ADOLESCENTS LEARNING ABOUT SEX - BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS,

SEXUAL EDUCATION, MORAL PANICS AND YOUTH CITIZENSHIP

by

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Adolescents Learning About Sex - Broadband Internet Access, Sexual Education, Moral Panics and Youth Citizenship

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This dissertation examines the experiences of fifty-one young people who were adolescents as high-speed Internet access became widely available in the United States. The data are drawn from semi-structured, open-ended interviews with thirty-nine women and twelve men. Interviews covered topics related to sexual socialization. These included formal sexual education experiences in school, informal interactions with peers, early sexual experiences, and information from media. Sexual scripting theory frames both the data collection and data analysis of this research. While participants describe a wide and predictable variety of sources of sexual information including movies, television, books, magazines, family, friends, and personal experience, the majority reported the Internet served a central role in how they learned about sexuality. As the Internet is a relatively new source of information about sexuality, and one that has been minimally researched in this capacity, in my analysis I emphasize the role of the Internet in sexual socialization. Despite popular concerns around adolescent use of such technology, the majority of participants reported positive experiences with the Internet as a source of sexual information. Participants reported accessing sexually explicit material as well as accurate sexual information on the Internet. The Internet was described as a relatively safe and

easy means of accessing sexual information specific to their concerns and readily

available in the absence of other sources. I place the findings within the cultural context

of moral panics regarding teen sexuality and technology as well as emergent theories and

debates about citizenship in order to fully understand the key social and theoretical

implications of the experiences of these young people.

For my Mom, you taught me that doing my best to empower others is the right

thing to do and education is the best way to do it.

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Enrique, I have not told you so, but you inspire me to keep going when I don't think I have anything left to run on. I need that motivation and as my brother you provide

it for me in a way that no one else can. Thank you for that. I hope in the future we can do better to keep on trucking together.

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that is only complementary to you. When you have a chance to pull away we will head to the Rio and then a show for some crucial tunes. Also, I am looking forward to breaking a bunch of music out of jail. When I've got room for more I'll let you know.

Bill, somehow you still manage to keep life in perspective and share a little bit of that perspective with me. I need every bit of it. I miss chasing the music with you something fierce. We started at about the same time and are finishing about the same time. We will have to at least celebrate at the same time until we can celebrate together. Now my goal is to get you to come visit Boulder. Beware, I think this document shows I am nothing if not tenacious.

Todd, you made me laugh when that truly was what I needed most. You provided tech support when crashed computers would have sunk the whole boat. And. I finally took longer than you did to get done with school. They are out of letters for me in the arts and sciences. Maybe I'll apply to law school.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation describes original research with young adults focused on their memories of learning about sexuality. While similar research has been conducted in the past (Gebhard 1977; Martin 1996; Plante 2007) these projects are based on data collected prior to widespread accessibility of high-speed Internet. Research shows that adolescents are increasingly using the Internet (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010), and additional research describes ways that adolescents include Internet technology in their lives (boyd 2008; Ito 2010). However there is currently no qualitative sociological research that explores the role of the Internet specifically as a source of sexual information. This research contributes to sociological knowledge by providing new empirical data and analysis that brings together diverse theories into a more nuanced understanding of these phenomena. Further this research begins to address some of the gaps in the sociological literature related to how sexuality, adolescence and technology interrelate.

Creating the Project

My interest in how cultural discourse and adolescent sexuality are related was brought into focus in 2005 when I attended a presentation by Naomi Wolf during one of her speaking tours for *The Beauty Myth* (1991). During this presentation she mentioned that increasing numbers of college-age audience members said they felt that pornography was changing their sexual lives. Although not the focus of her presentation, during the question and answer session audience members discussed how they were finding

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pornography to be influencing not just the social construction of feminine beauty but sexual behavior as well. I had occasionally heard similar comments from students as a teaching assistant for a sociology course focusing on sexuality at the university where I was beginning a doctoral program.

As a teaching assistant for the aforementioned sexuality class I frequently led discussions with young adults about their experiences growing up in an increasingly media saturated world. As a consumer of pornography with the technical skills and bandwidth necessary to explore some of the earlier streaming video pornography websites, I had some personal experience with this emerging world of sexually explicit and readily available media content. While I had some very limited exposure to sexually explicit videos growing up, the world of online sexual content was considerably different and sociologically intriguing.

Foucault documents the historical trends that gave rise to the "steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex" ([1978] 1990:18) since at least the mid 19th century in the United States. The Internet is a technology that could not have been anticipated by Foucault; nevertheless it can be understood as a sort of ultimate facilitator of this proliferation of sexuality discourse. The Internet allows for sexuality discourse as it is structurally organized with less possibility of censorship or other regulation of content than other media. Indeed, the very lack of effective regulation of content, including sexual content but perhaps most consistently regarding copyrighted material, has been of great concern to a number of countries, industries, and groups (Lessig 2004). The low cost and skill required to publish to the Internet, compared to other media, also allows a wider range of people to participate. Finally, the United States is a culture for which a

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sexual storytelling is a significant component. Together these factors contribute to the Internet as a place where sexuality discourses can and have proliferated.

As a sociologist long interested in technology, media, and sexuality this discussion resonated with me as a topic worthy of further exploration. Relying on the maxim put forth by Lofland et al (2006) of starting where you are and selecting a topic that piques your personal intellectual curiosity, I began to craft a research project that would delve into these issues. Thus this topic was initially born of the everyday lived experiences of people I encountered as well as my personal background and interest in related issues.

This introduction and chapter one describe the inspiration for this research and the overall approach to investigating these topics. Chapter two describes the specific research methods employed to gather and analyze the data for this research project. Chapter three provides a sociological description of the sample population and introduces the various sources of sexual information participants reported as influential during their adolescence. Chapter four focuses specifically on how these participants remembered formal sexual education. Chapter five is an in-depth discussion of participants' experiences of learning about sexuality via the Internet. Chapter six uses the key findings in the data to bring together different literature and themes into a coherent whole by drawing substantive and theoretical connections between research and theories of adolescence, citizenship and the Internet's role in social life. Chapter seven concludes the document by discussing the policy implications, the theoretical significance, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER ONE

Sexuality, Adolescence and Politics

Sexuality is an issue that is understood as deeply personally yet also culturally significant. It is also a concept that has proven difficult to define with precision and consistency. As stated by Howard and Hollander, "Sexuality is a fuzzy term, often used to refer to a group of related concepts including sexual behavior (what you do), eroticism (what turns you on), sexual orientation (who turns you on), or desire to engage in sexual activity" (2000:17). This combination of personal and cultural importance as well as ambiguity of definition contributes to sexuality being an issue that is malleable and ripe for political manipulation. One result of this has been that sexual propriety, when and how sexuality should be expressed, access to sexual health services, and access to sexual information have emerged as key points of social conflict in the United States in the 20th-century (Rubin 1984). Issues related to sexuality have remained sufficiently important among significant portions of the population such that sexual issues are a fundamental aspect of the "culture wars" (Hunter 1991). Foucault ([1978] 1990) states that sexuality:

> appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power. …
> Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of
> those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of
> maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most
> varied strategies. (P. 103)

Due to being both individually and culturally important, sexuality becomes an issue that can be used to connect issues of personal sentiment to societal regulations, laws, and policies. Indeed, scholars have demonstrated that issues of sexuality are the underlying

crux of successful political strategies of the last forty years precisely because of the intensity of sentiment about these issues (Luker 2006; Herdt 2009).

From this perspective grew the notion that "sex is always political" (Rubin 1984:267). Rather than sex being merely a physical act, in contemporary United States culture sex is laden with meaning. The who, when, what, where, how and why of sexual behaviors are intensely debated, regulated and evalutated. One result of this is that "Sex … often provides the ideal arena where groups can fight out their differences in what social scientists call 'symbolic politics'" (Luker 2006:216). Though historically late to enter into the realm of acknowledged sociological study in comparison to class, race, and gender, sexuality has proven to be, and remains, a productive issue to investigate sociologically (Weeks 1985).

THEORETICAL APPROACH

The significance of sexuality within recent United States culture may be approached from a number of perspectives. Overall these may be broadly grouped into two categories. Essentialist perspectives rely on a fundamental assumption that sexuality is an unchanging, innate, and constant component of people. In contrast, constructionist perspectives of sexuality rely on the fundamental assumption that sexuality is shaped, determined, interpreted, and made meaningful differently depending on the time, place, context, and people involved. Moreover, the understanding of sexuality is an ongoing process that changes over time as the people involved discuss the issues and respond to other social changes. For example from a constructionist perspective, there are no inherent means for categorizing sexual identity or behavior. It is over time that a culture

comes to identify sexualized parts of the body, categories of gender and sexual behavior, and even the significance of sexuality within the culture itself.

Sexuality has been constructed as a particularly significant component of individual identity in the United States and other Western cultures. Michel Foucault ([1978] 1990) traced the historical emergence in the United States and other western cultures of sexuality as a core part of identity. This amounts to historically situating the current construction of the importance of sexuality in contemporary United States culture.

Foucault also introduced the concept of "erotic speciation" to describe the process where sexuality shifted from being located in the act to being located in the identity–and the processes that shape that identity–of the individual (Rubin 1984:285). While the example Foucault employed to illustrate this concept was "the homosexual" this idea came to apply much more broadly than to just homosexuals. The heterosexual as well as a myriad of other sexual identities also came into being (Katz 1995). It is the task of the sociologist to inquire into this ongoing process in order to reveal that which is assumed as well as the inequalities that persist as a result of those assumptions.

Social Constructionism and Sexuality

The social constructionist perspective has been consistently productively applied to the realms of gender and sexuality (Garfinkel 1967; Gagnon and Simon 1973; Goffman 1979; Plummer 1995; Seidman 1991 to name a few). Gagnon and Simon (1973) were particularly influential in developing linkages between the social constructionist perspective generally and sexual identity and behavior specifically. They contributed the "scripting" theory of how socialization influenced the development and sense of a sexual

self within a particular culture and at a particular time (Kimmel 2007; Plummer 2010). Relevant to this project, their work may be understood as developing an understanding of the processes by which individuals understand themselves as a particular "erotic species" drawing from the available cultural landscape.

Another central aspect of the how sexuality is socially constructed in contemporary United States culture is the pervasiveness of sex-negativity. Rubin (1984) defined sex-negativity as the cultural assumption in the United States that sex is a negative aspect of life that must somehow be redeemed, most commonly by appeals to love or procreation, in order to be at all acceptable. In constrast, a sex-positive approach assumes sexual experience and expression can be a beneficial and valuable component of individual lives and a larger cultural experience.

These ideas provide the framework for investigating the significance of sexual selves in this research. In particular it is important to recognize that I take a sex-positive approach in this research. In contrast to the predominant cultural view that sex information, and sexuality are negative and potentially if not likely damaging, sex-positivity asserts that everyone has a fundamental right to experience sexuality positively as well as to feel comfortable and secure with their sexual identity so long as neither infringes upon the well-being of others. Sex negativity has guided many of the policies, stances, and beliefs about adolescent sexuality in particular (di Mauro and Joffe 2009).

SEXUALITY AND CONFLICT

In the following sections, I briefly describe how the polarized approaches to sexuality have played out in the past regarding pornography as well as the important and

relevant parallels to the topic of adolescent sexuality. By considering this past I hope to inform this discussion with the specific intent of avoiding the most problematic aspects of those disputes.

I next provide an introduction to the role of the Internet as an increasingly prominent source of sexual information particularly for adolescents. These topics frame this research as both sexuality, as a concept, and the Internet, as a technology, are generally understood to prominently figure into adolescent socialization but pose particular problems for sociological research. I discuss aspects of the difficulties with investigating these topics and present how this research attempted to move beyond these.

Polarized Sexuality Discourses

The history of the modern conception of the significance of sexuality within the United States has been traced back to the mid 19th century (Weeks 1985). Freud and other early sexologists began to study sexuality from biological and psychological perspectives around the turn of the 20th century. Then Alfred Kinsey and his associates published their reports on the sexual behaviors of men (1948) and women (1953) in the United States. This work not only was a landmark in that it foisted sexual discussion into the public realm and also shifted the perspective of analysis toward the sociological. Other important works that began to address gender and sexual inequality were written and contributed in important ways to the understanding that these topics deserved sociological analysis. Sexuality primarily gained widespread recognition as a legitimate topic of sociological inquiry within the context of the societal changes following the feminist movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Seidman 2003). This time period

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was also characterized by a growing acceptance and popularity of viewing pornographic films (Williams 1999). These two phenomenon would clash and produce what is referred to as the "Sex Wars;" academic debates over the benefits and harms of pornography. These debates are useful as a reference for issues related to researching sexual topics. When issues of sexuality intersect with the cultural anxiety about adolescents (Martin 1996) the discourse, similar to the sex wars, can and often has become so polarized, detached from reality, and rife with ideology that a host of perspectives are essentially excluded from discussion (Levine 2002). In the words of Weeks:

> We seem to find it necessary either to elevate the sexual to a pinnacle, or to cast it down into the pit. In the process the difficult, ambiguous, complex and subtle problems of sexual choice are ignored, and the genuine victims of sexual unfreedom pursue their lives in continuing anxiety and fear... (1985:13).

In the United States sexuality is discussed in public discourse in terms of worst-case scenarios, absolutes, and ideological extremes often to the detriment of the lived experience of actual people (Levine 2002). These polarized discourses regarding aspects of sexuality leave people feeling they have no options that realistically address the nuance and difficulty of the issues.

Polarized Sexuality Discourse: The Sex Wars

The "Sex Wars" were characterized by antithetical discourses and the resulting inability to move forward through addressing the underlying issues. These academic debates about pornography and sex work emerged in the 1980s, their effects and limitations lingered in academia for some time. Moreover, the Sex Wars had additional effects on broader discussions of pornography, sexuality, gender and power. Barton (2002) aptly describes the contrary positions as:

> … roughly separable into (1) radical feminists who find any kind of sex work, and often even sexuality itself, inherently and irrevocably exploitative within patriarchy … and (2) sex radical feminists who theorize sex work as subversive of patriarchy's definition of conventional femininity and who strongly support sex workers' right to perform erotic labor … . (P. 586)

These diametrically opposed positions emerged primarily among different feminist groups and then proceeded to dominate academic discourse related to these topics for years. The opposing viewpoints regarding pornography and sex work still continue to inform scholarly research (Jensen 2007), journalist accounts (Paul 2005) and political debate (Levine 2002), to the exclusion of other perspectives.

Though the Sex Wars have arguably subsided somewhat, pornography has endured as the primary object of sociological scrutiny in American notions of corrupted adult sexuality (Dworkin 1987; MacKinnon 1990; Jensen 1995; Elman 1997; Shope 2004; Paul 2006; Cebulko 2007; Jensen 2007; Simmons et al 2008). Pornography has also been repeatedly investigated as the causal variable for aggression in behaviorist research (Fisher and Barak 1991; Malamuth et al 2000). Malamuth et al's meta-analysis of research that investigates this topic concludes that "The current findings do suggest that for the majority of American men, pornography exposure (even at the highest levels assessed here) is not associated with high levels of sexual aggression" (Malamuth et al 2000:85). However they do note that men with the most elevated risk for sexual aggression have higher sexual aggression levels. While the alternative call for nuance and dialectical consideration of sexuality, sex work, and pornography was made by Vance as early as 1984, academia moved slowly into the unknown and uncertain, especially in these areas where few models of respected research exist.

The lingering cultural influence of the Sex Wars made it difficult to present nuanced discussion or complex analysis without it being reduced to fit either the pro-sex or anti-sex positions (Bernick 1992). The intensity and polarized nature of numerous sex-related topics may be partially attributed to underlying fundamentally opposed assumptions about the nature and propriety of sexuality (Luker 2006). There are important parallels between the polarized discourses of the Sex Wars and recent discourses related to adolescent sexuality. How and where young people are able to get sexual information and what they do or might do with that information is a topic of intense concern to many people in the United States (di Mauro and Joffe 2009). As with the Sex Wars, ideologically driven polarized discourses dominate the debates regarding adolescent access to sexual information. This has manifested clearly regarding sexual education (Irvine 2004; Fields 2008) and is comparable to concerns about adolescents use of the Internet (Luker 2006).

Polarized discourse and the subsequent omission of other more complex or nuanced approaches is a frequent characteristic of discussion of adolescent sexuality generally (Levine 2002). One example that is illustrative and relevant to this research are the ideologically driven policies supporting abstinence based sex education at both the federal and state level that have been instituted in the last fifteen years. In terms of a number of measures of sexual health including teen pregnancy rates, rates of sexually transmitted infections among adolescents, the United States is arguably doing poorly especially in comparison to other industrialized countries. The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the Western world (American Academy of Pediatrics 2010). One of the most comprehensive reports comparing rates of sexually transmitted

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infections across countries notes that adolescents in the U.S. have rates of infection of syphilis and gonorrhea among industrialized countries comparable only to the Russian Federation (Panchaud et al 2000). Rates of syphilis and gonorrhea have only changed minimally for adolescents in the United States since the earlier report was published (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2009). While parents and policy makers inveigh about the dangers of saying the word "clitoris" in sex education classes, adolescents are failing to understand their own bodies, enduring unwanted or coercive sexual interactions, getting pregnant without wanting to, and contracting a variety of sexually transmitted infections (Fields 2008; Luker 2006). This is significant because these debates reflected the more profound underlying disagreement about women's sexuality within a patriachal society. There were the "anti-sex" feminists who argued that sexual expression within patriarchy was fundamentally oppressive who stood in opposition to the "pro-sex" feminists that argued sexual expression could be subversive to patriarchy and empowering for women. These underlying disagreements then manifested in different stances regarding a number of key issues within the sex wars particularly pornography and sex work. Analogously, the clashing views regarding adolescent sexual expression and access to sexual information may be understood as manifestations of similar more basic contradictory approaches to sexuality. There are those who see sexuality as a dangerous and primarily negative force that adolescents should be prevented from knowing about it or participating in it. Those that see sexuality as primarily negative tend to also be particulary opposed to sexuality outside of marriage. They are uninterested in making sex safer for adolescents who from their perspective should not be involved in sexual behavior anyway. From their perspective, sex should

have negative repurcussions and the responsibility of parents and society is to keep young

people from being interested or involved in sexuality altogether. In contrast there are

those who see sexuality as a positive aspect of life. From this perspective adolsecents

should be empowered to participate in sex pleasurably and responsibly. Those that see

sexuality as primarily positive may still see marriage as the ideal circumstance for sexual

behavior but argue that adolescents should still be empowered to make these decisions

themselves and to be provided with information so as to be able to do so with full

awareness of the significance of their choices.

Different perspectives on the accessibility of sexual information help to explain

this divide:

> Coded within these very different notions of how to exercise morality are profoundly different attitudes toward information. If sexually liberal parents expect children to make increasingly complex decisions over time, it stands to reason that they want their children—and all children to have access to as much good information as possible. ... Sexual conservatives could not disagree more. As far as they are concerned, the more children are exposed to information, the more confused those children become. For them, children are tainted, not informed, by all the information floating around them (Luker 2006:194-5).

This fundamental disagreement has fueled the battles over sexual education that have

limited and minimized the content discussed in comparison to the sexual edcuation

curricula of the 1960s (Moran 2000). The argument for implementing sexual education

had been that it was fine as long as the content was presented objectively and limited to

factual statements. By the early 1980s sexual conservatives were effectively arguing that

sexual education could not be objective and that the very presentation of factual

statements still included a morality component because the information itself was

corrupting.

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Polarized Sexuality Discourse - Sexual Education

This approach to sexual information as part of sexual education is parallel to the concerns of sexual conservatives regarding the Internet. There is a long history of protracted and intense disagreement about the content and effectiveness of sexual education in the United States. While sexual education has not achieved the same level of visibility as other sites of the cultural wars such as abortion and access to birth control, it remains another locus point of disagreement. "It is because of the intrinsic link between public education, community and national identity, and the future (symbolized by children) that the institutions of education have long been a political and legal battleground" (Hunter 1991:198). As part of the conservative political movement, issues of sexuality including debates about sexual education have been reinvigorated (Irvine 2004). The popular discourse as well as sociological inquiry has remained focused on official policy and content. Since the 1996 passage of "welfare reform" (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) included mandates that states adhere to teaching "abstinence-only sexual education" as described in the act in order to receive federal funding. Federal support for "abstinence-only sexual education" has only increased since then (Irvine 2004). In the years following these changes the focus became measuring the effectiveness of these curricula. Often the expressed concern has been effectiveness as measured by declines in teenage unwanted pregnancies, rates of sexually transmitted infections for teenagers, and lower abortion rates among teenagers. However, even after it became clear that abstinence sexual education was not effective in accomplishing these goals (Stepp 2007; McGreal 2009) federal support for these programs has continued.

A number of scholars have recently produced important research focusing on various aspects of sexual education (Moran 2000; Schalet 2000; Irvine 2004; Fields 2005; Ashcraft 2006; Luker 2006; Fields 2008; Freeman 2008; Schalet 2010). However little qualitative sociological research that focuses on how and where the sexual education that is being taught is received by the young people themselves has been conducted since the mid 1990s (Martin 1996; Patton 1996). This is one of the topics that this research addresses. Given that debates about sexual education have been described as crucial to United States politics and culture in recent years (Herdt 2009) surprisingly little sociological research about the topic exists.

The existing sociological research has focused on the differences between programs in Western European countries in comparison to those in the United States (Schalet 2000), the involvement of parents, community leaders (Luker 2006), religious groups, and other advocacy groups in debates over content and type of education (Irvine 2004), the negotiations that result in how the official curriculum translates to actual content and instruction in the classroom (Fields 2005; 2008), and the problematic ambiguity of peer sexual education instruction (Ashcraft 2006). A number of scholars have also produced histories of sexual education in the United States including providing political context for the development and changes in the content and discussion of the issue (Moran 2000; Luker 2006; Freeman 2008;).

It is clear that parents, politicians at various levels of government, advocacy groups, and religious organizations spend a considerable amount of time intensely lobbying for particular content and kinds of sexual education (di Mauro and Joffe 2009). It is less clear if any or all of these efforts translate to the young people that are claimed to be the

primary concern. Finally, much of this past research is based on data gathered in the late 1990s and is therefore prior to the rise of the searchable Internet. This is significant because as Luker highlights, information is one of the fundamental divides that structure the debates, "And information, in turn, is the key to understanding why people are sexual liberals or sexual conservatives. Information plays such very different roles in the lives of people on the two sides of this conflict because they look at the world through very different lenses" (2006:135-6). Prior to a broadband and searchable Internet the possibility of limiting access to sexual information was significantly more feasible than after. For example, one of my participants, Rita, a twenty year-old heterosexual woman who grew up in a very strict middle class household where the topic of sexuality was neither discussed or even acknowledged, said when she had questions about sex that her friends could not answer, "If we didn't know, just search the Internet. … It was the easiest thing ever." This option of going to the Internet and being able to use an effective search engine to find information about virtually any topic is an option that was simply unavailable to any other generation.

If the assumption is that sexual information itself is threatening and encouraging of amoral sexual behavior, and the Internet is a vast repository of sexual information, then adolescents must be prevented from accessing the Internet. These diametrically opposed views result in discussions based on ideologies. The same aforementioned statistics regarding adolescent sexuality are used by the opposing sides to justify their approach. The sexual conservatives argue that these show that adolescents are learning too much too quickly and should be further insulated from sexual information. The sexual liberals argue that these issues are caused by adolescents not having enough sexual

information to make responsible decisions. In both cases adults are arguing about what they imagine or expect are the experiences of adolescents. By asking adolescents what there experiences are and what would be most helpful, a new perspective is interjected into these debates that will hopefully shed new light on the issues. It is within this broader historical and cultural context that I consider participants' descriptions of their sexual education experiences.

