McClelland, 2006, p. 305), to be uncovered and treasured by a savvy interviewer or otherwise exploited by boys and men.

Both of these discourses are problematic: the romanticized discourse of the “natural girl” whose own authentic desire will come free once she recognizes commercial and ideological forces; the choosing girl who chooses an inner sexuality after recognizing ideological forces. The argument asserts a natural girl opposed to a “packaged” one, and a choosing girl opposed to the dupes.

It’s interesting to note that the choosing girl discourse is quite similar to a marketer’s discourse with regard to adolescents (everyone, really) and their ability to make free choices.. This marketing discourse is tied to a Western belief that individuals, in this case teen girls, can self-create, construct their own
identities, by consuming. Consumers are set up as hyper-agents, making choices from an array of choices in a free market. As Becker (2005) points out in her critique of the self-empowerment movement, feminism has long incorporated male discourses of autonomy, individual rights, and agency that have influenced what we’ve seen as cures for women’s ills. We see this in marketers’ representation of women’s hyper-agentive identity as shoppers with the power to read through advertisements and craftily make a variety of shopping choices. Gill (2003) has called this discourse of endless choices “subjectification” that has replaced objectification.

The natural girl discourse, describing a girl who looks inward for desire and authenticity is also tied to a more mainstream discourse, one that situates the answer to political problems in individual, personal transformation (Becker, 2005), separating the inner from the outer. A girl who is said to be developing a more authentic sexuality is asked to know herself, know her body, and know her desires, not unlike the discourse of the self-empowerment movement (Becker, 2005). But who’s to say that when a girl does look within, she won’t find another packaged version of teen sexuality? For example, narratives of the “slut” often end in the realization that all the girl ever wanted was to be loved (Freitas, 2008). In chick lit, for example, a common theme is for wild girls to become “re-virginized” when they meet Mr. Right, seeing how shallow pursuit of pleasure was before (Gill, 2006). Thus while the girl empowered by porn may not be empowered in any broad or political sense of the word, the girl who finds her sexuality by looking inward may merely be buying into an age-old version of female sexuality of the “good girl” who just wants to be loved. The former is inauthentic because it is a performance for boys or imitates a stereotyped male sexuality in its embracing of agency and assertiveness; the latter is inauthentic because it is a traditional feminine position. Authentic sexuality is hard to find and feminist theorists may do best to leave that quality out of the mix.

Still, in what might seem a hall of mirrors of discourses, there may still be choices to be made. Gill (2006) wisely asks, “why is acknowledging cultural influences deemed so shameful? Conversely, why are autonomous choices so fetishized?” (p. 73). That is to say, we do not have to throw out what is good in the liberal ideal of individual choosing (Nussbaum, 2000) if we are careful not to call girls’ sexuality authentic or not but instead name where they are restricted and where they are presented with alternatives (as well as name which girls are presented with alternatives and why).
New Ways of Defining a Healthy Sexuality for Teen Girls

In this search of a new way to define healthy sexuality for girls one further issue begs discussion. Many of the descriptions of the embodied, agentive, subjective, authentic sexuality that is the ideal set out for teen girls lacks one important element – the other person. Authentic sexuality must be discovered in oneself and not in relation to another person. For girls, that other person, particularly within heterosexual sexuality, presents all kinds of dangers to their autonomy and agency, and girls are once again presented as wounded Ophelias (Marshall, 2007). Would it not be problematic if when teen girls discovered their most authentic, embodied sexuality, it was only able to be expressed alone, in the privacy of their bedrooms?

When we feminist theorists are done saying what good sex should not be, we can only create an unachievable ideal of what it should be, offering up fantasies of what we hope girls can achieve without regard to whether adult women have achieved such ideals in any uncomplicated and longlasting way. On the one hand, it may be helpful to teen girls to admit that sex is complicated and that there are few role models for a healthy and happy and even ethical sexual life out there. And, if they are out there, they may be buried beneath the sheets of certain couples who’ve closed the bedroom door on researchers and journalists – that is, they don’t perform it, write about it, talk about it, and they probably aren’t pretty enough to do it on TV. On the other hand, when writing about healthy teen sexuality for girls and describing it in a way that makes it appear so difficult to achieve, we run the risk of preserving an artificial sense of the specialness of sex. Is the right to sexual pleasure so special and so important that it rivals all other rights? This is certainly a matter for debate.

A different alternative to the directive of looking within for an authentic sexuality, finding one’s hidden or suppressed desire and then making healthy choices (an empowerment model that in the end makes a teen girl alarmingly, solely responsible for her own sexuality) is a model of mutuality. One might ask why not love? Teen girls do all sorts of self-destructive sexual things in the name of love so it hasn’t worked very well as a model to date (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1998; Lamb, 2006b; Thompson, 1990; 1995; Tolman, 2000). In the very least, we can describe a sexuality to girls that has to do with mutuality using liberal ideals of equality, making the case that equality and mutuality is an ethical ideal to aim for while sometimes hard to
achieve. Of course liberal ideals of equality have their own problematic tradition and are not offered here as the one and only alternative to the present discourses. But this ideal is not quite as perfectionistic and does not make teen girls quite so uniquely responsible for the kind of sexual lives they will embark on. It contextualizes their sexuality in relationship. And if it asks them to be choosers within a context of limited choices, it’s choosing to give as well as to receive, to seek pleasure within and from without, to love, have sex or play, with an eye towards fairness and an underlying ethos of caring and compassion.

And in a model of mutuality, partners (boys if we’re speaking of heterosexual coupling), are equally responsible for the kind of sex a couple will have together. And while it has seemed politically wise to work on the empowerment of girls to lay claim to sex as something they too can enjoy, it now seems equally wise for feminists to write about boys and to work with them and on behalf of them in order to undermine traditional ideologies relating to their role in sexual coupling, ideologies that work against mutuality and the possibility for them to take object as well as subject positions in healthy ways.

Adults, feminist researchers included, may have ambivalent feelings about how to have “good” sex and how to express a healthy sexuality, but perhaps female adolescents shouldn’t be expected to address that ambivalence for us. If not, then the best way to encourage a healthiER sexuality is to require a sex education that addresses these questions and dichotomies head on, through discussion of values as well as practices, through a sex education that examines cultural models for sexual performance and that also examines doubts and longings as they represent ideologies as well (Lamb, 2010). Rather than endorsing social skills training sex education models that are evidence-based with regard to pregnancy and disease prevention (Kirby, 2007), feminists ought to lobby for sex education that addresses the ideologies of our times, asking students to think about how these ideologies are represented in the media, in the world around teens, and how they play into expectations about what it means to be sexual. And rather than merely discussing the how-to’s of sex and contraception (even though the battle to be able to teach about contraception once again and get federally funded has only recently been won, again (Guttmacher Institute, 2009)), we need to discuss the interpersonal of sex and the gendered and ethical relations represented in sex. To the extent that cultural critique and sexual ethics are embedded in a sex ed curriculum girls may be free to examine what it might mean to construct a healthy or healthiER sexuality.
And with mutuality as a guide, in working out what kind of sexual adult lives they might want to lead, pondering over the idealized image of sexuality that most adults most likely don’t achieve, they can at least ponder this with someone else.
Chapter 3: Adolescent Girls’ Sexual Empowerment: Two Feminists Explore the Concept
Co-author Zoë D. Peterson

Abstract

Although all feminists tend to value empowered female sexuality, feminists often disagree, sometimes heatedly so, about the definition of and path to empowered sexuality among adolescent girls. In this theoretical paper, two feminists, who have previously expressed differing perspectives regarding adolescent girls’ sexual empowerment (Lamb, 2010a, 2010b; Peterson, 2010), discuss their disagreements and attempt to find some common ground in their viewpoints on girls’ sexuality. A critical question related to sexual empowerment is whether empowerment includes a subjective sense of efficacy, desire, and pleasure. In other words, are girls sexually empowered if they feel that they are empowered? The authors identify three themes that make answering this question particularly challenging—age differences, exposure to sexualized media, and the pressure to please a partner. Despite these challenges, the authors identify several points of consensus, including agreeing that adequate sex education and media literacy education are vital to optimizing adolescent girls’ sexual empowerment.

Historically, the broad ideology of feminism has included individuals, who hold a variety of contradictory perspectives, but who share an overarching set of values about a need for gender equity (Crawford, 2006). Nevertheless, it has been hard for feminist theorists and researchers not to fall prey to what we see as endless dichotomizing of feminist thought, a kind of dichotomizing that splits feminists from one another, denies commonalities, and feeds into the thinking of those who would blame feminism for a myriad of social problems (see Duits & van Zoonen, 2007; Gill, 2007 for a discussion of this). Some of this dichotomizing has been around quantitative vs. qualitative research; the importance of gender difference vs. gender similarity; and biological vs. social

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3 This chapter was originally published as Lamb, S. & Peterson, Z. (2012). Adolescent girls’ sexual empowerment: Two feminists explore the concept. Sex Roles, 66 (11-12), 703-712 and is reprinted here with the permission of the publisher.
constructionist explanations of gender. Many of these dichotomies relate specifically to differing feminist views of girls’ and women’s sexuality. For example, some of the dichotomies that are frequently imposed upon feminism include pro-porn vs. anti-porn, 2nd wave vs. 3rd wave, and sex-negative vs. sex-positive (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004; Edut, 2003).

This trend is partially why we, as theorists and researchers, who in previous writings (e.g. Lamb, 2002; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007) have worked in between dichotomies, celebrated ambivalence, and promoted the importance of girls’ and young women’s lived experiences as they interpret them, found ourselves placed in a position in which we were expected to argue two sides of a dichotomy in which we weren’t fully invested. Our positioning was unintentionally supported by the “Feminist Forum” framework in Sex Roles, a framework common in a number of academic journals, which seemed to call for opposing positions, yea and nay, for and against, theory and commentary, or in the words of Saturday Night Live (Michaels, 1978), “point/counterpoint.”

In the “Feminist Forum,” an author (in this case, Lamb, 2010a) completes her or his manuscript through the editing process and one or more other authors then respond to it (in this case, Peterson, 2010). The original author is then presented with the finished commentary and can rebut or reply to it in a response to the commentary (Lamb, 2010b). This interactional approach is designed to present the reader with a lively debate on an important issue, and it typically does. In our case, however, we found that it inadvertently and inaccurately led us to positioning our viewpoints about adolescent girls’ sexuality as diametrically opposed and in an adversarial way that in retrospect made us uncomfortable. Further, after the rebuttal to the commentary, the process of interaction was finished, leaving many issues unresolved. Through subsequent “behind the scenes” interactions about the content of our articles and commentaries in the Feminist Forum, we were reminded that, although we may have some minor differences in viewpoint, there is far more overlap than division between our positions, a fact that might have been obscured in a point/counterpoint format. We also hypothesized that this might be the case for other feminists who experience disagreements among themselves about the complex issues of adolescent girls’ sexuality.

We hope that by writing this follow-up piece, we not only will be working out our differences but also will be developing a more nuanced and incorporative view of female adolescent sexuality. Such a joining would work
against the tendency to dichotomize and oversimplify feminist views about adolescent sexuality. In undermining this tendency, we believe that we might make a contribution to naming some of the shared theoretical sticking points around which many feminists—regardless of their positions on concepts such as pornography and girls’ sexual expression—likely experience similar conceptual struggles.

Thus we begin by outlining the points made, commented on, and rebutted in the *Sex Roles*, volume 62, issues 5-6, and then move on to work on four points that may have seemed contentious in our commentary but where we believe that our views may be more similar than opposing. We also choose these four points because they reflect conflict in the field at present.

I, Lamb (2010a), began my article about the idealization of female adolescent sexuality, by raising questions for feminist theorists and researchers about our theorizing about “desire”, “pleasure”, and “subjectivity.” I identified how these concepts had arisen and become important to feminist thinking about sexuality. I then criticized the way these concepts are understood and used today. For example, I wrote that the idealizing of subjectivity reifies a dichotomy between subject and object in sexual practice, one that I believe doesn’t exist so rigidly. I also criticized the way an overemphasis on pleasure as a gauge for what makes sex “good” for girls (good in terms of physical feelings, self-protection, and ethics) crowds out other important feminist goals regarding girls and sex. I argued that ideas of desire, pleasure, and subjectivity may have different historical meanings and context for girls of color and that a healthy sexuality that includes all these elements may be unrealistic to achieve and more of an expression of what adult women want for themselves, but imposed on teens. I advocated for more realistic goals for female adolescent sexuality that took into account girls’ development. In mocking, to some extent, the idealized picture of the adolescent girl who feels pleasure, desire, and subjectivity as described by these theorists, I noted that this picture is ironically similar to the commodified, sexualized, marketed teen girl that Levy (2005) brought to our attention in her work on “raunch culture” and that Gill (2008) has argued is now a part of advertising culture. I wrote that typically, for feminist theorists (Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1993; Fine, 1988, 2005; Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005; Lamb, 2002; Tolman, 2002; Tolman & Debold, 1994; Welles, 2005), it would seem that empowerment is conflated with the idea of choice, and that the choices made may feel like choices to girls but not be choices at all; that
is, imitating sexuality that’s highly marketed to girls may reveal less agency than girls themselves may argue they have. I also wrote about how some theorists tried to resolve this issue about empowerment by discussing authentic versus inauthentic sexuality (e.g., Tolman, 2002) but I found this a very problematic solution. In the end, I offered some brief thoughts on mutuality as an interesting concept to bring to the table in promoting a certain kind of sexuality to adolescent girls.

I, Peterson (2010) agreed with many of Lamb’s critiques of the potential disadvantages of a model of healthy adolescent sexuality that focuses exclusively on desire, pleasure, and subjectivity, but I felt that one very specific aspect of Lamb’s paper—the portion in which Lamb argued that sexual desire, pleasure, and subjectivity are not necessarily signs of adolescent girls’ sexual empowerment—was a risky view and had the potential to be misread and misused. I did not think that these concepts fully defined empowerment, but I worried about prioritizing an “expert” view of empowerment over girls’ own subjective sense of empowerment. I worried that devaluing desire, pleasure, and subjectivity could result in giving girls the hurtful message that, although they feel empowered, their sense of power is, in fact, a false consciousness marketed to them by a sexualized advertising culture. Thus, in my commentary, I argued that empowerment might best be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct. From this perspective, sexual desire and pleasure could be viewed as two valuable dimensions of sexual empowerment; in other words a subjective sense of empowerment is legitimate empowerment, but it is only one aspect of legitimate empowerment. Other dimensions of sexual empowerment could include successfully negotiating with sexual partners about wanted and unwanted sexual activities and intellectually and politically challenging restrictive cultural discourses about girls’ sexuality. Girls might simultaneously experience empowerment on one level and disempowerment on another level. However, in attempting to promote the importance of girls’ pleasure, desire, and subjective feelings as relevant elements of sexual empowerment, I may have wrongly suggested that Lamb doesn’t respect or value girls’ lived experiences.

In this way and on this particular issue, we had placed ourselves in familiar feminist dichotomized positions, with Lamb believing that Peterson could celebrate a teen girl giving a football player a lap dance at a party as a sign of empowerment and Peterson believing that Lamb didn’t value pleasurable sexual experimentation as a sign of empowerment. Peterson argued that some
forms of sexual expression (even those that imitate media culture) could, on some levels and in some instances, be viewed as positive experimentation in the service of future desire, subjectivity, and pleasure. Lamb argued that borne as many of these acts are from the worst of pornography, they are always suspect. We recognize that neither of these positions is very satisfying, and we would like to take the opportunity to expand on and identify the shared space between these positions.

There are certain fundamentals that we would like to set out as points we agree on: We do not want to place a burden on the newly sexually active or merely sexually curious teen to become a super-teen with regard to sexuality (always knowing and understanding her desires, pleasure-seeking, and strongly able to say no or yes in a myriad of positions and situations). Nor do we want to support the public opinion that children are asexual before they reach adolescence (see Lamb, 2002; 2006b for work on childhood sexuality). While it is important to honor the place of sexual desire, pleasure, the ability to say no, and activism around restrictive discourses, we agree that this super-girl ideal is itself restrictive (Girl Inc, 2006). Moreover, it doesn’t allow for ambivalence in sexual experiences, which we both agree is normative. That is to say, it is not always problematic for a girl to feel ambivalent about sex and sexual participation (Lamb, 2002; Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2005).

We agree that the idea of sexual empowerment is a potentially important one that could inform sex education and girls’ growing understanding of how to be sexual in the world at all ages. We also agree that the term empowerment has been overused and co-opted by marketers, who then suggest that empowerment can be achieved through consumerism (e.g., Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991), so a subjective feeling of empowerment may not be the only indicator of whether or not a girl is actually powerful. As Peterson (2010) wrote, “Sexual behavior that feels sexually empowering for a particular girl may function to reproduce cultural and institutional constraints on women’s sexuality more broadly” (p. 308; see also Barton, 2002). We agree that there are different aspects of and definitions of empowerment including the subjective feeling of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995) and access to political power and resources (Riger, 1993). Despite our many agreements, a sticking point in our positions seems to be whether we, as “experts”, or in the very least, as adults who care deeply about girls’ development, can ever make the strong point, theoretically or directly to a girl, that a girl who feels empowered is actually not empowered.
There is the smaller dilemma about whether it is wise or productive to say this to a girl, for example to influence a daughter’s decisions. And there are two larger issues associated with this question: One that asks whether we can ever know if such acts do not empower or are damaging, and the other which asks whether experts are the best judges of that. Throughout the rest of the paper, we explore the complexities of this conflict: Can an adolescent girl’s subjective feelings of empowerment—including feelings of sexual desire, pleasure, and agency—count as one dimension of sexual empowerment that may in some ways serve her well in the future and contribute to her ability to know herself sexually, make positive sexual decisions, become a true partner in relation to another person, and not participate in sex in a way that supports oppressive practices? Does the answer to this question change depending on the age of the girl? What role does sexualized media, including explicit pornography, play in our answer? How does our answer relate to girls’ desire to please a sexual partner? We explore these challenging topics related to adolescent sexuality because we recognize that they are potentially fertile ground for disagreements among feminist scholars, ourselves included. Most of our discussion of these issues deals specifically with adolescent girls in the U.S., although we also use sources that address these issues for adolescent girls who are from the Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

**Age and Sexual Empowerment**

In discussions of adolescent girls’ sexual subjectivity and empowerment, “adolescent” often is poorly defined. In some cases, this may contribute to feminist disagreements about what is appropriate sexual exploration for adolescent girls. Some authors may be thinking of a girl who is 13- or 14-years-old, and some may be thinking of a girl who is 17. Indeed, the range might be even larger when it comes to discussions of girls’ sexuality. The National Institutes of Health (1999) defines “child” as anyone under 21 because many individuals are still in the education system and dependent on their families until at least age 21. On the other end of the spectrum, a commonsense.org public service announcement sparked controversy by featuring an 11- or 12-year-old girl singing into a videocamera, “Fuck me,” in imitation of a pop star (Morrissey, 2010). Thus, when it comes to discussions of adolescent girls’ sexual empowerment, feminists may be envisioning girls ranging in age from 11 to 21!
Most feminists and psychologists would probably agree that what is developmentally appropriate for a 17 year old is not necessarily appropriate for a 13 year old. Yet, when discussing adolescent girls’ sexuality, we often forget to address the vast differences among adolescents in terms of their development (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2009).