ADOLESCENCE AND SEXUALITY - A BRIEF HISTORY

Adolescence was named as a distinct social category in 1904 by G. Stanley Hall (Luker 2006). The processes of industrialization and urbanization that were happening during the 1800s had led to a primarily but not exclusively white, "urban working-class youth leisure culture" (Carpenter 2005:27). A sharp rise in popularity of public schools, the declining average age of puberty and an extended period of training and education of young men all contributed to the emergence of adolescence at the end of the nineteenth century (Moran 2000). While this category was and is largely based on age, sexuality was an integral component as well. "Indeed, adolescence was precisely that period of chastity between puberty, or sexual awakening, and marriage, when the young man or woman' sexual impulses could finally be expressed" (Moran 2000:15). Once defined and then located within a cultural discourse of implicit or overtly eugenic evolutionary arguments about "savage" cultures and "proper" or "complete" development, the sexuality of adolescence was one that needed to be controlled and managed by adults.

In the early twentieth century the concerns about expression of sexuality by adolescents were largely based on the assumed corrupting influences of the metropolitan

city as well as the internal drives thought to be associated with men. Women at this time who were participating in early forms of dating and sexual behavior were viewed with suspicion. They were thought to be in danger of victimization and that engaging in sexual behaviors would result in them being ruined and in turn excluded from a respectable life (Luker 2006).

In addition to gender differences, the social concerns about adolescents were connected to race and class. Many of the "new" styles of clothing, dance, and sexual relations were already common in working and immigrant communities, but they seemed to qualify as trends worth noticing only when they began to percolate upward to the middle and upper classes" (Moran 2000:81-2). The sexuality of people of color has long been, and continues to be, seen as more intense, uncontrollable, and suspicious by the larger dominant United States culture (Collins 2004).

Since at least the 1920s, concern about sexuality entered the larger social discourse of debate, concern, and sometimes panic, typically after it reached into white-middle class culture while already supposedly being commonplace in poorer and/or communities of people of color. With the appearance of the reports by Kinsey and his research team on the human male (Kinsey et al 1948) and female (Kinsey et al 1953) together with the first English translation of de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in 1953 discourses of sexuality were no longer relegated to private discussion at the margins of the public. This more public discourse of sexuality resulted in heightened concerns of parents and the corruptibility of youth. Dances of the 1920s and the 1950s were both viewed with scorn as too sexual for white, middle or working class adolescents, and were attributed to the corrupting influences of poor and/or communities of people of color. So-

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called "loose women," prostitutes, and women in general were also often scapegoated for the spread of "social diseases" as they were attributed with tempting otherwise respectable young men (Moran 2000). In sharp contrast with past examples of the past where primarily white, middle class youth were portrayed as mere victims that had the influence of ethnic minorities and the poor imposed upon them, the Internet reached first into the homes of the wealthier and typically white families in the U.S. Though the politics of influence were reversed, it was still the access to "other" types of sexuality and a wealth of presumed uninhibited sexuality that were the cause of social concern.

Adolescent Sexuality - Cultural Anxiety Central

Current concerns about youth, sexuality and the Internet represent a nexus of areas historically considered to be problematic in United States culture. Adolescents in the United States remain in many ways a marginalized group. This is highlighted with regard to issues of sexuality. While clear and important differences separate the issues of adolescent sexuality and pornography there are useful comparisons for understanding the dominant approaches to research on these topics. The issue of pornography and gender is comparable to adolescent sexuality for considering and understanding how the extreme polarization of the debate summarily excludes some positions and complexity of argument.

Given that sexuality is a fundamental component of a modern self concept and that adolescence is a liminal life stage rife with contradictory expectations, these combine with volatility. Since the early development of cinema and television, both were sources of anxiety about potentially negative impacts especially on young people. The Internet is

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perhaps the most significant technological development since the printed word. Its

remarkable openness to participation and as a container of all other media means the

concerns about all other media come into play. The combination of adolescents,

technology, sexuality and media becomes so packed with emotional connection that it is

difficult to even begin to navigate the terrain without one's arguments being

oversimplified, being subjected to efforts to discredit the work, and having one's personal

integrity and character publicly attacked. Levine (2002) offers an exemplary case as she

experienced all of these issues as well as other sanctions after publishing her work that

addressed adolescent sexuality without assuming negative connections between the two.

MORAL PANICS

Gusfield (1963) was early to describe the cultural machinations that were typical

of efforts to enact social control on a particular group within a culture. One of his

exemplary cases was related to sexuality and young people.

> The criteria of proper behavior in any subgroup or subculture may be rejected or
> accepted by most people in the total society. … Some aspects of "youth culture," for
> example its dating and athletic concerns, are viewed by adults as legitimate ways for
> the young to behave. Other aspects of the same culture are seen by adults as
> "problems," as violations of normative standards, even though shared by many young
> people. (Gusfield 1963:62)

This framework is still very much the case as the debates about the standards and

expectations of sexual behaviors among young people continue. Teenage pregnancy is a

prime example of how widespread social concerns are readily galvanized and focused on

the actions of a select portion of young people (Edin and Kefalas 2007; Luker 2008).

Later, Becker discussed the processes whereby people (or institutions) advance a

new definition of deviance in his work *Outsiders* (1963). Becker labels the people

involved in such efforts to redefine deviance "moral entrepreneurs" (1963:147). Moral entrepreneurs consist of two primary groups of actors, "rule-creators" who are involved in establishing rules formally often as laws and "rule-enforcers" who work to insure the rules that exist are recognized and prosecuted. This theorization relies on an underlying assumption that social control should and will reside within the bounds of the modern state whose agents and structure provide the means by which rules (laws) are created and enforced. Further, this theorization relies on the understanding that it applies to the citizens of a nation-state. It is citizens who are eligible to have the right to be subjected to the institutions and structures of the state, such as the legal process, in the first place (Turner 2001).

Upon institution of a new set of rules in the past moral campaigns have been typically accompanied by calls for either existing agencies to be tasked with enforcement or that a new organization be created that is deemed responsible for enforcement (Becker 1963). As the enforcers of new rules in the past have been separate entities from those who are "rule-makers" enforcers typically have "no stake in the content of particular rules themselves" (1963:161). As a result, the new agency or repurposed existing government agency would enforce rules based on the constraints of available resources. With the policing of the content available on the Internet this has proven to be difficult if not impossible.

Previous studies have analyzed different aspects of moral entrepreneurial campaigns. Among the most prominent recent moral entrepreneurial campaigns are those related to drunk driving, obscene music, and child abduction. McCarthy and Wolfson (1996) discuss the different strategies groups used for mobilization of resources for

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strengthening the penalties and enforcement of drunk driving. Grossberg (1992) details the involvement of the Parents' Music Resource Center in defining children's access to certain music as a social problem and restricting their access to it. Best (1987) describes the rhetorical strategies used by claims-makers in advancing the abduction of children by strangers to a new level of public awareness.

Moral campaigns focus on the definition or re-definition of deviance and typically seek to bring more attention to a specific phenomenon. In contrast, moral panics occur when the attention and reaction paid to a particular social concern is "disproportionate to the actual seriousness of the event" (Cohen 2002:xxviii). In moral panics, the efforts toward raising awareness about the event or issue of focus are actually part of the problem. This may be problematic for a number of reasons including distraction from other issues and especially the opportunity it affords to scapegoat a group for responsibility.

In the introduction to the third edition of his groundbreaking book, Cohen notes "There is a long history of moral panics about the alleged harmful effects of exposure to popular media and cultural forms - comics and cartoons, popular theatre, cinema, rock music, video nasties, computer games, Internet porn" (Cohen 2002:xvii). These comprise a subset of moral panics, specifically "media panics," based on the generic equation that a given medium transmitting some specific type of content will result in problematic behavior. The most typical instance is violent content and violent behavior. Here the comparable argument is that accessing sexual content will result in increased participation in sexual behavior. More specifically young people having easier access to

hard core pornography via the Internet will result in their participation in undesirable sexual behavior.

Recent Panics About Adolescents

The 1980s saw a number of panics emerge that were based on the supposed protection of children. These included child kidnappers, sexually abusive teachers, givers of poisoned Halloween candy, and satanic rock music cultists. The concern was so intense that the justifications that led to national moral panics were based on flimsy evidence yet endured just the same (Nathan and Snedeker 1995). Rubin wrote in 1984 that "[f]or over a century, no tactic for stirring up erotic hysteria has been as reliable as the appeal to protect children" (271). Arguably this has remained accurate.

In general, these social panics of the 1980s gave way to a broader discourse of cultural fear that permeated throughout the 1990s (Glassner 2000). Glassner offers the discrepancy between reported fears of being a victim, and actual declining rates of murder and many violent crimes as a prime example of this phenomenon. Glassner (2000) reiterates Rubin's (1984) argument that panics do well to gain traction when focused on the supposed dangers facing children. In his discussion of "cybersmut" he highlights a *Time* magazine cover story in 1995 that was later thoroughly debunked. However, there was enough concern generated that congress passed the Communications Decency Act in 1996 (later overturned by the Supreme Court). These types of concerns would re-appear as the Internet continued to evolve and more and more people got online.

Judith Levine writes that, "… the idea that sex is the thing that can hurt your babies most of all is hardly the way of all flesh, not now and not in the past. Indeed, the concept that sex poses an almost existential peril to children, that it robs them of their very childhood, was born only about 150 years ago" (2000:xxvii). Nonetheless, it is still one of the most deeply held values of Americans that children need to be protected from sexuality. Americans as a whole are remarkably in agreement about this idea. Once children reach adolescence they begin to be able to be, and become, sexual beings in accordance with cultural norms and expectations. In contrast to the societal agreement about cloistering children's sexuality, adolescent sexuality is intensely debated. It is during adolescence that these issues become located within the larger culture war that often focuses on issues of gender and sexuality (Hunter 1991).

These intense disagreements about appropriate adolescent sexuality may be seen in the arguments that the "sexing up" of "tweenagers" and young women (Durham 2008; Kilbourne and Levin 2009) are cause for great alarm and new calls to diligence from parents. So too one of the primary issues with the general "pornographization" of our culture is the effect this will have on young people specifically with regard to sexual maladjustment (Paul 2005; Dines 2010). Anxiety about adolescents is particularly intense because the life stage itself is thought to be one of transition and experimentation. In United States culture it is the time when otherwise good kids can become bad adults. The family structure of parental or guardian authority is also typically increasingly relinquished, challenged, and negotiated (Martin 1996).

SEXUAL SELFHOOD

In the United States great significance is placed on one's sexual identity, gender identity, sexual behaviors, sexual practices, and embodiment with regard to sexuality. Adolescence in United States culture is recognized as a time when individual begins to form and independent and mature sense of self (Erikson [1959] 1980). This is true for aspects of self and identity related to sexuality. In adolescence individuals begin to experiment sexually and oftentimes assume or claim a sexual identity, when people come to be recognized as young men and women including the gendered associations with those terms, engage in sexual behaviors and practices as well as are recognized as maturing into a sexual body. Overall the approach while designing and conducting this research project was to investigate the processes and concerns of becoming a "sexual self" in the time of widespread high-speed Internet access.

The notion of a sexual self lies at the core of this research as well. A sexual self includes perceptions of sexual behavior, the body, and an emotional component of sexuality that is not typically included in gender identity and sexual orientation. Gender identity and sexual orientation are issues I considered to be an important part of this research. The definition of gender identity I take from Howard and Hollander, "... one's inner sense of oneself as female or male; it is a major part of one's self concept" (2000:16). My research does not focus on exploring issues of gender identity directly but the participants' concept of self included locating themselves in terms of dominant cultural categories of gender. Sexual orientation was also something that I asked participants about. The significance of gender identity and sexual orientation for this research was noticing when participants called upon often unstated expectations of what

they should do based on how they identified in terms of gender and sexuality. In other words, these were parts of the overall focus on the formation of a sexual self and the role that various sources played in that formation as remembered by the participants.

As described by Nack (2008) there have been several ways researchers have operationalized the concept of a "sexual self." However, I rely primarily on Nack's definition where "the components of a sexual self ... include the level of sexual experimentation, emotional memories of sexual pleasure (or lack thereof), perception of one's body as desirable or undesirable, and perception of one's sexual body parts as healthy or unhealthy" (Nack 2008:7). I will add to these components of a sexual self the perception of one's sexual experimentation as well as one's sexual body parts as normal or not.

Scripting

In 1973 with the publication of *Sexual Conduct*, John Gagnon and William Simon developed and proposed a "scripting" model of human sexuality. Scripts are general frames that people use to make sense of and participate in complex interactions including sexual behaviors. "Scripts are involved in learning the meaning of internal states, organizing the sequences of specifically sexual acts, decoding novel situations, setting the limits on sexual responses, and linking meanings from nonsexual aspects of life to specifically sexual experience" (Gagnon and Simon 2005:13). Scripts exist and operate at three levels, which dialectically inform and influenced one another. The first level of scripting is cultural scenarios. Cultural scenarios "exist at the level of collective life" (Simon and Gagnon 1984:53) and are the most general guides of possible and appropriate

behavior. The second level of scripts are interpersonal scripts, these operate when individuals transform the broader cultural notions into actual behavior through negotiation and interaction with other people as constrained by personal qualities. The thrid level of scripts are intrapsychic scripts. Intrapsychic scripts are the "internal rehearsals" of the individual, the processing of cultural scenarios and interpersonal scripts, to make sense of personal desires. The different levels of scripts will have varying importance at any given time depending on a variety of factors such as the social context and the individual's biography. Altogether, this framework allows for an understanding of the choreography and endurance of typical sexual conduct as well as analysis of how individual variation is shaped but not decided by cultural influences.

Script Formation

As aforementioned adolescence is considered to be "a critical moment for people in terms of psychosexual and sociosexual development" (Simon and Gagnon 2005:53). While there has been some debate about the age bounds of adolescence since Simon and Gagnon initially published their work in 1973, adolescence is still considered a separate life stage in United States culture and one that is critical for formation of self. Gagnon and Simon, in 1973 (2005) asserted that there are four primary sources of sexual information in our culture: media, school, peers, and families. Later Gagnon argued that

> [i]n complex societies ... cultural scenarios for sexuality are not monolithic or
> hegemonic, even within institutions. Instead, there is a constant struggle between
> groups and individuals to foster their own scenarios. Some groups and individuals are
> more powerful than others, but no individual or group or institution is in entire
> control of the sexual scenarios... (2004:140).

However, the Internet does not fit within these four established categories of sexual information that were put forth some time ago by Gagnon and Simon (2005). The Internet may be considered both a container and a distributor of more traditional kinds of media. The Internet has also spawned other forms of media itself for example Flash-based interactive websites, video chat, text cybersex, to name a few. These technologies have produced their own means of sexual interaction that have themselves been researched. However, the focus has remained almost exclusively on either how adults use them (Waskul 2004) or how they are used to exploit women and children (Hughes 2002). The influence of these technologies on adolescents has remained understudied. By significantly changing the limits of space and time the Internet allows adolescents to connect with peers and family members via social networking websites, instant messaging, texting and a number of other technologies.

Prior to the widespread diffusion of the Internet, access to information about sexuality and in particular access to sexually explicit images and film was generally easier to control. In a family where discussion of sexuality was taboo adolescents may still have been able to access sexual information by such means as looking through books in a library or possibly at a friend's house. However, this would have involved more planning and effort than simply opening an Internet browser window. In terms of the possibility of viewing sexually explicit media, it was more difficult to possess if for no other reason that the simple fact that a physical copy—a magazine, a videotape, a DVD—actually was necessary for viewing. So while some adolescents prior to the Internet still clearly were able to access sexual information and sexually explicit material, it was constrained in ways that the Internet is not. In introducing his article theorizing Internet

pornography Vannini writes "... [T]he carnal treasures of voyeurism that we could only obtain through the complicity of an older sibling or the absent-mindedness of a news-kiosk clerk are now a simple mouse click away" (2004:75). The accessibility of sexual content on the Internet is in large part the concern about the technology. The Internet is given particular attention here as it disrupts the boundaries of the four primary sources of sexual information that Simon and Gagnon referenced. The Internet shifts the power dynamics in controlling sexual scenarios as it presents new opportunities for people to access a wider variety of sexual scenarios and ways to view those scenarios. With high-speed Internet and websites such as YouPorn and PornHub, the structure of accessing sexual content is different as well. Even in comparison to watching a DVD the process of viewing is different. Viewers of digital video can jump to segments of content in an instant, multiple videos can be viewed simultaneously, and isolated portions of a scene or sequence are often presented separately. Altogether as all video content has been increasingly fractured and segmented so to has sexual video content.

The Changing Nature of Adolescent Sexuality

Recent social research indicates that some sexual norms for young people are shifting in comparison to the behaviors and expectations of a generation past. For example, Bogle (2007) explores changing practices of courtship and sexual interaction for young adults. She found that young adults, particularly college students, are "hooking up" rather than dating. There is indication that among adolescents "previously less common sexual behaviors such as oral and anal sex appear to have become more widely practiced" (Herbenick et al 2010:255). Also, condom use among adolescents appears to

be increasing since 1991 (Reece et al 2010:273). In addition attitudes supporting same-sex marriage have changed substantially (Herbenick et al 2010).

The Internet is increasingly researched as a key factor influencing changes in youth culture. The Digital Youth Project is a significant sociological undertaking that coordinates multiple research efforts under a larger umbrella of "how young people learn, play, socialize, and participate in civic life" (Ito et al 2008). Within this umbrella project, more focused work has been conducted including the influence of new media—cellular phones, texting, instant messaging, social networking websites—adolescent intimacy behaviors including meeting, flirting, going out (Pascoe 2008) and breaking up (boyd 2008). Again, however, thus far the available results do not include consideration of sexually explicit materials and comparable consideration of other potential influences. Interviews with participants who are now young adults about their experiences while younger will give a different insight into what for them was most meaningful in contrast to direct observation. Interviewing current adults also allows for discussion of pornography that is much more difficult to accomplish because of the aforementioned reasons such as the illegality of adolescents viewing pornography. I hope to contribute to an understanding of what young adults believe were important influences in socialization with regard to sexuality when they were adolescents.

I conducted interviews for this project with the intention of producing a broad narrative of sexuality including identity, experience, and other perceptions from adolescence to young adulthood, including what types of sexual information were available and how they were or were not meaningful, what the social and sexual context was in their lives during this time, and what people were involved and important in their

lives in relation to sexuality. In doing so these interviews offer insight into the recent

erotic habitus (Green 2008) of young people. Green (2008) defines erotic habitus as, "a

socially constituted complex of dispositions, appreciations, and inclinations arising from

objective historical conditions that mediate the formation and selection of sexual scripts"

(614). This research project was largely driven by the notion that widespread Internet

access marks a significant change in the "objective historical conditions" of the

experience of adolescents and this in turn would be related to sexual scripting. My

questions regarding available sexual information along with description of the particular

social contexts where it was encountered and made meaningful will ideally produce rich

data regarding the erotic habitus (Green 2008) of my participants. I hope responses may

allow for analysis to venture beyond description and support that the available sexual

scripts in certain subcultures in the US have changed to include "hooking up" (Bogle

2008) to consideration of how these scripts are actually "produced and selected" by these

individuals.

Bogle's (2008) book describes in precise and useful ways the cultural shifts in

scripts that inform the conditions for establishing potential sexual interaction, from

"traditional" dates to "hooking up." However, she does not explain or seem to have asked

participants to offer details as to what "hooking up" specifically involves and what

influences whether a "hook up" ends at kissing or progresses to oral sex. It still leaves

unanswered the question of what people are actually doing. More directly relevant to my

interests are the questions: from where do they get their ideas of what it is acceptable or

even possible to do? For Bogle's (2008) participants hooking up includes behavior from

kissing to "not intercourse;" this is decidedly vague. This lack of specificity is itself

interesting and Bogle shows how this ambiguity serves primarily to privilege and benefit

men. However, Bogle (2008) attributes this, it seems by default, to the historical

significance of penile-vaginal intercourse in terms of reputations. In other words, by not

having intercourse women are less vulnerable to accusations of "slutty" behavior and

men are more able to avoid more traditional demands of monogamous, heterosexual

relationships. However, if we accept that the personal and social significance of oral sex

has changed considerably for the current generation, what is it that prevents or has thus

far prevented similar changes for the meanings of penile-vaginal intercourse? Perhaps

inaccurate, incomplete, or unrealistic knowledge of anatomy, contraception, sexually

transmitted diseases and infections, safer sex practices play a role. Green points out that

thus far "… left unanswered by scripting theory are the core questions for a sociology of

desire: Why do individuals differentially select sexual scripts and what is the process of

this differential acquisition?" (2008:601). This research contributes to answering these

sorts of question in particular by directly asking young adults about their own "process of

differential acquisition." It is worth noting here that Green emphasizes that the concept of

the erotic habitus is meant to supplement scripting theory by providing a means of

discussing the dialectical nature of experience and the different levels of scripting without

falling into traps of structural determinism or overly individualistic psychologizing.

PRIMARY SEXUAL INFORMATION SOURCES

Formal Sexual Education

Simon and Gagnon also identified formal education as a key component of sexual

socialization. Recent sociological work has investigated the political divides and battles

over the content of sex education curricula (Irvine 2004), the processes of negotiation in teaching those curricula, including the hidden messages conveyed by teachers in the course of instruction (Fields 2008), the history of sex education debates (Moran 2000), and the ideologies and backgrounds of those who advocate for one side or another (Luker 2006). Very little research exists as to what the experience and impact, if any, is on the actual people receiving the education. This project contributes to addressing that question.

Media

Gagnon and Simon (1973) included media as one of the key components of sexual socialization that they identified from their research. Different aspects of both the mainstream media and sexually explicit content have been studied sociologically in terms of their influence on various facets of sexuality. This has included the ability of the mass media, especially advertising, to promote changing ideal beauty standards for women and girls (Wolf 1991; Brumberg 1997), appropriate gendered behaviors and self-expression (Ehrenreich et al 1986; Kilbourne and Pipher 2002; Baldwin 2006), and the influence of particular genres of video on white, middle-class, norms of femininity (Pitcher 2006). Research has also explored impacts of various mass media on notions of beauty and those implications for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities (Atkins 1998). Rebecca Plante (2007) conducted research specifically on this topic of the development of sexual selfhood. She similarly interviewed young adults (aged nineteen to twenty-six). While fascinating, her data were collected in 1994, prior to so many of the social, cultural, and technological changes of interest here, including significant developments in

Internet use and capabilities. This project includes exploration of the impact of those changes.

Peers and Family Members

Media, formal sexual education, peers and family members all play a role in conveying sexual information to varying degrees for different individuals. Past research efforts parallel this focusing more or less on each of these major socialization agents. For example, Bogle's work describing how college students come to participate in sexual interactions with one another alludes to the importance of popular films (2007) but the focus is on the importance of peers for shaping sexual expectations. Similarly, Martin's impressive research on adolescent sexuality makes mention of popular media (1996) she focuses primarily on the roles of peers and parents.

This research also considers the role of peers and family members in the process of learning about sexuality. While peers and family members are considered throughout the research process, formal sexual education and the Internet were the primary focus as these factors have fundamentally changed in the recent past.

The Internet

For people who have grown to adulthood during at least the last decade (depending on varying individual experiences), adolescence has been characterized by starkly contrasting sexuality discourses. The conservative Republican administration of George H. W. Bush and the election in 2000 of Republican majorities in Congress led to an intense push toward implementing and expanding abstinence-only sexual education

curricula (Irvine 2004) that had first become policy in 1996 (Fields 2008). While some states have rejected federal money for sex education because of the accompanying requirement regarding the curriculum, the vast majority have not. Meanwhile between 1999 and 2004, the portion of those between the ages of eight and eighteen with Internet access jumped 47% to 74% (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010). While race, class, and gender "digital divides" exist in computer ownership and Internet access, smart phones and alternative means of accessing the Internet other than a personal home computer continue to expand access (Ito et al 2008) particularly in industrialized nations such as the United States.