Of course, age is not the only, or necessarily the best, measure of socio-sexual development. Not all 17 year-olds are equally prepared to handle sexual activity or equally capable of interpreting and critiquing sexual media content. And we would argue against any biological definition of “readiness” to handle sexual activity, especially given that we know that even prior to adolescence, individuals experience a variety of forms of childhood sexuality, some of which are perceived as positive and normative and some of which are perceived as confusing and/or abusive (Friedrich, 2007; Lamb, 2006b). A problematic kind of readiness discourse exists in Abstinence Only Until Marriage sexuality education curricula as “emotional readiness” (Mast, 2005), and we do not wish to support this narrow concept of sexual readiness either. We both believe that “emotional readiness” discourses as well as “biological readiness” discourses promote a false idea that there a specific time point at which every adolescent or young adult moves from being unambivalently unready for sex to being unambivalently ready for sex.

Further, it is important not to look at older teens’ expressions of sexuality as standing apart from younger teens’ and even girls’ sexuality. Younger girls look to older sisters and older teens in the media for information about what it means to grow up sexually. Learning about one’s sexuality doesn’t begin in adolescence, and to some extent, the representation of sexuality in and by older teens has an effect on younger girls. So, if an older teen experiments by pole-dancing and shows off a sense of sexuality and power, as did Miley Cyrus on the Teen Choice Awards in 2009 (FoxNews, 2009), even with the knowledge that she was just playing around, who is responsible for how this is understood or “read” by her younger fans? Yet despite these complications, to ignore age and developmental level altogether also seems irresponsible.

So, recognizing that all 13-year-olds are developmentally different, if we consider a typical 13-year-old, the one who the Sexualization of Girls Task Force may have had in mind when they warned parents about the dangers of media sexualization (APA, 2007), what might empowerment look like for her? Must she know and experience “desire” in order to protect herself from the
media, from rape, from other exploitation? And what does it mean to experience “desire” in a positive way when one is 13? Many feminists might agree that it means that this 13-year-old thinks positively about becoming sexual, that she is learning about sexual development and sexual relationships in non-threatening ways and in places where questions and exploration are welcome, and that she looks forward to both initiating and responding to sexual advances in relationship to peers to whom she is attracted.

Now we consider the ways in which a 13-year-old might subjectively feel empowered in her decision to have intercourse, and we choose this example using a 13-year-old to push the boundaries of the discussion. Neither of us believe that most 13-year-olds will benefit from choosing to have sexual intercourse, and research supports that early sex is very risky for girls (e.g., Kaestle, Halpern, Miller, & Ford, 2005; O’Donnell, O’Donnell, & Stueve, 2001). So, (1) She could feel strong and positively valenced physical and emotional desire for intercourse (or for some intense sexual experience). Regardless of her decision about having intercourse, we might say that this is a form of empowerment because, in a culture that has suppressed female sexual feeling, it is something to celebrate when a girl feels desire this intensely and positively. (2) She could feel empowered about making the decision to have intercourse. This feeling of empowerment could derive from thinking about herself as an independent chooser, weighing options, and becoming more and more certain over time. This feeling of empowerment may be supported by her not having to ask permission from her parents. (3) She could feel empowered in her decision because she feels certain that it is the right one (perhaps because she feels she really loves her partner). (4) She could feel empowered in that she has thought through birth control and is going out to buy some condoms or getting on the pill. This would show a sense of responsibility about her decision. So we have several situations, one that describes empowerment as desire, another that describes empowerment as autonomy (e.g., from parents or other influencing forces), another that describes empowerment as certainty, and a fourth that describes empowerment as responsibility.

Any of these scenarios could qualify as some dimension of sexual empowerment based on some definitions. Yet, any of these scenarios could ultimately result in a negative outcome—she could be left by her partner shortly after they have intercourse, she could get pregnant, she could contact a sexually transmitted infection, she could get a bad reputation among her peers. This
raises the following question: If she experiences a negative and unwanted outcome as a result of her subjectively empowered sexual experience, was she ever really empowered? We do not think that a negative outcome necessarily negates empowerment. We think instead that the kinds of empowered feelings she had to begin with may need inspection. Perhaps her initial feelings of sexual empowerment reflected only one dimension of empowerment, or put another way, her sense of empowerment may have been ambivalent at best (Peterson, 2010). Given this, how do we judge the value or accuracy of her subjective feelings of empowerment?

On the one hand, these subjective feelings of empowerment may come from oppressive situations in her life. For example, what if her feeling of sexual desire comes from imagining herself re-enacting a pornographic act that she has seen on the internet? What if she comes to feel that she has made an autonomous choice about her decision to have sex after she has received considerable pressure from her 17-year-old boyfriend? Or what if her sense of certainty is based on her false belief that she and her partner will be together forever? Any one of these feelings of empowerment could be encumbered by less than empowering contextual factors.

On the other hand, many 13-year-olds who do have intercourse do so without planning and without the requisite desire, autonomy, certainty, and responsibility that we feminists associate with empowerment. Surely it is better that a girl experience her sexual desire as positive rather than as negative. Surely a subjective sense of autonomy and responsibility are better and possibly more psychologically protective than feeling coerced and out of control.

And yet, she is 13. There are good reasons for us as adults, who have more knowledge and life experience than she does, to not want her to feel desire so potently at this young an age, to not want her to make autonomous and absolute decisions that may place her at emotional or physical risk. Moreover, she is not even of an age when she can legally consent to sex except perhaps to another 13 year old (depending on the state). Thus, perhaps subjective empowerment is suspect when we are considering a 13 year old who may not be in the best position to evaluate the context and background behind her own sense of empowerment. Again, this highlights the complexity and possibly the multi-dimensionality of our concept of sexual empowerment.

Now what if we think about older adolescent girls and young women who are more physically and emotionally mature and for whom sexual activity is
increasingly normative? After all, research suggests that 30% of girls have had intercourse by age 16, and 67% of girls have had intercourse by age 18 (Chandra, Martinez, Mosher, Abma, & Jones, 2005). If we de-emphasize the importance of subjective sexual empowerment for 13 year-olds, at what age can we value subjective feelings of empowerment as a worthwhile goal? Is it valuable or important for a 17 year-old girl to feel sexually empowered? A 21 year old woman? A 35 year old woman? A 55 year old woman? Or are women’s subjective feelings of empowerment always suspect? After all, as we discuss in the next section, girls’ and women’s images and stereotypes of what it means to be sexually empowered sometimes come from sources (e.g., sexualized media) that are predominantly created by and marketed to men. Yet, to challenge all adult women’s subjective feelings of sexual empowerment seems invalidating given there are few other sources available to women that “teach” about sexual empowerment. Thus, these difficult questions lead us back to empowerment as a subjective feeling that one of us is eager to validate, the other of us is afraid to. One of us finds it a useful concept; the other finds it too mired in a discourse that has been damaged and connected to heavily to problematic institutions (media, pornography, heterosexism).

Sexualized Media and Experimenting with Empowerment

Although Lamb’s (2010a) original Feminist Forum article and Peterson’s (2010) response did not focus heavily on the role of pornography and other sexual media in adolescent girls’ sexual lives, this was an important subtext within a larger discussion of the “pornification” of the culture in which adolescent girls live. Indeed, in Lamb’s (2010b) rebuttal to Peterson, the relationship between explicit sexual media and empowerment was highlighted as a major source of disagreement, just as it is has been a major source of disagreement among feminists for many decades (see e.g., Cornell, 2000).

Central to our disagreements about the role of sexualized media in the sexual subjectivity of teen girls were two questions: (1) If a girl is inspired by highly sexualized media representations (including explicit pornographic representations) is she less empowered? (2) Does empowerment have something to do with the way in which she positions herself in relation to these representations?

One point that we agreed on in our original article and commentary (Lamb, 2010a; Peterson 2010) is that there is no such thing as an “authentic”
sexuality. All sexuality is shaped and modified by social forces and cultural discourses (e.g., Gagnon & Simon, 1973), so it does not make sense to discuss an “authentic” sexuality that is somehow free from social constraints and influences, and sexualized media is one potentially important social influence. Nevertheless, even if all girls are influenced directly or indirectly by sexualized media, the amount of ownership or control that girls feel over their own sexuality in the face of strong media messages may vary—both between different girls and within the same girl over time and across relationships. Some imitation of sexualized media may be playful and light-hearted and some may be more obligatory or self-defining, and yet we can’t base our judgments on these forms of imitation simply on how light-heartedly they seem to be enacted.

Why do girls imitate sexualized media and how conscious is this imitation? A girl may imitate sexualized media thinking this is the norm for teen sexuality and simply that she is conforming to what “all the kids” do. She may imitate it because she has learned “boys like this.” She may also imitate it in a more conscious or deliberate way, experimenting, playing around with how it feels and finding that it’s pretty exciting to imitate these sexualized moves and ways of expression. These three descriptions of imitation aren’t mutually exclusive, either, but they all raise the broader question – Is a girl who “buys into” mass-media-promoted forms of sexuality less empowered and does an awareness of media, an ability to critique it or observe its influence, make a girl more empowered even as she imitates?

On the one hand, it seems likely that teen girls’ interpretation and conceptualization of their own sexual imitation is central in determining the psychological and interpersonal impact of their mimicry. If a girl sees herself as a sexual object who must perform to get or keep a boy’s attention, aren’t the consequences likely to be different than if she sees herself as engaging in fun, playful experimentation? Of course, this is potentially an empirical question that could and should be tested in future research.

On the other hand, even if we were to agree (and potentially demonstrate through research) that experimentation, consciously or unconsciously, with mass-media-produced versions of sexuality could be healthy and nonproblematic, there would still be a secondary critique about what the goals and intentions of these representations are and to whom they are sold. There is a problem with these kinds of representations being “sold” to younger and younger girls; these images seem to dictate that girls need to be sexual at a
young age, and they may dictate to adolescent girls some narrow version of what it means to be sexual. Indeed, advertisers may intentionally promote sexual insecurity among young girls in order to sell products that will supposedly turn girls into sexy teens (APA, 2007; Durham, 2008; Levin & Kilbourne, 2009). There is also a problematic lack of diversity of sexual expression and of models of “sexiness” in mainstream and explicit pornographic media. Gill (2008) writes that this version of media sexuality is profoundly ageist and heteronormative as well as classist and racist. Thus while these media images of sexuality may be empowering to some extent, they are also incredibly restrictive and shape desire and subjectivity into forms that are more mainstream. And they bring up the issue that what might feel empowering to some may feel so in a context in which these images disempower others. Is it thus better to have desire and subjectivity even if it’s an imitation of a marketer’s version than to have no desire or subjectivity at all?

We agree that girls are not passive viewers of the media. Even when advertisers and other producers of sexualized media have ill intentions, as they commonly do (such as to promote and exploit girls’ insecurities for the sake of product sales), that does not necessarily imply that girls automatically accept the intended message (Leurum & Dworkin, 2009). Thus, even when undesirable or limiting representations are sold to girls, these representations do not necessarily leave all girls harmed or unempowered. Thus, one can and should critique the methods and motives of those that create the media without taking the position that media representations of female sexuality are always harmful to all girls. Further, this highlights the potential value of media literacy training for adolescents; in classrooms, adolescents can get some distance from the images’ potential to transform their sexuality by dissecting the intentions and multiple possible meanings of these messages. It is encouraging that such efforts to include media training in sex education curricula are already underway (APA, personal communication, 2010; Dines, personal communication, 2010; Lamb, 2009; Tolman, personal communication, 2010).

Finally, we need to consider the argument made by some feminists that when empowered young women imitate sexualized media there is potential for them to transform it in ways that undermine its original intention (i.e., make it empowering rather than demeaning), and this kind of imitation needs to be examined differently. There was considerable discussion in the 1980’s and 90’s in LGBT studies about reappropriating and reclaiming labels and events that
derived from oppression and by reclaiming and re-using them, changing their meaning. The possibilities for this kind of reclaiming were explored by Butler and hooks in their essays on the film *Paris is Burning* (Butler, 1993; hooks, 1991). The term “queer” has more or less been successfully reclaimed to mean something different than it was originally meant to mean. We agree that the possibilities for this kind of transformation of sexualized media messages are there; however, this political kind of resistance through redesigning and subverting media representations seems unlikely in the average 17-year-old, let alone the in a 13-year-old, but perhaps with good sex education and media literacy training it is not impossible.

**Empowerment and Pleasing a Partner**

Regardless of whether one is interested in Abstinence Only Until Marriage or Comprehensive Sexuality Education for adolescents (Kirby, 2007; Lamb, 2010c; Luker, 2006), in U.S. culture it is the norm to tell girls to wait for sexual activity until they are certain that they want and desire sex; we tell them not to engage in unwanted sex just to please their partner. However, sometimes girls and young women may feel ambivalent about wanting sex (Lamb, 2001; O’Sullivan & Gaines’s, 1998; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007; Tolman and Szalacha, 1999), and sometimes girls and young women may legitimately desire sex because they want to please their partner or increase closeness with their partner (Impett, Peplau, & Gable, 2005; Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). Indeed, Lamb (2010c) points out that far too often in sexuality education, the other person (or partner) is ignored so that sexuality education is all about making the right choices for oneself with no consideration of other people. Thus, girls may be left feeling confused and uncertain about how to follow our well-intentioned advice to wait until they clearly want and desire sex.

Of course, engaging in sex to please a partner can mean a variety of different things, and there is likely a range of subjective positions by which girls sexually please boys. For example, Impett & Peplau (2003) suggested that complying with sex due to approach motives (e.g., to show love or promote intimacy with a partner) may frequently have positive consequences, whereas complying with sex for avoidance motives (e.g., to avoid a partner’s anger or rejection) may tend to have negative consequences.

Further, when we tell girls to wait until they want and desire sex (and when we make this a condition of sexual empowerment), we may be (sometimes
unintentionally) promoting traditional sexual scripts that suggest that boys are constantly striving to get sex and that girls are responsible for sexual gatekeeping (Edgar & Fitzpatrick, 1993). In these scripts, girls are supposed to be unambivalent about their [lack of] desire and boys are assumed to always unambivalently want and desire sex. In actuality, research shows that boys and men feel much more ambivalently about sex and wanting it, than public opinion and media representations might indicate (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006; Oswalt, Cameron, & Koob, 2005; Tolman, Spencer, Rosen-Reynoso, & Porche, 2003), and certainly we know that girls often do want and desire sex.

It is also important to note that sometimes girls don’t have the option to only have sex when they want and desire it; some girls are forced into sex. Thus knowing and not knowing what one wants becomes complicated and sometimes irrelevant when the other person is exploitative. If we define sexual empowerment as including sexual assertiveness skills (e.g., being able to clearly refuse unwanted sexual activity), sexual empowerment may help to protect some girls/women from coercive sexual experiences, but even women who are assertive can be sexually victimized, so sexual empowerment (regardless of how we define it) certainly is not guaranteed protection against forced sex.

**Considering Empowerment as a Continuum**

Peterson (2010) proposed that one way of resolving the many complexities of sexual empowerment might be to conceptualize girls as on a developmental path toward empowerment and on the way, trying on a variety of forms of sexual expression, some of which might be modeled after media images of girls’ and women’s sexuality. Thus, a girl pretending a strip tease for her boyfriend because she watched a pole dance on TV, might in some cases merely be showing playful sexual experimentation rather than a sign of sexual oppression. The pretend strip tease need not define the girl’s sexuality. In other words, the same girl could pretend a strip tease on one occasion and also assertively refuse unwanted sexual activity on another occasion. After all, adolescents “try on” on a variety of behaviors, values, and identities along the road to adulthood (La Guardia & Ryan, 2002); it makes sense that they would try on different ways of being sexual as well. Peterson (2010) acknowledged that there is no ultimate version of sexual empowerment at the end of the pathway; rather, empowerment is a continuous and multidimensional construct. Although empowerment may be a developmental process, at any given time,
girls (and women) are likely to experience sexual empowerment on some levels and disempowerment on other levels.

Lamb wonders two things. First, how can we assume a developmental path when we are unclear about the endpoint? Second, Lamb wonders what makes experimentation “just” experimentation and thinks that much of the literature on play supports the idea that play has real influence and power to constitute who one is as one grows up. She wonders if imitating a stripper in the dancing of a 13 year old or a porn star in the act of intercourse for the 18 year old, because it is such a powerful image that may reap rewards from boys and men (who are also influenced by narrow representations of male sexuality), could lead a girl at any age to construct sexuality along a narrow dimension. And while she may feel empowered, even feel sexual feelings in her body (and performing sex does not necessarily mean that a girl won’t feel sexy, sexual, and even have an orgasm), one has to consider that, in the developing adolescent these experiences may have a formative effect. In other words, even if it’s experimentation, these experiments, with their concomitant rewards and sexual feelings are pretty powerful and can form the adult sexuality of a person in problematic ways. So is there a path (or multiple paths) to sexual empowerment?

We agree (to varying extents) that media images have the potential to be both promoters of and threats to girls’ sexual empowerment. Especially as girls get older and begin developing their sexual identities, sexual media has the potential to play a positive role. Sexual media has the potential to help dispel sexual shame, provide education, and promote a diversity of ways of being sexual (Strossen, 1993; Tiefer, 1995). We also agree that most mainstream media fails to achieve its positive potential and instead constructs girls’ sexuality in a way that is narrow and restrictive. Perhaps one reason that restrictive media images are a threat to girls’ sexual empowerment is that, for many girls, the media may be their primary or only source of information about sexuality and that girls take in media in a way that isn’t mediated given the poor state of sexuality education and media literacy in the US.

We further agree that sex education is an important component of sexual empowerment and denial of access to this is tantamount to oppression (Fine & McClelland, 2006). Even Obama’s call for evidence-based sexuality education (2009) still only gives funding for pregnancy prevention, which is a very limited form of sexuality education. Girls who are disadvantaged in multiple ways – for
example, girls who are living in poverty, who have immigrant parents, and/or
who have limited access to health information or health care – are particularly
harmed by the lack of readily available sex education. These girls may be forced
to rely on media depictions of sexuality as their sole source of education. One
path to empowerment might include a good sexuality education course, which is
rarely available (especially to these disadvantaged girls) given the decades of
exclusive government funding of Abstinence Only courses (Fine & McClelland,
2006). Another path to empowerment might include media literacy training,
which also doesn’t exist in most schools except occasionally as a couple of
lessons added on to an English curriculum.

Conclusions
One of our goals for this paper was to identify the many points of agreement that
we as feminists share regarding adolescent girls’ sexuality because many of
these commonalities were obscured in our original point/counterpoint articles.
We have addressed our areas of agreement throughout the paper. Below we
summarize some of the most important points on which we whole heartedly
agree:

1. We want adolescent girls to grow into women who can receive pleasure
and enjoyment from their sexuality.
2. We agree that the media often provides girls with confusing and
damaging messages about their bodies and their sexuality, and we agree
that the media, especially when combined with media literacy training,
has the potential to promote positive images of girls’ sexuality.
3. We agree that girls frequently experience ambivalence and uncertainty
about their sexual wants and desires. To deny or pathologize that
ambivalence is harmful to girls.
4. We agree that comprehensive sexuality education is essential to help
address negative media messages, acknowledge and validate girls’
ambivalence, and encourage sexual communication skills, all of which
will contribute to long-term sexual satisfaction and pleasure.

Throughout this article we have raised many questions that we have left
unanswered. In many cases these unanswered questions reflect our differing
perspectives as individuals on the difficult issues that we have discussed here.
However, even in cases in which we might provide different answers to the
questions we have raised, we both agree that there is not a single clear or
definitive answer. For example, sexually empowered behavior likely varies
across different individuals, different ages, different relationships, and different social and cultural contexts.

We have discussed these questions theoretically, but empirical research could also shed light on these topics. Potentially fruitful areas of research in the future include investigating how adolescent girls’ conceptualizations of sexual empowerment, sexual desire, and sexual pleasure differ as a function of their age; examining how girls (of varying race, age and ethnicities) interpret and respond to sexualized media images; and investigating how girls’ desire to please their partner may have an impact on their sense of empowerment, their sexual desire and pleasure, and their ability to practice sexual assertiveness.

We believe that these unanswered questions will require on-going discussions, struggles, and perhaps even conflict among feminist researchers and writers, and we think that these issues are worthy of this attention. We also believe that differing feminist perspectives on these challenging questions are valuable in that it will contribute to a richer and more productive exploration of adolescent girls’ sexuality.
Chapter 4: The Use and Misuse of Pleasure in Sex Education Curricula

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Abstract

Since Michelle Fine’s writing on the missing discourse of desire in sexuality education, there has been considerable prompting among sexuality educators and feminist scholars to incorporate talk of pleasure into sexuality education curricula. While the calls for inclusion continue, few have actually examined the curricula for a pleasure discourse or explored how it is contextualized within sexuality education curricula. In this paper we analyzed curricula used in the U.S.A. in the past decade. A qualitative thematic analysis revealed that the discourse around pleasurable sex was often linked to a range of dangerous or negative outcomes including not using condoms, rushing into sex without thinking, regretted sex, and pregnancy or STDs. When the discourse around pleasure was included in sections on “knowing one’s body”, this discourse took a medicalised, scientific tone. Pleasurable sex was also presented in more positive ways, either linked to marriage in Abstinence Only Until Marriage curricula, or within a more feminist discourse about female pleasure in Comprehensive Sex Education curricula. Our research indicates that a discourse of desire is not missing, but that this discourse was often situated as part of a discourse on safe practice and in doing so, continues to equate pleasure with danger.

There has been a tremendous response to Michelle Fine’s 1988 article pointing to the missing discourse of desire in sex education (Fine 1988). In this article, Fine connected desire to female sexual subjectivity and argued that sex education’s tendency to emphasise female sexual victimization results in the suppression of a discourse about female desire and pleasure. More recently, researchers note that while pleasure is now a part of the conversation about female adolescent sexuality and is commodified in popular culture, little change

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has occurred within sex education since the article had been published (Fine & McClelland, 2006), in part due to the dominant presence of Abstinence Only Until Marriage curricula (AOUM) in the U.S.A. Although AOUM curricula were the primary type of sex education funded in the United States over the past two decades, Comprehensive and Evidence-Based curricula were taught in schools in states that turned down funding and by religious and community organisations. Unfortunately, little research has examined whether discourse of pleasure now exists and if it does, when and where this discourse is contextualised within sex education curricula. The current study examines a variety of these curricula for discourses about pleasure and attempts to understand how authors use pleasure to persuade and educate in these teaching texts.

The call for the inclusion of pleasure into sex education has continued since Fine’s article (Allen, 2004; APA 2007; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Lamb, 1997; Thompson, 1990; Tolman, 2002), and has extended to a discussion that includes both boys and girls. Rasmussen (2004) writes that, “Sex and pleasure are fundamental aspects of students’ lives and school cultures…integral to students’ sense of well-being” (p. 446). Nevertheless, researchers have noted that school-based curricula are saturated with fear-based, rather than pleasure-based or other sex-positive messages (Bay-Cheng, 2003), and continue to be replete with sexual stereotypes (Lamb, Graling, & Lustig, 2011). Recent critiques of both abstinence and comprehensive sex education (CSE) demonstrate that these curricula continue to focus on the danger of sex instead of pleasure for both boys and girls (Fields, 2008; Kendall, 2008b; Lamb et al., 2011). When sex educators teach to address this danger (e.g., by teaching refusal skills), sexual desire and entitlement, for girls especially, become associated with being “bad” or “slutty” (Tannenbaum, 2000) and negatively affects the development of female sexual subjectivity. This is particularly problematic for Black, low-income girls, for whom exploring or expressing desire makes them further vulnerable to the stereotype of being a “ho” (Froyum, 2009; Lamb, 2010a). In practice, more open discussions may take place that address such stereotypes, as curricula often provide discussion questions that do (as Fine 1988 showed), but the focus of lessons limits peer classroom discussion to topics related to the dangers of sex.

The discourse of pleasure in sex curricula is not always absent. In her research on New Zealand curricula, Allen (2007a) noted that pleasure is
discussed, however only within a focus on danger prevention. Kiely (2005) argues that in Irish Sexuality and Relationships curricula, the narrowing of sex to mean one act, coitus, means that other pleasurable, and even safer acts, aren’t considered. In these curricula, information about masturbation, sexual positions, fantasy, non-genital activities, and oral-genital contact are not mentioned, suggesting that these behaviors are preliminary to the “real thing” (Kiely, 2005, p. 259).

Students and teachers have voiced reactions to the missing discourse of pleasure in sex education. Although students have been critical when pleasure is missing in the curricula (Measor, Tiffin, & Miller, 2000), they also express worries that sex is something too personal to teach and should happen naturally (Allen, 2007a, 2007b). Teachers also express worry about how pleasure can be incorporated into sex education and difficulty talking about pleasure outside of the stereotypes of heterosexual relationships (Harrison, Hillier, & Walsh, 1996). In one study, when pleasure was used in a way to bolster talk about safety, teachers expressed feeling more comfortable (Harrison et al., 1996).

The inclusion of pleasure in sex education curricula could improve education for both girls and boys. Teaching an “ethics of pleasure” (Allen, 2007a, 2007b; Carmody, 2005; Lamb, 2010c; Rasmussen, 2004) could open up “new possibilities for understanding sexual subjects” (Allen, 2007a, pp. 83-84), including non-heterosexual identities. Consideration of non-heterosexual sexual activity is typically absent from sex education curricula (Fine & McClelland, 2006). Teaching LGBT sexuality from a positive and pleasure-oriented perspective in the classroom has almost been “unthinkable” (Mayo 2011, p. 70). Rasmussen (2004) argues that sex education should include teaching about pleasure for pleasure’s sake and not used in an attempt to fight “homophobia, misogyny, or patriarchy” (p. 455). But teaching about pleasure inclusive of LGBT identified young people can provide a counter-narrative to the “it gets better” project (www.itgetsbetter.org) and “wounded identity” discourse (Rasmussen, 2004), a discourse that positions LGBT youth as always harmed by homophobia. Without specific reference to LGBT pleasures, talk about pleasure can re-inscribe harmful stereotypes.

In this paper, we examine discourses of desire and pleasure with consideration of past critiques of sex education, including the framing of discussions of sexual desire in lessons on danger, focus on coitus, and exclusion of LGBT sexuality. We do this in the context of recent school-based sex
education in the U.S.A. where the federal government has provided more than 1 billion dollars for abstinence only programming since 1996 (Kendall, 2008; Santelli et al., 2006). While President Barack Obama and congressional leaders have called for an end of funding for programmes that do not have evidence to support their effectiveness and has recommended increasing funding to states for teenage pregnancy prevention programmes (Guttmacher Institute, 2009), in 2010 the U.S. Congress elected to maintain 50 million dollars of funding for states that wanted to continue to use AOUM curricula. The new focus on evidence-based and health-oriented sex education may mean that goals such as the development of sexual agency and entitlement are again pushed to the side (Lamb, 2011, 2012). Although sexual health and sexual pleasure are connected (Tolman, 2002), it is unlikely that, given the current political climate, a fully comprehensive sexuality curriculum that addresses pleasure will emerge for use in schools.

The current study examined curricula from the last decade in order to explore how talk of pleasure was integrated into curricula and in what context it arose. We decided to examine three types of curricula: Abstinence Only Until Marriage curricula, curricula that were written by those who advocate Comprehensive or Evidence-Based Sex education (including those comprehensive curricula revised to fit into an Abstinence-Plus framework—abstinence plus comprehensive information about birth control), and a comprehensive curriculum that is taught outside of the schools but that is considered by liberal sex education advocates to be the gold standard of comprehensive curricula (Estrella, 2012). Choosing a range of curricula that represented various political agendas enabled us to see how discourses around pleasure are put to different uses.

Discourse always functions to assert some ideologies over others and our title, the use and misuse of pleasure, is meant to invite reflection over ways in which pleasure might be included in curricula to support more ethical sexual practices in addition to student health and well-being. This paper does not lay out a framework by which pleasure can be put to better use, as previous theoretical writings address this issue (Allen & Carmody, 2012; Carmody, 2005; Lamb, 1997; 2010c; Lamb & Peterson, 2011).

The discourse approach stems from Foucault’s (1979) writings regarding sexuality as a social construction that is discursively constituted through “a plethora of social institutions whose meanings are historically and culturally
located” (Allen, 2007b, 249). If individuals’ sexualities are forged through such discourses, then an examination of the pleasure discourse within sex education curricula can inform with regard to what kinds of pleasures are permitted, when, where, and how.

Methods
This research arose as part of a broader study of ethical issues in current sex education curricula for young people in which an array of curricula were analysed. For the current paper, we selected primarily school-based curricula from both AOUM and CSE sources. We reviewed only those curricula that are in wide use today in the U.S.A., were published in the last decade, and were used to teach sex education to adolescents in middle school and high school. Despite substantial efforts, we were unable to obtain accurate statistics about the frequency with which any curriculum is used. The determination of “popular” curricula was made by looking at the Abstinence Clearinghouse Web Site, talking to leaders in the field at two sex education conferences (individuals in leadership positions of two national organizations), and noting which curricula have been included in previous evaluations of curricula (Administration for Children and Families and the Department for HHS, 2007; Committee on Government Reform, 2004; Kirby 2007; LeCroy & Milligan, 2003; Trenholm et al., 2007). Informed by this information, we created a sample of convenience. This sample included four AOUM curricula, six CSE curricula, and one non-school-based CSE curriculum (See Table 1). AOUM curricula were self-classified in their titles and by their primary focus on encouraging abstinence from sexual intercourse versus how to engage in sexual intercourse safely. Two of these curricula have new versions that came out recently, but in order to ensure that we were comparing a similar sample of curricula, we chose to analyse the older versions of these curricula that were written under the same administration’s legislation when AOUM curricula were fully supported. We also analyzed six CSE curricula, four of which were included in lists of evidence-based, effective curricula (Kirby, 2007). The fifth, Making Sense of Abstinence is a group of lessons written by a CSE advocate to conform to AOUM expectations (Taverner & Monfort, 2005). We included a sixth truly CSE curriculum, Our Whole Lives (OWL) (2000), which was written for delivery in Unitarian churches, because OWL has not been edited to conform to legislation around sex education as it is not school-based. We included it with the expectation that it would provide us with examples of what can be said about
pleasure in sexuality when not confined by legislation and school restrictions. CSE were classified by central focus on how a student who chooses to engage in sexual intercourse can do so safely.

In order to analyse sex education curricula, we used a thematic analysis methodology described by Braun and Clarke (2006) conducive to the exploration of discourse. Although we concentrate on themes, our analysis follows discursive psychology’s practice of examining language with regard to how it works to construct subjects, in this case sexual subjects, and knowledge, in this case sexual knowledge (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Willig, 2008). Following the authors’ general guidelines, two to three members of the research team independently read through curricula and identified on note cards salient quotations and comments that were relevant to the theme of pleasure. The team then met and sorted the cards into categories representing overarching themes. One person sorted the quotations. Then the second and third members of this research team re-sorted the first person’s categories until all three coders agreed that a quotation or topic fit under a particular category. Quotes were permitted to lie under different themes. Initial reliability statistics were not attempted as the process was collaborative and first codings were not meant to form lasting categories. Temporary theme titles were assigned to each group.

Members next defined and developed each theme (Braun & Clarke 2006). At the end of this process, we narrowed the categories to three broad themes with subthemes. After identifying themes, we used quotes to develop a description of themes and then proceeded to analyse the theme and any problems that might arise in shaping the pleasure discourse for students. The three authors also worked with other research group members who were consulted on quotes that were difficult to place.

Findings

Pleasure discourse fell into three themes with sub-themes: Health and Knowing Your Body; Problematic Pleasure; and Positive Pleasure. Themes and subthemes are identified below.

Health and Knowing Your Body

There is a long history of US sex education including information about body parts, reproduction, and the mechanics of sex. In the past, this information has narrowly represented heterosexual sexual intercourse (Moran, 2000). We
found that there were still lessons that presented this information and that some of these lessons referenced pleasure and arousal (MSA, PI, SWSW, and OWL.)

How the body works: Knowing oneself vs. pleasing another

Pleasure was sometimes included in larger discussions of physical health and knowledge of the body. In some of these discussions it was presented in a scientific, expert tone that differed from the tone of many of the other chapters, which took on a more casual or conversational tone. This discourse described arousal in a way that suggested that by providing such information, students would better understand how their bodies work.

For example, in PI’s sections on negotiating sexual relationships, the authors refer to sexual arousal with slang expressions such as “feeling very horny” or “getting very hot” (p. 19). However, when presenting pleasure information in lessons on knowing one’s body, the authors utilize a more neutral, expert, and regulating tone, common to the discursive shift from a values to a science emphasis in sex education (Carlson, 2012). For example, PI uses the following language to describe sexual excitement for girls: “having wetness in the vaginal area when sexually aroused” (p. 142). By presenting the biological bases of arousal and pleasure separate from other chapters and using language and tone that is more medical and expert, the authors take pleasure out of the realm of the emotional and relational experience of sex. While this may imply that pleasure ought to be domesticated through integration into discussions of relationship, we merely mean to point out that most pleasure occurs in relation to another person whether in actuality or in fantasy, and to take it out of a relational context may support a more self-focused, neo-liberal project of self-management (Rose, 1996). This language also suggests to students that pleasure is achieved through focus on their own sexual responses rather than the sexual responsiveness and arousal of others, which has been discussed as a problem in sex education (Lamb, 2010c, 2011).

While discussion of arousal in medicalised language may have drawbacks, it may also have benefits. Specifically, normalising discourse about pleasure may undermine feelings of shame. MSA, SWSW, and PI provide information that normalizes arousal. After including a description of puberty changes (e.g., wet dreams; vaginal lubrication), SWSW’s authors add that students may also “desire to masturbate more” (p. 197), thus normalising masturbation. In the past, the discourse of science and medicine has
problematically been used to control and discipline those who do not fall under the narrow version of “normal” and so such a discourse should be critiqued. However, in these curricula, it may be a strategy for those CSE authors who would like to more freely teach about pleasure to insert information about pleasure in an acceptable format. It is also possible, however, that this “expert normalisation” creates more problems than it solves by creating hegemonic norms that might alienate individuals experiencing different forms of pleasure and arousal, or who may even be asexual or pre-sexual. Sexual experiences, such as masturbation or the sexual arousal response, are not universal and often vary (Tiefer, 2004).