More significant for this research than access to the Internet are the changes in the available content and usability of the Internet. With the development of effective search engines such as Yahoo in 1995 and Google in 1998 it became significantly easier to search for and find content on the Internet related to a particular topic. Coupled with the increased offering and subscriptions for high-speed Internet access, the Internet became a technology capable of distributing virtually all types of media including streaming high quality video. YouTube serves as an example of this trend. By the middle of 2006 the website was claiming 100 million viewings of video clips per day (Reuters 2006). In a national study of media use, high-speed Internet access for eight to eighteen year-olds wasn't reported for 1999 but had reached 31% by 2004 and increased to 59% by 2009 (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010:21). This meant that all of the concerns about access to media and other kinds of information about sexuality could be applied to and represented in discussion of Internet access. Anyone who has observed the evolution of the Internet can recall just how different the experience of the Internet is now with streaming video

sites such as YouTube and effective search engines such as Google in comparison to the days of AOL and dial-up data transfer speeds. However, it is one thing to experience the development of such technology and quite another to grow up always having had it. The cohort that has recently become adults is defined in part by their lifelong access to digital and networked technologies. Hence, the term "digital natives" is used to refer to this cohort (Palfrey and Gasser 2008). In some sense each generation experiences a new social landscape, but in this case, the infusion of a broadband Internet has led cultural critics to make claims such as, "To an unprecedented degree, the torrent of images, songs, and stories streaming has become our familiar world" (Gitlin 2003:6). This was in 2003.

With high-speed Internet access, curious young people are more easily able to access sexual information of many kinds, including an increasing variety of sexually explicit and otherwise controversial material, in ways that they have never been able to before. As Judith Levine points out, "Luckily, just as the sources of information about sex dried up in the earthbound institutions of the public school and publishing house, they started proliferating in cyberspace …" (2002:143-4). She goes on to discuss several apparently very reasonable, accurate, and well organized websites designed for the purpose of answering the gamut of adolescents' questions about sexuality. However, it is unclear who is actually seeking these out and what else they are finding on the way to do so. This placed many adolescents who grew up during the 2000s at the crossroads of the vast information repository of the Internet and abstinence-only sex education. The primary official public discourse on sexuality is the limited medical information of abstinence-only sexual education in schools while many simultaneously have access to sexually explicit video along with countless other types and kinds of sexual information

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on the Internet. This resulted in a unique cultural climate for adolescents who matured during the early 21st century.

Even those not seeking sexual content or sexual information on the Internet were likely to encounter it consistently in movies and television. From 1998 to 2005 "[t]he amount of sexual content on television continue[d] to increase" (Kaiser Family Foundation 2005:4). It is also clear that much of this educational information and media representation is interpreted and made meaningful via discussion and interactions with the socialization agents that research has shown to be directly connected to sexuality (Simon and Gagnon 2005). This includes peers (Lesko 1988; Tolman 1994; Mullaney 2001; Giordano Et al 2006; Pascoe 2007; Bogle 2008) and family (Fields 2001). This process of how young people perceive the influence of peers and family members in understanding the volumes of sex-related information available through the media, the Internet, education and elsewhere is exactly what this project investigates.

CULTURAL ANXIETY AND SEXUALITY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The controversies and concerns about sexuality that emerged in the Post-Victorian United States were revealed early on in the formation of the category of adolescence and the subsequent discussion of constraining adolescent sexuality. Discussion of the sexuality of children itself was understood by Foucault as a key area for the expression of power, evidence of both the proliferation of sexuality discourse and one done so in the interest of control. "Educators and doctors combated children's onanism like an epidemic that needed to be eradicated. … an entire medico-sexual regime took hold of the family milieu" (Foucault [1978] 1990:42). And into this new realm of control and power being

negotiated within the family regarding the sexuality of the young, or perhaps because of it, the category of adolescent was introduced.

Generations

Generational differences have been noted and theorized as significant in United States culture. Strauss and Howe asserted that each generation has a "peer personality." Those that are born as part of a generation have "collective attitudes about family life, sex roles, institutions, politics, religion, lifestyle and the future" (1991:63). These are determined by a myriad of circumstances but are patterned. This informs my focusing on participation in this research by those born during the latter half of the "millenial cycle" (Strauss and Howe 1991). The millenial cycle includes those born between 1982-2003. While these authors do not split their analysis of generational impact in this way, my focus on the significance of the more recent changes in the accessibility and usability of the Internet accounts for this.

Ken Plummer (2010) recently contributed an invited essay to a special issue of *Symbolic Interaction* focused on "sex(ualities)." In this essay he made a call to include generation as a factor that should be reconsidered in the study of sexuality. "Human sexualities are deeply generational and need analysis and study as well as a relatively neglected feature of thinking about human sexual life" (Plummer 2010:170). I was enthused to read this call from such an influential scholar of sexuality (Plummer 1995). This research was designed with idea that the digital natives generation is one for whom sexuality was of particular importance as they are the first to have always known ubiquitous computing and the endless information of the Internet.

RESEARCHING THIS TOPIC

Research questions

Gagnon and Simon asserted in 1973 that there are four primary sources of sexual information in our culture: media, formal sexual education, peers, and families. Their work has influenced a generation of sexuality development scholars (Kimmel 2007). Further, they highlighted that adolescence is "a critical moment for people in terms of psychosexual and sociosexual development" (Simon and Gagnon 2005:53). As I approached the project the fundamental issue of concern in my project is how sexuality is influenced during the developmental years of adolescence. Other questions that informed the early stages of this research include: What are the cultural scenarios for sexual interaction available to today's youth? How does this vary by background, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality? What does this relationship between sexual knowledge and adolescent socialization mean for how young people feel about themselves as sexual beings and how they experience sexual encounters?

For numerous reasons that are discussed below there is minimal research about how sexual information is actually encountered, experienced, and becomes meaningful for young people according to young people themselves. While I could not address all of the questions that inspired the research I focused on designing a project that would access the lived experience of adolescents and investigate the impacts of the Internet on those experiences. My data focuses on addressing the following topics within this larger area of research. I recruited participants that were, or came to be, adolescents during the 2000s, a period of significant expansion of Internet access and content. I did this in hopes of gaining an understanding of how participants themselves thought that early influences

impacted their later sexual identity and attitudes about sexuality. This was motivated by the idea that this first cohort to experience adolescence within the aforementioned social contexts will provide unique insight into how these technologies are changing the formation of a sexual self. Additional questions I explore are how notions of sexuality develop during adolescence, especially how different agents of socialization interact with available information to influence the formation of a sexual self.

Difficulties Researching Sexuality

Minimal research about how sexual information is understood by young people exists for a variety of reasons. First, there are a number of difficulties in gaining access to be able to discuss sexuality with young people. The necessity of sexuality research in general and related to adolescents specifically has been often been met with skepticism or outright resistance (Levine 2002; Wicke 2004). Sexuality researchers themselves may be viewed with suspicion of "perversion," prurience, or "morally suspect" (Plummer 1975). Sexuality research may be assumed to negatively impact those they are attempting to study (Ericksen and Steffen 1999). In short, sexuality research as a whole has become the subject of political opposition and criticism.

Difficulties Researching Pornography

As this research project involves investigating what adolescents are accessing on the Internet regarding sexuality, including pornography, this introduces additional research obstacles. Research that includes addressing pornography can be particularly problematic (Lehman 2006). There are potential legal difficulties with researching

pornography as some pornography is considered obscene and thus illegal to possess or view (Jenkins 2001; Jones and Mowlabocus 2009). Also the cultural approach to sexuality in the United States situates the topic as one that is to be kept private and personal. Therefore discussions of sexuality for research may be influenced by desirability bias, omissions, and refusal to participate along with other cultural sensitive topics. Many of these concerns have been most prominent in quantitative and survey research on sexuality. The nature of qualitative research that involves more thorough and detailed discussion of the topic has also been met with even more intense skepticism, opposition and criticism than quantitative research. Quantitative research into pornography has primarily investigated *if* pornography is being consumed and possible immediate changes in opinions or emotions; it rarely addresses issues such as the variety of content, the context in which it is viewed, and how the content is understood (Malamuth et al 2000).

Pornography in Existing Research

In contrast to research on other types of media content there is virtually no scholarly work devoted to youth viewing of pornography. That past research has rarely addressed adolescent viewing of pornography is due to at least two factors. First, the assumption that legal regulations and informal sanctions effectively limited young people accessing pornography sufficiently that it need not be considered as important as other factors. Second, with regard to psychological research based on experiments there are significant legal restrictions to showing adolescents pornography. This precludes comparison between a control group and experimental group. Therefore, the viewing of

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pornography by young people has been minimally discussed particularly in comparison to mainstream media.

Addressing Pornography in this Research

One of the distinguishing features of this research is that I am allowing that many adolescents are indeed accessing pornography, if not regularly, then at least in greater numbers than ever before. There is some support for this as the spring 2007 issue of the Canadian publication *The Sex Educator*, directed at "... interveners and educators who are offering sex-education activities for young people of secondary-school age" (Gagnon 2007). This issue is devoted to ways educators can productively address youth exposure to pornography whether that exposure be inadvertent or proactively sought out. This relies on the assumption that young people are in fact doing so, and that such exposure is necessarily harmful.

Research Objective

In sum, this research is meant as a pilot investigation that seeks to offer a voice to the young people themselves who experienced adolescence in the early state of the Internet and media saturated cultural climate. By conducting interviews with young adults who came of age in this realm we can begin to consider how people are constructing a core piece of their identity within this new social context. One might reasonably ask why interview young adults rather than adolescents themselves? I will address this at length later but suffice it to say that getting young people to talk to a

researcher who is in his mid-thirties and getting the legal permission from a university to attempt to do so was beyond the realm of possibility.

DISCUSSION

One of the main contributions of this research is giving young people a voice in these matters through interviews. In the past and throughout society the opinions of young people especially with regard to sexuality are dismissed as less than fully deserving of recognition and consideration. However, the policies and decisions that are made without such recognition fundamentally affects adolescents' quality of life. This raises questions as to the role of adolescents within the broader culture including issues of rights, responsibilities, recognition and participation. In chapter six I explore the implications of these questions as they relate to recent debates regarding citizenship.

CHAPTER TWO

Research Methodology

While teaching sexuality and gender classes at a large state university in the Midwest, I noticed that students consistently mentioned using the Internet to seek out sexual information as adolescents. Their comments strongly indicated an accessible source of sexual information that was qualitatively different than had been available in even the recent past. In response I began to formulate a research project to explore the encounters young adults were having with this new landscape of information. I wanted to investigate how this was influencing their early sexual experiences and development. Rather than merely gathering descriptive data about who was accessing sexual content on the Internet and what content they were accessing, I wanted to be able to place these new cultural realities and shared experiences of this age group within a broader cultural discourse surrounding sexuality.

USE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

Quantitative and qualitative sociological research methods each offer strengths and weaknesses for investigating particular research topics. Quantitative methods are appropriate and important for gathering broad and descriptive information. However, qualitative research allows for gaining a "richer" (Lofland and Lofland 1995:16) in-depth understanding of how people make sense of their lived experience. Further, qualitative research methods are particularly useful for researching private and sensitive topics such

as sexuality because this area of human behavior is not easily directly observed and it has a complexity that warrants more in-depth and open-ended questions (Hesse-Biber, Leavy and Yaiser 2004). For these reasons I concluded that qualitative methods were more suited to answer my research interests.

Within qualitative methods, there are a variety of options for gathering data. Gamson, notes that qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, "fit especially well with" (2000:348) lesbian and gay studies. Also, Plummer (1995) was instrumental in demonstrating the importance of narration in understanding and creation of sexual selfhood. While Plummer, in part, focused on the sexual stories told by people who identified as gay and lesbian, he also showed that a range of other sexual stories are told and could be investigated. Other research has problematized and investigated what had been assumed to be stable and understood gender and sexual identities such as heterosexuality (Schwartz 2007) and masculinity (Connell 2005). Hence, I would assert that these approaches have demonstrated that sexual selves of all types are constructed and understood in a processual manner.

Open-ended interviews present an opportunity to allow for people to narrate their own sexual selves. This in turn serves as rich data for investigation into how people understand and communicate their sense of self, in this case, as related to sexuality. Therefore, I concluded that in-depth interviews offered the best option for achieving the goals of this research project.

With this interviewing process adopted as the fundamental basis of securing the relevant data, the essential components of the project became apparent. They would include designing and recruiting a representative sample of interviewees, designing an

appropriate interview script, and then, of course, conducting the interviews and analyzing the data. Overarching and intertwined with all of these steps would be consideration of necessary ethical and other constraints for the protection of the University , myself, and most important, the interviewees.

CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Conducting research on sexual information and sexual selfhood presented specific challenges. Sexuality is still a controversial and sensitive topic of study within the academy particularly when it is likely to include discussion of the role of pornography (Wicke 2004).

Initial Criticisms

I first encountered skepticism and reservations about my choice of topics by various institutional actors. I had considerable difficulty getting approval from the Institutional Review Board of my university to conduct this research. Professors expressed suspicions about my motives and practices in selection of topic and research procedures. The reasons for these concerns were readily understandable and many of the recommendations were easily and readily followed. For example, limiting interviewees to persons over the age of eighteen was obviously a legal and moral necessity. Many other recommendations of the Institutional Review Board were valuable in completing the project and were followed.

However, one recommendation of professors and early advisors I did choose not to follow. At one point I was flatly told that it would be impossible for me to research

women's sexuality and that ethically I should only recruit and interview men. I considered this criticism at length. However, I decided that to exclude one gender category from possible participation would impose an artificial restriction on the potential data I could gather. Given the difficulty in getting people to talk about sexuality excluding this portion of potential interviewees seemed untenable.

Sexuality is arguably a sensitive topic for anyone to discuss particularly in a research setting and with a researcher whom they are unlikely to know well. As explained below the interaction effects based on gender and perceived sexuality of researchers and interviewers has been inconsistent in similar research projects. It is unclear if gender is the determining factor for participation in sexuality research. As a result I moved forward with recruiting a variety of participants without gender limitation. I did, however, take a number of steps to alleviate possible adverse effects that might arise from a male researcher interviewing female subjects. These are more fully set out below in descriptions of the interview process.

Institutional Constraints

I faced a number of challenges in getting approval to conduct this project from the university Institutional Review Board, which monitors research that involves human subjects. These challenges extended beyond the possible interview participants to also the design and conduct of the interviews.

After consulting with the social sciences representative of the board, I crafted an initial proposal with much support and feedback from my dissertation committee chair. Significant changes to the initial proposal were required. This included removal of

specific questions about sexual activity. The Institutional Review Board also mandated that interviews could only be conducted on campus in my office or a campus library meeting room rather than in a private setting of the participants' choosing that was comfortable for the participant. As a result, this inhibited participation of non-student respondents as it placed the burden of travel on interviewees. It also meant that persons from the community who may have skepticism about such research or be intimidated by coming to a university campus and office may have been discouraged from participating.

Also at the behest of the Institutional Review Board, I consulted with a public defender regarding the legality of what could be discussed and the obligation to report child abuse. Specifically, I had to re-emphasize to all participants prior to beginning the interview that any experiences that met the age differences qualifying as statutory rape in the state of Colorado could not be discussed. In addition, I was required to prevent respondents from any discussion of sexual experiences that were non-consensual, regardless of the age at the time it occurred, if the incident had been reported to police or adjudicated, or any other factors.

The National Violence Against Women Survey reports that one in six women in the U.S. has been raped and more than half of victims were raped by the age of eighteen. In addition, one in every thirty-three men has been raped (NVAWS 2006). These results are generally consistent with other nationally representative research on sexual assault (NVAWS 2006). As a result this requirement that non-consensual sexual experiences could not be discussed likely excludes a considerable amount of important data.

In more qualitative terms, Plante argues that, with regard to sexual selves, "We cannot overestimate the significance of these kinds of traumas on developing sexual

selves and subjectivities. There are multiple consequences to learning about sexuality via rape, incest, and assaults" (2007:41). Even more emphatically Plummer claims that while "The modern world is cluttered with all kinds of sexual stories. Yet one major pattern has proliferated and developed most rapidly in the latter part of the twentieth century. These are stories of sexual suffering, surviving and surpassing" (1995:49).

While these constraint may have caused some loss of data, such limitations were necessary for the protection of all involved. The Institutional Review Board was understandably acting to protect participants from reliving negative experiences. Further, the Institutional Review Board was acting in accordance with state laws that require reporting of childhood abuse, regardless of the wishes of the person discussing this experience.

Were someone to have endured such an experience yet not want that experience reported to authorities, its revelation in an interview would have put me in the position of being compelled to divulge such sensitive information to authorities against the wishes of the participant. Such circumstance could have been far more damaging than any potential loss of data.

The Role of the Researcher

Beyond the concerns and constraints imposed by the Institutional Review Board, I was acutely aware of the necessity of appropriately controlling my role in the interview process.

In the interest of acknowledging my own subjectivity and role in the research process, I approached this project within the context of the "current 'postmodern

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moment," in which both 'grand theories' and the 'concept of the aloof researcher' have been abandoned" (Gamson 2000:349)." My interest is "meaning creation and the experiences of everyday life" (Gamson 2000:349) as this applies to the formative experiences of people who have recently moved from adolescence to adulthood. Inclusion of numerous sexualities due to cohort membership and thus a shifting and new [mostly because of the Internet] cultural erotic habitus is a somewhat different project than the inarguably valuable research of the earlier wave of research that worked to "reclaim the gay and lesbian past" (Duberman, Vicinus & Chauncey 1989 in Gamson 2000:351).

While my project does not specifically focus on contributing to the reclamation of a past of members of marginalized and oppressed sexualities, it does work to document the recent history of the experiences of young people in the United States. United States society is fraught with deep concern and restriction of the sexuality of young people. This is often expressed in popular culture and news reports about the "sexualization" of young men and women. Arguably, with regard to sexuality youth are part of a marginalized group, subject to heightened surveillance and social control (Rubin 1984; Bearman and Brückner 2001; Fields 2004).

My own subjectivity was an important consideration while designing and conducting this research. It is well established that there are interaction effects when conducting interviews based on the appearance and characteristics of the interviewer as well as the participants. However, these interaction effects are not always clear or obvious (Warren 1988; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004). The politics of interviewer and interviewee identities in conducting sexuality research specifically about sexuality have a

long and intensely debated history (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004). As a thirty-something year-old white man, I faced particular challenges and opportunities when talking to young adults about sexuality.

RESEARCH SAMPLE AND RECRUITING PROCESS

I recruited primarily students from a public university located in the Midwest. I was open to speaking with anyone who was between the ages of eighteen and approximately thirty years old and willing to discuss their experiences learning about sexuality with me. The upper age limit was approximate because Internet access during adolescence would have varied depending on geographical location and adoption of the technology by household. The age restriction was based on the underlying idea and initial anecdotal indications of the project about particular shifts associated with expanded Internet availability.

I recruited from undergraduate university classes as well as personal networks of friends. I focused recruitment on classes that included sexuality and gender as central topics. I predicted students in courses where gender and sexuality were discussed would more likely be willing to participate in an interview on similar topics. However, students were not required to participate in my study or any other research project as part of their grade.

During recruitment I stressed that I was not going to judge or evaluate the experiences of any participant. This was particularly important in order to attempt to combat social desirability bias (Lofland and Lofland 1995) as much as possible. While this is typically discussed in regard to survey research (Neuman 2003) it was relevant to

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this research project. I also made a deliberate effort to phrase questions and comments in ways that did not imply judgment or negativity during interviews.

I also asked respondents to pass along my name and contact information to anyone who they thought might be willing to participate in an interview, often referred to as snowball sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). This method resulted in six additional participants. Snowball sampling is useful precisely when the topic is controversial or potentially stigmatizing (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). Having someone who has participated in the interview "vouch" for the interviewer's respectability, or the enjoyment of the interview is helpful for reassuring somewhat hesitant participants. This was likely also true for university students.

Having taught classes on sexuality and gender for several years at the university I also recruited former students to participate. This proved to be a productive option as a number of former students participated in interviews. Former students likely felt more comfortable participating in an interview about sexuality.

As the issue of sexuality is a sensitive topic in U.S. culture my participants are very likely more willing to discuss the topic than the general population. This sample of interviewees exhibits "volunteer bias" that has been of concern for sexuality research in the past. The sexuality scholars Plaud et al (1999) as well as Wiederman (1999) have noted that much research is based on college students who are not representative of the larger population in terms of demographics or attitudes. Further, men are frequently over-represented as they are more likely to volunteer for such research (Wiederman 1999). As will be seen, the over-representation of men was not the case for my research.

With these issues in mind, it must be conceded that this sample is not representative of the larger population. People who volunteer to participate for research on sexual topics "tend to be more sexually experienced and to hold more positive attitudes toward sexuality and sex research than do non-volunteers" (Crooks and Baur 2002:29). Nevertheless, as this is inductive research meant to explore how people are understanding a changed cultural landscape the goal was to gather a range of experiences and then analyze them for similarities and differences. The objective here was not to accomplish a representative sample; this was not logistically feasible. My sample is a convenience sample that is based primarily on college students so the results are neither representative of, nor generalizable to, a larger population. In sum the results of this research are preliminary, potentially useful for theoretical development, or for informing the construction of future sexuality research.

I sought to establish rapport with potential interviewees while recruiting. When recruiting from college classrooms, one of the only venues where I was allowed to solicit interviews, I emphasized that my own adolescence was full of awkwardness when it came to sexuality. This was meant to convey to participants that, if they had similarly awkward experiences, I would be able to somewhat identify with the difficulty of such experiences.

While recruiting I also pointed out that I researched and studied pornography. I did so in order to establish that pornography was a topic I was comfortable discussing while leaving my opinion on it open to either condemnation or consumption. Finally, when recruiting I emphasized that I was neither interested nor in a position to judge the behaviors, interests, or experiences of participants.

I personally am very comfortable with discussing and viewing a wide range of sexual behaviors, interacting with people of a variety of gender and sexual identities, and am generally very open to sexual topics. The one topic I would not be comfortable discussing with participants would be perpetration of sexual assault. As one of the constraints imposed by the Institutiona Review Board was to prohibit any discussion of non-consensual sexual activity, such limitation alleviated the potential for this topic to arise as a problem.

During interviews I continued to establish rapport with participants in order to set them at ease as well as to facilitate their discussion of personal and sensitive topics. I did so by attempting to be polite but still friendly. As I was as much as fifteen years older than participants I understood that the line between friendly and "creepy" was one I would need to manage. In an effort to remain on the friendly side of this line, I remained polite and conservative in mannerisms and speech.

At times I did offer personal comments and discussed sexual experiences to demonstrate my empathy with participants or to show that I too had somehow comparable experiences with sexual topics. The experiences I discussed I did so honestly and without deception. This allowed me to collect a significant amount of rich data from participants including many who were willing to discuss very personal topics. This is demonstrated by the "richness" of the data that is described throughout.

Even with the aforementioned limitations of my personal biography and getting the university Institutional Review Board to approve the research, I believe the results demonstrate that a semi-structured interview process was the best method for gathering this data.

Inclusion of Participants

I served as a teaching assistant for a sociology course that focuses on sexuality for a number of years. I also taught courses that focused on gender and sexuality for several semesters. I drew on my experience teaching these classes to prepare myself to be able to conduct the research in a way that would be as accommodating as possible to a range of participants.

Throughout the research process I strove to consider ways to make the research more comfortable and accessible to as many respondents as possible. This included considering training and working with a woman interviewer and giving respondents a choice of interviewers. While it proved impossible to present this option to participants, I did make efforts to conduct interviews in a style more conducive to full participation from women. As a man, I worked to be particularly sensitive to issues of power and speech styles when I interviewed women.

Devault asserts that "women face particular differences of speech" emphasizing that this has been ignored in past interviewing techniques (2004:229). Devault advocates several ways to make interviews more conducive to women's participation including less definite boundaries for interview topics, focusing on difficulties of expression as areas where language fails rather than the speaker(s), highlighting the importance of attentive listening to *all* interviewees, and calls for renewed concern with preserving women's speech in recording of data and when presenting findings. I endeavored to remain aware of these factors particularly when I interviewed women.

In Denzin's discussion of the common difficulty of getting people to tell a researcher about a particular topic of interest, he specifically mentions the example that "Women are often reluctant to discuss their sexual relationships..." (2009:130). While this may be accurate, at least since the work of Kinsey (1953) there has been some success by researchers in being able to overcome this reluctance of women. Weiderman who also specifically noted, "college student women are less likely than their male peers to volunteer for a sexuality study" (2001:43).