Despite past research pointing to heterosexism in the way sexual education presents sex, this was not apparent in the manner in which CSE curricula presented biological information on desire and arousal. In fact, in almost all cases there was no sexual partner within these discussions, which made the sexual response or behavior being described more applicable to a variety of relationships. The one exception to this is when SWSW describes the vagina as the “place that holds the penis during sexual intercourse”.

Although the presentation of this information in these curricula was largely not heterosexist in its language, there was one interesting omission that may be related to homophobia. In the curricula’s discussion of pleasure and desire in the body, none discuss the anus or perineum as a potential source of pleasure. This omission is particularly noticeable when these curricula discuss the other points of pleasure in the body (clitoris, penis, vagina, G-spot, and skin). While several of these curricula include the anus on a diagram (SWSW), include anal intercourse in their lessons on sexual decision making (OWL), or mention anal intercourse in passing (e.g. MSA), curricula do not explore these regions of the body as pleasure areas. This omission could be related to the stigma against gay men and anal sex among heterosexuals.

Making healthy sexual choices

Talk about pleasure also occurred in the context of making healthy choices and was used as a way to increase the attractiveness of safe sexual behaviors. For example, in BPBR, the authors write that “some people focus on how to make sex feel really good and be fun for both people. They also need to think about being safe. …Openly communicating needs and concerns can increase enjoyment of the experience” (p. 127). Readers should note that
pleasure is fully acknowledged and integrated with a message that also speaks to safety.

Condom use is also an area in which both pleasure and safety is integrated. BART’s authors attack the idea that condoms decrease pleasure with the response from one student to another in a vignette, “It will feel good to know we’re keeping each other safe” (p. 174). In this way, the pleasure of sex is matched with the pleasure of taking care of the other person. PI asks “which part in the process feels the same whether or not a condom is used?” p. (103), in order, it would seem, to show that there is still sexual pleasure to be experienced with a condom even if, during intercourse, it may be lessened. SWSW even makes a suggestion to further increase the pleasure of safe sex, “A bit of lubricant inside the condom gives many guys more feeling during intercourse” (p. 79).

Several curricula also focus on non-coital pleasure as a way to keep sex safe. For example, SWSW suggests that there are “things that two people could do with each other if they want to be sexual” but not have intercourse, and asks students if these activities “feel good” (p. 219). OWL (pp. 91-2) asks students to think up a safe sex fantasy: “sexually exciting and fulfilling behaviors that do not involve penetration.” These curricula may be countering the common cultural assumption that intercourse, especially unprotected intercourse, feels the best. This assumption is not presented directly as a myth or a cultural belief, but is addressed indirectly through the promotion of other practices, including what some call “outercourse” (MSA, p. 61).

AOUM curricula reviewed in this study did not include pleasure information from a “know your body” or “safe practices” perspective. The restriction regarding teaching about contraception derives from the belief that teaching about a subject leads to experimentation with that subject. When contraception is mentioned in AOUM curricula, as in the case of Journey, it is with the purpose of reinforcing the message that only abstinence is 100% effective against pregnancy and STIs. Discussion of arousal and pleasure may also be seen by these authors as too evocative.

**Problematic Pleasure**

Talk of pleasure was also included in discussions of risk, self-control, regrettable sex, and peer pressure. However, in this context, pleasure is not typically discussed in a way that is meant to enhance self-knowledge, fun,
getting to know someone else, or developing sexual subjectivity. Instead, pleasure is presented as a problem in that it is an obstacle to restraint, abstinence, and health.

**Pleasure Makes It Hard to Control Oneself**

In our analyses of AOUM curricula, we found that several AOUM curricula present sexual pleasure as an impediment to self-control. However, when AOUM curricula teach that any sexual activity is dangerous because, once started, a student might not be able to stop, they imply that sex feels good. Several of these curricula use metaphors for desire that tie pleasure to uncontrollability. *Journey* includes a lesson about “chemistry” and “attraction” and compares them to lighting a match. When one lights a match, the fire is not contained, and it can burn out quickly or burn down the house. But when one lights a log in a fireplace (meant to symbolise marriage or commitment) the fire burns over time and in a “safe space” (p. 37).

This message of desire being uncontrollable was also found in a CSE curriculum. *RR* presents students with a list of pleasurable activities and asks them to say whether the activities, including massages, fantasising, masturbation, mutual masturbation, and oral sex, are risky or not. In “red alert” situations (p. 161), pleasure is identified as a red alert sign, thus only presented in relation to danger. The uncontrollability of sex is not questioned or explored as an aspect that might make sex enjoyable. Moreover, in some sense the argument that sex is overwhelming and uncontrollable implies a biological, even animal model of sex, which is problematic. Choice is available as an option to students, but only at a certain point in the progression towards sexual intercourse, after which point choice is more difficult or even impossible. In this discourse, having a choice and being able to make a choice is the focus supporting, once again, a discourse of self-management of the neoliberal subject (Bay-Cheng, 2011; Lamb, 2012).

**Pleasure in Relation to STD’s and Pregnancy**

Several of the curricula, both CSE and AOUM, implicitly and explicitly link pleasure and desire to the negative consequences of STDs and pregnancy. For example, in *RR*, instructors are told to ask the students to identify some of the consequences of having sex: “Students may include some positive outcomes (e.g. it’s fun or it makes us feel close) and these should be acknowledged as
reasons that millions of teenagers risk getting pregnant, or infected with HIV and other STD each year” (p. 40). The immediate and dizzying jump from fun and intimacy to infection is reminiscent of AOUM curricula, although RR is not identified with that ideology. In MSA, students are given five scenarios in which someone is aroused but needs to make the decision to remain abstinent from sexual intercourse. As with the discourse on sexual arousal inevitably leading to intercourse because it is hard to control, here arousal is presented as leading to disease or pregnancy. While it is true that these are serious risks that are attached with intercourse, the linking of pleasure to these risks raises questions with regard to authors’ intended message to students about pleasure.

**Pleasure and Regret**

AOUM curricula also make the case that there are emotional risks linked to pleasure. In several AOUM curricula, desire or pleasure was linked with regret. For example, one vignette presents a couple who had decided to wait to have sex, and, in the “heat of the moment, they ended up having sex” and then regretted it and broke up (*Journey*, p. 54). Other curricula do not explicitly mention the pleasure in the “heat of the moment”, but still introduce the idea of regret. For example, in *GP* (p. 45), students are warned, “many are surprised at the shame and guilt they may experience after engaging in intimate sexual behavior. They may also feel that they were being used in a relationship for sexual gratification alone.”

**Pleasure and Pressure**

Another very common use of desire and pleasure appeared when curricula presented examples or vignettes of one person pressuring another to have sexual intercourse. This occurred in both CSE and AOUM curricula, although less so in AOUM curricula. In many of these instances, examples were used to help students prepare to deal with these situations. For example in one vignette, a male says to a female, “we can take things slow I promise. But I think you might change your mind…you don’t know how good it could be” (*Journey*, p. 62). Another example from *BART* demonstrates one young person pressuring another to have sex by saying, “come on, baby, I’m going to make your earth move” (p. 217). In this manner, pleasure is again presented as uncontrollable and linked to potentially regrettable or unwanted sex.
Positive Pleasure
In addition to discussions about the negative consequences of having sex, we also looked for discourse that acknowledges pleasure in a positive way. We found many positive references to the pleasure of sex, surprisingly in both AOUM and CSE curricula, as well as in *OWL*. True to their aims, the AOUM curricula emphasized how pleasurable sex can be in marriage. Other curricula emphasised the pleasure of sex in reference to mutuality or female sexuality.

Pleasure in Marriage
The aim of many AOUM curricula is to encourage students to wait until they are married to have any form of sex, especially sexual intercourse. One of the promises made to students is that if they wait, they will less likely encounter the negative consequences from sexual activity. But these curricula also advertise better (presumably more pleasurable) sex when a student waits: “A study done by the University of Chicago shows that married people are having the best and the most sex” (*WAIT*, p. 58). These curricula also emphasise the role of fidelity and trust in creating more pleasurable sex. *GP* relates that, “couples who are faithfully married report better satisfaction with their sex lives than couples who aren’t married” because “their trust, love, and respect for each other make their physical relationship more enjoyable” (p. 60). Thus, positive pleasure is mentioned in some AOUM curricula, but only in the context of marriage.

Pleasure Together/ Mutual Pleasure
We found that *OWL* curricula and one CSE curriculum also talked about pleasure within the context of relationships, although not specifically marriage. In *SWSW* the authors write, “Sexually healthy people feel positive about sexuality, like their own bodies, can talk openly about sexuality, and see sex as mutual, loving, pleasurable, fun and safe for both partners” (p. 26). On the very first page of *OWL*, the authors write that people “engage in healthy sexual behavior for a variety of reasons, including to express caring and love, to experience intimacy and connection with another, to share pleasure, to bring new life into the world, and to experience fun and relaxation.” Contextualising pleasure within relationships may be a way in which pleasure was “tamed” in an era in which safety is the primary purpose of sex education. Surprisingly, this was not a tack taken by the majority of CSE curricula which included very few
messages about mutual pleasure. There was also very little discussion in CSE curricula that counteracted the “regret” discourse and pointed out the positive benefits to a relationship once a couple has sex. This may have been a taboo topic in the era of AOUM sex education.

**Female Pleasure/Female Pain**

Several curricula made special attempts to discuss both female pleasure and sexual abuse and victimisation. This may have been an attempt to address some of the concerns expressed over the past two decades with regard to sex education and the lack of a discourse around female pleasure and subjectivity (Fine, 1988). Many CSE curricula included information about the female body and female arousal. *BPBR* gave explicit information with regard to how many women receive pleasure:

> Most women need to have their clitoris (the arousal organ in their vulvas) touched, directly or indirectly in order to have an orgasm…sexual intercourse is not the only way for couples to express feelings, to feel good, or to have fun…. Using a condom can become part of the touching and stroking that happens prior to intercourse…The lubrication will make it more comfortable for her and more slippery and exciting for him.… (p. 128, *BPBR*).

Note that the message of condom use and safety (although combining talk of pleasure with talk of risk) emphasises both male and female pleasure. *SWSW* authors also discuss “false scripts”, which include beliefs that are deterrents to female pleasure. False scripts include: “Orgasm is the primary goal of sexual intercourse”; “Intimacy or a feeling of relationship with a partner is less important”; and “A sexual encounter is over once the male has had his orgasm” (p. 12). *OWL* also explicitly includes information that tells male students to think of one’s partner after orgasm. Teachers are told to “tell the group that once the condom is removed, the man may relax with and hold his partner, or continue to pleasure his partner without further penetration with the penis” (p. 87). Although the authors do not specify the gender of the partner, the mention of the man as the main actor suggests it is an antidote to the stereotype of men forgetting about their female partners.
Another way that curricula now seem to address female concerns is by including information about victimisation. Sometimes information about victimisation contains information about pleasure and sex in that pleasure is introduced as an impetus for date rape in several vignettes. In *SWSW*, Larry gets turned on and tries to go further with Diane and she pushes his hand away and says no. He later insists, “I’m so turned on let’s do it” (p. 140). These vignettes possibly suggest the problematic idea that pleasure is no indication that someone is safe and that pleasure is linked to female exploitation. The man is pictured as overwhelmed by his own arousal, whereas a different presentation of this scene might have presented him as predatory or very much in control with regard to wanting to have sex independent of the girl’s consent.

The message that sex should be pleasurable may be important to combat victimization. Some feminist theorists purport that young women’s experiences of desire increases their ability to assert themselves against coercive or unwanted sex (Fine, 1988; Tolman, 2002). Today pleasure is synonymous with sexual subjectivity and agency (Gill, 2008) and research shows that sexually agentic women are more able to assert their needs and say no (Impett et al., 2006). However, it is unclear how messages about pleasure convey information to boys about assertiveness and violence. Curricula do not say enough about how and why pleasurable sexual experiences are sometimes linked with exploitation and what boys can do about it.

**Conclusion**

Pleasure is not merely a biological experience; it is defined, controlled, and evoked through context. In this paper, we were interested in examining desire and pleasure as they were represented in sex education curricula in the U.S.A. during a historical period during which the mention of pleasure most likely needed to be circumscribed, whereas sex is over-represented in the media young people consume. This perspective led us to ask several questions: is pleasure included in curricula at all? If it is, in what context and to what use?

Overall, we found that pleasure is no longer ignored and this was true for both AOUM and CSE sex curricula, and that the discourse around pleasure had various functions. Pleasure and desire were included in medicalised, expert CSE discussions about the body. Many curricula were heterosexist and failed to discuss anal or non-heterosexual pleasures. In many of the curricula, discourse of desire and pleasure are linked with messages about danger and risk, including
desire being uncontrollable, desire carrying emotional and health risks, desire used in peer pressure, and desire in relation to victimization. Positive references to pleasure and desire took place in the context of discussions about the pleasures of safe sex, marital sex, mutual relationships, and being female.

One might argue that students do not need to know that sex is pleasurable, that they will find that out soon enough or that messages of pleasure are infused within popular media already. However, as noted in the introduction, research suggests that the manner in which girls are socialized interferes with the development of sexual subjectivity (Tolman, 2000, 2002; Tolman et al., 2006), that students themselves want to know what feels good (Allen, 2007b), and that lack of discussion about the pleasure of sex makes curricula seem to students less relevant (Allen, 2007b). Moreover, representations of sexuality in popular media more often than not tend to be heterosexist, sexist, and derivations from pornography (Dines, 2010).

The discourse of desire is no longer missing, but is often situated as part of a discourse on safe practice and in doing so, equates pleasure with danger. In a climate where AOUM curricula were federally funded and the authors of CSE curricula were attempting to show CSE’s effectiveness in preventing pregnancy and STD reduction, it is no surprise that pleasure and risk were deeply connected. While the acknowledgement of the “fun,” “good feelings,” and pleasure of sex goes far to undermine the link between shame and sex that has been present in a number of eras of sex education (see Carlson, 2011), this emphasis on prevention practice largely overshadowed any discussion of issues relating to mutuality and the importance of developing pleasurable sexual practices for both male and female students, though there were exceptions.

How was pleasure defined in these curricula? There were no overarching definitions or detailed descriptions of sexual pleasure per se, none similar to those suggested by researchers like Fine (1988), Tolman (2002), or Allen & Carmody (2012). Perhaps that was why we as researchers were limited to teasing out a discourse of pleasure by examining phrasing regarding “getting horny”, getting carried away, and the mechanics of arousal. There are a variety of pleasures that could have been described. Authors pursue a discourse of restraint around desire and instructors are told that if students ask for permission to list the positive consequences of sex (after exercises in which they list negative consequences), they are told that they are to respond with reminders that sex is dangerous.
Although sexual safety is a laudable goal, the juxtaposition of pleasure with danger reinforces old messages about sex and shame; that if one gets carried away, enjoys sex with abandon, or seeks out sexual pleasure, harm will come. Largely missing in discourse on sexual pleasure is a discourse that connects pleasure to mutuality in non-marital relationships (Lamb, 2010c; Lamb, 2012). Focusing on prevention and danger, educators miss the opportunity to talk with adolescents about pleasure in the context of a good relationship, one in which the adolescent can both take care of her/himself as well as her/his partner. When the young person is positioned as reckless, easily pressured, unknowledgeable or unwise to consequences, rather than as a human being who seeks relationship and pleasure within it, discussions of sexuality will be as superficial as the kind of sex these curricula are trying to prevent. As the OWL curriculum reminds us, talk of pleasure ought to be embedded in discourse about negotiating relationship, communication, and mutuality. In so doing, the goal of prevention may be reached while higher and more positive goals are also attempted.

Table 1

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<tr>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Citation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. WAIT Training (Why Am I So Tempted)</td>
<td>WAIT</td>
<td>AOUM</td>
<td>M&amp;H*</td>
<td>Krauth 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Aspire</td>
<td>Aspire</td>
<td>AOUM</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Phelps 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Choosing the Best Journey</td>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>AOUM</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Cook 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Game Plan</td>
<td>GP</td>
<td>AOUM</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Green 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Becoming a Responsible Teen</td>
<td>BART</td>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>St.Lawrence 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Be Proud! Be Responsible! Strategies to Empower Youth to Reduce Their Risk for HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>BPBR</td>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Jemmott, Jemmott, &amp; McCaffree 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Positive Images: Teaching About Abstinence, Contraception, and Sexual Health</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Brick &amp; Taverner 2001</td>
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<td>8. Reducing the Risk: Building</td>
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Skills to Prevent Pregnancy, STD’s And HIV
9. Streetwise to Sexwise: Sexuality Education for High-Risk Youth
10. Making Sense of Abstinence: Lessons for Comprehensive Sex Education

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*M & H represent Middle School and High School
Chapter 5: Toward a Sexual Ethics Curriculum: Bringing Philosophy and Society to Bear on Individual Development

Abstract

For over a decade, battles have raged between conservative Abstinence Only Until Marriage (AOUM) sexuality education advocates and liberal Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) advocates. While these battles have focused on the inclusion of health information about contraception and whether or not a curriculum must advocate abstinence as the best and only method to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, these debates have often ignored other important values about sex. In this article, Sharon Lamb reviews the recent history of these sexuality education battles, criticizes both AOUM and CSE curricula, and discusses how, in CSE’s accommodation to AOUM objections, ethical dimensions of sex education may have been neglected in favor of evidence-based practice. She then suggests ways in which the current curricula could teach ethical reasoning and make sex education a form of citizenship education, focusing on justice, equity, and caring for the other person as well as the self.

Nineteen years after abstinence education was endorsed and promoted by President Clinton, and after eight years during which the Bush administration supported and grew an Abstinence Only Until Marriage (AOUM) programmatic approach to sexuality education, it is interesting to consider the changes that await adolescents’ sexuality education given the promise of an Obama presidency that aims to “restore science to its rightful place” (Obama, 2009). In his May 2009 budget, President Obama called for an end of funding for AOUM programs that did not have evidence to support their effectiveness. In addition, he said the government will no longer fund programs that ignore or denigrate the effectiveness of contraceptives and safe-sex behaviors. He also recommended increasing funding for comprehensive teen pregnancy prevention programs (Guttmacher Institute, 2009). And the most recent version of the health-care bill

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eliminates all funding for AOUM programming. While this change may not end
the battle between AOUM and CSE advocates, it certainly is a harbinger for
more progressive reform in the practice of sex education.