Interestingly, I ultimately had considerably more difficulty in getting men to respond and participate in the study. Early recruitment efforts made this clear, and as the research progressed I stressed that I was particularly interested in having men participate. Nonetheless, I ended up with thirty-nine respondents who identified as women and twelve respondents who identified as men. My experience recruiting and my sample of participants are different than other researchers who have had more difficulty recruiting women for sexuality research.

I wanted to focus on the formation and discovery of sexual identities in all their variety for young people who matured in a cultural environment rapidly changing because of significant technological shifts. Hence, I made efforts to recruit a variety of participants. As noted above, I recruited from classes and through informal social networks. Recruitment by these means were the only ones approved by the Institutional Review Board.

While I was more successful at recruiting participants with particular gender and sexual identities, for example I had the greatest number of participants who identified as heterosexual women, I did not exclude anyone from the research by design other than

imposing an informal upper age limit. This was appropriate for this research as the focus was finding out what information young people were encountering and how they felt about the relationship between this and their sense of sexual selfhood.

Another motivation for including participants from a range of gender and sexual identity categories is that these identities are changeable over time. "[I]dentities are multiple, contradictory, fragmented, incoherent, disciplinary, disunified, unstable, fluid—hardly the stuff that allows a researcher to confidently run out and study sexual subjects as if they are coherent and available social types" (Gamson 2000:356). Were I to exclude a particular group of participants this would rely on a static notion of gender and sexuality. Such an essentialist perspective is fundamentally at odds with the social constructionist perspective underpinning this research.

People also often resist dominant categories of sexual and gender identity for a variety of reasons. In order to avoid unnecessarily excluding those who may not identify as a particular gender, I did not specify particular participants as more or less desirable for the research.

While people do resist particular identities, individuals still do typically identify, however temporarily, as one of a number of culturally available sexual identity categories. This identification is also variously meaningful for their sense of self. Even those who resist identifying as one of the available sexual categories, asserting it is oppressive (Connell 2005), often refer to those categories as points of reference for that which they are not. For example, Mackenzie, a white twenty-four year-old woman from a middle class background who had recently completed a college degree, when I asked how she identifies in terms of sexuality responded:

I guess I identify as straight but I don't know that I really like that terminology. But I don't really fit into the other terminology. I wouldn't consider myself a lesbian but I really don't adhere to heterosexual norms. Maybe crooked or something.

Even though Mackenzie was primarily interested in men as sexual partners her understanding of heterosexuality as a sexual identity did not align with her sexual practices. As a result she referenced the dominant sexual identity categories with which she was familiar, "heterosexual" and "lesbian" but resisted categorizing herself as one of these options. Thus, it is reasonable to stretch beyond the study of only "heterosexuals" or "gay men," et cetera, to discuss a range of people and inquire as to their stated identities, and perhaps come to understand what the formation of a sexual identity means and accomplishes for them.

There are various means of approaching this research topic without limiting participation to those who do or do not identify as a particular gender or sexual identity. "One strategy is to build on the long-standing tradition of making identity itself the focus of research while integrating the instability, multiplicity, and partiality of identities into the research program and analysis" (Gamson 2000:358).

Indeed, the primary topic of interest of this research is construction of sexual selfhood, of which identity is a major component. Sexual selfhood differs from identity in that:

the term sexual self means something fundamentally different from gender identity or sexual identity. Invoking the term sexual self is meant to conjure up the intimate parts of individuals' self-concepts that encompass how they think of themselves with regards to their experienced and imagined sensuality (Nack quoted in Plante 2007:33).

This research is designed to allow for the analysis of how the availability of sexual information through the medium of the Internet is influencing development of

sexual selfhood and identity. Semi-structured open-ended interviews create a space for

self narration (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). Therefore, this was how I approached and

designed this research. I chose not to include specifically only particular gender or sexual

identity categories or exclude particular gender or sexual identity categories from

participating. I was more successful at getting particular individuals to participate due to

the population from which I was recruiting and other factors that are discussed below.

The interviews I was able to complete serve as the data I analyzed.

Recruiting Men Participants

One particular challenge was revealed in my difficulty recruiting men to

participate in both the initial exploratory group interviews as well as the one-on-one

interviews. Hesse-Biber and Yaiser (2004:112) point out past research demonstrating that

for "[e]specially for heterosexual male researchers homophobia may . . . get in the way of

understanding." They continue saying , "[O]ne of the biggest reasons there is so little

research on sexual identity conducted by heterosexual researchers . . . is directly

connected to the cultural assumption that anyone who does study sexual identity is

homosexual" (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004:112).

Having presented myself as "queer" and "gay" to sexuality classes for

pedagogical reasons in the past , I was comfortable being "read" as gay or other than

hegemonically masculine by potential participants. While I did not actively work to

present myself as gay the possibility that I was interpreted as such remains. The "cultural

assumption" that sexual identity researchers are homosexual may have contributed to the

hesitation of men to participate in my research due to homophobia. This is somewhat

supported by the fact that other researchers who are women have had success getting men to participate in similar studies. For example, Dworkin and O'Sullivan (2007) were able to get thirty-two men to discuss masculinity and sexual initiation practices. However, any number of other factors could have also contributed to my difficulty recruiting men participants.

I was able to recruit twelve men to participate in this research. Of these twelve, only three were men who were neither former students or from informal social networks. Two of these three had been encouraged to participate by women who had already engaged in a research interview. Therefore, only one man volunteered to participate in this research of his own volition without some other social connection to either myself or another research participant. Given these circumstances, one reasonable conclusion is that that men are particularly uncomfortable or distrustful of a male researcher interested in discussing sexuality. Nevertheless, apparently having some rapport or a participant that would vouch for me in some regard was enough to get a number of men to participate.

When designing my research I also compiled a list of local and national resources available for advice and assistance with issues of sexual assault, sexual coercion, and mental well-being. I made this list available to participants with the intent that were the interview to unearth past experiences that were upsetting, respondents would have some recourse for seeking help. I did so with the recognition that I am not a mental health professional and was also bound by what I could allow respondents to discuss.

The vast majority of interviewees declined to accept this list of resources, but occasionally I insisted that respondents, particularly men who seemed hesitant to be willing to seek or accept potential help, take a copy.

Other Limitations

Limiting my interviews to young adults proved to be advantageous in a number of ways. It allowed me to gather data not only of the memory of their experiences learning about sexuality while growing up, but also how they had transformed those experiences into a narrative of the development of their sexual self. This is significant because from the vantage point of recent adulthood each participant could reflect back on what were the most significant information and experiences learning about sexuality when younger.

People remember experiences selectively based on forming a coherent identity narrative and these experiences are often reinterpreted over time (Messner 1999) and for particular reasons (Holstein and Gubrium 2000). With regard to narratives of sexual identity, "No longer do people simply 'tell' their sexual stories to reveal the 'truth' of their sexual lives: instead, they turn themselves into *socially organized biographical objects*" (emphasis in original, Plummer 1995:34). People tell sexual stories as part of the process of understanding themselves (Walden 2003). Through the process of telling sexual stories in particular contexts and about particular events people come to understand the experiences they have had. The sexual storytelling that was produced by participating in these interviews was not a basic relaying of the facts of when and where. Rather these were conversations whereby people discussed how and why they have come to understand their past.

The social context of the discussion of identity is also influential in how an individual constructs that narrative (Irvine 1999). Interviewing people specifically about sexual experiences and information that they consider meaningful in their personal

biography created an opportunity to analyze how they construct that narrative. As stated by Plante in her analysis of sexual stories with peer sexuality educators, "Analysis of sexual stories would provide a glimpse into both the individuality of sex *and* the collective nature of the cultural scripts that underlie individual stories" (emphasis in original 2007:33). I therefore constructed my research based on conducting interviews that would elicit a narrative of sexual selfhood.

I approached this research with the hope of increasing understanding about what young adults consider to have been useful, helpful, and meaningful as they learned about sexuality while growing up. When recruiting participants I mentioned that one of the goals of my research was to understand the impacts of the sexual information they had access to as young people. I also mentioned that I hoped that my research would offer insight into making useful and accurate sexual information more accessible to young people and more meaningful for them.

By asking what they sought out, why, and what they found, I hoped it would reveal what worked and what didn't with regard to what young people themselves felt they needed to find out. While ultimately impossible to determine how this influenced participation, I had participants who mentioned motivation for participating both because they were very satisfied with the sexual information that was made available to them as well as participants who were very disappointed and frustrated with the available sexual information or lack thereof. Interviewees mentioned being motivated to participate in this study by both contributing to research that could demonstrate the value of preserving or expanding access to accurate sexual information as well as contributing to research that

might improve the accuracy and availability of sexual information. This will be discussed further in my findings chapters.

DATA COLLECTION

Group Interviews

The first phase of this research involved conducting "exploratory" group interviews (Fontana and Frey 1991). As described by Fontana and Frey, "Herbert Blumer recommends bringing together several knowledgeable observers who are familiar with the social situation under investigation into a discussion or resource group" (1991:177). It is toward this end that I conducted a group interview with five exemplary former students who were women. This size is consistent with the advice that "smaller groups [a]re more appropriate with emotionally charged topics that generated high levels of participant involvement" (Morgan 1996:146). The purpose of the exploratory group interview was to brainstorm and discuss topics for one-on-one in-depth interviews to be conducted later rather than specific personal experiences.

The group interview lasted approximately two hours. The participants served as "knowledgeable observers" who are more familiar with the experience of sexuality during adolescence in recent years that is the "social situation under investigation" (Fontana and Frey 1991:177).

I initially planned to also conduct a group interview comprised of only men or with a mix of men and women, but after recruiting intensely from former students I was unable to get men to participate. While some initially expressed interest they later backed out or would not commit to a time and place.

This group interview was intended to create questions and brainstorm topics that were of concern to young people and were particularly relevant to their experiences growing up rather than my ideas of what those would be. While I would have preferred to also have a group interview with men, this discussion with these co-researchers was extraordinarily helpful, and I cannot thank them enough. Based on this focus group, my interactions with students, as well as an initial review of related literature, I developed an interview schedule for one-on-one interviews.

Interview Process

While recruiting and conducting interviews I worked to present myself as non-threatening (Lofland and Lofland 1995). Drawing upon my observation of the casual standards of appearance and grooming for students at the university where I conducted my research, I recruited and conducted interviews in what could be described as business casual attire. Typical attire consisted of slacks and a short-sleeved collared shirt.

During interviews it was sometimes necessary to present myself as understanding and accepting of behavior I find personally distasteful. With men this included discussion that was consistent with describing sex as a conquest (Beneke 1982). I also actively worked to ignore and conceal my dislike of language I found to be sexist, heterosexist, or racist during interviews.

Heterosexist and sexist language is rife within some high schools (Pascoe 2007) and this is also often the case on the college campus and in the community where this research was conducted. For example, Leigh, a nineteen year-old white woman who identified as heterosexual and grew up in the South used "gay" as negative descriptor

several times throughout her interview. This use of "gay" is something I frequently

challenge in everyday conversation and problematize in classes; however, in the

interview I refrained from doing so.

During data analysis I also worked to consider these comments as potentially

useful data and temper any negative feelings that these might inspire that would prevent

me from seeking to consider and include the perspective of whoever used this language

(Lofland et al 2006:58-9).

I stated in the beginning of the interview that participants were also welcome to

ask me questions or to offer additional thoughts about any of the topics if they so desired.

This is consistent with recommended techniques for "toning down the emotional level"

that is of particular concern for interviews that include discussion of sensitive topics

(Rubin and Rubin 1995:137). I sometimes offered my own experiences and ideas to

participants when it seemed appropriate. I primarily did this either to establish rapport as

a strategy of selective competence (Lofland et al 2006:70) with the interviewee. I also

took this approach in order to reinforce that I was not judging or evaluating the morality

of an individual's experiences.

While volunteers were clearly informed that they would be discussing culturally

sensitive topics related to sexuality I still started interviews with less personal questions.

I typically started interviews by asking respondents to describe their family and the

neighborhood where they grew up. This was meant to establish "natural involvement"

and help interviewees feel more comfortable in the interview (Rubin and Rubin

1995:129).

After several more general questions about personal history and background I shifted to topics that were specifically about sexual information. This was sometimes a very straightforward development as their discussion of school could be used to segue into discussion of sexual education. I, thus, made an effort to move gradually to more sensitive and more personal topics over the course of the interview.

One-on-one Interviews

Operating within the constraints and limitations described above, I ultimately succeeded in conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with fifty-one respondents. The interviews were designed to elicit narratives about access to sexual information and sexual development during the years of adolescence.

I approached interviews as "practical production[s], the meaning of which is accomplished at the intersection of the interviewer and the respondent" (Fontana and Frey 2005:717). This is different from the more traditional approach to interviewing as a means of eliciting an objective knowledge or truth from a subject (Fontana and Frey 2000). I created a formal interview schedule of questions, but I used this list of questions as a reference of topics to be addressed rather than following the order and verbiage exactly. I worked to "listen during the interview to clues and openings that [could] be pursued further" (Hesse-Biber and Leckenby 2004:216). I also specifically asked participants if there were other topics that they felt were important which I had not asked about or if they would like to add anything regarding earlier topics we discussed before the interview concluded.

Often in answering a particular question participants would stray onto other topics. I would note these during the interview and when possible, given the constraints of imposed by the Institutional Review Board, I would ask for further thoughts on topics mentioned by the participant. I would also refer to the interview schedule to make sure I had asked about each topic of initial interest. The vast majority of the interviews proceeded more as a guided conversation. I did ask questions out of order and in less formal verbiage than stated on the interview schedule but I did not veer to topics not specifically approved by the Institutional Review Board.

A few respondents replied in very limited ways to prompts and questions including seemingly a base minimum of what they thought was directly relevant. However, most participants were very talkative and often a short question or prompt would result in an extended response. Given the topic and approach I had taken to the research, I wanted participants to offer as much of their thoughts as they felt comfortable sharing, rather than limit them to more superficial content or just descriptive facts.

While I approached interviews as a conversation from the beginning, after the first several interviews I frequently explicitly described the interaction to the participants as a conversation rather than as a question and answer format. This was meant to frame the conversational depth of the interview for participants (Rubin and Rubin 1995:125). In addition to framing the discussion as a conversation I also used prompts to offer participants another opening to say more.

DATA ANALYSIS

Transcription

With the consent of each participant I used a digital audio recorder or my laptop to record each interview. After each interview was completed I stored the digital audio file on an external hard drive that was encrypted to help insure confidentiality. I then immediately securely erased any copies that remained unencrypted on my laptop or the audio recorder.

I personally transcribed each interview using computer software that plays audio files at variable speeds and a basic word processing software program. I first listened to the interview at a slower speed so that I could type at the rate that the interviewee spoke. I then would begin again at full speed and make any corrections or additions to further insure accuracy. I included my own questions and comments as well as those of the participants. I also included in brackets notes indicating sarcasm or laughter to indicate if the meaning of a statement was tempered by inflection or tone. I also noted moments of crosstalk or inaudible speech in brackets.

Finally, I punctuated the interviews as I listened the second time at full speed. I worked to transcribe in ways that best captured the intent of the speaker as I could discern it and to accurately reflect the respondent's style of speech (Kvale 1996). Rather than punctuate as might be most grammatically appropriate I used commas to indicate short pauses and ellipses to indicate longer pauses. In this way I was able to create a record of the interview that was as reliable and valid as I could make it as well as useful for the intended purpose which was analysis of the interviews as data (Kvale 1996).

As I was transcribing I would omit or change names of people, places, and other comments that could allow an interviewee to be identifiable. Again, this was to insure confidentiality.

As I was limited to recruiting from college courses and did not receive Institutional Review Board approval until midway through the academic term, I completed an initial round of fourteen interviews in a short period of time in the spring of 2010. I transcribed these interviews and began to analyze them for ways to improve my interviewing technique as well as to consider which interview questions to focus on. Given the difficulty of gaining Institutional Review Board approval for the research and the specific constraints they imposed on topics and questions, it was untenable to add additional interview questions over time as some scholars have suggested (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Rather, I reviewed early interviews in order to evaluate which questions, if any, to stress or to omit as well as to consider the ordering of questions.

For example, initially I began with background topics including asking about the participants' experience of middle school. I then would ask about sexual education. After completing the second round of interviews I shifted to first asking about the participant's earliest memory of learning about sex and then asking about sexual education later in the interview. This produced a significantly greater variety of answers in comparison to earlier interviews when I first asked about sexual education. As a result in the subsequent interviews I continued to first ask about early memories of learning about sex.

I completed three additional waves of interviews. During the summer of 2010, I completed an additional nine interviews. Midway through the fall semester of 2010, I solicited interviews again and was able to complete an additional sixteen interviews. After these interviews were completed I conducted another round of analysis to consider ways that ordering of questions could improve discussion as well as small adjustments to questions that did not change the substantive approach but elicited better responses.

Finally, soon after the start of the spring semester of 2011 I was able to complete twelve more interviews. Having already completed several rounds of intense analysis for nine of these final twelve interviews I used "selective" transcription (Strauss 1987:266-7). For those interviews that I transcribed selectively I based the transcription on themes and concepts that had emerged previously. The other three interviews I completed during this time I transcribed fully and analyzed closely because during the interview process I noticed that participants made claims that potentially contributed new insight or challenged my earlier analyses. I also fully transcribed those parts of interviews that were relevant to aspects of my analysis that were not yet complete. Altogether I completed interviews with fifty-one participants. The descriptive details of the participants are discussed in chapter three.

Memoing and Coding Data

I transcribed in stages after completing several interviews. After doing so I reread all of the interviews that I had transcribed up to that point to insure familiarity with the data thus far. While doing so I made notes and used the practices of "memoing" and "coding" conjointly (Lofland et al 2006:200).

Once I had transcribed a group of interviews I reviewed each transcript and continued the process of initial data analysis. This included specifically line-by-line coding and memoing (Rubin and Rubin 1995).

Throughout the fall semester and winter of 2010, I engaged in an iterative process of "memoing," "coding" and data analysis. In this way coding of my data "proceed[ed] in stages" (Rubin and Rubin 1995:239) both during and after completing data collection. I

then proceeded to conduct additional interviews working toward accomplishing "data saturation" (Charmaz 2000:520). I continued this iterative process including "initial coding" (Charmaz 2006:47) until I had completed thirty-nine of the fifty-one interviews.

The final twelve interviews I analyzed with established codes and themes in mind. I noted if and when any data emerged that countered or challenged these earlier ideas. At this time I felt that I had achieved data saturation for the themes and topics that emerged as most salient to my research questions.

The next stage of my analysis of the data involved "focused coding" (Charmaz 2006:57). This involved "using the most significant and/or frequent codes to sift through large amounts of data" (Charmaz 2006:57) specifically to evaluate and if necessary refine those codes.

For example, during initial coding I made note of the wide variety of sources of sexual information reported by participants. When reviewing this coding it became clear that there was an important distinction for participants between sources of sexual information that were other people on the one hand and media sources (movies, books, television) on the other.

It also became clear that the Internet occupied a separate category as it could be a means for both of these other sources and was also searchable based on particular interest at a particular time. In other words, participants described using the Internet in ways that involved direct communication with other people as well as in ways that involved them viewing or reading digital copies of other media.

For example, a number of participants reported chatting with other people via instant messaging about sexual topics on the Internet. Other participants reported viewing

video content that was sexually explicit on the Internet. In addition, most participants

who used the Internet to seek out sexual information described the ability to search for

particular content in noticeably different ways than other sources of information.

Altogether it was clear that the Internet was a source of information to be analyzed

separately.

During focused coding I grouped these initial themes into three overarching

categories of sources of sexual information: interpersonal sources, media sources, and the

Internet. I then revisited transcriptions to consider larger patterns in how participants

discussed these different categories of sources, comparison of attribution of significance

to different categories of sources, as well as variations in discussion within the categories

by gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class background.

Having printed transcribed interviews, I conducted initial line-by-line coding of

each interview by hand. I kept a master list of code abbreviations on a separate sheet of

paper next to the transcribed interview and in different colored pen wrote those

abbreviations wherever relevant on printed copies of interviews. During focused coding, I

grouped initial codes into larger analytical categories and themes. Once I began the

process of focused coding, I printed new (not annotated) versions of all interviews. I then

created a new master list of themes and categories and reread these unmarked paper

copies of transcribed interviews and coded based on these new categories.

During the stages of initial and focused coding of data, I wrote memos for each

code (Charmaz 2006). These memos described what each code referred to and also

sometimes included brainstorms and ideas about relationships to other codes and topics. I

also noted if there were data that were possible exceptions to codes particularly with

regard to the final twelve interviews. I then re-analyzed these codes to consider if they were inaccurate, needed refinement, or if something that seemed contradictory was actually an outlier.

After conducting focused coding I "put all the material with the same codes together" (Rubin and Rubin 1995:240). I was then able to review this material to recognized and develop patterns of the data.

SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Sociologists can rarely, if ever, directly study the actual phenomena of interest (Babbie 1986). As a result we must make choices to approach a topic of interest in a way that will produce reliable and valid research. This involves balancing a number of factors including breadth of the study versus the depth of focus, constraints on time, money, and energy that can reasonably be devoted to any one project, and limitations of personal biography for gaining access to a particular group or topic. The methodological approach I have taken for this research also has strengths and weakness.

The main weaknesses of this research design include the severe restrictions on topics imposed by the university Institutional Review Board. In addition, those interviewed are almost entirely from a specific population that is atypical of larger United States society. While this research is not intended to be generalizable, a wider variety of participants in terms of background, ethnicity, and class might have produced data suggestive of additional commonalities and themes. It is important to note that from the data produced by interviews with this sample, saturation of categories and themes

emerged. Toward the end of the data collection process I was consistently hearing experiences that had similarities and connections to existing data.

The main strength of this research is the richness and the extent of the data that emerged from the fifty-one completed interviews. Most respondents proved willing to discuss very personal and sensitive topics very honestly and sometimes at length. I was hopeful but also skeptical that I would be able to get participants to discuss such experiences with a relatively unfamiliar researcher. This is particularly important given that the topic is controversial and arguably under-studied.

CHAPTER THREE

Adolescents Learning About Sex

This chapter begins by describing the sample of my study. Then the focus is placed on how participants recounted their experiences learning about sexuality from sources that have been influential prior to the emergence of widely accessible high-speed Internet. I provide additional context for these reports by including sexual experience and other sources of sexual information described by participants as available to them. This includes discussion of three of the four primary sources identified by Gagnon and Simon (2005) in their classic text: peers, family members, and mass media. Within the discussion of peers I address both friends as well as early sexual partners. I provide information about those who talked about sex with peers and the type of talk reported. The analysis of families includes consideration of siblings as well as parents. I asked participants about other family members who were influential in raising them and very few reported that this was the case. I address those cases as appropriate. I identify the role of other popular media such as movies, television, books, and magazines, as conveyed by my participants. I also describe various other sources of sexual information noted by participants. This chapter is meant to provide context for role of formal sexual education and the Internet. Given the heightened emphasis placed on the role of the Internet and formal sexual education within the broader culture in recent years I address these two sources of information in greater detail in the following two chapters. Chapter four looks

closely at the experiences of formal sexual education as described by these participants.

Chapter five focuses on analysis of the Internet as a source of sexual information.

THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

My sample consisted of fifty-one participants. They ranged in age from eighteen to thirty-two years old with an average age of twenty-two. The vast majority of participants were from middle class backgrounds, white, currently enrolled and attending a university, and identified as heterosexual. Though there is some diversity with regard to sexuality, ethnicity and class background as can be seen below in Table 1 that lists participant demographics. Throughout this research I discuss women and men rather than males and females because I am interested in the gendered experience of these participants rather than the biological sex. To discuss females and males would imply that these are static categories based on essential biological differences therefore contradicting the social constructionist approach of this research (Howard and Hollander 1997). I interviewed thirty-nine women and twelve men.

The following table details demographics of the research participants.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Gender	Sexuality[1]	Ethnicity	Education	Class[2]
Abby	20	Woman	Heterosexual	Hispanic Irish	In college	Middle
Alice	28	Woman	Queer	White	College and graduate degree	Upper middle
Angela	19	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper Middle
Art	21	Man	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper middle
Betsy	20	Woman	Gay	Hispanic	In college	Upper middle

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[1] As reported by the participants themselves. Unspecified means the participant chose not to answer or I did not specifically ask for sexual identity. Undefined indicates the participant preferred not to select a specific label for his or her sexuality.
[2] As reported by participants in reference to their family class position while growing up

Name	Age	Gender	Sexuality	Ethnicity	Education	Class
Cassie	19	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper middle
Cleo	18	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper middle
Cynthia	19	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper middle
Emily	20	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle
Glen	22	Man	Heterosexual	Asian	In college	Upper middle
Graham	21	Man	Heterosexual	White	College degree	Middle
Gretchen	21	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper middle
Hannah	22	Woman	Unspecified	White	In college	Middle
Jack	22	Man	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper middle
Jade	24	Woman	Heterosexual	White/Jewish	College Degree	Middle
Janice	21	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper middle
Jennifer	21	Woman	Undefined	White	In college	Middle
Joan	20	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Working
Jonas	20	Man	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle
Josh	25	Man	Heterosexual	White	In graduate school	Middle to upper
Juliette	19	Woman	Bisexual	White	In college	Middle
Justin	32	Man	Heterosexual	Native American	College degree	Middle
Kara	22	Woman	Undefined	White	In college	Upper
Katie	22	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle
Kyle	20	Man	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle upper
Lauren	30	Woman	Undefined	White/Native American	High school equivalent	Working
Leigh	19	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle
Lila	20	Woman	Homosexual	Mexican/Jewish	In college	Upper middle
Mackenzie	24	Woman	Heterosexual Questioning	White	College degree	Middle
Mallory	19	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle
Marion	20	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle
Michael	29	Man	Heterosexual	White	College degree	Middle
Molly	19	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle to working
Nicole	21	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper middle
Nora	23	Woman	Heterosexual	White/Jewish	College degree	Upper middle
Oliver	22	Man	Kinky	White	College degree	Upper middle
Paula	20	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle
Penelope	18	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle

Name	Age	Gender	Sexuality	Ethnicity	Education	Class
Rachel	23	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Working
Rita	20	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle
Robin	26	Woman	Hererosexual	Caucasian	In grad school	Upper middle
Samantha	21	Woman	Heterosexual	White	College degree	Middle
Sandra	20	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle
Scott	24	Man	Heterosexual	Black	In college	Lower middle
Sophie	22	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper middle
Tess	21	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Lower
Timothy	19	Man	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle
Trudi	20	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper middle
Vera	20	Woman	Queer	Hispanic/Mestizo	In college	Lower middle
Whitney	19	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Middle
Yvonne	20	Woman	Heterosexual	White	In college	Upper middle

WHERE AND HOW PARICIPANTS REMEMBERED LEARNING ABOUT SEX

I asked participants open-ended and probing questions as to where they remembered learning about sexuality. Recollection of learning is surely imperfect; as a sociologist I recognize that a considerable amount of learning occurs indirectly and without awareness. However asking participants to describe when they were aware they were learning may prove enlightening as to the development of self, the process of sexual identity formation, as well as being useful for identifying significant factors in learning about sexuality. I divide the sources mentioned into two overarching categories, those that involved direct interpersonal interaction and those that did not involve direct interaction.

In terms of values and propriety of participating in sexual behaviors virtually all of my participants identified people and personal experience as more significant than media. Mainstream movies and television were identified as significant by a few

participants as references for how romantic relationships should progress, gendered roles within relationships, styles of communication within relationships, and when and how sexual interaction within relationships should occur. A number of participants referenced media as particularly significant for learning about the details of sexual interaction and particularly behaviors and identities that they did not consider to be normal.

DIRECT INTERACTION WITH PEOPLE

Participants reported that people in direct face-to-face interaction were important agents of socialization about sexuality. The categories of people that were identified as significant in decreasing order of frequency were friends, sexual partners, parents, and elder family members, siblings, doctors, with religious figures and teachers rarely mentioned as influential. It is important to note that friends and sexual partners often overlapped, as friends became sexual partners over time or vice versa.

CHILDHOOD SEXUAL EXPERIENCES

Almost all participants remembered some type of sexual experience or awareness during childhood (twelve years old or younger). A number of participants described having some sort of sexual experience as children. This was primarily limited to masturbatory behavior, undressing with a friend of another gender, or intimate touching with friends. Kara, for example, a twenty-one year-old white woman who grew up in a wealthy family in the South described masturbatory behavior when asked about her earliest memory of awareness of sex:

> I also have a memory of me and my cousin at like age six humping pillows in my room. We were like acting out sex ... not with each other, we had our own pillow, but

we were in my room. I remember doing that and my mom being like, "Girls what are you doing?!" and we knew something was wrong, we thought it was wrong, and as soon as my mom came in we like stopped and tried to cover up what we were doing. But I don't know if I really knew what sex was, but I knew how to imitate it at least.

This is indicative of participants who described childhood experiences that in hindsight were understood as sexual but were not coded as sexual in a way comparable to other sexual experiences Kara later described.

In order for physical interactions to be understood as sexual experiences participants had to identify the experiences as being with an appropriate potential sexual partner. For example, Jack a twenty-three year-old, white, heterosexual man who grew up in a college town on the east coast stated:

There was a kid who grew up like two houses down the other side who was six years older and I hung out with him. And his sister was three years older than I was. So I was always hanging out with kids who were way older than I was. That's where most of my stuff [sexual information] came from. ... No question. The girl who was three years older than me. She was the first girl ... we used to do, when we were little kids we would get naked and show each other our shit [genitals] and whatever. It wasn't sexual, but it was like, "You're a girl, I'm a guy. This is what I have, that's what you have."

When I followed with a probing question as to if that relationship or those experiences ever became sexual later? Jack replied, "No. She was always more of like a sister type person." So while Jack recognized these experiences as somehow sexual he did not consider them particularly important for his understanding of sexuality.

Several women described what could be considered sexual interactions with same gender friends only in response to questions not directly related to early sexual experiences. This indicates that these experiences were not understood to be sexual in the same way as others because the participants did not recognize those involved as potential sexual partners either because of age or gender of those involved. Only women participants discussed having sexual interactions with friends of the same gender. A few

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men did describe engaging in sexual behaviors while young but would dismiss these as not actually sexual interactions because it was something done just as kids. This understanding of interactions with others that were in hindsight recognized as sexual but were not understood as such as the time extended into adolescence. Kara, a twenty-one year-old white, woman who grew up in an upper-middle class, family in the deep south described sexual experimentation during sleepover parties with friends during middle school.

> Me and my girlfriends used to make out all the time and practice on each another. And I think I even remember fingering each other and stuff. In eighth grade-ish, we would, we were over at one girl friend's house. I made out with a lot of my girl friends but we never thought of it as gay. We just, we experimented on each other a lot.

Participants almost never described these behaviors as lesbian or indicative of lesbian identity, at least not at the time that the experience was happening. This was made evident as discussion of these experiences arose in response to questions about topics other than early sexual experiences. Women participants were much more likely to discuss these experiences when talking about friendship groups in middle school and high school rather than in response to questions about sexual behaviors. A small subset of women discussed these early same gender sexual experiences as possibly indicative of lesbian inclinations during the interview but gave no indication of having done so as they were happening.

Women were also much more likely than men to advise one another on whether or not to engage in certain sexual techniques or behaviors. Abby, a heterosexual, middle class, twenty year-old woman described learning specifically about oral sex from a friend

who was "very advanced" sexually in comparison to the rest of her friendship group.

Abby recalled this story,

> And then she like, I remember the infamous (experience). We had a Squeeze Pop. And we were all in my friend's bedroom and she was like, "All right I'm going to teach you guys how," and taught us how to give head [perform oral sex on a man] on a Squeeze Pop. And then I would be like, "Okay I guess I can try it." And I did. But a lot of her things would be like, "Oh you guys gotta do this."

As Abby mentions not only specifics about how to engage in oral sex with a man, she also makes it clear that it was because her friend was participating in the behavior it normalized it for her. This also gave Abby more assurance that she could engage in the behavior as well. Abby's description of how one friend would convey knowledge especially about a particular sexual behavior was consistent with remarks of several other women.

Age and gender were the reasons that participants explained as reasons for not considering interactions as sexual experiences at the time they took place. Participants often dismissed these interactions as not sexual because of age. For the women participants who did not identify specifically as lesbian Nora, a twenty-three year old white woman from an upper-middle class background who discussed having several experiences that involved sexual behavior with same gender friends but that she did not understand as sexual at the time. This perspective was further supported in that she did not mention these experiences prior when asked specifically about her sexual experiences. Sophie had this to say about these early experiences with friends:

> No. Me and my girlfriends used to like make out all the time and like practice on each another. And I think I even remember like fingering each other and stuff. In like eighth grade-ish, we would, we were over at one girl friend's house. I made out with a lot of my girl friends but we never thought of it as like gay. We just, we experimented on each other a lot.

The "practice" here that Nora refers to was practice for sexual interactions that would involve boys. Altogether this shows that cultural scenarios about age and gender of a potential partner were understood by participants at an early age such that interactions that might otherwise have been considered sexual were not considered so.

SEXUAL EXPERIENCES WITH PEERS

From interviews with these participants it became clear that early, particularly first, sexual experiences with other people were significant for the development of sexual identity, comfort and interest. Several scholars have explored the experience of "firsts" or first sexual experiences including intercourse (Bouris 1993; Carpenter 2005).

Friends

The majority of my participants named friends as one of the most influential sources of information about sexuality. Participants described several ways that friends could be influential. In some cases participants reported that they had engaged in early physical sexual experimentation with friends. These interactions typically were confined to early adolescence but for some women interviewees this continued into high school.

Participants also described dialogue with friends as being an important factor in how they learned about sex. Friends were consulted for any number of topics related to sexuality including who was considered attractive potential romantic or sexual partners, a benchmark of normalcy for sexual behaviors and experiences, a reference for when to participate in sexual behaviors not previously tried. This was almost exclusively the case for friends who were the same gender as the participant. Participants did report discussing

sex with friends who were not their same gender, but all characterized this discussion as qualitatively different. Most reported sexual discussion with friends of other genders was much more limited in scope and depth of topic and detail. A number of participants became sexual partners with friends of both same and other genders, and thus were influenced by friends through sexual experience. These topics are discussed in further detail below.

Sexual Experimentation with Friends

Numerous research participants mentioned early physical sexual experimentation with friends. This included a few men who described some sexual experimentation at a young age with friends who were women. A larger number of women described sexual experimentation at a young age with their same gender friends. A higher proportion of women than men discussed such experiences. There were no men in this sample who described same gender sexual experimentation. This may be for a number of reasons including my limited number of men participants, concerns about revealing activities that participants may have perceived as homoerotic, or that men did not perceive these experiences as important in their learning about sexuality. Indeed, even men who described early sexual experimentation with women barely recognized this as sexual interaction and so, while a factor, to these men it wasn't significant. This is consistent with other research that reflects a deliberative interpretation of experience as aligned with desired or expected sexual behavior for a particular sexual orientation identity (Messner 1999). Further this is consistent with the component of the script for hegemonic heterosexual masculinity that sex equals intercourse (Zilbergeld 1992:51-3).

In comparison, many women who participated in this research described participating in sexual experimentation with same gender friends during adolescence. This division of discussion with regard to sexuality is generally consistent with past research that has found adolescents talk about relationships and sex differently depending on the gender of the friendship group. This has been attributed to girls' relationships with friends as being closer than that of boys (Collins and Laursen 1999).

Sexual Partners and Experience

Almost every interview participant reported having had some sort of sexual interaction with another person ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse. Romantic as well as sexual partners were attributed as being very influential in terms of learning about sexuality. In this regard there were three groups that emerged from the interviews. Examples of each of these groups as well are described in further detail below. The first group was first and foremost interested in direct interpersonal experience. Those who recalled approaching sex in this way were minimally interested in reading, talking, or otherwise learning about sex prior to engaging in sexual behaviors. A second group was concerned with learning about some aspects of participating in sexual behaviors. Those within this group often described asking friends about emotional readiness, finding out how to engage in safer sex practices, or looking up something about mechanics of sexual behaviors or anatomy prior to participation. A third smaller group was very invested in learning a significant amount prior to involvement in sexual behaviors with other people. There was some movement between groups with regard to penile-vaginal intercourse compared to other sexual behaviors such as manual stimulation or oral sex. In other

words, a few participants described being ready and willing with little background information or knowledge to "make out" with people, stimulate others with their hands, engage in oral sex. However, with regard to sexual intercourse they were noticeably more concerned with finding out information of various sorts prior to participating. This supports Martin's (1996) earlier finding that "[t]here is a socially constructed line between all other forms of sexual petting and intercourse in teen culture. Intercourse is invested with more meaning and significance than any other act" (60). The additional hesitance and preparation that participants described regarding first intercourse were due to the additional significance placed on this experience.

Participants described a range of interest in learning about sexuality from various sources prior to engaging in sexual behaviors with partners. The majority of participants described gaining some information about sexual behaviors and experiences from various sources prior to engaging in them. Most participants described early sexual experiences as significant and eventful. Consistent with past research sexual intercourse was described as a sexual experience of particular import.

Experiential Learners - Diving In

The interviewees that were minimally interested in learning about sexual experiences prior to engaging in them with partners were exclusively women. These women described remembering being intrigued by the prospect of participating in sexual behaviors and saw limited purpose to learning about them from others. For example, Cynthia, a white, nineteen year old woman who grew up in a middle class family in the Midwest, stated that while she would offer advice to friends about sexual topics she

hardly ever asked others about sex. I followed this discussion by asking her if she was more comfortable learning about sex through experience. She replied:

> Yeah. That's definitely true. I'm not big on seeking out advice about sex. Which I'm fine with giving it. My friends talk with me a lot about it [sex] but I don't really, I think maybe just because I don't think the experience is ever the same with any two people so it doesn't really make sense to get advice from other people about it.

Cynthia was much more concerned with her ability to trust and feel comfortable with a person who was a potential partner as a measure of her willingness to engage in sexual behavior rather than knowledge of the topic from other sources. Cynthia's comments are indicative of the few women who were uninterested in information regarding sexual behavior prior to engaging in it.

Experience and Study - Wading In

The second group, which included a majority of participants, described some combination of engaging in sexual behavior with little other information at times but also sometimes being interested in and actively pursuing information about sexual activity or behavior prior to participation. This was an iterative and dynamic process. Participants who fall into this group often would have a sexual experience of some kind and then seek out more information about that experience. Alternatively these participants would become involved in a relationship where they felt they could explore sexuality and as a result would look for more information about options to explore.

Book Learners - Gauging Depth Beforehand

The participants in the third group were very focused on learning a significant

amount about a sexual behavior prior to participating in such a behavior. Nicole, a white twenty-one year old heterosexual woman discussed why she felt that she participated in sexual behaviors later than most of her friends,

> I think it was probably in a lot of ways my own fear, if I didn't know a lot about, I'm trying to think, getting fingered, or giving a blow job, or anything like that, like I'd be too nervous to try any of those things because I wanted sort of all the information, and how it's going to go and what it was going to be like beforehand. So I don't think I had enough information at the time to feel comfortable doing it. I think that is an area where my friends may have had more information about those kinds of specifics, but I don't know they just might not have been as scared.

For Nicole finding out information related to the behavior was necessary for her to feel comfortable enough to engage in it. She was also comfortable asserting her desires to wait or move to try something else with sexual partners.

Early sexual partners were often people whom the participant had been a friend with for some time, and this relationship turned sexual as they aged from childhood into adolescence. This was significant in that these participants were more likely to report having very positive initial sexual experiences. In comparison to other participants those who first had sexual intercourse with partners they had been long time close friends with they were also more likely to describe trying what they perceived as sexual variation earlier in their sexual careers (different positions, locations). In short those who were more comfortable and had rapport with their first sexual partner tended to report This is noteworthy particularly with regard to women who often have negative and un-pleasurable first sexual experiences (Martin 1996; Carpenter 2005).

Firsts

A significant number of participants mentioned kissing when asked about first consensual experiences with another person. Within this group several discussed kissing and "making out" as desexualized or inconsequential activity. For example, Cynthia, a twenty year-old white woman who grew up just outside of a college town in the Midwest, when asked about her early consensual sexual experiences said the following:

> I, it's kind of funny, because again, like I said in eighth grade I was kind of not in a good group. I was hanging out with high school kids a lot and that's when I was drinking. I made out with a lot of guys going into high school. And then going into high school I didn't date anyone or anything. I had one boyfriend before, in my sophomore year and all we did was make out. And I guess to me I don't really consider those sexual experiences. Making out just wasn't really like that to me at all. And then beginning of my junior year I started dating the guy who I dated for the rest of high school. And he's the one who I, I did all, like the first time I went to second base, got fingered, or gave him a hand job or I did *all* of my firsts with him. And that was like beginning of junior year, so.

She specifically states that kissing and making out were not really something she considered sexual. This was a common assessment of kissing by women interviewees.

When asked about first consensual sexual experiences with another person many participants responded with description of first sexual intercourse. Even those that also discussed other "firsts," penile-vaginal intercourse was still referenced by interviewees as the first time that they "had sex." This shows that intercourse still serves as the primary milestone of sexual maturity for the participants in my research.

Negative Firsts

A significant number of participants described first intercourse as a largely negative experience. Common descriptors reported by participants about the experience included awkward, frightening and painful. Heterosexual men, heterosexual women as well as lesbian and bi-sexual woman participants had negative experiences with first

intercourse. A number of these women participants described feeling pressured to have intercourse with others and most often by their friendship group. This pressure sometimes was indirect and diffuse with participants describing wanting to have intercourse in order to be able to participate in social interactions with peers who had had sex.

However several of women described more direct pressure to have sex. Nicole, a twenty-one year-old white woman from a middle class background who identified as heterosexual offered the following in response to my question as to if she felt pressured to be involved in sexual behaviors:

> I think I did feel pressure in some ways, from partners as well as friends and not direct pressure like nobody told me I had to, well I guess I did feel more direct pressure from partners but, friends, no, not so much.

Nicole describes that in hindsight she did feel there was an expectation from friends and partners to participate in sex but that the pressure did not manifest as directly applied. Well she does report having felt "more direct pressure" from partners she went on to say that she had felt comfortable asserting her boundaries with partners as to sexual interaction. Nicole was also notable in contrast to others who felt pressure in that she positively assessed her early sexual experiences.

Women's Pain

There was a commonly expressed understanding by these participants that the first time a woman has sexual intercourse it would be painful. For example, I asked Whitney, a nineteen year-old white woman who identified as heterosexual if she had expectations about sexual intercourse. She replied in part, "

> I feel like I didn't really look too much up on the Internet or anything beforehand but I feel like I got some conceptions from movies and the romance and the beauty and

it's supposed to feel great. But I also knew the first time for a girl was supposed to hurt a little bit. I kinda had an idea of what is was going to go like, but I also had an ideology of what it was going to be like, so I kinda knew it is not going to feel great and its going to hurt for a girl's first time.

This was typical of many participants, both men and women, who described this expectation that first sexual intercourse would necessarily be painful for women. Only a very few participants attributed this expectation that it would be painful for the woman because first sexual intercourse may involve breaking the hymen. This was referenced several times as "popping her cherry" or "popping my cherry" depending on the gender of the interviewee.

Underwhelmed

Another group of participants described it as anti-climatic in the sense that they reported feeling underwhelmed in comparison to their expectations. Jade, a twenty-four year-old, Jewish, heterosexual woman from a middle class background spoke matter-of-factly about her first experience with sexual intercourse:

> It wasn't bad. It wasn't the best you know. And its just kind of something you have to get, you have to get it over with, you have to get it out of the way. And you know I really cared about the guy at the time and you know as messed up as our relationship was we did care about each other. And that was mainly the important thing for me. I was mainly waiting for someone I cared about and who cared about me. But I do think that especially for girls we hype up what the first time is going to be, and who its going to be with and how its going to be, I mean. It wasn't romantic you know. It wasn't like planned with candles, flowers. It wasn't that at all. It was just like, well, maybe we should try this you know. It was like we've been together for this long, this is about the age that people, our friends are starting to do this, you know, why not?

While in the interview Jade spoke of remembering her first experience of sexual intercourse as a milestone yet one that was not as significant as she remembered expecting it to be. Discussion of first intercourse as something to experience in order to

"get it out of the way' was common for a number of women who participated in this research.

Positive Firsts

Another commonality that emerged from participants reports were those who had positive and pleasurable experiences of first intercourse. Participants who described becoming sexually and romantically involved with partners they had known as friends described initial sexual experiences as significantly better than those who had initial sexual experiences with relatively unfamiliar partners. This correlated strongly with feeling more able to discuss sexual topics with people that participants had relationships with other than sexual. So just as most participants described having some discussions of sexuality with friends, particularly closer friends, participants also were much more likely to report talking to romantic partners about sexual intercourse prior to having it in comparison to those who engaged in sexual intercourse with people with whom they were less familiar or did not have some other relationship, almost always friendship or some level of acquaintance from school or the community.

Virgins

Four interviewees described themselves as virgins. The clear implication for the overwhelming majority of the participants in this research was that loss of virginity meant participating in penile-vaginal intercourse ending with the man's orgasm. Adherence to this definition included the four participants who described themselves as virgins. Two of these four had not participated in penile-vaginal intercourse intentionally as they planned to remain chaste in this regard until marriage. Both of these participants

reported participating in other sexual behaviors with partners such as manual sex or other stimulation through clothing to orgasm. The two other men, Oliver and Timothy, who had not participated in sexual intercourse, attributed their virginity to lack of opportunity. This status was something they described with a restrained frustration. Oliver was clearly interested in participating in sexual intercourse should the opportunity arise. He had also only had limited sexual experiences other than intercourse with other people. Timothy, on the other hand described himself as a practicing Catholic. He was ambivalent with regard to participating in sexual intercourse due to his religious beliefs. He described possibly waiting until marriage but qualified this stating that if he were to find a partner whom he loved and was in a long term committed monogamous relationship with the intention of marriage, sex with this partner would be a possibility. Another participant, Scott, a twenty-four year old black man from a lower-middle class urban background did not have sexual intercourse until the age of twenty unlike almost all other participants who were sexually active, including having had intercourse, in their teens. All of these participants described feeling different than how they perceived most of their friends. This was something to manage. Those who identified as religious were better able to articulate a positive outlook on being different than those who described feeling they were virgins primarily due to lack of opportunity.

Compartmentalization of Sex

Several women participants described deliberately imposing a separation of sexual partners and romantic partners. For example, Hannah, a white woman who grew up in the South and preferred not to identify in terms of sexuality described the difficulty

she had in explaining the context of some of her sexual interactions to her mom. In response to a question about recent sexual interactions, Hannah included the following:

> Its tough, it really is, because it's impossible for my mom to understand. It's really impossible for her to understand. She lost her virginity to my dad. I mean she's had sex with other people but he's the first one and the last one she's had sex with. So I mean this concept of, when I tried to talk with her about ... the vocabulary is difficult too. Because its like I want to tell her I'm essentially sleeping with this person, like hooking up with them, but not dating them. She can't reconcile those ideas. If I'm sleeping with someone I'm dating. We're dating. But dating means you hang out, and you talk a lot and you get to know each other but that's not what's going on. So it's really hard for her to comprehend.

Hannah's comments are indicative of an alternative cultural scenario for sexual interaction in comparison to that which they understand as one their parents adhered to. Further it deviates from sexual scripts that are dominant among some demographics of the United States that assert sex should be an expression of romantic love. This may be understood as that separation of romantic and sexual scripts that may have been imbricated in ways for her mother that they were not for her. Sexual interaction should be an extension of and expression of romantic love *not* separated. Joan, a twenty year-old heterosexual white woman who grew up in an urban area described having one partner that she consistently "hooked-up" with. When I asked her to clarify the bounds of this relationship she stated the following:

> With sexual attraction comes like the physical emotional attraction. But I think because we only hang out for sexual means. I mean if we started hanging out for other means it totally could go somewhere. We're not like let's go to a movie. We don't do that, so yeah. ... Cause I mean, I sleep with him but I date other people. So I mean I have that emotional connection with other people. Yeah. And I think that, and, its weird to say, but I sleep with him and date other people because I know he is clean. And like other people, I'm not just going sleep with everyone I date. So its like I get my sexual pleasure here but I get my emotional, like oh he took me out and he bought me flowers type thing on this side. So yeah.