Over the past twenty years, an approach used by CSE advocates to
combat the growth of AOUM curricula has been to bring science to bear on the
AOUM agenda, and we hear in Obama’s recommendation for evidence-based
programs that he and his administration have been listening to these arguments.
CSE advocates have not only provided science-based critiques of AOUM
curricula, but they have been working around constraints and agendas quite
foreign to their purpose in order to get the funding and permission needed to
provide teens and preteens with reliable information about their own sexual
development. In recent years they have rarely been given the breathing room, let
alone the grant money, to imagine what sexuality education could be like
beyond social skills training that would lead to scientifically measurable
outcomes, such as the delay of first sex and the reduction of teen pregnancy and
STDs.

Here I argue for including ethical education as part of sex education. An
ethics approach to sex education will help teens develop and express an ethical
orientation to sex and teach them not only to look inward and narrowly address
the personal choices they will need to make in the future but to understand the
ethics these decisions reflect. It will also help them examine the moralities
represented in the world around them, such as those in the media or expressed in
our culture’s response to rape, sexual harassment, pornography, and prostitution.
I also argue that sexuality education in a liberal studies tradition should be
taught from an interdisciplinary perspective whereby health information is only
a part of the curriculum and thinkers from fields such as philosophy and history
introduce the moral issues at stake. This is a vision in which sexuality education
is designed to educate the whole teen as a decision maker, a sexual citizen, and
an ethical human being. Philosophical and practical discussions about individual
rights, consent, human dignity, mutuality, respect, and even beneficence could
and should be included in a sexuality education curriculum that has at its core
moral development rather than prevention, restraint, or social skills
development.

I also welcome a new age of sexuality education by exploring the past and
envisioning a future in sexuality education that moves not only beyond the
AOUM agenda but also beyond simple evidence-based social skills training that
provides accurate health information. To do this in what could be a new and open climate about sexuality education, we must be willing to critique what is missing from current liberal and progressive sexuality education curricula. It is important to first examine the history (in response to which evidence-based critiques arose) before examining how evidence-based curricula are not the best curricula to promote an ethically sound sex education for teens. Thus, I begin with a review of sexuality education over the past twenty years in the United States to describe the existing sexuality education curricula. I then examine the critiques of these curricula made by those working in the field, in particular feminist thinkers who decry the absence of education about pleasure, and move on to propose that those of us working on sexuality education curricula need to reclaim a discourse about ethics, one that has often only been associated with conservative curricula. In closing, I introduce several ideas with regard to what could be included in a new vision of sexuality education and argue why these areas are as important as education for public health and social skills.

A Brief and Recent History of Sexuality Education in the United States

In the late 1980s, only one in fifty sexuality education programs taught abstinence alone (Dailard, 2001). Before that time Ronald Reagan had funded abstinence-only education minimally, leaving decisions about sexuality education to states and community groups (Kendall, 2008a). By the late 1990s, 86 percent of “schools with sexuality education policies required that abstinence be promoted as either the only (35% of schools) or the preferred means of contraception” (Landry, Kaeser, & Richards, 1999, as cited in Kendall, 2008b, p. 24). The change from minimal federal support for abstinence curricula to full support came when abstinence-only curricula became required for federal funding under the Clinton administration. With Section 510 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, the president supported a bill that gave $50 million a year in federal grants to states for AOUM education (Dailard, 2005).

Since 1996 the federal government has provided more than $1 billion for AOUM programming (Kendall, 2008b; SIECUS, 2007, 2009). The national growth of these programs was supported by another bill, the Children and Families Community-Based Abstinence-Education (CBAE) program, passed in 2001. This legislation made available even more funding for AOUM programming, funding that bypassed states and gave directly to organizations
that were faith-based or that provided pregnancy crisis services. Since 2006 all the growth in funding has come from the CBAE program (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Santelli, 2006).

The initial funding to the states enacted in 1996 laid out an eight-point definition of abstinence education and instructed that a program could emphasize any of them as long as it also did not contradict others (Santelli, Ott, Lyon, Rogers, Summers, & Schleifer, 2006). Yet the CBAE funding was more rigid and required that states include all eight components. For example, programs were not permitted to provide information about contraception. Moreover, in 2006 the initial objectives “designed to discourage ‘premature sexual activity’ and ‘abstinence decisions’ [were] changed to ‘premarital sexual activity’ and ‘abstinence-until-marriage decisions,’ respectively” (Dailard, 2005). This growth in AOUM funding occurred in spite of Surgeon General David Satcher’s (2001) report, “The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Behavior,” a bright point in the past two decades that called for comprehensive sexuality education and provided evidence for its effectiveness. Satcher’s report found no scientific support that sex education leads to earlier sexual activity and that students who had comprehensive sex education, rather than AOUM education, were more likely to use contraception when they became sexually active. Over time, as states found that these programs were not effective, many began to refuse CBAE funding and looked elsewhere (LeCroy & Milligan Associates, 2003).

Criticism: Scientific, Ethical, and Feminist Ethical Arguments

Critics of the AOUM sexuality education policies assert several lines of argument. One argument, which marshals scientific evidence, says that AOUM curricula are ineffective. There are also ethical arguments which make the case that withholding important information from teens interferes with their individual rights (ACLU, 2007; Wiley & Wilson, 2009). Additionally, feminists make arguments for the right to pleasure and against gender discrimination.

Among the various arguments against AOUM curricula, science-focused arguments have become the most frequent and effective force. Those who make them define effectiveness in public health terms and evaluate whether any given curriculum is effective in delaying first sex and preventing sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted teen pregnancies. These critics support the idea that the purpose of sexuality education in the schools is prevention. They point out that
outcome evaluations of federally funded AOUM programs have not shown positive long-term effects (Cagampang, Barth, Korpi, & Kirby, 1997; Kirby, 2007; LeCroy & Milligan Associates, 2003; Manlove, Romano-Papillo, & Ikramullah, 2004; Trenholm, Devaney, Fortson, Quay, Wheeler, & Clark, 2007. For example, in his review of studies of U.S. programs, Kirby (2007) concludes that there is no strong evidence that any AOUM programs delayed first sex or reduced the number of sex partners. However, he found that two-thirds of the comprehensive programs did show positive effects in terms of delaying first sex, reducing the number of sex partners, increasing contraceptive use, reducing frequency of sex, and, perhaps most importantly, reducing unprotected sex. Likewise, research on virginity pledges has found that those who pledged were more likely to delay initiation of intercourse but, eighteen months after they pledged, were less likely to have used contraception after they initiated sexual intercourse (Brückner & Bearman, 2005). A six-year follow-up showed that the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases in the pledging group was similar to nonpledgers and that 88 percent of pledgers, compared to 99 percent of nonpledgers, had sexual intercourse before marriage.

Those critics who bring in scientific data thus tend to take a public health perspective. Science arguments appear to be consequentialist, positioning the greatest public health for the greatest number as the greatest good. And scientists’ description of the good of sexuality education is instrumentalist (Santelli, 2006; Silva, 2002, as cited in Kendall, 2008b). As Kendall (2008b) writes, the “instrumental value being investigated is taken for granted as a social good” (p. 25). However, the instrumental value is not the only use for science in this debate. One could instead (or additionally) use science to look at ethical changes in teens with regard to their sexual attitudes, but that kind of research is rare.

One place where science and ethics meet is in the use of opinion polls. CSE advocates call on democratic values by showing that the majority of parents would like CSE for their teens. The point of these surveys is to show that the will of the people (the majority) ought to have precedence over the will of a select few, whether those few are a religious minority (e.g., evangelical Christians, a group most supportive of AOUM curricula) or those in power in the government (Dailard, 2001; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2000; NPR, Kaiser Family Foundation, & Harvard Kennedy School, 2004).
The U.S. congressional Committee on Government Reform (2004) also took an approach that used science to advance ethics, releasing a minority report stating that eleven of the thirteen sexuality curricula it reviewed contained false, misleading, or distorted information as well as stereotypes with regard to male and female behavior. The committee wrote that people in a democracy have a right to accurate information to use in decision making; that not giving students this information contributed to the censorship of students and teachers regarding sexuality topics and encouraged the stigmatizing of homosexuality as deviant.

Santelli and colleagues (2006) use a purely ethical argument and assert that from a human rights perspective on sexual health, governments have

an obligation to provide accurate information to their citizens and eschew the provision of misinformation . . . Withholding information on contraception to influence adolescents to become abstinent is inherently coercive. It violates the principle of beneficence (i.e., do good and avoid harm as it may cause an adolescent to use ineffective (or no) protection against pregnancy and STIs). (pp. 78, 79).

Referring to ethics regarding coercion, discrimination, insensitivity, and human rights, the authors claim that the curricula are insensitive to sexually active teens and discriminate against gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (GLBTQ) youth.

Discrimination is a key focus in some ethical arguments against AOUM curricula. In her ethnography of a North Carolina school system’s battles over sexuality education, Fields (2005) examined the discourse of sex education advocates for talk about values and found that advocates of AOUM curricula implied that African American girls’ sexuality was corrupt and repeated a statistic that 20 percent of these girls were unsalvageable. In her comparison of two school districts making decisions about sexuality education, Kendall (2008b) notes how AOUM curricula categorized various groups—teens of color, those from nontraditional families, those who had been sexually abused, and those who did not identify as heterosexual—as unhealthy.

Ethics regarding inclusion and nondiscrimination are also reflected in feminist critiques. Fine and McClelland’s (2006) critique asserts that AOUM policy unequally affects and discriminates against poor, working-class, female, less able, black, Latino, and LGBT youths. Their argument is that many of these
youths have less access to alternatives to public school and public health sources of education. In addition, there is a kind of “sexual vigilantism” that has been “unleashed” (p. 322) particularly in low-income schools and poorer communities. Situating their critique in a human rights framework, Fine and McClelland caution that these curricula frame sexuality as moral choices while ignoring moral questions about access to information and education. They write that these programs lodge sexuality education in fear and shame rather than desire and pleasure. Their hope for a sexuality education that teaches about desire and pleasure is an ethic unique to feminist critiques of sexuality education.

Feminist ethical criticism of sexuality education curricula existed before the AOUM agenda defined sexuality education in the United States, and this criticism responded to problems of stereotyping, male orientation, and sex bias against girls. Lees (1993) writes that the feminist model of sex education stands as more progressive than liberal and conservative models in that it questions social norms and takes seriously power structures and inequality, including the oppressive history that defined women—their role and potential as sexual beings. It also stands somewhat apart from the science arguments that focus on public health and from the science/ethics arguments that focus on democracy.

One argument made by feminist critics in the United States and abroad is that sexuality education has been too risk-focused, thus making sexuality always problematic and dangerous and necessitating crisis management (Allen, 2007a; Fine, 1988). This risk model, they argue, disproportionately affects girls and women (Fine & McClelland, 2006) and is at odds with the desires of teens and teen girls (Kendall, 2008b). Its dominant mythologies and narratives see girls at greater risk and also place greater responsibility on girls for birth control (Allen, 2007a; Ashcraft, 2006; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fine, 1988; Lamb, 1997; Tolman, 2004). Feminist theorists also describe these risk-focused curricula as picturing girls as potential victims (Allen, 2007a; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fine, 1988) not only of the sexual harassment and violence that affect the majority of girls in schools (AAUW, 2001) but of boys’ uncontrollable sexuality and their pressure to have sex (Fine, 1988). They point out naturalizing discourses that reify an uncontrollable male sexuality that girls are meant to manage or watch out for (Ashcraft, 2006; Fine, 1988; Lamb, 1997; Whatley, 1991) and bemoan the absence of any sexual scripts for girls that describe agency, initiation, and

Feminists also criticize sexuality education curricula as having an unrelenting but biased focus on biological aspects of sex (Ashcraft, 2006; Lamb, 1997; Trudell, 1992; Whatley, 1991). They point out that the discourse on puberty for girls has centered around menstruation while for boys the focus is on erections and ejaculations—menstruation evoking pregnancy and problems and erections evoking pleasure (Whatley, 1991).

Fine (1988) argues that sexuality education curricula ignore desire and pleasure in the education of girls, thus reflecting a bias that represents girls as victims or passive. Following Fine’s essay, many feminists have explored problems with regard to silence around pleasure and desire in sexuality education (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Holland et al., 1998; Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005; Kehily 2002b; Kiely, 2005; Rasmussen, 2004; Lamb, 1997; Tolman, 2000, 2004; Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003; Welsh, Rostosky, & Kawaguchi, 2000). Some argue not only for the discussion of pleasure in sexuality education for girls but specifically for the discussion of female masturbation (Kendall, 2008a).

While most feminist critics focus on girls’ representations in sexuality education, a few also point out that boys are represented in problematic ways (Ashcraft, 2006; Lamb, 1997; Trudell, 1992; Whatley, 1991). Still, there is little acknowledgment that boys may have a more complicated relationship to sex than the media represents (Ashcraft, 2006; Brown, Lamb, & Tappan, 2009; Lamb, 2002; Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 2004; Tolman, Spencer, Harmon, Rosen-Reynoso, & Striepe, 2004).

Critics of AOUM who make ethical arguments look beyond efficacy and argue for a certain kind of sexuality education that reflects liberal human values. These critics sometimes call their vision “democratic” and sometimes an “ethics of pleasure” (Allen, 2007a; Carmody, 2005), supporting the right to pleasure, respect, autonomy, and equality. Yet current CSE curricula rarely reflect these ethical goals.

*Ethics in Sexuality Education*

An ethics discourse is rarely present in the AOUM and CSE curricula used today, although it may appear quite frequently in the actual classroom. When an ethics discourse appears in curricula, it narrowly refers to personal
ethics in decision making. Curricula ask students to think about how they will decide what to do in a sexual situation rather than to think about what is good (ethical) behavior in sexual matters and how we might live as a society when we consider matters of sexuality. Generally the curricula conform to a social skills training mode. Social-skills training derives from a cognitive-behavioral perspective that identifies skills worth having and then proceeds through cognitive exercises and practice to enable a person to perform these skills. This model may have been chosen in order to avoid the teaching of values, because values are such a hot spot in the sex education battles. Or it may have been a way to set up a curriculum for effectiveness outcome research. Evidence-based approaches tend to use cognitive-behavioral techniques because they are more easily administered and tested. As a result, discussions about the ethics of sexuality, something that may seem difficult to measure, rarely occur.

There are, however, ways in which the current curricula could teach ethical reasoning and could be a form of citizenship education. This education would focus on two ethical ideals, justice and caring for the other person (Gilligan, 1982)—a more positive way of describing the ethics of no harm (Gert, 2008). Sex can be explained to teens as an activity in which rules regarding justice and equality can be applied, and teens can also be taught about sex in a way that emphasizes that the other person’s, as well as one’s own, safety and pleasure must be considered. These suggestions for methods of incorporating these ethical points of view into sex education could address many of the critics’ complaints with regard to current sex education and may even be able to bring together AOUM and CSE advocates in some important areas.

**Sex and Justice**

To be sexual citizens, students need to know from where rights are derived, how they are protected, and how these laws are relaxed or emphasized in matters of sex. Such a discussion of rights need not only focus on whether teens really are free to make their own choices with regard to sex but what rights and protections are afforded them with regard to matters such as education, contraception, coercion, and privacy. But their own rights are not the only rights at stake; students need to understand the rights of others and the meaning of equitable treatment in interpersonal relationships. Therefore, focusing on justice in a sex education curriculum would require discussions of human rights, equality, and nondiscrimination by gender or sexual orientation.
With regard to human rights, both AOUM and CSE curricula tend to examine freedoms in terms of individual freedoms. But CSE curricula also make sure that they are not heterosexist, and some even include units on gender and sexuality discrimination. Describing one kind of individual freedom, an AOUM curriculum asks students to focus on freedom and how the consequences of premarital sex interfere with it (even if such freedoms are reduced to the inability to go to prom) (SR). One CSE lesson broadens what could be an individual freedom through its use of more general language: “No one should feel pressured to engage in sexual activities. No one should pressure someone else to do something they do not wish to do sexually” (Taverner & Montfort, 2005, p. 218); and “Understand that the option not to have sexual intercourse is a basic human right that an individual should be able to assert at any time in any relationship.” In this way, the students are asked not only to think of their own rights but the rights of others. Other CSE lessons tend to focus on the individual students’ rights. Thus, visiting a clinic for birth control information suggests to students that they individually have a right to seek out information without adult permission. Lessons that teach students how to ask a partner about sexually transmitted diseases arguably teach students they have rights to that information. Those lessons that teach students they can buy condoms at a store or search for information on the Internet teach them they have a right to seek out and obtain information as well as contraception. Although focused on the student’s individual rights and taught by implication (that is, while students are rarely told this is their right, asking them to go to a store to buy condoms will let them know that they do have a right to do this before they are eighteen), these are nonetheless important lessons. However, more controversial freedoms, such as the freedom to masturbate or the right to an abortion or to engage in nontraditional or non-heterosexual sex acts, are not included.

One way to combine a discussion of human rights with more personal decision making in sex education and with the rights of others is through a unit on consent. Students need to learn not only the social skill of how to obtain consent, but they must also learn why consent is essential to one’s and others’ fundamental rights as well as the limits to consent, such as underage drinking. In her work on anti-rape education in New Zealand, Carmody (2005) suggests that the lack of understanding about consent and how it is to be negotiated is at the heart of exploitation. She suggests we stop teaching refusal skills and instead teach consent as a way of promoting “ethical non-violent relating” (p. 478) and
at the same time addressing gender-related expectations that interfere with consent and nonviolence.

Another way to discuss human rights in sex education is to encourage students to look globally and make comparisons with regard to what rights are afforded people, teens, and girls versus boys. Several national and international groups have developed lists of sexual rights that are recognized in law, human rights documents, and statements. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2009) declares that all persons have the right—free of coercion, discrimination, and violence—to the highest attainable standard of sexual health. This right includes the following: access to sexual and reproductive health-care services; access to information related to sexuality and the freedom to impart such information; sexuality education; respect for bodily integrity; the freedom to choose one’s partner; the decision to be sexually active or not; consent to sexual relations; consensual marriage; the freedom to choose whether or not, and when, to have children; and the freedom to pursue a satisfying, safe, and pleasurable sexual life. WHO also declares that the responsible exercise of human rights requires that all people respect the rights of others. This list and others like it provide sex educators with knowledge of human rights so that they can teach students about them and about where and how these rights are not respected. The list also implies a responsibility for the rights of others—regarding equality, fair treatment, nonviolence, and more—not only in their own country but around the world.

Another way students can be taught about their sexual rights is through studying history. So that sexual rights are not taken for granted, students should be taught the history of these rights, how they fit into a greater schema of human rights, and times in history when these rights have been challenged or eliminated. Without discussion and understanding, students may become passive in relation to their rights, less autonomous in their exercising of them, and less inclined to work for the rights of others or understand their own behavior when it interferes with the rights of others, particularly in terms of gender or sexuality discrimination.

**Gender and Justice**

The teaching of gender rights warrants a more thorough discussion. Some current AOUM curricula reinforce gender roles through remarks like, “Boys tend to use love to get sex. Girls tend to use sex to get love” (Mast, 2001 p. 11).
In this same curriculum, female sexual assertiveness is described as aggressive and is blamed on the women’s movement. AOUM curricula use shaming words like “unnatural” (Mast, 2001, p. 52), language that seems sure to make non-heterosexual youth feel unsafe, ashamed, or angry, and this is most likely why the congressional review deemed such curricula biased and dangerous (Committee on Government Reform, 2004). Furthermore, some AOUM curricula do not even discuss non-heterosexual sex.

Social skills curricula generally do not have units on gender equity or equal treatment, nor do they discuss the perils to democracy and to individuals when such equity is not ensured. Curricula can sometimes imply gender and sexuality equity in subtle ways. For example, the Reducing the Risk (Barth, 2004) curriculum features characters named Lee and Lee so that the genders are interchangeable and the issue being discussed could be applied to a straight or gay couple. When non-heterosexual sex is included, it frequently is included in a unit on stereotyping and how hurtful it can be. But even if curricula attempt to address stereotyping, when they focus on sexual intercourse as the endpoint of sex, they betray a heterosexual and even male bias. This overfocus on sexual intercourse in sexuality education leaves out other kinds of sexual pleasures and makes intercourse appear to be the one and only goal (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Kiely, 2005).

What should curricula do with regard to gender and sexuality equity? First, sexuality education in a democratic society must serve all students regardless of their individual sexualities. Second, with gay marriage laws now under debate in U.S. society, sexual orientation is important to any discussion of rights and respect for others’ rights. Thus, curricula should teach individuals about treating each other as equals and teach them to be citizens who support equal treatment, avoid stereotypes, understand the ethical foundation of equitable treatment, and explore non-heterosexual orientations and prejudices against such. Investigating a variety of pleasures and practices is important to an ethical curriculum—not just so that all students feel included or because, from a health perspective, it is necessary for safe practice, but also because it is important that students understand the history of the government’s interest in and disapproval of certain pleasures. In addition, inclusion of material on sexual orientation can and ought to lead to a discussion of how varying desires are overlaid with certain discourses of normativity (Carmody, 2005). The discussion of what we as a society consider normative and the prejudices that underlie such
consideration is part of self-reflective practice in any democratic society. This kind of education gets students to explore where ideas of “normality” derive from, how these ideas are established, and why the state at times takes an interest in the personal preferences of others. This kind of discussion would inevitably lead to education about sex as harmful and sex as a form of pleasure, one of the most important discussions to be included in a sex education curriculum.

Sex, Harm, and Caring About the Other

There is a difference between teaching about sex that is good for you (does not harm you)—sex that is pleasurably good and sex that is ethically good. As described earlier, the feminist critique of sex education centers on the absence of a pleasure discourse for girls. Yet this pleasure discourse typically teaches about sex as good for the self and focuses on the importance of not absenting one’s self in sexual encounters, a potential danger for girls and women. Thus, education about good and ethical sex must also be about harm. While it may be problematic for girls to not count themselves and their own pleasures as important in sexual encounters, it is equally, if not more, important that teens of both genders think about not harming others through sex. However, including discussions of pleasure, harm, and character will not be enough unless curricula also, more positively, speak of mutuality.

Feminist theorists (Allen, 2007a; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Tolman, 2004) argue for inclusion about pleasure in a sexual curriculum to legitimize teens as sexual subjects, give teens a sense of empowerment to make positive sexual decisions and have safer sex, help them negotiate sexual situations, and provide space for a sense of entitlement, control, and self-worth. We see this occurring in a few CSE curricula. For example, in one unit, entitled “Handling Horny,” in Making Sense of Abstinence (Taverner & Montfort, 2005), the authors tell teachers that validating expectations of sexual pleasure and desire will increase the likelihood that girls will delay intercourse. This finding has also been suggested by researchers (Holland et al., 1998; Thompson, 1995). Furthermore, in Becoming a Responsible Teen (St. Lawrence, 2005) students practice assertive communication skills. But researchers have found that when, in sexuality education classes, teens discuss the ideal of experiencing pleasure, the discussion gets reduced to prioritizing orgasm and how to achieve it (Allen, 2007a). That is, students have a way of reproducing problematic societal
discourses: pleasure for pleasure’s sake, intimacy as weak, and pleasure as orgasm (deriving from a mainstream male perspective).

Avoiding doing harm would seem to be a fundamental ethical responsibility in sex; however, when curricula discuss harm, again their focus is on harm to self. Abstinence Only curricula teach that premarital sex harms the person physically, psychologically, and financially and introduces “long term regret” (Mast, 2001, p. 95). Both AOUM and CSE curricula briefly teach about acquaintance rape and sometimes other exploitative behaviors. The F.L.A.S.H. (Reis, 2006) curriculum does better than others at this; it asks students to name the kinds of sexual experiences that can lead to guilt and regret and acknowledges the harm done in sex that is dehumanizing, humiliating, and fear-inducing and that makes a person feel disappointed and lonely.

These harms are important harms, and an ethics curriculum that helps students take the perspective of one’s partner needs to also take on the idea of exploitation. Exploitation, as it relates to human rights and consent, is important. But interpersonal exploitation and the way it harms individuals is crucial with regard to prevention of all kinds of bad sex – sex that exploits, damages, traumatizes, and leaves people, in the very least, feeling mistreated. This kind of education could include discussions of sexual harassment and a variety of forms of rape. It should also include treatment of uncaring and exploitative sex, the kind that may occur frequently at adolescent parties or on college campuses.

An ethics curriculum needs to include a discussion of pleasure while also acknowledging that we often seek more than pleasure in sex. Indeed, recent research suggests that boys as well as girls look for intimacy with sex (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006). Allen (2008) also reports that students ask for more lessons on relationships, emotions, and breakups. Halstead and Reiss (2003) note that “maintaining that sex is about the maximization of pleasure is all very well but the sad truth is how little pleasure some people get from their sexual relationships” (p. 73). Finally, there is nothing inherently ethical about being pleased, but there may be something ethical in pleasing another—that is, pleasure can be selfish or mutual.

At the same time, discussions of sex as harmful need not edge out a discourse of pleasure, as Fine noted in 1988. We need both. Yet somehow the discussion of sex as a form of pleasure seems to have edged out the idea of sex as intimate. What makes sex harmful is not only the violation of rights but also the attitude that it does not take into consideration the other person in a way that
is caring or compassionate. Thus, a discussion of “good” sex should include discussion of pleasure, intimacy, and harm.

**Mutuality and Caring for the Other**

Given that the kind of sexual relationship on which these curricula focus is one that occurs between two people, and that empathy, caring, and the ability to take another’s perspective are cardinal abilities in moral education, one would expect that focus on the other might appear more frequently than it actually does in these curricula. Instead, when there is moral discourse, it focuses on character of the self. For example, in the AOUM curriculum *Sex Respect* (Mast, 2004), self-restraint is taken to be a sign of maturity and is represented as difficult but admirable, in need of boosting through self-talk in the form of slogans. Acting on impulse, and thus not using self-restraint, is presented as dangerous. *Becoming a Responsible Teen* (St. Lawrence, 2005) includes a lesson on “creating your own (private) traffic light” (p. 36). While many of these curricula also emphasize the importance of communication, *assertive communication* is a value, thus picturing one’s partner as hostile to one’s own needs. Similarly, honesty as a virtue in communication appears only briefly. As an exception, in one *Making Sense of Abstinence* (Taverner & Montfort, 2005) lesson, students are asked to consider, before having sex, whether they treat their partners as equals, trust them, and are honest with them. Also, in *Sex Can Wait* (Core-Gebhart, Hart, & Young, 1994) honest communication is viewed as a responsibility. These are two of the only mentions of mutuality in the curricula I reviewed. Thus, a self-focus—even if it is within a moral discourse—including self-reflection (i.e., Am I honest? Can I show self-restraint?) and autonomy (i.e., Can I make judgments independent of peers?), leaves little room for mutuality (Nussbaum, 2000).

Indeed, I found surprisingly few examples of individuals making a decision together or examples of one person understanding how another person with whom they may have sex feels or thinks. When included, this was pictured as something that interfered with self-care or taking one’s own aims seriously. For example, *Becoming a Responsible Teen* (St. Lawrence, 2005) includes a unit entitled “Personalizing the Risks,” (of HIV and STDs) which misses the opportunity to teach that risk to self and risk to others are often intertwined.

The best example of taking the other person seriously is represented in a lesson in *Making Sense of Abstinence* (Taverner & Montfort, 2005) whereby
students are asked to find out how the other person feels, to talk honestly and listen carefully. Yet after doing so, students are urged to “stand up for (his or her) decision” (p. 104). Missing is the idea that a student might be influenced by what someone else says or wants in a positive way. A partner is set up as a straw “man” pressuring one to do something one does not want to do. In a unit entitled “Saying Yes, Saying No” in Making Sense of Abstinence, social skills training in assertiveness sometimes looks like a battle of the sexes where terms like “win” and “lose” describe the actions. Furthermore, in Reducing the Risk (Barth, 2004), “relationship building” (p. 39) is featured only as an alternative to not having sex. Only in a unit in the AOUM curriculum Sex Can Wait (Core-Gebhart et al., 1994), “Sexual Responsibility: A Two-Way Street,” appears the suggestion of mutuality: “decisions that are based on one’s personal goals, that take into account one’s partner’s feelings, needs and values, and that protect both partners against the danger of disease or unwanted pregnancy” (p. 297). This is a good example of a curriculum taking one’s partner seriously, but, generally, curricula that focus on pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease prevention, whether AOUM or CSE, are more likely to focus on self-care rather than on one’s partner.

From a care perspective, the language of mutuality may work to deemphasize the self and include the other or any others with whom one will have sex. Mutuality is a concept discussed in some current curricula that embraces both treating others as equals and the how of having sex for teens. It moves beyond or in a different direction from a discussion of rights and respect for partners’ rights to hint at caring for the other and his or her pleasure. A discussion of mutuality as a value ought to be discussed as a moral goal for sex.

Yet an emphasis on mutuality may be where feminism and ethics collide. The sex-positive approach for girls teaches agency and sexual subjectivity as antidotes to past traditions which have taught that sex for women is dirty and shameful and overemphasized women’s partnering in such sex as objects of pleasure rather than explorers of such. Given this history, some may worry that teaching about mutuality and the pleasure one can give others in sex will reinforce stereotyped roles for girls in heterosexual relationships as only providing pleasure for boys and men. This is indeed a problem, but the answer to this problem is not the creation of a selfish ideal where everyone seeks their own pleasure wherever they may find it.
The risk of including lessons about caring and love in sex curricula is that girls in particular will fall into heterosexual romance narratives that have worked against their sexual agency and self-protection (Holland, et al., 1998; Thompson, 1996; Tolman, 2000, 2004; Ussher 2005). But research with teens indicates that learning about emotions, love, and caring is high on their list of wants and needs in sexuality education (Allen, 2008; Halstead & Reiss, 2003), so it may be important for curricula authors to rethink how to teach about love and caring in ways that undo problematic stereotypes of heteronormative romance. Avoiding talk about love and caring in sex may send as problematic a message to teens as avoiding talk about contraception.

If a curriculum were to include discussions of love and caring, jealousy and infidelity should also be discussed. Students want to understand the wrongs of infidelity given that it can hurt so much (Halstead & Reiss, 2003), and nearly all young people believe that sexual fidelity toward a person with whom one has a personal relationship is a duty (Lottes, 2002, as cited in Kiely, 2005). Furthermore, jealousy and infidelity have been connected to interpersonal violence (Babcock, Costa, Green, & Eckhardt, 2004), and although almost everyone agrees infidelity is wrong, it is widely practiced (Jackson & Scott, 2004). Indeed, monogamy and its concomitant value of faithfulness to one person is set forth as a goal, even as a moral obligation, in U.S. society and thus it is important to advance discussions with young people about why this is so and whether there are ethical and practical reasons for monogamy. This is particularly important in an era in which there are competing public discourses with regard to high-profile celebrities and politicians being caught cheating and where threesomes are part of party culture on tween shows like Gossip Girl. Discussions about monogamy can raise issues of caring and fairness.

Thus, love, caring, mutuality, infidelity, and reciprocity ought not to be separated from sex education, especially when sexual education curricula address issues of pleasure and harm. The following discussion explores the idea of broadening ideas of justice and caring from applying justice and caring toward sex partners to applying these concepts to society. In this way, and as a form of citizenship education, caring for others can be much more broadly defined.

Broadening the Discourse on Sexuality Education
Fine and McClelland (2006) warn against the moralizing discourse of “personal choices” (p. 301) and its interference with real human rights. When moral education meets sexuality education, surely a curriculum can go beyond the level of personal morality and speak to the person in society. What if we imagine sexuality education to reach beyond the individual, beyond even the individual’s potential sexual partners, and beyond a cursory “checking in” with one’s family and clergy about values? What if sexuality education educated for values not only in a teen’s own life but in the society in which the teen lives, asking him or her to be a sexual citizen who not only understands his or her own rights in context but also appreciates the importance of certain rights for others and for society? This curriculum could teach teens to be sexual agents and thinkers who consider what good sex might mean for all.

Such an education would provide an answer to several disconnects for teens in the world today. The first such disconnect is that between the values teens hold and the place where these values are located. In many curricula teens are taught to reflect on their views and articulate why they hold these views. This can merely amount to a justification of values. Values, as they represent ethical systems, derive not just from what parents teach or pass down; being able to defend one’s values is not the same as understanding what sources they come from. Adolescence is a time of life when individuals are most interested in questioning their beliefs and the status quo of social values (Erikson, 1968), and sexuality education lessons might benefit from taking advantage of this adolescent impulse to justify their own beliefs as well as understand what is at stake when others do not hold the same values or come from the same ethical positions.

The second source of disconnect for teens is that they are taught to examine their own values about sexuality but are not taught to examine those in the context of ethics expressed in the world around them—for example, through laws, through marketing, through media, and even through economics. Teens may be against rape (and in sexuality education may be given scenarios where they need to determine what a rape is), but are they asked to understand rape in the movies they see or images in advertising that suggest rape, rape laws, or state funding to anti-rape organizations or to understand why such images are shown and at times acceptable? Such a political, social, and contextual
understanding of rape and its relationship to sex in this culture could follow a model outlined by Fine and McClelland (2006), one in which young people are entitled to a broad range of desires for meaningful intellectual, social, and political engagement, the possibility of financial independence, sexual and reproductive freedom, protection from racialized and sexualized violence, and a way to imagine living in the future tense. (p. 300)

The third disconnect is that teens are asked to focus on their own behavior rather than the behavior of their friends, peers, and people on their TV screens, in their newspapers, and in the world. Teens hear about sexting, see interpersonal problems in their peer groups, and hear about rape and sexual abuse, and some have experienced these as victims, offenders, and bystanders. Yet despite living in a world where “bad behavior” exists, they are rarely given an opportunity to look at the behavior of others and discuss it from an ethical perspective.

Moral education as sexuality education can do more than ask students to examine their own values, and its effectiveness can be measured in terms greater than pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease prevention. In a sexual ethics curriculum, sexuality education should provide students with a deep level of discussion, an ethics-focused discussion on sex in society, and a treatment of the ways that sex in society affects their lives and the lives of others.

The following are four suggestions for how sex education in this new era can speak to the whole adolescent as a moral person.

1. It must include philosophical and historical perspectives on sex.
2. It should teach about society and possible harms.
3. It must include discussion of the media as a socializing force.
4. It must discuss and help students understand religious perspectives toward sex in their present and historical forms.

Bringing a Liberal Arts Perspective to Sex Education

1. Philosophical and Historical Perspectives on Sex
What better way to broaden sex education than to bring in a liberal arts perspective and teach philosophy and history? These disciplines can help students answer the question, “What should human beings seek in their sexual lives?” For example, students might be introduced to Augustine because Christianity has shaped how sex has been seen in the Western world and because ideas about sexual restraint and pleasure that derive from his views are a part of many adolescents’ understandings about sex. Furthermore, the ancient Greeks had ideas of friendship and love that raise questions for teens today. Other philosophers have also addressed such questions as, Can friends be in love and can there be passion for another human being without desire? And more questions on lust and its relationship to respect are found in Hobbes’s and Kant’s work (Gray, 1978).

Since consent is a crucial lesson for sexuality education curricula, why not look at the laws about consent and read philosophy on autonomy and constraints to autonomy? Students could consider questions like, What does developmental disability mean for a person’s capacity to consent? What is the relationship to age or to incapacitating drugs? What responsibilities does an individual have with regard to asserting his or her rights? Can silence ever mean consent? Philosophers Sobel (2002), West (2002), and Wertheimer (2002) provide hypothetical cases that can help students distinguish among threats, coercive offers, fraud, competence, and other acts that interfere with freedom to consent. The case study approach, also called the moral dilemma approach (Kohlberg, 1981), could be used to present students with reasoning at a slightly higher level than their own. This could help students look past general rules of behavior to situations that bring the idea of consent into high relief.