Joan effectively separated her sexual interests and romantic interests. She reported being very happy with this arrangement. Joan was also very specifically motivated to do this based on her fears of contracting a sexually transmitted infection. This was not always the motivation that was described. The other motivations that were reported were limiting sexual partner count and plainly a lack of interest in the sexual partner as anything more because of personality or other attributes.

Sexual Assault and Sexual Coercion

Much to my dismay the Institutional Review Board of my university specifically and deliberately required I proactively prevent participants from speaking about sexual interactions that were not consensual including those that met the state laws regarding statutory rape regardless of the participants own assessment of the interaction. These restrictions were justifiably placed in the interest of protecting participants from a variety of potential negative impacts. I had eight interviewees specifically state that because of these restrictions as detailed on the consent form required for participation they could not answer a question at or completely, they could not discuss a topic, or whom I had to stop and remind they could not continue with what they had begun to state. This was particularly problematic for me as a researcher because I recognize sexual assault and coercion as one of the most important social problems facing United Statesculture and particularly women today. It was made clear by several participants that they too were frustrated by these restrictions. Emily, a twenty year-old, white heterosexual woman from the east coast who grew up in a close family including five siblings, when asked if she ever went to siblings to talk about sex or if siblings offered information about sexuality

replied, "I told my sister, the first time I had sex which, yeah, I told her afterwards. I can't really go into that though." I prompted asking if this was because of the restrictions described on the consent form regarding what could not be discussed. She replied, "Yes. But, yeah …" This exchange was followed by a long, emotional pause during which Emily teared up. While I made available a detailed handout of university, local, and national resources for survivors of sexual assault, this was little comfort to Emily in the interview. As I couldn't even offer Emily a compassionate ear in the context of the interview this was an extremely difficult component of the limitations of the study. It was difficult personally and emotionally as a researcher as well as an individual with intense concerns about sexual assault. Given the overwhelming majority of other participants who described their first experience with sexual intercourse as a significant milestone it is reasonable to conclude that this may too have been the case for Emily and the other young women who were not allowed to include this information in this research.

They considered these experiences to be significant in some way to their sexual history, their sexual identity, as well as their personal biography. How exactly this was the case was clearly also excluded from this research. I was determined to document at the very least the number of participants who had experiences that had to be excluded as this is crucial topic and one that needs to continue to be researched from a variety of perspectives and among all populations particularly those that are typically underrepresented in sexuality research. In sum I had eight participants, all women, who somehow indicated they were limited by the constraints of the consent form regarding what they could say during the interview. This is approximately consistent with the rates

of sexual assault that are found to occur in nationally representative samples (NVAWS 2006).

FAMILY MEMBERS

Family members were most likely to be mentioned in the context of general discussion of "healthy" relationships. Those participants with parents that were still married were typically signaled as an ideal type of relationship and one that they hoped to emulate. Siblings were discussed as important as either models for relationships or as an alternative resource to parents.

Parents

Parents or parental figures were regularly mentioned as influential for participants, sharing key values and generally shaping perspectives on sexuality. For example, those few participants whose overall attitude toward sexuality I would characterize as sex-positive largely attributed this specifically to a parent or parental figure. This included who it would be appropriate to date and when it was appropriate to be sexual. However parents rarely were described as offering any information about specific sexual behaviors. Moreover, participants often mentioned that they did not want to hear about specific sexual behaviors from their parents.

Parents that had divorced were also referenced and described as either a negative model or a lack of model of a "healthy" relationship. This indicates that participants understood often implicitly that a monogamous marriage between a man and a woman

that lasts a lifetime was the ideal type of relationship to be involved in. When siblings

were mentioned they were discussed in very similar terms when there was sufficient age

difference between the participants and the sibling such that they were understood as

adults. Family members were therefore models for romantic scripts either serving as

positive examples or lessons as to what not to do in terms or organizing relationships.

Penelope, an eighteen year-old white woman from a middle class background captured

this sentiment as experessed by others particularly well. When I asked her if her parents

served as a model for relationships she replied:

> Not necessarily. My parents were never like, well you know find a nice boy, whatever
> that kind of thing. I think the more you look at, maybe that's where movies come in,
> but that was just like, I think when you get older you realize that not every time you
> go on a vacation your going to fall in love with this beautiful boy, you know. You
> watch it because that's what you'd like, but it's just not going to happen. And I don't
> know, maybe that's why I'm kind of cynical about relationships, because I've seen
> not, I saw my parents break up. I've seen my friends with just drama drama bullshit
> like, not, it doesn't seem worth it to me.

Though she says she does not attribute her parents with serving as a model for

relationships she implies that their breaking up contributed to her cynicism about

relationships. She also expresses that movies were a contibruting factor to her notions of

romantic scripts as well.

The experience participants remembered having with parents fell into three

distinct categories. A small number of participants had very open, honest, ongoing

discussions with parents. These participants describe discussions with parents as

normalized to the extent that they were not demarcated or identifiable as a specific talk or

talks about sex-related issues. A majority of participants described having some but

limited discussion with parents about sex. For these participants talk with parents about

sexuality was a noteworthy and infrequent interaction. It was noteworthy precisely

because of its rarity and because parents made a special event of these talks. Finally, a small number of participants had no or virtually no discussion about sex with parents.

A few of the individuals I interviewed mentioned parents as being influential for them in terms of sexuality indirectly. In these cases one or two parents were described as influential in his or her role in the divorcing of the other. This was either in the infraction, such as infidelity that was attributed as the primary cause for divorce, or the behavior as a single parent after a divorce. Nora, a white, nineteen year old woman who grew up in a middle class family in the Midwest in telling how her dad found out about her having become sexually active sparked this digression

> At that point my dad and I were kind of estranged, not really but I didn't really make an effort to see him. ... after they divorced. The divorce spurred me starting to date Jake. ... I had a lot of like trust issues cause of my parents. Just like cause they had such an unhappy marriage. And when they got divorced rather than becoming more so that way I just realized like there's no point in like not dating him even if it ends badly. So I decided to start dating him.

Her parents' marriage that had ended in divorce sparked her to pursue a sexual relationship with a friend whom she had had an ongoing flirtatious friendship with for several years. She mentioned specifically that this friendship had almost turned romantic several times but she had hesitated letting that happen prior to her parents' divorce. This wasn't necessarily typical of other respondents with divorced parents but the general influence of the relationship of a participant's parents was referenced frequently. Mallory, a nineteen year-old, woman grew up middle-class in the suburbs of a major west coast city discussed her parents as having a positive influence on her notions of relationship. When I asked if they provided her with a model of a healthy relationship she replied,

Yeah. Well I mean with every relationship I see good and bad but I see a lot of good in my parents relationship. I know my parents will never get divorced. My godparents are like very close, so yeah I would say that from the beginning that's like what I've learned relationships and marriages, male and female dynamics.

While not always a positive or healthy example, many participants described learning about long term relationships from seeing their parents either success or lack thereof as being influential for their own understanding.

Siblings

Of the participants who had siblings the majority spoke of having some discussion about sexuality with their siblings. Discussion of sexuality was more likely to have occurred if the siblings were closer in age. In addition, participants described a gendered difference in the likelihood and extent of discussion about sexuality with siblings. This was true for both men and women interviewees. For example, Josh a twenty-five year-old white heterosexual man who grew up as the third child of four, and the only son, said the following when asked about discussions of sex with his three sisters:

I didn't end up talking to my, anybody in my family about sex until probably college when I started talking to my sister who is four years older than me. And she's still pretty much the only one I talk to about sex. My younger sister I'm too protective of. I have conversations with her about dating and whatnot but not explicit like, "Oh I banged this guy last night." My older sister will tell me that and I'll be like that's gross, but I could say the same thing to [her] so. I'm much more comfortable talking to her about sex and getting her take on things and whatnot.

Josh's response here is also indicative of the participants' reports that they generally tended to have more open discussion with siblings as they got older. It was more likely that open discussion began after each of the siblings had engaged in sexual intercourse rather than having reached a specific age threshold. Participants also attributed greater

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comfort discussing sexuality with siblings once one of the siblings involved no longer resided in the same home.

Older siblings in particular were sought out in times of crisis or potential crisis for help. They were often seen as a viable alternative resource when participants would have been uncomfortable seeking assistance or advice from a parent. As aforementioned, Emily, a twenty year-old woman who grew up as the youngest of six children in a middle class family on the east coast had a sexual experience as a teenager that was non-consensual. Afterward she sought out her sister for comfort and advice. "I told my sister, the first time I had sex which, yeah, I told her afterwards. I can't really go into that though." She was unable to describe the situation at any greater length because of restrictions imposed by the HRC overseeing this research. However, it was clearly a significant and negative experience for Emily and she went to her sister for help at this time.

Family Constraints on Partners

A few participants were explicitly told by family members with whom they could or could not become romantically or sexually involved. The constraints imposed were either forbidding same gender partners, disapproving of partners of a different ethnicity, or someone the family member did not approve of for reasons left unstated by the respondent. These restrictions were enforced to varying effectiveness. Significantly, only woman reported being directly and explicitly constrained in this way. Much more typical was a general sense that the approval of parents and friends was sometimes a factor in considering who might be a potential romantic partner.

With rare exception if participants referenced family members with regard to sexual scripts it was limited to one topic. This was the topic of pregnancy prevention. A significant number of participants were told to use condoms if they were to engage in sexual intercourse. Several participants were given condoms by parents though this was always a one-time occurrence within my sample. A smaller number of participants were simply told either not to get pregnant (women), or told not to get anyone pregnant (men). Of this group some were given information as to how to accomplish this, but not always.

FRIENDS

Most women described either being or having the one person in a friendship group who was seen as the primary resource for sexual information. This often correlated with sexual experience with partners but not always. Mackenzie, a twenty-four year-old white heterosexual woman relayed this in response to being asked if she talked with friends about sex:

> But I mean I was the first out of my friends to have sex. I was the first with a serious boyfriend, so it was always kind of like ... I still remember the first time I gave Cameron a blow job. And it was just like they all wanted to know how you did it and that sort of thing. Girls totally do that. Guys think that girls don't do that but they wanted *all* the details.

Having been the first within the friendship group to have engaged in this behavior she then became sought out as a resource for other friends. This was consistent with the descriptions of a number of women although several attributed friends with being the more experienced person amongst their friendship group rather than themselves.

Most women who mentioned having close friendships with men and women reported strictly dividing or constraining talk of sexuality by gender. Cassie, a nineteen

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year-old white woman who moved to a small mountain community during her first year of high school was proud of having made friends with multiple cliques ranging from, as she described them, the "dance team" who were mostly Hispanic women, the "gangs" mostly made up of Hispanic men, and the "smart kids" who were primarily white women. When asked if there was anything that wasn't talked about with friends regarding sexuality replied,

> No, not really. We talked about different types of birth control from female friends, sex positions and all the other stuff with the guys. It was a pretty free-for-all information type of thing.

So while discussion of sex altogether was a "free for all," the particular topics changed depending on the gender of the friends with whom she was speaking. Kara, a white, heterosexual woman who grew up in an upper-class family in the South, similarly described herself as a "traveler" who "had friends in every single group" or clique in her high school. Kara recalled a similar divide in sexual discussions based on gender. Her comments followed my questioning if only talked with her friends who were women about sex:

> Yeah, for the most part. I had like a few really close guy friends who I wouldn't talk about it with in detail but, you know, I would tell them when something happened. And most of them were friends who were mutual friends of my boyfriend and I; they were the ones I talked about it with. Otherwise I think people just assumed things were progressing. But I didn't really talk to my guy friends about it.

Kara's comment was indicative of responses from both gender. Men were less likely to talk specifics with women friends just as women were less likely to talk specifics with men friends.

Doctors and Medical Professionals

Very few of my participants mentioned doctors or medical health professionals as important sources of sexual information. However, even those who did not note medical professionals as having general importance subset sought out medical advice in moments of crisis such as fear of having contracted a sexually transmitted infection or options for a sexual experience that could have resulted in unplanned pregnancy. Medical professionals in these cases were the final arbiters of this crucial information often when the participant described having already consulted friends, siblings, and/or the Internet. In these cases none of these other sources of information seemed sufficient to quell the anxiety about the issue.

Teachers and School Officials

The vast majority of these participants did not describe their formal sexual education as a positive experience. This is described in greater detail and depth below in a separate section. However, of those participants that recalled having a positive experience with formal sex education, an even smaller number mentioned teachers or other school officials specifically as being a source for sexual information. This was apparently due to participants associating instructors of sexual education with their primary topic of instruction rather than specifically *sexual* education. In other words when respondents did describe the instructor that delivered the sexual education curriculum, he or she was referenced as the "science teacher" or the "gym teacher" rather than "sex ed teacher." Not one individual mentioned seeking out a school official, teacher, coach or counselor as a resource for sexual information. While a number of participants offered that they had some awareness that a school official was supposedly

available for this sort of information not one participant reported actually going to that individual for advice.

The vast majority of participants were clear that sex education was a topic that was decidedly uncomfortable to learn and to teach. Due to sexual education being a topic that few participants took seriously and that was overwhelmingly taught either dispassionately or awkwardly, the instructors were not seen as an accessible source of information for sexuality other than during the sexual education lessons.

MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Mainstream media here references established and publicly accessible movies, television, radio, and printed materials. For the past several decades, sociologists have continued to examine the role of media in sexuality socialization (Arnett 1995; Brown, Steele and Walsh-Childers 2002). The participants in this research discussed a variety of mass media as sources of information and attributed them as being influential to some degree in their learning about sexuality. As the influence of the Internet is of particular concern I address this in greater depth in the following section. Participants mentioned mainstream (non-pornographic) movies and televisions shows most frequently and as having the most influence among mainstream media sources. A number of participants also discussed books and magazines as playing a role in learning about sexuality. A small number of participants mentioned various other media sources including radio programs, music videos, and manga (Japanese style comics). Here I introduce the categories of media that were described by participants. Further discussion of each type of media is

provied in the section devoted to the influence of popular media that appears in Chapter Four.

Movies

In addition to family members, mainstream movies in particular were referenced as a model of romance and general sexual interaction. Several participants mentioned Disney movies as influencing notions of relationships and romance. For example, Angela, a nineteen year-old white woman from an upper-middle class background mentioned the following:

> That major event in my childhood has definitely effected a lot of my views about life and sex and relationships. I mean, I was always the [one who thought], when you get married it's perfect. Maybe that's a product of Disney. But growing up on a diet of *Pocahontas* and *Little Mermaid* it's hard not to think that when you get married the opposite sex disappears.

The "major event" was learning as an adolescent that her father had participated in multiple extra-marital affairs. These affairs were very upsetting for her in a number of ways including inspiring a period of several years where she described having an inability to trust men generally and a disinterest in being in a romantic relationship with a man. She had dated prior to finding out about her father's infidelity and about two years later she did begin a monogamous relationship with a young man. Jade, a twenty-four year-old, Jewish heterosexual woman also attributed Disney with influencing her early notions of romantic scripts. When asked if television shows or mainstream movies was maybe somewhere that she got ideas about how sexual interactions or how relationships should go, she replied:

> ... I mean you know when you're younger and you watch Disney movies and you watch all these love stories, and then you experience a relationship, I think it's the

first couple of relationships, the first one you have it doesn't go like that. You're like well, wait, or you get mad at the person because they're not doing what they're supposed to do which is what happens in Disney movies. And then the first boyfriend you're like well maybe he was just a fluke. Then you keep dating and dating and you're like wait a minute ... that does not happen in reality. And everything makes relationships look so easy, and it's work. It really is work. And as I've progressed with dating different guys, you just, you learn what is actually normal, not what is movie normal.

This quote from Jade well captures the sentiments of many of my participants who expressed that they had absorbed the representations of romance and relationships from Disney films and experienced a sort of disillusionment as they began to actually have interpersonal experiences.

Titanic (Cameron 1997) was the single most referenced film, and one of only a handful that respondents named specifically, in response to questions about where participants learned about sex. When discussing different aspects of how she learned about sex, Abby a twenty-year old Hispanic and Irish woman who grew up in an urban area included in a response that, "I think in general like learning what you actually like do would be from movies. Just like plain, *Titanic* or something, you know. I never like talked about it with anyone." So while she did not discuss sexual interaction with other people movies served to provide a frame of reference for sexual interaction. Another example was Angela, a twenty year-old white heterosexual woman from a very conservative family in the Midwest. She described her and her friends' intense interest in *Titanic* particularly the romantic relationship between the two main characters. We were in like second grade when that movie [*Titanic*] came out. So we were really obsessed with it. All the girls in my class were. It was. It was a great movie. Because we had to do journal entries every day. There is an entire, its a *Titanic* journal. I mean that whole entire little journal is just me pretending to be Rose. And we fought over who got to have

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Leonardo DiCaprio, who got Jack Dawson. I mean we were obsessed. And she got to see that scene [Angela herself was forbidden from seeing the sex scene in the film] and my friend told me about it. And she was like, they're in this car, and she puts her hand on the window, and he was like, "I'm trembling." And I was like, "Oooh, oh my god." And I didn't even get that. I don't even know what is going on but it was so erotic to me. I think probably I got most information just from talking." This was often the case for participants that described not discussing sex with friends, siblings, or parents. Women in particular were more likely to mention specific Hollywood movies in regard to romantic scripts.

Titanic does include what is presented as a sex scene but in terms of detail is confined to a tight shot of the protagonists from the mid-chest up; minimal detail of the interaction is actually shown. This is indicated by the movie's PG-13 rating. *Titanic* in fact appeared most commonly as a movie that was specifically named by participants in discussions of where they remember learning about sex. Given the frequency that this movie in particular was mentioned and how it was discussed it is clear that it was a reference for ideas of romance, romantic love, and the place of sex within such a relationship. The discussion of both Disney films and *Titanic* was markedly gendered as not one man that I interviewed mentioned either of these sources specifically.

Other than *Titanic* and to a lesser extent Disney films, participants mentioned various other mainstream movies specifically because they remembered seeing in the sexually explicit content in them, nudity in particular. There were several other films that participants noted specifically as making an impression on them about sexuality. Of films that were not specifically described as pornographic, a few participants, both men and

women, mentioned remembering horror films because of the sexual content in them. For example, Marion, a twenty year-old heterosexual white women described walking in on her brother watching horror movies.

> But, my brother used to watch a lot of horror movies that he wasn't allowed to watch and I would like walk in and horror movies always have these, these crazy sex scenes where people die. That was probably my first, "Oh, what are they doing?!"

None of these women discussed having sought out horror films themselves. Rather they encountered films as Marion did, accidentally, or a partner or friend initiated the viewing. Regardless, for this subset of women the sexuality contained in these horror films was something that made a distinct impression on them. Horror films have been aligned with pornography and often do contain nudity and sexual activity (Clover 1992).

Television

Participants relayed that they remembered several television shows as providing models of sexuality for them as adolescents. The television show most frequently named was *Undressed*. According to The Internet Movie Database *Undressed* originally aired on MTV from 1999-2002, and is described as a show that "examines the diverse sexual relationships involving the different genders, races, sexual orientations and fetishes of high schoolers, college students and post-college roommates" (IMDB 2011). Participants described television shows as offering general models of relationships and romance as well as appropriate expression of sexuality within relationships. However, participants overall did not report television shows as a source for information about the particulars of sexual behaviors.

Books

Quite a few participants mentioned reading books specifically about sexuality. However, surprisingly few described these as particularly significant for learning about sexuality. Nicole, a twenty-one year-old woman, grew up in a college town on the East Coast and identified as heterosexual. She specifically mentioned books as important for her learning about sexuality, "I remember reading *Are You There God? It's Me Margaret*. Thank goodness for Judy Blume. Like I listened to it on tape ... Judy Blume is great. Great." However this was atypical amongst these participants.

The most common mention of books were those that specifically addressed sexual matters. It was most typical that parents provided these books to participants. Occasionally they were also accompanied by some discussion or introduction by parents. However in many cases participants just found books placed on their shelves or left on their beds for them. For example, Oliver a twenty-two year-old man who grew up in a smaller town in the Midwest described finding books that his mother left for him. "When I hit puberty my mom went to the library, checked out all like the old 70s "your body's changing" books, and left them on my bed. And I was like, "What are these books?" And she said, 'I thought you might need them.'" This was not accompanied by any other discussion with his parents. Several participants had similar experiences where they were given books by parents but the content was not discussed. It was more common that books were not accompanied by discussion unless the topic arose prior to puberty. Parents did go through books with participatns when they were younger for example in the event that questions arose because a younger sibling was born. These participants learned or had reinforced from this that sexuality was a topic to be kept secret and not to

be discussed with their parents. It was evenly divided as to whether participants described actually reading these "recommended" books or not.

Magazines

Both men and women recalled referencing magazines as a source of information about sexuality. Women were much more likely to have mentioned magazines. It was also much more likely for women to reference magazines as playing a more significant role. Women participants specifically mentioned the magazines *Seventeen* and *Cosmopolitan* as being part of how and where they learned about sexuality. However, a few women were critical of the content of these magazines. Juliette, a nineteen year-old bisexual woman from a middle-class background mentioned *Cosmopolitan* as a source of information about sexuality. When I asked her what she thought of the content of the magazine she replied,

> Its pretty much the same and they act like, oh my gosh, oral sex is the naughtiest thing you could possibly do. <laughter> I just think they should broaden their things. Even reading it you could tell it is to a *very specific* group of women. And like I'm not even one of those women. Even with like their fashion, they'll be like oh my god what a deal a $100 purse. I'll be like, yeah, cool <sarcastic> That's like not possible at all.

Even among the white middle-class young women who are among the primary audience for *Cosmopolitan* several were critical of the sex advice as well as the expensive clothing styles that were recommended. Women who were critical of magazines included those who identified as heterosexual in addition to those who identified as bisexual or lesbian.

Music Videos

A small number of participants, all women, mentioned music and/or music videos as being part of where and how they learned about sexuality. Rap and hip-hop music videos were mentioned exclusively in this capacity. For example, I asked Katie, a twenty-two year-old woman who identified as heterosexual if there was anything else that would have been influential in how she learned about sex. She replied:

> Music videos. In particular, just ass and titties hanging out everywhere, and you know, there being one dude with three million women around him. Obviously the guy is the important one there. So objectifying women and shit like that.

Here Katie is critical of the depiction of gender roles depicted in the music videos she remembers viewing. Very few other participants mentioned music videos as a component of how they learned about sexuality. Even among those who mentioned music videos as a source of information about sexuality, they did not mention them as particularly significant.

Other Media: Comics and Radio.

One participant described reading Manga and that playing a role in her learning about sexuality. Manga comics are fairly well known as containing more sexually explicit content than is typical of comics produced in the United States. Broadly speaking they tend to reflect Japanese sexual values that are more permissive and explicit than those of United States culture. When I asked Sophie, a twenty-two year-old woman from a middle-class family in the midwest who identified as heterosexual about where she learned about sex during middle school she mentioned manga comics:

> And I got into manga, I don't know how. Something happened there and I just really got into that. And that was borderline because there were always some sexual things that did pop up in that and so I think that got me interested in the sexual ideas of it. So then I was realizing that this was a media that I could seek that out in without worrying too much about it seeming dirty.

These comics were something that Sophie could read without notice or suspicion of her parents that they contained sexual content. Though once she realized they did include a sexual component Sophie recognized this as part of what kept her interested in them.

I also had one participant mention talk radio, specifically the program *Loveline* as a key source of information about sexuality. These sources were atypical of the respondents and any conclusions regarding them should be tempered accordingly.

Pornography

Overall the vast majority of the participants in this research described having seen what they considered to be pornographic video prior to the age of eighteen. It is important to note that very few considered that having done so had a negative impact on their sexual development or their general well being either as adolescents or at the time of the interview. As a large majority of these participants accessed this content online this will be discussed at length in the chapter that addresses the Internet.

MISSING INFORMATION

From the data it became clear that there were various sexual scripts and aspects of sexual scripts that were omitted. Based on identity, background, or personal experience participants had come to realize that these topics had been glossed at various points in their lives.