With regard to teaching about equality in sexuality education in terms of GLBTQ students’ rights and gender discrimination, students ought to hear and understand the standard arguments on all sides of these issues. There are religious positions that spell out the morality of homosexuality that are nuanced and worthy of discussion, even when such arguments may be repugnant to teacher and students alike and even at the risk of including heterosexist biologizing discourse (Kehily, 2002a).

Philosophy can also offer students ways to think about harm, harm to self, and harm to others. In philosophical discussions about whether pornography is harmful, John Stuart Mill (2007) is often quoted: “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied” (p. 19). His perspective that some
pleasures are higher than other pleasures is an important one to have about pornography, one that goes beyond the simple freedom of speech arguments that students could readily come up with on their own.

And what of free speech? To understand free speech and its limits, students might read MacKinnon’s (1987) argument about whether certain kinds of speech silence the speech of others, an argument applicable to media and sexuality. They might read about obscenity trials in history, such as that of 2 Live Crew.

These are the kinds of questions that engage high school students. Without philosophy and history as guides to these discussions, values education is reduced to a sharing of beliefs in an atmosphere of tolerance. This atmosphere of tolerance might be called “tolerance lite” in that it doesn’t ask students to understand the history, context, and philosophical underpinnings of the arguments of those with whom they disagree.

2. Teaching About Society and Possible Harms

Another way to broaden the curricula is to focus lessons on social issues. Some of these issues—pornography, prostitution, objectification, and child sexual abuse—may already be a part of social studies classes, but as social problems they intersect with the lives of the students. And students will have to make decisions about how to act and react in relation to these issues, as victims, as bystanders, as users of pornography, as enactors or enablers of objectification in girls’ self-objectification, and as citizens.

Understanding objectification might include, but also go further than, knowledge of how the media affects our impressions of what girls and boys ought to look and act like. In a world where sex can be commoditized and media representations of objectified bodies, particularly women’s, is rampant (APA, 2007), understanding objectification and its harms is important; it relates to sexual practice and needs to be included in a sexuality education curriculum.

Education about rape, abuse, and other forms of exploitation would be an important moral goal of sexuality education, since they are public health issues and are as serious as unwanted teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Satcher, 2001). Today girls might be taught how to avoid rape; boys are taught skills for procuring consent. But what of the wrongness of rape? Teaching what makes rape wrong takes the onus off of girls and puts it on potential offenders as well as on society.
Further sexual harm topics could include other forms of exploitation, such as exploitation based on age difference, economic opportunities, constraints on autonomy, and the ability to choose sex. What do students have to say about the tension between the rights of teens with regard to making their own decisions and the possible harms from having sex with much older people? Discussions about the right to sell sex and the harms of it, the nature of prostitution in the United States, the high percentage of trauma victims, the media representations of glorified prostitutes (e.g., *Pretty Woman*), and the economics that support prostitution could all be issues that students might consider in order to develop thinking with regard to autonomy, choice, sexuality, gender equality, and exploitation.

3. Media as a Socializing Force

Teaching about sexual harm might also include discussions of media. A growing research literature has shown the increase in sexual content in the media (Donnerstein & Smith, 2001; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005) and its effects (APA, 2007; Brown, L’Engle, Pardun, Guo, Kenneavy, & Jackson, 2006; Collins Elliott, Berry, Kanouse, & Hunter, 2003; Ward, 2002). Many media literacy campaigns have focused on the importance of teaching girls and women about media distortions of body image. The *Sexualization of Girls Task Force Report* (APA, 2007) warned of the harmful effects of exposure to these images on girls growing up in American culture. Theorists have also argued that essential to teaching girls about sexual agency is the undoing of consumer culture’s influence on their construction of themselves as sexual beings (Gill, 2007; Harris, 2005).

The Internet is an important source of sexuality information and is becoming known as a sexual “super-peer” (Allen, 2008; Brown, Halpern, & L’Engle 2005). Yet rarely do sexuality education curricula describe the world of sex on the Internet, from porn to informational sites. How are students to weed out the accurate information from the inaccurate, to understand sexual relationships as portrayed in the movies, and to make sense of the opportunities to view porn in its varieties for no cost at all? Given the omnipresence of pornography and the pornographic (Sarracino & Scott, 2008), students need to be presented with material that helps them understand what is at stake—not only for themselves in their consumption of media (Brod, 1992) but for everybody.
4. Religious Perspectives in Present and Historical Forms

Finally, to teach about religion and religious practices is not the same as teaching religion or preaching. Individuals have collective identities, and some of these collective identities, more than others, define for teens what it means to be sexual. Religion is one such identity. Salls (2007) writes that “citizens of a pluralistic society, then, should seek out an education for their children that encourages them to love and to better the traditions into which they have been born” (p. 118). A sexuality education curriculum should help teens understand not only the spiritual, historical, and ethical implications of their faith’s beliefs about sex and the ethical system where those beliefs are located but also about others’ faiths and beliefs. As Luker (2006) writes, “Religion gives people a vocabulary, a cultural tool kit, with which to talk about the issues that sexuality raises, and a set of templates for understanding alternative visions of family life, not to mention the larger world” (p. 21). Such a toolkit is moral in nature, and moral arguments ought to be evaluated and treated as any argument.

Rather than asking students to merely talk to their clergy or parents (as many curricula do), schools may have an obligation to place religious beliefs about sexuality in a social and historical context that parents can’t necessarily provide. Addressing religious perspectives in sexual education might also work against harmful stereotyping in that within all religions there is debate, as well as diversity, in beliefs and practices with regard to sex and sexuality.

Conclusion

As Lapsley and Narvaez (2006) write regarding character education, “fully prepared is not morally adept”; character education must uncover ways to articulate a positive conception of moral agency as a “deeply relational and communitarian achievement” (p. 288). Much of the additions to sexuality education I suggest here speak to citizenship and moral agency. Educating about rights in a democracy is critical to citizenship. Educating about harms is also critical. Thus, lessons on personal autonomy, freedom to choose, and freedom to exercise one’s rights—“freedoms to” as well as “freedoms from” (Halstead and Reiss, 2003)—and lessons on exploitation, media effects, religious views, and cultural differences can develop social and moral perspectives on sex and sexuality that the typical self-focused, public health curriculum cannot.

How do we integrate moral education with sex education to prepare teens to become self-reflective and full participants in their society, a society in which
sex intersects with a variety of pleasures and problems? Whether sex education is taught from a virtue ethics position, a cognitive developmental position, or a rules- and respect-based Kantian notion of morality, a perspective of mutual aid and care is not as important as the need to teach teens the history of their values and place them in a political and philosophical context. Teens need to make sense of the information bombarding them about the place of sex in the world and its intersection with their own lives. They need to think about how to lead the good life in a pluralistic society, and they need to consider both pleasures and dangers of sex in terms of what society condones, permits, and celebrates, as well as what is forbidden and harmful to self and others. A curriculum can do all of this by including education about rights, ethics and philosophy, views of sex in society, and religious perspectives, and it can do so under a general discussion of what it means not only to develop a sexual identity as an adolescent but to become a sexual citizen.
Conclusion

One can deduce from the Introduction as well as the chapters of this dissertation that girls ought to develop a sexuality that is both empowering and ethical, and that this is both for the benefit of themselves and others. While this dissertation focuses primarily on girls’ development, all adolescents ought to act ethically in matters of sex, which I have suggested means not only making autonomous decisions and acknowledging others’ autonomy (as suggested by Archard, 2000b) but bringing to sex a framework of care – in its fullest form, loving attention to the other. While Archard (2000b) has argued cogently for the centrality of choice in sexual matters as essential to sexual education curricula taught within a liberal democracy, I have yet to argue why mutuality must also be an ethical requirement of sex and taught within sexual education. Archard (2000b) (whom I will write more about below) argues for something more minimal than I am advocating, in short, that sexual education must give students enough information to make informed choices, that it should teach for autonomy in choice-making, and that neutrality with regard to the content of those choices will support sexual education in a liberal democracy that respects the views of all its citizens.

When I make the argument for the teaching of ethics within sexual education courses, I acknowledge that there won’t be neutrality on some issues because from a framework of care, adolescents need to be proactive in order to prevent harm. In addition to choice, an ethic of mutuality belongs in the teaching of sex in today’s sexual education classroom because 1) care might be no less a moral requirement than respect; 2) the overemphasis or simple emphasis on choice actually supports a worldview regarding sex that is self-centered and might contribute to harming others; and 3) from some feminist perspectives, equality and care should support one another (Gilligan, 1982). Care can almost be seen as a check for equality and is an ethic that is particularly suited to prevention of harm in sexual relationships, harm that feminists have been concerned about.

Recent History of the Sex Ed Curriculum

My suggestions that follow are based on a U.S. history of sexual education. In the past few decades, Abstinence Only Until Marriage (AOUM) curricula authors focused on both ethically good and prudentially good sex.
They believed that sexual education should teach that sex in adolescence is wrong morally (ethics), but they also focused on what is prudential, that abstinence is the only sure way someone can avoid pregnancy. Evidence-based (EB) curricula, curricula that are currently supported in the U.S., focus very little on ethics and more on prudence. (Evidence-based curricula come from a movement that supports only education that has been proven empirically to reduce pregnancies and STIs.). The EB curriculum thus addresses Archard’s requirement that sexual education give students the information to make informed choices. Through a focus on health and prevention (via lessons about how to say no as well as contraception) proponents of evidence-based curricula argue that the only way in which adolescents can avoid pregnancy and STIs is to have the information that EB sexual education provides. They make no moral claims about what is ethically good sex, but argue that no matter what adults might think is right or wrong, adolescents will be having sex and that to do so safely is to do so with proper birth control and STI prevention practices.

In Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation, I presented reasons why Abstinence Only Until Marriage sexual education was unethical as a school-based education. While it focuses on values, it promotes mostly one set of values associated with the Christian right and Christian fundamentalism in the United States over other values, values that are more common among liberals. These values are not just biased towards one group and one religion but contain repressive judgments about sexualities that aren’t heterosexual. AOUM sexual education also restricts and sometimes prevents students from obtaining health information that would enable them to make healthy and ethical decisions concerning sex (which is itself unethical). Students cannot give valid consent, act autonomously, or take care of themselves or others if not given accurate information about contraception, disease, and pleasure. AOUM supporters would argue that because they are children, they don’t need to act autonomously, and if they are taught the overarching ethical principle that no one should have sex before marriage because it is morally wrong, then those who disobey this injunction will of course face consequences.

Those educators and researchers who have in the past advocated for a more Comprehensive Sexuality Curriculum (CSE) chose to emphasize EB curricula out of pragmatism. Rather than arguing over competing values (at a time when teaching about contraception was forbidden), they focused almost exclusively on the effectiveness of curricula with regard to health goals that
were measurable. Rather than take on the eight tenets of abstinence education, which came along with U.S. President Clinton’s Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, an act that supported an increase of 50 million dollars a year in federal grants to states for AOUM education, they circumvented the direct attack by simply discussing what pragmatically works. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, one of these tenets required that sexual education must teach that abstinence is the only certain way to avoid pregnancy and STI’s. Another tenet required teachers to teach that a mutually faithful, monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of sexual activity. Programs could not provide information about contraception and were required to teach all eight tenets. AOUM programs grew tremendously after 1996 and then again via the Children and Families Community-Based Abstinence-Education (CBAE) Program bill of 2001, a bill that bypassed state authority in the U.S. and gave funding directly to faith-based organizations that followed the eight tenets of AOUM education.

Thus the EB movement, by promoting a scientific view, aimed to take sexual education back from religion. The focus on pragmatics and health, however, represented two problematic turns. The first problem was that sexual education was narrowed to health education, education needed to support public health. The second was that public health was not defined in any way to include mental health or healthy relationships. The measurement of success was determined by whether or not the curriculum delayed vaginal intercourse, reduced/prevented STIs, and reduced/prevented pregnancy. Thus the list of “effective” programs researchers compiled (none of them at that time AOUM programs) addressed only those that prevent pregnancy and STIs.

A focus on science seems a reasonable response in the face of AOUM curricula that originally (and inaccurately) taught that students could get HIV/AIDS from swimming in pools or that condoms were ineffective. Also, in a homophobic society, it was difficult to promote comprehensive sexual education without also engaging in corollary battles about LGBTQ rights. Instead, schools were made responsible only for the health aspects of sexual education, and comprehensive information about contraception was thus advocated for students’ optimal decision-making.

*Ethics and Sexual education*
In the United States today, as funding for AOUM education has decreased, there exists a possibility of promoting a different kind of education. My goal has been to reintroduce ethics into more liberal versions of sexual education through lessons that focus on the foundation of ethical sexual behavior: obtaining consent and caring for the other person. These ethics are extended to an examination of sex in society, thus redefining sexual education as a kind of citizenship education, helping students to see that sexual practice has as much to do with treating other people morally as it does about personal health.

To this end, and using the 5 chapters of this dissertation as a start, I have composed eight tenets of an ethics-based sexual education, tenets to rival the earlier eight tenets of the Abstinence Only movement. These tenets have been published in Lamb (2013a, 2013b) in various forms and are in Chapter 5 in an earlier and reduced form. (Chapter 1 also includes a list, but this list is for a sexual education that would diminish violent behavior.) Here I have rearranged the tenets as published in Lamb (2013a, 2013b) to better justify them in the section that follows:

1. Sexual education must be ethics-focused, including training in justification of one’s views using ethical principles.
2. Sexual education should include academic readings and not appear to be a “dumbed down” curriculum; this would call for de-emphasizing “whether or not to do it” lessons.
3. Inclusiveness regarding sexual identities and practices should be an aim.
4. The curriculum should include a focus on the other person as well as the self, with equal focus on harm arguments as well as rights arguments.
5. An emphasis specifically on mutuality as well as consent as two kinds of litmus tests for ethical sexual practice should be included, along with lessons on empathy, trust, kindness, and conversely, exploitation.
6. Teachings about pleasure, the varied sources of it and problematic pleasures, must be included.
7. A focus on society is needed with lessons on institutions that shape sexual ideologies. The curriculum should teach students a critical perspective on the media, pornography, censorship, prostitution, and the treatment of rape and child sexual abuse.
8. The curriculum should take an especially welcoming stance towards discussions of religious beliefs, as religion provides a foundation for many students’ ethical and sexual beliefs. Each of these tenets are justified below and considered in light of female adolescent sexuality and sexual education.

Tenets 1-3 relate to the way in which sexual education ought to be taught, from an ethics perspective, as an academic course, inclusive of all potential students.

1. Sexual education must be ethics-focused, including training in justification of one’s views using ethical principles. As noted earlier, and in Chapter 4, the move away from ethics was a strategic move in order to bring comprehensive material on contraception into sexual education classrooms in the U.S. While health education with regard to sexuality is important, such a focus understandably points students to an examination of practices vis-à-vis their own health. Such classes contain an implicit moral suggestion that taking care of one’s self is a good thing and primary to sexual interaction. While health information is important, health does not exist outside of a context and this information could be embedded in instruction on taking care of others as well as oneself.

Choosing and defending one’s opinion (providing justification) calls for a reflection on the practice of choosing and the idea of choice. There is a proliferation of “choices” in the neoliberal marketplace where individual responsibility is over-emphasized, and the idea that we are all equally free to choose among a myriad of options regarding self-identity, behavior, and opinions is common. While a curriculum ought to support autonomy, it also can raise consciousness among students about constrained and inauthentic choices.

2. Sexual education should include academic readings and not appear to be a “dumbed down” curriculum; this would call for de-emphasizing “whether or not to do it” lessons. This is also addressed in Chapter 4, the chapter that calls for an integration of liberal arts material into sexual education classes. As Carr argues for the use of the arts and literature in emotional education (2005), I argue that philosophical and social science literature could enhance sexual education around issues of citizenship and cultural beliefs and behaviors. The SECS-C (Sexual Ethics for a Caring Society Curriculum) includes readings from
Aristotle on friendship as well as Blum on “false symmetries” (2012). Using mostly excerpts from philosophical readings addresses the problem of students’ varying reading capacities. This is a curriculum developed by the author that is found online as well as described in Lamb (2013b). In the U.S. today, sexual education is often taught through workbooks and handouts that engage students in practice saying “no” and reasoning about their future in hopes that such practice and planning prevents early pregnancy. Indeed, it has been shown that practice and social skills training does contribute in lowering pregnancy rates. But when one teaches ethics, real moral debate is essential in order to make a difference to ethical development. Decades of research in the field of moral development suggest that a top down approach is not effective, and that the inclusion of material from the arts and literature as well as democratic classroom processes encourage real discussions and real moral change.

3. Inclusiveness regarding sexual identities and practices should be an aim. This tenet is placed in the how to teach sexual education section because rather than seeing it as content in the course, (content which is hotly debated in school systems in the U.S.), it is a method of teaching the course in which the assumption is made by the teacher and reflected by curriculum authors that there are diverse sexualities in the classroom. Both Chapters 4 and 5 address the exclusivity of modern sexual education in the U.S. For a sexual education curriculum to be ethical, it has to address and even reach out to those teens who may have non-mainstream sexual identities and interests. The exclusion of these, as noted in the discourse analysis in Chapter 4, is a tacit disapproval. The inclusion of these helps to contextualize the regulating norms through which adolescents, and as noted in the introduction, adolescent girls are controlled. Indeed, inclusion of these sexualities is one way to present alternative discourses about sexuality that free girls from discourse that regulates via heterosexual norms. This is also part of the call for a democratic sexual education (see Chapter 5).