Lesbian Sexual Interaction

The women I interviewed who identified as lesbian consistently spoke of mainstream media, porn, family, and sexual education in different ways than those that identified as heterosexual or bisexual. The lesbian women described being acutely aware that there was virtually no discussion of lesbian relationships or sexual interaction in their experience with media and this included virtually no depiction of lesbians in mainstream media. This also extended to the content available on the Internet.

Betsy, a twenty year-old Hispanic woman from an upper-middle class family described not having a cultural scenario of sexual interaction as reference when discussing early sexual experiences she had had:

So its almost like I could've asked for, or proceeded to do anything and it would've been acceptable as long as it was consensual, and not painful or anything like that. As long as it was within normal standards, sexual standards it was okay. No expected sexual encounter. Nothing to define it as sex either. Lesbians kind of get to decide when they've had sex and when they haven't. You know that was sex and that wasn't. Well we aren't having sex right now with what we're doing but if we do this then we are having sex. I think I like that flexibility. The absence of a doctrine, a sexual doctrine to follow.

Betsy describes this freedom to participate in a variety of behaviors without concern about failing to meet an expected model of behavior as positive. In response to this statement I asked a follow-up question as to if consent was explicitly discussed in the sexual experiences she's had. Her reply included the following:

And going back to an example. Going back to if I were a man sleeping with a woman and it was her first time. She would have to know implicitly that this is going to end, however this begins its going to end with me putting my penis in you. And there's no really consent asked for. It's assumed. ... And for lesbians there is none of that. If you're naked and kissing another person that does not give you this implied we're going to … there's just no destination, no specific destination as there would be in a lot of typical heterosexual experiences. So if you're naked and you're kissing that is all you have permission to be doing is to be naked and to be kissing. And if you decide that you want that experience to end in one of the partners being penetrated, that usually, not always but usually that has to be kind of verbally agreed to. Is it okay

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if we do this? Do you feel comfortable if we do this? Do you want us to do this? And both partners have to be okay with that. It's not implied.

For Betsy the absence of a set cultural scenario created a space where sexual interaction is consistently discussed including an ongoing discussion of consent. This also reveals that Betsy is clearly aware of the components of a cultural scenario of sexual interaction for a man and a woman. Similarly, Alice, a twenty-eight year-old woman who identified as queer similarly mentioned an absence of cultural scenarios regarding lesbians as a whole. Alice primarily began to recognize and figure out her interest in women only upon beginning at a women's college where other students were openly involved in lesbian relationships. For her this was a revelation,

> When I say I had no exposure to it, I actually mean I didn't understand women could be gay. So when I went to college that was honestly the first time that that had ever really been presented to me. Like I understood, gay male sexuality is much more deeply entrenched in media and stuff. Stereotypes, fine. But whether or not that representation is good is beside the point. You couldn't be alive at that time and not understand that men could be gay. But I literally didn't know that women could be gay.

For Alice sexual interest in women by women had simply never been a component of the range of possibilities presented to her. She went on to explain that she came to see this lack of expectation about sexual encounters with women as a very positive aspect. She explained:

> Frankly for me sex became interesting when I started sleeping with women. To this day I still find sex with men a little bit boring. You know. I don't know if it's just I have everything normative, I'm not really sure. I guess I kind of feel like, sex with men there's always a known end game. Right? We're doing this thing but ultimately we know where we're going to end up. We're going to end up at penetration and we're going to end up at male ejaculating. That's where everything is headed. Sex with women is really interesting because you fucking *never* know where that is going. Right? Sometimes you all just make out for awhile and get up and take a shower and get on with your day. Nobody comes and that's not a thing. But like even if one does think of that as the end game in queer sex, there's so many ways of getting there I feel like that make it *so* much more interesting.

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For the women in my sample who identified as lesbian or queer the lack of cultural scenarios was interpreted as an opportunity for their own creativity and self-expression. It was also discussed as a more authentic experience in comparison to what they imagined or had experienced in interactions with men. Rather than going through the motions that structured the sexual interactions of women and men they were freer to participate without pressure of fulfilling or adhering to a particular cultural scenario.

Women's Pleasure

A significant number of women specifically mentioned a lack of discussion or even acknowledgement of women's pleasure. Women's pleasure was excluded from discussions of sexual interactions with other people as well as masturbation. Women's masturbation was rarely acknowledged as a possibility. Mackenzie, a twenty-four year-old woman grew up in a communal living arrangement that was atypical for my sample in terms of open and consistent discussion of sexuality, comparatively more nudity, and sexuality generally more infused into all aspects of home life. Even for Mackenzie who was comparatively more liberal in her views on sexuality she reported women masturbating as an omitted topic. She described having a conversation with a boy who lived in this communal arrangement where she remembers first understanding he was alluding to masturbating. As she described this conversation in hindsight she realized that it was interesting that she had no frame of reference that women could also masturbate.

> Because like female masturbation was *never* something that had been even discussed in my life for some reason. My mom never really talked about it. And my godmother, who was my other like major form of sex education I don't distinctly remember her talking about it. ... I just think it might've been something that just did not come up.

Mackenzie's is only atypical in comparison to other participants in that there was open discussion about a lot of sexual topics however women's masturbation was not one of them. Other participants also reported that women's pleasure and especially masturbation was a topic that was summarily not addressed.

Women's pleasure during sexual interaction was also elided in the experience of my participants. Abby, a twenty year-old Hispanic and Irish woman who identified as heterosexual stated plainly, "I didn't, I knew what ejaculation was but I didn't know anything on the part of girls. And so, I mean, I think I sort of understood what an orgasm was but I didn't understand like what it would feel like ..." This is similar to the comments of many women who mentioned that beginning with anatomy lessons men's pleasure was at least tacitly acknowledged in that men were told they would have wet dreams. Paula, a nineteen year-old woman from a middle-class background who identified as heterosexual mentioned:

> It was in my health class when we did the diagram or whatever, and talked about like the girl's like labia and clitoris and that kind of stuff. I had never seen an actual clit in my life before a sexuality class in college. So I mean I knew what it was and I knew if you stimulated that would help with arousal and stuff, but besides that it was just kind of like, I know it's somewhere down there.

The lack of discussion of women's pleasure manifested in a number of ways. My results are consistent with past research that shows women's pleasure, sexual desire, and sexual expression is stigmatized, minimized or omitted throughout the culture (Tolman 2002).

CONCLUSIONS

Direct interaction with family, educators, and peers as well as mainstream media still serve as important sources of sexual information for people who were adolescents during the expansion of access to broadband Internet.

Parental and familial relationships were often described as serving as a model of how to, and how not to, properly organize a longer-term sexual relationship. However, participants generally indicated that parental models were not seen as necessarily applicable to their own lives during adolescence.

Participants most frequently attributed mainstream media with influencing their most general notions of sexual and romantic interaction. In other words, participants discussed mainstream media as informing what they understood to be the cultural scenarios for relationships and appropriate contexts for sexual interaction. Rather, mainstream media sources that depict participants similar in age and general appearance were more significant. This was considerably more likely to be discussed by women than men. Cultural scenarios that were informed by mainstream media included what constituted romance, the organization of romantic relationships, and the social context where appropriate sexual interaction could occur. At the levels of interpersonal and intra-psychic scripts interpersonal interaction with peers and romantic partners were attributed as having the most significance.

The Internet has increasingly played an important role as a means of learning about sexuality. The content and experience of using the Internet stands as distinct in comparison to both mainstream media and direct interaction and as a result is discussed further in the subsequent chapter.

Parents, and to a lesser extent other family members, friends as well as mainstream media, especially movies, were reported as influential in formation of cultural scenarios level of sexual scripts. Participants referenced family members while discussing relationship scripts much more frequently than sexual scripts. This included serving as reference for "healthy" relationships and to a much lesser extent of appropriate sexual interaction.

Overall Skepticism About Sexual Knowledge

Based on the interviews I conducted there is a pervasive theme of distrust and skepticism about various kinds of sexual knowledge. There was a general skepticism about a variety of topics. The most frequent example that emerged in interviews was skepticism that the pill would prevent pregnancy or generally that scientific claims about sexuality were to be believed. While the effectiveness of hormonal birth control is not 100%, (according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2011 report, *Unintended Pregnancy Prevention: Contraception*, it is 92-99% effective) this skepticism was not described in that context. Hannah who was described above as an example of a woman adamant about using condoms had this to say about the pill,

> If you're on this pill, I don't know, its just this pill, it doesn't seem worthy you know. <laughter> It doesn't seem like enough of a barrier. So that [using condoms] has been something that was second nature and just very I never questioned it. Its just something that happens.

While it certainly does make sense to use multiple forms of conraception, or barrier methods in addition contraception for a variety of reasons this statement is revealing of comments made by many participants that they had a fundamental suspicion of claims related to sexuality. She didn't give any indication that she was aware of how or why the

pill would be more or less effective depending on consistent and proper use or in comparison to other methods such as proper use of condoms. Rather there was a fundamental skepticism about the idea that a pill could accomplish preventing pregnancy.

This was similarly reflected in the above discussion of concern about sexually transmitted infections. The lack of specific knowledge about routes of transmission and the potential of particular safer sex practices to interfere with those routes of transmission consistently emerged in the discussion of participants in this research who had concerns about sexually transmitted infections.

While debates continue with a significant number of parents, government officials, and educators arguing that much sexual education should be left to parents this research shows that very often parents are not providing this information to young people. Young people themselves often understood this argument as well. Emily, a twenty-one year-old white heterosexual woman who grew up on the east coast with politically conservative parents including her two older sisters relayed this story:

> There was one really awkward moment in New York where my mom was like, she seemed almost apologetic about not telling us what sex was. She was just like I'm sorry I didn't tell but like do you want to know now? It was at a point where we already knew ... But like my mom is just like so religious that like, sex is sacred and for marriage only, so it wasn't something she was going to talk to her kids about, god forbid.

Several participants in this research were themselves unlikely to seek out information about sexual topics from their parents for a variety of reasons. While some of these parents may have been willing to discuss these topics with their kids, the kids were uninterested in having these conversations with their parents. While it is important and useful to explore why communication regarding sexuality is problematic within families the larger point here is that these conversations about sexual topics between parents and

their adolescent children are very often simply not happening. As a result, this research

shows that adolescents are turning to other sources, particularly the Internet and friends

as sexual education is regarded as insufficient or inadequate to provide much of the

information that in hindsight participants reported thinking would have been very helpful

to them.

CHAPTER FOUR

Experiences in Formal Sexual Education

In this chapter I examine the reported experiences with formal sexual education among my participants in order to assess if the information and opportunities were beneficial for them according to their own criteria. Participants were asked if they had formal sexual education, what they remembered of any sexual education they did have, if and how that was beneficial or problematic for them personally, and in hindsight if and how it could be improved. This approach is meant to step outside of political arguments over these issues and determine if and how sexual education is influencing the lived experiences of individuals on their own terms. Individuals will be influenced by the larger cultural discourse related to these topics but so often education is suggested as a solution to social problems that examining whether or not those who participate in such programs agree with that notion is important socially and sociologically.

As participants are recalling these memories (for older participants who had some initial sexual education in elementary school the earliest memories are of events as much as fifteen years prior to the interview) it is interesting to note what they still remember of the material presented to them in sexual education classes. However, while memory is imperfect its strength lies in revealing what participants took away and kept from these experiences. These accounts give an idea of what is most enduring about the content and the experience of sexual education. In addition I describe respondents' assessments of that material in retrospect. The content of sexual education curricula has been hotly

contested and has re-emerged periodically as a focus of intense debate both in local communities and as part of national policy since the late 1970s. One such period occurred in the mid 1990s around the passing of 1996 federal welfare reforms (Fields 2008) that included provisions dictating content of sexual education. More recently these debates have again emerged with the significant increases in funding for so-called abstinence-only sexual education by the Bush administration in the early 2000s (Irvine 2004). This has remained a point of contention in many venues as research has shown that these programs are ineffective based on a number of international measures of adolescent sexual health and well-being (American Academy of Pediatrics 2010). In addition, internal assessment of these programs conducted by the United States Department of Health and Human Services showed these abstinence curricula had virtually no impact on measures such as rates of participation in sexual behavior, age at first intercourse, rates of unprotected sex, knowledge of unprotected sex risks, the "consequences of STDs," perceived effectiveness of condoms and birth control pills (Trenholm et al 2007).

While policies are being intensely debated at various levels of government, sociologists have begun to document how these policies and sexual education program curricula are imprecisely translated into actual practice. As Fields (2008) details in her research, regardless of the official curriculum, the material that is taught and how it is received is influenced greatly by the instructor, the students in the class, as well as the particulars of the classroom or venue in which it is taught. So by asking young adults to assess the value, content, and usefulness of the sexual education they received this allows for a window into the sexual education for which little data, and even less qualitative data, exists. This could provide insight into ways to improve what is being taught in

sexual education programs as well as how it might be taught more effectively. The focus here is not necessarily the particulars of the content as it is how and when the content was presented and the ways that content was understood and remembered in subsequent situations by those being taught, in this case my participants who had sexual education.

PARTICIPANTS REMEMBERING SEXUAL EDUCATION

While it is important to continue the research that connects federal, state and county policies to rates of adolescents' sexually transmitted infection, unplanned pregnancies, and other concerns, this only shows part of the picture. This research has done well to demonstrate that the sexual education being taught in the United States is failing to address these concerns in comparison to European and other industrialized countries (Schalet 2000). However this research does not allow us insight into exactly how and why the United States curriculum is failing in these ways. By asking participants about what they remember from sexual education classes I offer an initial glimpse into what the takeaway messages and experiences of sexual education were for this group of young people in the United States. As these are descriptions of remembered experiences anywhere from just under two years to approximately fifteen years after the fact, depending on the age of participant during sexual education and the age at the time of interview, what is revealed is that which became a long-term memory of the experience.

Sexual education was left undefined for participants. The vast majority of participants understood sexual education as those components of school, or much less frequently church, curricula, that were specifically devoted to sexualized parts of the human body or reproductive processes of people. My initial direct question in interviews

about this topic was if the participant had sexual education growing up. Not one participant asked for further clarification what that meant. Though a number of participants clarified that sexual education was referred to by teachers or school officials as part of "health" classes. It was not described as "sexual education." For example, when I asked Yvonne, a twenty year-old white woman who identified as heterosexual, about sexual education she replied, "In like seventh grade we had "health." I never had "sex ed" I always had "health." So it was like, drugs, alcohol, diet, like hygiene, obesity and then a week or whatever of STDs and contraception." A number of respondents pointed out that any formal education that included discussion of sexual topics was within the context of "health" classes and was decidedly not referenced as sexual education.

I derived the above definition of sexual education based on responses to questions about any experience of sexual education that participants described having. I use the term "sexual education" to refer to experiences of previously described formal curriculum in a structured institutional setting such as a school or church. While this research clearly shows that participants were learning about sexuality from a variety of sources "sexual education" is used specifically to refer only to those experiences that were by design meant to teach about sexuality in a formal institutional setting such as a school or church.

The vast majority of my respondents reported having some kind of sexual education though it was often not labeled as such. Overall three primary themes emerged from the data as the most salient and significant reported memories of sexual education. First, was setting; participants described the experience of being in the situation in which sexual education was taught ranging from school wide assemblies to classes with small numbers

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of students. Second was content; participants described the topics that they remembered being taught, this was often connected with what participants described as the overall approach taken by the instructor. Specific topics that participants described included reproductive anatomy, pubertal changes, sexually transmitted infections, and options for contraception. Finally participants described topics that they remembered, or realized later, were simply not addressed.

Sexual Education Settings: You Are Being Watched

A number of my respondents remembered specifically the circumstances of the actual presentation of the material in sexual education. One common theme that emerged from the interviews I conducted was description of scrutiny from other classmates during the presentation of content. This was mentioned more so by the men in this study. Scott, a twenty-four year-old, black, heterosexual man from a working class background vividly remembered monitoring his own reactions during sexual education out of concern he would be targeted for ridicule if he did not. When asked what he remembered from sexual education in school he replied:

> I just remember like any time you even moved around a little bit, like, that asshole kid would be like, "Ha ha! Scott is excited!" And this it would be like, "No I'm not I've just been sitting here for the past twenty minutes I need to do something." It's so awkward like looking at pictures of vaginas.

Here Scott was referring to the first sexual education he received which was during the fourth grade. After approximately fifteen years since this first sexual education class the first thing Scott mentioned regarding sexual education in school was the scrutiny he felt from other kids. He did also remember some of the specific content but the feeling of being watched and evaluated by other kids was what stood out foremost in his memory of

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the experience. Similarly, Juliette, a nineteen year-old, white woman who had recently come to identify as bisexual, spoke similarly about her memory of sexual education when asked about it:

> Yes in seventh grade. They talked about the same stuff [as in her fifth grade sexual education lesson which was primarily anatomy and pubertal changes] and then they opened it up for questions. You're asking your science teacher, no one wanted to ask questions in a whole group of people.

It is unsurprising that Juliette went on to say that she remembers having questions that she wanted answers to but was unwilling to ask in her classroom environment. In response to her earlier comment I asked a follow-up question as to if she thinks she would have asked questions in a different situation. Juliette replied:

> Maybe. Cause I don't feel like I really knew anything about male anatomy. Like how does stuff interact? All of that kind of stuff. Just cause I didn't really know that much. But then also the Internet was very helpful in that. So that was more my sexual education.

Certainly this is tempered by recollection and there is no way to know if she would have actually asked a question in a different circumstance. However, presenting adolescents with a means of asking questions that does not expose them to ridicule and gossip from peers would very likely encourage or enable some students to ask some questions. The impact of social context is consistent with the reports of other participants who had sexual education in circumstances where they described feeling comfortable asking questions. These comments from Scott and Juliette are indicative of a number of respondents who described being very aware of the social context when sexual education instruction was occurring. While most comments described the social pressures as constraining questions and having a generally negative impact on the experience a few participants described instances where the context was arranged to have a positive effect.

This is described in greater detail below in the section devoted to positive experiences of sexual education. These descriptions are consistent with the conclusion of Fields (2008) who observed sexual education being taught in a number of schools. She detailed how the logistics of how sexual education was structured influenced the temperament and approach of the students she observed.

A number of my respondents also mentioned not wanting to ask questions even of friends or siblings regarding sexuality, especially questions of vocabulary, for fear of looking inept or "uncool." If adolescents are worried about these issues with friends and siblings it is not a far reach to conclude that they will have these concerns among peers and classmates as well. Juliette's comment also further illustrates the claim that the Internet is often where young people went for information that they could not or did not think they could get from formal sexual education and/or parents.

SEXUAL EDUCATION CONTENT: "PRIVATES, PREGNANCY, PATHOLOGIES, AND PRETENDING"

Of the content that participants recounted about the sexual education they had the predominant topics mentioned were sexual anatomy, sexually transmitted infections, birth control methods particularly condoms, pregnancy, and morality exercises. Of the variety of lessons and approaches taken participants indicated they most clearly remembered the images and videos shown. In particular images of symptoms of sexually transmitted infections were by far the most commonly reported by participants. These images were also reported as being vividly remembered. In terms of videos, many participants described vividly remembering the content of video of a live birth. Several

participants also described clearly remembering morality exercises that were a component of their sexual education experience. However, within each of these topics there was a variety of content that stayed with participants and a variety of ways that participants understood, evaluated and contextualized the information. Patterns in the understanding and interpretation of content emerged as well. Overwhelmingly my interview participants remembered fear as the most prominent message conveyed either overtly or implicitly.

Privates

Anatomy

The vast majority of participants, when asked if they had sexual education, described some formal discussion of sexual anatomy during late elementary school, most commonly fourth or fifth grade. Participants described the content of this sexual education as discussion of reproductive biology and physical changes that would accompany puberty. Katie, a twenty-two year-old woman who identified as heterosexual described her first encounter with sexual education as follows:

> I remember we started in the fifth grade and that was on the West Coast. And so we learned a little bit there which was like, you know you learn about how your body changes and like puberty and stuff like that. Not so much like sex, most all they gave you at that point particularly in that state, was this is how your body is going to change. You may start to notice boys and stupid little politically correct things.

Katie's comment is indicative of participants who were much more likely to discuss early sexual education matter-of-factly. Participants frequently qualified these lessons on anatomy with clauses such as "just," indicating they didn't consider it particularly significant content. In comparison to sexual education that participants typically received

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later that addressed topics such as contraception, pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. A number of participants were critical of this component of their sexual education as well but this was a much smaller proportion than those who were critical of later sexual education that dealt with other aspects of sexuality.

Pregnancy

Birth Videos

A significant number of participants reported clearly remembering being shown a video of a woman giving birth assisted by a doctor. This was the most frequent subject of a video that was reported as being shown. This video was almost always shown in the context of invoking fear at the possibility of becoming pregnant. Participants variously recalled this being part of an abstinence-only curriculum as well as part of more comprehensive curricula. Participants described being clear that the point of the video was to show the pain and trauma that would be associated with birth. This was meant to make them fearful of the pain they would face if they participated in sexual behavior that could result in pregnancy. Abby, a Hispanic twenty-year-old woman who grew up in an urban setting in a middle class family offered this description of what she remembered about the video of birth:

> And they showed the baby coming out. And you're like, "Oh my god." ... I mean it was, "You're going to get pregnant and this is what pregnancy's like." And then the woman is like screaming in her stirrups. Yeah. Fun fun fun (sarcastically).

Abby is less direct and more sarcastic in her evaluation of the video but is still clear that the video was meant to be shocking and dissuasive of sexual behavior. Molly, a nineteen year-old white woman who identified as heterosexual and had been in sexual education in

the South was more direct. She described the birth video as follows,

> They are very informative. *Very*. So in the seventh grade, no wait, yes, in the seventh grade we saw a baby being born. *Traumatic*. Zoom in on a lady with her legs open and the doctor reaches his hand and yanks the head out before it was even all the way out.

This video was shown in the context of sexual education content that Molly remembered as intended to scare her and her peers into avoiding sexual behavior. Several men also reported seeing the video of birth as part of sexual education. However they did not discuss this in as much detail or comment on the implications of the video in the context of any larger messages being conveyed. Men primarily described the birth video as similarly unappealing. Jack, a twenty-two year-old white man who grew up on the East Coast and identified as heterosexual mentioned the following in his description of sexual education, "I mean, we saw obviously the giving birth video, you know what happens the beauty of it, blah blah blah blood all over the place. Just nasty shit. Saw a lot of videos like that. ... That was upsetting, that was really upsetting." His comments were indicative of the other men who reported having seen video of a birth.

Altogether the descriptions of participants regarding how the video of birth was presented indicated to both men and women that it was women who should primarily be concerned with pregnancy. This reinforces the notion that birth control and safer sex practices with regard to pregnancy are the responsibility of women. This perpetuates this inequality and places young women in the position of bearing the burden of obtaining, paying for, and using birth control.

Safer Sex - Barriers and Birth Control

The vast majority of participants described being at least told about some form of

safer sex method. The safer sex option most commonly mentioned by my participants was use of condoms. This discussion ranged from actually being given condoms in a classroom setting and being asked to put them onto a banana or similarly shaped vegetable to a brief mention that condoms existed as a possible option for safer sex. Only two participants reported seeing a video of how to properly put on a condom. Several participants reported being told what a condom was and how to put a condom on. Another subset of participants reported actually putting a condom on an object such as a banana. Finally, a number of respondents were clear that they were neither told nor shown how to properly use a condom.

The majority of women who participated in this research described being on hormonal birth control and all but one on hormonal birth control mentioned being specifically on oral contraception. However, overwhelmingly the women who reported being on hormonal birth control as adolescents attributed the motivation for beginning this as *not* related to pregnancy prevention. Women reported starting oral contraception to alleviate symptoms of menstruation or to help to diminish symptoms of acne. These women reported genuinely being motivated by these other factors but then also acknowledging that oral contraception ended up playing a role in pregnancy prevention at some point during adolescence. Even for women who described having parents that were minimally or completely unwilling to discuss sexual topics with them sometimes including menstruation, they were able to discuss birth control with regard to another reason it might be prescribed. Being able to attribute oral contraceptives to reasons other than pregnancy prevention allowed for a number of participants to also gain this benefit when they would not otherwise have sought it out.