Tenets 4-6 reflect principles that address the relational quality of sex and support the ethic of care that I’ve argued must exist alongside principles of autonomy and choice (Archard, 2000b). Below I justify the inclusion of harm, mutuality, and pleasure and the relationship of these three to a feminist education for girls.
4. The curriculum should include a focus on the other person as well as the self, with equal focus on harm arguments as well as rights arguments. The introduction to this dissertation presents my argument for a focus on harm as well as rights, and the idea of mutuality is one that encompasses something beyond the goal of doing no harm. While Archard argues that liberal education and the needs of the state justify teaching to enhance adolescents’ choice (2000b), and, in my words, individual rights, I add to Archard that the liberal state also has an interest in protecting people from harm and encouraging the flourishing of people. Protecting individuals’ freedom and autonomy doesn’t always equate to protecting them from harm and thus an additional ethic of care needs justification, especially because sometimes, protecting people from harm interferes with individual rights. (Liberal states are constantly weighing the costs to individual choice and freedom when the state takes action for protection. But it is beyond the scope of this thesis and particularly this conclusion to review the vast literature on the democratic state that provides versions of democracy that acknowledge that states need to insure protection and care of persons and not just their rights (see Sandel, 1998, for example). The ethic of mutuality addresses both the protection of rights as well as the protection from harm in that it prevents unfairness in relationship and insures care of the other.

Beyond protecting individual rights and insuring protection from harm, the state also has an interest in the flourishing of individuals. While protecting individuals’ autonomy and insuring their safety may clear the way for flourishing, it does not necessarily promote it. Mutuality can not only protect individual rights and prevent harm to self and other but can address flourishing when the idea of pleasure is combined with mutuality. Only pleasure in the context of mutuality safeguards rights and safety from harm while also contributing to the flourishing of individuals sexually.

5. An emphasis specifically on mutuality as well as consent as two kinds of litmus tests for ethical sexual practice should be included, along with lessons on empathy, trust, kindness, and conversely, exploitation. While units in sexual education should thus include lessons on valid consent and on those circumstances that invalidate consent or make consent less free, they must also understand what loving attention to the other might be because such attention prevents harm to persons and not just harm to their rights. Students ought to be able to understand why, from a perspective of respect for persons and respect for
other persons’ autonomy, sex without valid consent is wrong. But they also must understand why it is harmful to another. Just as there are minimal expectations for respecting the rights and autonomy for others, there are minimal expectations of caring and mutuality. These are important and nuanced discussions to have in a sexual education classroom.

6. Teachings about pleasure, the varied sources of it and problematic pleasures, must be included. As suggested in Chapters 1 and 5, pleasure may be useful as a way into the discussion of mutuality because lack of pleasure can sometimes be an indication of abuse. But pleasure can be experienced during exploitation and other ethically problematic forms of sex. It is not only a sign of empowerment, mutuality, and ethically good sex, but connected to less ethical, less mutual, and less empowered sex. As noted in Chapter 4, which was published online in December of 2012, pleasure discourses can contain the same repressive stereotypes that AOUM curricula and older curricula contained (Lamb, Lustig, & Graling, 2012). Pleasure and desire belong in the curriculum in so far as they work toward representing women as equal to men, and deserving of pleasurable, assertive, and satisfying sexual relationships. But pleasure itself does not work to “liberate” always, especially in circumstances in which pleasure is tied to the successful enactment of porn-power repetitions in relationship. That is why mutuality is the context in which pleasure contributes to the flourishing of an individual. For girls in particular, it opens the door to a more equal sexuality and to a more embodied and fulfilling sexual experience (see the discussion of pleasure and embodiment in the Introduction).

Tenets 7 and 8 address the civics nature of the sexual education I propose. The curriculum needs to consider personal and interpersonal ethics as it is applied to general social experiences and attitudes having to do with sex. There is a special emphasis on religion in that religious views on sex can be the most divisive in a classroom as well as society.

7. A focus on society is needed with lessons on institutions that shape sexual ideologies. The curriculum should teach students a critical perspective on the media, pornography, censorship, prostitution, and the treatment of rape and child sexual abuse. Given these institutions present powerful discourses that compete with an ethic of mutuality, even when they are supported by an ethic of
individual autonomy, they ought to be explored in the classroom. Such a focus also represents sex not only as something one practices, but something about which students need to have an opinion and a justification of that opinion from an ethical position. Such inclusion in the curriculum would also involve lessons on power, gender, and other social categories that privilege some over others and contribute to discrimination and victimization. These are complicated discussions about which most teachers and students will have complicated answers. Bringing ethical principles to bear on any of these topics will not yield a definitive opinion, (e.g. pro-porn or anti-porn, pro-prostitution or anti-prostitution), but giving students ethical principles against which to weigh these opinions might assist them as they think about these social issues and develop their opinions over time.

8. The curriculum should take an especially welcoming stance towards discussions of religious beliefs, as religion provides a foundation for many students’ ethical and sexual beliefs (Halstead & Reiss, 2003). At the heart of AOUM education is a Christian stance towards sex. However, the separation of church and state in the U.S. might suggest that religion has no place in a sexual education classroom and therefore a progressive sexual education might choose to leave out any discussion at all of religion’s part in sexual values and behaviors. Progressives and those that look to EB curricula to rescue children from AOUM, have long associated sexual education with secularism (Rasmussen, 2010). They see religion as a “regressive force in the world, one that in its dogmatism is not amenable to change, dialogue, or non-violent resolutions” (Jakobsen & Pellegrini, 2008, p. 2).

But teaching students about the religious answers to questions about sexuality is an important component for sexual citizenship. Religions often provide arguments, reasons, and even leeway with regard to what is right and wrong when discussing sex. They also contain writings about homosexuality, birth control, masturbation, pleasure, and more. Also, most religions, as practiced, contain wide variations with regard to how permissive or restrictive they are. Religions also change over time leading to additional versions and variations in practices. Thus, even within the religion that Archard (2000b) discusses (presumed to be Islam but unnamed in this work), a religion in which sexual education to women might be seen as demeaning or corrupting, there are people within that religion who have differing views. Just as Catholics differ
mightily on the ethics of abortion (independent of official policy), Muslims differ on the role of women.

What I am arguing with regard to bringing religion into the classroom is to spell out the justifications of practices using ethical principles. Doing so may lead students to different conclusions, but the practice of examining these against ethical principles of harm and rights in the classroom will hopefully teach students to hold up religious views against ethical standards in the future. I also advocate that choice is understood in the classroom in the context of power relations. When students are asked to examine supposed choice in the context of oppression, both autonomy and harm are questioned. In short, the curriculum may not advance one side or another in the treatment of women just as it does not do so in prostitution or pornography, but it will encourage the students to look at issues of fairness and possible harm to women of any view given the context of intersecting identities and histories of oppression. Indeed, when considering autonomy and its relationship to empowerment for women, as well as mutuality, certain perspectives on protecting women might not hold up (see next section). And this is most likely the outcome for discussions of some practices.

Another reason for the study of religion within a sexual education classroom is because students sometimes don’t realize the root of their beliefs. Religious teachings are deeply entangled in current discourses about sex, even progressive discourses. And, many students do not actually know the teachings of their own religion about sex and sexuality even if they are regular attendees at their places of worship. While more restrictive parents may fear that knowing the diversity in religious perspectives invites students towards relativism, that may not be true. Sexual education that incorporates religious perspectives can help a student deepen his or her understanding of his or her own religious background. At the same time it contributes to respect for others’ beliefs.

Finally, sexual citizenship as I define it means understanding sex in its current cultural context. To become a sexual citizen, one needs to look at the modern (e.g. media and other public expressions) view of sex while also acknowledging the roots of ideology and beliefs about sex from all possible sources.

*Empowered and Ethical Female Sexuality*
The above tenets address healthy sexual education for all, but is there also an ethical obligation of schools to promote an empowered and ethical *female* adolescent sexuality? I would argue yes from the feminist/humanist argument that what is good for girls in society will also be good for boys. But including pleasure, as earlier feminists argued (see Chapter 2 and tenet 6 above), is not the primary or only answer to a positive sexual education for girls. As I argued in Chapter 2, pleasure cannot be a marker of positive sexuality as some exploitative kinds of sexual acts and sexual expression can feel quite pleasurable. That is why I have emphasized mutuality as some kind of marker that goes beyond consent that hopefully would work for both boys and girls regarding ethical practices. Because this dissertation has focused on girls’ empowered sexuality I assert that replacing pleasure with mutuality as a sign of more ethical sexual practice will be helpful to girls. While girls may consent to exploitation (because they don’t see it as exploitation or because of various rewards such as attention and/or feelings of power or pleasure), they would most likely not experience exploitative sexual practices as mutual.

Teaching about the media and other social institutions also contributes to an empowered female adolescent sexuality because it leads to discussions of fairness, heterosexism, privilege and power. While we can’t in democratic education ensure that students will see injustice where we see it, democratic education is not valueless but expresses values about equality and fairness that can be extended to the content lessons. Exploration of the media as well as a critical examination of public images of female sexuality can also lead to teachers discussing with students alternative and potentially healthier ways of being sexual.

But what is the main purpose of sexual education with regard to female sexual empowerment? Is it agency? Is it autonomy? Is it self-reflection? Is it to enhance mutuality? Archard (2000b) writes that liberal education must help to create individuals who can make free, autonomous choices as to how they want to lead their lives. It should maximize the opportunities and capacities of individuals to exercise their own free choices. And if sexual education is indeed a part of that general education then it should be shaped and informed by the same ideal (p. 37).
He argues thus that sexual education should give students enough information to make informed choices, that they be taught to make their own choices, and that choice be accorded a central role in legitimizing sexual conduct.

While I have above argued that choice untempered by caring is not protective enough against harms in sex, I have also argued in the Introduction and chapters that followed that the ideology of choice and autonomy can be unhelpful to girls. Choice is embedded in a problematic discourse that advantages some people in society over others. From a Foucauldian perspective there is always power, and recognizing where that power is coming from and whom that power serves helps one to resist more harmful discourses over others. Just because the world is mediated through discourse, this doesn’t mean that some discourses, at certain times and for certain groups, aren’t better than others – harm less, support rights more. The discourse of choice advantages males over females at this time in this cultural context. When choices are limited by what can be imagined, and what can be imagined sexually is formed and supported by a culture that is still sexist and oppressive, then choice needs to be tempered so that it doesn’t support the sexist and oppressive culture. When sexual education vis-à-vis female sexual empowerment engages female students (really all students) to critique those sources of power that support repressive regulation, they are protected. But when another ethic, that of mutuality or care, is used alongside the discourse of choice, girls and boys may see into the gender relational problems that arise when sex is mutually agreed upon. In this way, the discourse of autonomy is tempered by a discourse around care and mutuality as well as a close examination of the power relations embedded in the discourse of choice.

*Sexual education Taught Democratically*

While I have focused mostly on the content of a sexual education course that teaches mutuality and points students outwards away from their own behavior and towards the treatment of others, I have not said much about how it is to be taught. To the extent that a curriculum shows how discussion of issues such as marketing, pornography, religion, and the media can help adolescents to become moral citizens, the nature of civics is broadened. Laden (2012) writes that we need to stop “dividing the political from the non-political, [which] is common … in discussions of civic engagement” (p. 30). The sexual issues taught in the SECS-C (Lamb, 2013b) are political, but because they have to do
with “sex,” they are often read as apolitical and a matter of individual values and preference. Noddings (2002) warns against the isolation of citizenship from what Dewey called the “whole system of relations with which it is actually interwoven” (p. 75), and thus students need to learn about sex in relation to others. The democratic sexual education curriculum I advocate, with its emphasis on ethics, evokes discussions that deal directly with injustice. Injustice and lack of care are indeed universal “wrongs” named in the curriculum, and the focus of sexual education would be to help students negotiate mainstream discourses that hide power relations and integrate ethical reasoning related to justice and care.

In other work, I have advocated for a democratic process that involves a focus on moral reasoning and philosophy (Chapter 2). The philosophical approach asks hypotheticals and presents students with principles that can be used for justifying or reaching new positions. I find Laden’s approach to civic education illustrative of how democratic process in the classroom is not merely a style in which any opinion is valid and anything goes. Laden (2012) writes that the key to civic education is asking students to offer “we” reasons to each other (p. 23). We reasons are different from justifying one’s own opinion; it shows a sensibility that the ethics one is defending is an ethic for all. Already, we can see in this approach an essentially democratic approach in that it seeks participation from all and that individual opinions and justifications will be held up to a standard of what is fair and good for all. In teaching in this way, both standards of autonomy and mutuality in sexual practice is supported through the practice in the classroom. The “we” perspective goes beyond protection of individual rights of each but presumes a concern for others. By teaching fairness, justice, as well as caring for others in the classroom, a “we” perspective, the very act of teaching becomes a model for how sex might be practiced, with fairness as well as caring.

Haste and Hogan (2006) write of democratic process in the classroom that it “is a social process” and teachers must “work with that to attain the desired social and political goals in which individual rights and freedom are protected” (p. 478). But Noddings also asserts that the classroom must be a caring environment and that education should be organized around themes of care (2002) to produce ethical citizens. Although she contrasts her view with what is typically viewed as liberal education, her view is not actually antithetical to some views of what democracies do (Sandel, 1998).
The curriculum I have imagined and worked on, and which appears online at www.sexandethics.com and is explained in a new book, *Sex Education for a Caring Society* (2013b), introduces alternative discourses. Some of these discourses are about ethics and ethical questioning, and others are about sex and sexuality. Presenting an array of discourses gives students the opportunity of trying out alternative discourses. Giving them philosophical method to entertain the ethics that underlie various discourses permits them to question the origin, usefulness, and deep ethics of any point of view. However, the curriculum does not stop at offering a variety of perspectives. In the curriculum I hold views up to an ethic of justice and an ethic of care or benevolence, even mutuality. By treating the students as citizens of the classroom as well as the world, they are asked from the very beginning to create rules for the classroom that would be fair and just and also take care of their classmates. For example, the very first exercise asks them to imagine how it would *FEEL* to be (fill in the blank with a minority position) and hear (fill in the blank with a remark that might be offensive.) How someone feels when his or her rights have been violated is treated as just as important as the right being violated. The students are asked as they propose moral rules for the classroom to justify these from ethical positions. They invariably justify these with harm arguments as well as rights arguments.

To assert ethical principles in the classroom does not undermine the democratic process. As discussed above, democratic ethics and laws can not only protect individual rights but call for the care and protection of others. In this way teaching about mutuality as well as autonomy does not call into question the democratic classroom. Moreover, the democratic process in the classroom occurs through the promotion of conversations that ask students to examine their beliefs and practices in light of how their beliefs and practices affect others. My future research hopes to identify discursive moves towards an interpersonally oriented focus by students in the classroom and to explore what happens in the classroom in response to this. We also plan to explore how students’ race and gender contribute to both the discourses used and the process of change from a focus on self-protection to a focus on the other.

Remaining Questions

There are a few remaining questions that have to do with the implementation of such a curriculum and which would lead to discussions too
extensive for this dissertation conclusion. When a curriculum emphasizes society and the care of others, how would one also teach and protect autonomy as an ethical principle? Would it be autonomy in the context of relationality, or, a version of autonomy that acknowledges that identities and choices can never be separated from their encumbrances? Would one want students to understand that there is no pure form of autonomy separate from culture and institutions have made on that identity? That is an issue that deserves exploration.

Another remaining question is how to teach about mutuality? What is the justification one gives for teaching mutuality that doesn’t refer back to a rights perspective, e.g. mutuality helps to protect rights and insures valid consent? Mutuality needs a different kind of justification than a rights-based one and if this is the core of the curriculum, along with consent, how would a teacher negotiate a democratic style without appearing inauthentic? In our own teaching of the curriculum, we ask students who espouse rights-based ethics to consider also a caring perspective. As argued above, this can be seen as consistent with a democratic citizenship perspective if one understands democratic as inclusive of not only protection of rights but of promoting mutual and caring relationships among its citizens because it ensures women’s rights and flourishing.

Others have asked whether schools have the responsibility or right to intercede in teaching of the good relating to sexuality. It seems to me that schools cannot avoid teaching the good. Sex involves relationships, and sexual behavior affects not only the individual actor but the context around him or her, whether it be his or her family or the college culture of what is permissible sex. The individual student’s opinions about sex in society also affect his or her treatment of others and, arguably, society’s support of sexual matters such as pornography, prostitution, and more. As such, sex is not that private matter whose privacy must be defended. Sexual behavior and attitudes of the individual affect many.

Another question that might have been raised in reading the introduction as well as the conclusion is whether sex educators ought to steer discussion, e.g. towards feminist and humanist principles, and if so, is steering antithetical to the democratic process? In today’s society in the U.S., a teacher with a feminist perspective is always suspect of steering in the classroom as if non-feminist teachers are teaching in a more neutral way. A feminist teacher might use the example of exploitative or harmful behavior of boys towards girls (for example, sexual harassment of girls by boys which is an acknowledged problem in U.S.
But wouldn’t any sexual education teacher need to take up this perspective if the focus of the curriculum was ethical sexual behavior? With regard to teaching about sexual harassment, shouldn’t any teacher ask of boys to not only respect the rights of others but understand the harm done? This would be steering towards ethical behavior, and not feminism. There are indeed anti-date rape curricula that take ethical positions and use both open discussion and steering so that all students reach ethical positions (e.g., Safe Dates, Foshee, & Langwick, 2010). Teaching about mutuality in sex is an ideal that is not so much feminist, but which advantages boys as well as girls. When thinking of true human flourishing, boys as well as girls want intimacy, relationship, to be loved and to love.

The final and perhaps most important question is whether the state should at all teach more than just basic liberties. In short, why should the state care about mutuality? Isn’t that a private ethic? When the state ensures that young women’s rights are protected and teaches young men not to impinge on the rights of women, is it not doing enough? One defense of why the state should concern itself with the good for women, comes from the moral goal of human flourishing. As Nussbaum (2000) has argued, flourishing goes beyond having rights protected. Ignoring this ideal leaves it to the individual, once rights are protected, to fend for herself to create a better life in the context of inequities. Doesn’t the state have a responsibility to support and structure opportunities for flourishing? This is one of the things education is for.
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