Several women reported being prescribed or seeking out oral contraception themselves because parents would understand it as indicative of sexual activity regardless of other effects. Joan, a twenty year-old, white heterosexual woman who grew up working-class in an interracial family described being prescribed birth control by her doctor:

> Yeah, I actually got on birth control in high school because of menstrual cramps, not for preventive measures. I had like really really bad cramps and I thought I was anemic cause I used to pass out. So I went to the doctor and she said that birth control would help. That's when I got on it. I started talking to my doctor about it, not my mom. Because I was like, my mom would be like, "You want to be on birth control because you're having sex? No."

Joan's comments are indicative of many of the women in this research. Parents were often willing to facilitate their daughters being on hormonal birth control to keep them from getting pregnant but unwilling to acknowledge that their daughters might be having sex. The women who reported seeking out or getting a prescription for birth control without their parents' knowledge had these medical resources available to them. All of these women subsequently became sexually active while in high school. These women described how being on birth control was instrumental in insuring their intention to not become pregnant.

Pathologies

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Overwhelmingly participants described remembering sexually transmitted infections discussed as a component of their sexual education. The vast majority of those who reported being taught about sexually transmitted infections were shown images of people experiencing symptoms of sexually transmitted infections. For example, Abby, a

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twenty year-old, Hispanic woman who grew up in a middle-class home in the heart of a Midwest city after describing seeing images of "actual gonorrhea and herpes" said the following in response to a follow-up question where I asked if her sexual education included discussion of condoms, "I mean they talked about condoms. They said that there was going to be another class where they teach you how to use a condom, but they never did." It is certainly possible that another class was taught that addressed how to put on condoms but that Abby somehow did not attend it. She went on to say, "I know they have to show the repercussions of sex and stuff like that, I mean what you can get. It definitely outweighs the like, "What if you decide to have sex kind of thing?" You don't remember that." Ultimately though by not connecting the use of barrier methods to these symptoms what this meant for Abby was that she should be fearful of potentially contracting an sexually transmitted infection or getting pregnant but with little information, at least from sexual education, as to how to go about avoiding these things. Marion, a white, middle class, heterosexual twenty-two year-old woman talked about clearly remembering seeing the "STD slideshow" during sexual education. Marion had become sexually actively during her sophomore year of high school within a monogamous relationship that lasted two years, and then had become involved in a couple of shorter relationships during college. Later in the interview she described this situation:

> Or like when I started having sex with Rick, the third guy, I never had to put a condom on a guy before, Cameron had always done it before. So that was kind of embarrassing. Like I just did not know like what to do at all. But since I'd known him for so long it just didn't seem. I was just like, "Yeah I've never put a condom on a guy before" so it just didn't really matter.

Admittedly this was six years later but this is significant in that she did remember the sexually transmitted infection slideshow but not how to actually use a condom. This

reflects how the separation of young people by gender bifurcates the relevance of the content, which is taught in terms of applicability, and relevance. Almost all participants reported an initial sexual education experience in elementary school that was focused on pubertal bodily changes and hygiene where students were separated by gender. While later sexual education classes were almost never separated by gender several participants described only some of the content being relevant to them due to their gender. In other words, some women only recognized as relevant that content of sexual education that was specifically about women, such as hormonal birth control or was gender neutral (such as sexually transmitted infections).

This is also somewhat supported broadly by the recent data showing that adolescents in the United States are contracting a number of sexually transmitted infections at rates higher than other developed countries (Panchaud et al 2000; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2009). Even if other information was presented many of my respondents really only remembered seeing the actual images and being told overall to either avoid sex or that condoms would help prevent contracting sexually transmitted infections. It may be considered effective that the images of people experiencing symptoms of sexually transmitted infections and the video of birth made enough of an impression to be sometimes vividly remembered a decade later. However it is clear from survey research that these media are at best temporarily delaying sexual activity among young people and are either not including ways to prevent transmission, which was sometimes the case according to my participants, or not convincing students to use preventative measures (Herbenick et al 2010). By reducing discussion of sexually transmitted infections to disturbing images and vivid descriptions of symptoms this did

achieve at least some temporary fear of sex. However most participants also reported that this left them woefully unprepared and uniformed as to actual risks regarding sexually transmitted infections. Respondents felt they were taught little other than using condoms would prevent sexually transmitted infections. In terms of making responsible decisions regarding safer sex and in what ways barrier methods could be used to interrupt routes of transmission respondents who later learned about these topics elsewhere were sometimes aghast at what they learned in sexual education.

Numerous respondents relayed their vivid recollection of the horrific images of sexually transmitted infection symptoms and then discuss not using barrier methods soon after when having initial sexual experiences. There was a common disconnect between the fear effectively instilled in a number of my respondents regarding sexually transmitted infections and the consistent use of barrier methods that would interrupt routes of transmission. However, there were a small number of participants, young women in particular, who described being adamant about using barrier methods. Interestingly though of these women most reported concerns with pregnancy as the reason for using barrier methods rather than practicing safer sex with regard to sexually transmitted infections. When I further discussed with Joan, the twenty year-old white woman that grew up lower class in an interracial family, if she used safer sex practices she replies as follows, speaking about any potential new sexual partner,

> I'm one of those people [for whom] the world is disgusting. I don't know what's out there. "Have you been tested? Do you have this? Do you have this?" I ask, I'm like very adamant about asking how many other partners they've had. And a lot of guys are like, "Why does it matter?" I don't care who you slept with but I want to know like if the [people they had sex with] have anything, so yeah. I'm definitely like for condoms, contraceptives. Yeah.

She went on to explain how and when she started using the pill as birth control. I asked a follow-up question specifically about barrier methods, Joan replied, "I'm worried about pregnancy. That's weird too because I'm like, "Oh, I could get stuff [sexually transmitted infections]" but then I'm like "not barrier methods." I think it's mostly pregnancy though." Here Joan is precisely modeling panic discourse with regard to sexually transmitted infections. Panic discourse focuses on categories of infected people and the moral meaning of contracting an sexually transmitted infections in contrast to epidemiological discourse that focuses on risks and interrupting routes of transmission (Schneider and Jenness 1995).

In contrast I talked with Hannah, a twenty-two year-old white woman who grew up in the south about what she discussed with friends regarding sexuality and if safer sex practices were among the topics her friends, she offered the following:

> You know, it's never really something I've talked to them about. It's just something I took for granted. I just always assumed that everyone is using condoms. Like, duh who wouldn't do that? Because I've always been so *freaky* about it, like just *intense* about it. And, I guess I just assumed that everyone was the same way so I've never really talked to them about it.

Hannah's remarks are interesting here because she was the one participant who described never having had any formal sexual education of any kind. However participants were overwhelming concerned with the implications of sexually transmitted infections not because of health concerns but because it would be and was understood as severely stigmatizing. Further, contracting a chronic sexually transmitted infection was understood would quite literally mean the end of sexual interaction with other people.

Not one of my participants mentioned remembering a specific fact or piece of data such as rate of infection, routes of transmission, or unintended pregnancy rate, from

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sexual education. When asked open-ended questions of what they remembered from sexual education participants spoke in broad terms and generalities. As participants were describing sometimes-distant memories this is somewhat understandable. Although it is possible to imagine a program of sexual education where exposure versus infection rates of sexually transmitted infections would be memorized as are multiplication tables.

Sexually Transmitted Infections and the Slut

The approach to sexually transmitted infections taken in most sexual education as described by my participants fed into the slut paradigm that is still applied to many young women in schools. The emphasis on sexually transmitted infections as a result of number of partners rather than actual routes of transmission and exposure versus infection ratios was transformed by young people into meaning that a young woman who had had the slut label applied to her was also necessarily "contaminated" with some sort of sexually transmitted infection. I asked Abby, a twenty year-old woman who identified as heterosexual, if there was anything she knew now about sex that she wished she had known earlier. She replied it would have been helpful if she and others during high school were taught more about sexually transmitted infections. She explained why this would have been helpful:

> Because there will always be talk of that one girl who has Chlamydia. It was always a girl. It was never a guy. Who you know, rumors around school would be she had herpes or something and then everyone would make fun of it. But you know it could be just because she had a canker sore. I wish more people would understand that.

I prompted further to ask if the slut stigma operated in her high school or if women were targeted for ridicule based on rumors of having sexually transmitted infections. Abby went on to explain that these were not separate issues, "It was definitely "slut" and once

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you were called the slut, then you obviously had herpes. There was no question about that." Abby described that rumors that a woman had a sexually transmitted infection were enough to also cast her as a slut. This process also apparently operated in the other direction whereby if a woman was labeled a slut she was also assumed to have a sexually transmitted infection. Thus these labels served to reinforce one another and amplify the power of the stigmatized identity. In Abby's experience being labeled a slut also implied that a woman had a sexually transmitted infection and this provided further fuel to ridicule and generally treat a young woman to whom this label had been applied poorly. Abby attributed her peers' ignorance about sexually transmitted infections with contributing to the conflation of these two stigmatizing labels. While only two other women described similar experiences this is an interesting development with regard to the slut stigma women face (Tanenbaum 1999).

Pretending

Morality Lessons

Several participants described clear memories of exercises and demonstrations that they understood were meant to convey values and morality of sexual experiences. For example, Josh, a twenty-five year-old, white heterosexual man who grew up in a middle-upper class family discussed a demonstration in sexual education that involved symbolizing sexual experience as a gift:

> I remember them doing this exercise where they would pass around a present that was fully wrapped and they said all right everybody grab a piece, and everybody takes a piece back. And then one has another box that's fully wrapped. If you wait till your marriage this is what you're like [fully wrapped present], if you don't wait until marriage this is what you're like [present with torn wrapping]. Which would you want to be? And I remember being like, well gift wrap is really fun but it just gets in

the way of the gift so I almost would rather that one [present with torn wrapping]. So I saw completely past the whole exercise and the point of it. ... I look back at that, I *hated* that shit.

Josh reported resenting the lesson at the time it was taught and his resentment only increasing in intensity since that time. He saw the exercise as disingenuous and detached from the experiences of young people that were happening around him. Josh's discussion of the point of this demonstration also reinforces that the intended goal is not always what students of any age actually learn. Other participants who reported remembering similar demonstrations were not as displeased as Josh, although they did generally find these lessons to be contrived and oversimplified.

Images and Videos

The vast majority of the participants in this research described images or video from sexual education as the aspects of the content that they most clearly remembered or often as primarily what they remembered. As detailed above, participants described remembering the videos of birthing, as well as the slides of sexually transmitted infections, during sexual education. However, other participants described other videos as well as what they remembered of sexual education. As this research demonstrates that a significant number of participants clearly remembered the content of the images and videos shown this could be useful for development of other instructional materials. For example, the two participants that described seeing a video of how to put on a condom indicate that proper safer sex practices could perhaps be better demonstrated via images or videos.

Evaluation of Sexual Education Content

Many participants described remembering their experiences with sexual education in negative terms including it being irrelevant or alienating. A smaller number of participants described remembering their experience of sexual education in very positive terms. Those that reported having positive assessments of their sexual education were much more likely to have had an atypical sexual education in comparison to the majority of the respondents involved in this research.

Irrelevant

Those respondents who described sexual education as irrelevant attributed this either to the timing or the content. The timing of sexual education is well known and acknowledged. Indeed Luker (2006) found that timing is one of the key issues of sexual education that is debated by parents and public officials. The concern is that if taught too early it will encourage sexual exploration and if taught too late the opportunity to prevent unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, or sexual exploration itself will have past. This proved to be the case but not in the way one might imagine. For my participants sexual education that was presented too early was primarily dismissed as a waste of time. As they remembered not yet feeling sexual or ready to be involved in sexual encounters the information was not personally relevant and so was largely ignored.

Several of my participants specifically avoided at least part of the sexual education curriculum, specifically the presentation of images of people with sexually transmitted

infections, because they had heard about it from others, felt they understood the point, and simply did not feel it necessary to endure the actual images themselves. Marion, a white twenty-two year-old heterosexual woman purposely avoided the slides of people experiencing symptoms of sexually transmitted infections. When I asked if she had sexual education at all she replied:

> Um hm (affirmatively) I purposely took a sick day to avoid the STD video. ... Yeah, I just heard about it and was like, "It'll probably make me puke up my breakfast." So my mom called in for me that I was sick. I just feel like I didn't need to see it. Waste of class in watching that. We had already learned about all the STDs. I just didn't feel it was necessary to look at them.

Similarly, Abby, a Hispanic twenty year-old, heterosexual woman also reported many of her peers not attending sexual education.

> So I mean it [sexual education] was in the gym. It was during gym hours. So many kids didn't even go. I went cause I liked gym. But, yeah it was just ridiculous.

My participants described being quite aware that the slides or videos of symptoms of sexually transmitted infection as well as the video of birth were intended to dissuade them from participating in sexual activity. However, only two men and six women mentioned any component of sexual education that included relationships, communicating with partners, strategies for negotiating sexual behaviors, or otherwise preventing coercive sexual interactions. A few participants described this point being very overtly driven home by the format of the sexual education instruction.

Alienating

Of my research participants, those who identified as gay, lesbian and bisexual describe feeling alienated and excluded from the sexual education they received. Very few of any of the interviewees, and none of the participants who identified as gay, lesbian

or bisexual had sexual education that acknowledged same gender sexual experiences. Betsy, a Hispanic, twenty year-old lesbian had sexual education during several years of school. She had this to say about her recollection of the experience, "Maybe just because I was aware that I was gay at the time, I'm not sure, but I just thought it was all stupid. And then I just thought this is the stupidest thing I can't believe they're teaching us this crap." More directly when I asked Betsy if her awareness of her sexual identity at the time of sex education influenced her interpretation of it she stated, "Yeah. I think it did change because none of it seemed to apply to me." Betsy was summarily excluded from the sexual education she received other than the earliest lessons where girls and boys were divided by gender and spoken to about anatomy. Betsy talked about always having an awareness of interest in women and identifying as gay as early as fourth grade; so when sexual education lessons began in her school she was quite clear that none of the discussion applied to her. She spoke cynically and derisively of the content, understandable given that it was not acknowledging her identity or possible sexual experience. While her experience was not indicative of other participants she was also different in that she described awareness of her sexual identity much earlier than the other women in the sample who identified as bisexual, queer or preferred not to identify. However this indicates that future research that was able to include more participants who identified as other than heterosexual would be well justified.

Positive Experiences of Formal Sexual Education

In contrast several participants described circumstances sexual education that the participants remembered as being particularly helpful. As these environments were also

associated with more comprehensive sexual education curricula we cannot attribute these differences entirely to the role of the environment. However these few cases do serve as important demonstrations that sexual education can be done in a way that is standardized, supervised, and remembered as being useful and helpful by the participants themselves even as adolescents. One program that two women participated in is the Our Whole Lives (OWL) program developed and published by the Unitarian Universalist Association. Nicole, a twenty-one year-old white woman who identified as heterosexual described her experience in the OWL program. When I followed up by asking if she found the program helpful she replied, "I think it was really helpful I know I mean I got some sort of personal information from my parents as well and I think that … think it was helpful that I never once in my childhood remember any sort of abstinence only message being directed at me." Nicole had since become a peer sex educator at her university and throughout the interview would mention the misinformation among her peers that she dealt with in her role as a peer educator. Both participants who had participated in OWL found this curriculum to have been very beneficial and empowering.

The only other arrangement for teaching about sexuality that stood out as particularly helpful and effective was unique to a particular alternative school attended by one of my participants. In this case students were grouped in small numbers and regularly met with a guidance counselor to discuss all kinds of concerns often including sexual topics. Mackenzie, a twenty-four year-old woman who grew up middle-class and described herself as heterosexual but questioning her sexuality, described it this way:

> My high school offered a woman's group that met once a week. And we got out of class for it and we'd sit down and talk about sex. We'd talk about our partners and our relationships and what was happening and like where to go if we needed something and they'd pass out on condoms at the end of the meeting. And it was

totally great. It was totally great. I don't know if they do that at my high school anymore. But it was totally great. It was very helpful. And that's where I got a lot of my information actually.

This arrangement leverages the comfort and reliance on friends that most of my respondents reported but includes an authority figure. While this would require the personnel and space to be able to offer this, it is still useful as a demonstration that sexual education can be somewhat individually tailored, relevant and helpful for adolescents, and also remain supervised and somewhat regulated. Mackenzie went on to describe sexual education that was much more cumulative than the vast majority of my other participants. It is worth quoting at length:

> I did have sexual education at [my] middle school. They put out a little box. And you could write questions down and put questions in the box. ... Actually the high school I [later] went to, came and taught us about sexual education when we were in middle school. They had a group of kids that came through that were volunteers through the high school. And they would come through and teach us about that kind of thing. So we put condoms on cucumbers, talked about different kinds of birth control methods and that we were too young to be having sex but here's the methods just in case. And yeah, the teachers and we had question and answer sessions and stuff like that.
>
> It was every other week we would go to homeroom and meet and ask questions. I think it was just like, "Okay, we need to do sexual education." I don't really remember.

It is interesting that this Mackenzie remembers her sexual education as uneventful in stark comparison to most other participants. In contrast to the descriptions of situations where participants remembered primarily the potential or actual embarrassment or discomfort at participating in sexual education Mackenzie describes primarily the actual content of the discussion.

DISCUSSION

My research regarding sexual education supports the research conducted by Fields

(2008) showing that the micro dynamics of the classroom have a significant impact on the outcome of sexual education. When taught in an environment where discussion and questions are encouraged and steps are taken to ensure no one is singled out can improve the ability of students to focus on content. In contrast, in classrooms where little to no discussion is allowed and an atmosphere of sex negativity prevails, it is more conducive to creating an environment where kids who may be feeling awkwardness or other emotions could be teased or bullied.

As these results are not generalizable the rate at which these different means of using condoms cannot be extrapolated to a broader population but they do show that almost participants remembered either being shown or not how to use condoms. This strongly indicates that adolescents are aware that condoms are a component of young adult life that is relevant enough to have endured as a memory of sometimes long ago sexual education.

The few positive experiences with formal sexual education are not necessarily generalizable but are useful as examples that it is possible to provide sexual education to young people that they may later remember as relevant, helpful and informative. Overall my participants reported sexual education being ill timed, incomplete, or otherwise inadequate. Oftentimes sexual education raised more questions for participants than it answered. Participants also remembered being aware even as adolescents that the curriculum was designed more to scare them into not having sex more than it was to actually educate them. Given that participants often understood this was the overall approach this bred an attitude where they did not take the content seriously or questioned the veracity of the claims being made. Instead of presenting adolescents with accurate

information about risks and how to responsibly make decisions that would be positive for them adolescents were told a bit about sexually transmitted infections, sometimes contraception, and sexual anatomy. Overall participants did not find their experiences in formal sexual education settings to be helpful. As a result they often turned to other resources for information that would fill the gaps left by their sexual education experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

Learning About Sex from the Internet

Recent sociological research strongly indicates that high-speed Internet and Web 2.0 technologies are and have been significantly impacting the social lives, identities, relationships, and experiences of embodiment of those that have access to them (Shapiro 2010). The impacts of these technologies are often most pronounced among adolescents who are more likely to be early adopters. In addition early adopters of technologies are more likely to experiment with changes in identity and behaviors including in intimate aspects of their lives (Buckingham 2008; Ito et al 2008). Therefore the influence of the Internet served as a "sensitizing concept" (Blumer 1954:7) in creating and conducting this research. As a result, this chapter is an extended discussion of the use of the Internet by research participants to seek out sexual information and pornography.

This chapter focuses on the details regarding what kinds of sexual content participants described seeking out on the Internet. I use the term sexual content to include anything understood as sexual in nature by participants. Participants reported seeking out two categories of sexual content. First, participants described seeking out content that was related to sexual health. I refer to this content specifically as information through this chapter. This information was typically text based, however images or video were sometimes mentioned. This primarily included information about sexual anatomy as well as information about sexually transmitted infections. Second, participants described seeking out sexual content that I categorize as pornographic. Pornography is notoriously

difficult to define precisely and in the abstract (Winks and Semans 2002). While pornography is often used to refer specifically to content that includes graphic depiction of genitals and penetration I define the term differently. Drawing upon my participants responses as well as for convenience and clarity, I use pornography to refer to images, video (with or without sound), or written content that is intended to cause arousal. This includes depiction of people in sexualized positions, in revealing clothing, naked, and/or engaging in behaviors widely understood as sexual. Participants typically did not make distinctions such as "hard-core" "soft-core" or similar distinctions and as a result I typically do not do so in analysis of this data. Therefore I use pornography as an umbrella category. It allows for discussion that participants referred to as explicit but did not distinguish further. The lack of distinction between sexually explicit mainstream content, soft core, hard core or similar distinctions indicates that these boundaries are no more clearly established now than they were during the Meese Commission (Winks and Semans 2002). Health-related information and pornography were consistently the two primary types of sexual content participants described seeking out on the Internet. After discussing the variety of topics and types of use of these different kinds of sexual content on the Internet I conclude the chapter with discussion of similarities and differences among and across groups.

INTERNET INFORMATION RELATED TO SEXUAL HEALTH

In terms of sexual health information participants overwhelmingly sought out information on three particular topics. First, participants went to the Internet to learn more about sexual anatomy. Second, participants looked to the Internet to find more

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information about sexually transmitted infections. Third, participants sought out

information about contraception. There were not mutually exclusive topics as many

participants would report seeking out information on the Internet about all three or some

combination of two. A large majority, fourty-four of fifty-one participants, described

consulting the Internet at some point for sexual health information. Men and women that

identified as heterosexual as well as women that identified as lesbian, queer or bisexual

all described having looked up something related to sexual health on the Internet.

However, none of the men in my sample described looking up anything related to sexual

anatomy with regard to health on the Internet. Proportionally more women reported

seeking out information on sexually transmitted infections as well as contraception.

Anatomy

Anatomy was a primary component of sexual health information that participants

described seeking out on the Internet. Rita, a twenty year-old woman who identified as

heterosexual and grew up in a middle-class household where discussion of sexuality was

summarily unacceptable, offered the following when asked if she ever looked up

anything about sex on the Internet:

> I don't even know how to explain it. I always thought that possibly I maybe had a
> yeast infection. Possibly, but I never did. It was just natural to have that amount of
> moisture I guess, so that was pretty much the only thing that I had looked up. And
> that was the question I asked my friend as well in high school. It was from then on
> that I guess that that's something that I was always self-conscious about, always with
> guys I never want them in my pants because I was like, "Is that normal?" I didn't
> know if it was okay to be that wet down there. That was pretty much the only thing I
> looked up.

Though Rita had asked a friend in high school she also consulted the Internet about the

same topic. This issue was one Rita was clearly very shy about discussing such that I

reminded her as she contemplated before answering that she did not have to discuss

anything she felt uncomfortable talking about. Rita's response is indicative of the use of

the Internet for further information or reassurance about information that participants

accessed elsewhere. Rita's comment is also indicative of how participants would use the

Internet to find out information that they thought was particularly sensitive or potentially

embarrassing.

Cleo, an eighteen year-old white woman from an upper-middle class family who

identified as heterosexual described learning about menstruation in sexual education but

also online. In the context of a discussion about another topic she recalled that the

Internet was a resource for her in terms of information about sexual anatomy:

> Online. There's like beinggirl dot com. It's Tampax's website. They would tell us,
> they gave us something in either elementary school or middle school. It was
> something with beinggirl.com, you can go there and check it out. There's a lot of stuff
> on that website. I actually did learn a lot of stuff, it was less about sex, more about
> menstrual stuff.

Cleo's experience was notable as the only other participants who described being sent to

the Internet for sexual health information did so within the context of an alternative

sexual education curriculum. It would be interesting for future research to include

investigating the extent of efforts such as this and what sort of content is available on

these websites.

The experiences of Rita and Cleo were typical of many other women in that they

found information about their bodies online. A sizable majority of participants described

having formal sexual education that addressed sexual anatomy including pubertal

changes. Women very often specifically mentioned formal sexual education that went

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over menstruation. However, a sizable group of women participants still consulted the Internet with questions about sexual anatomy.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Within the category of sexual health information about sexually transmitted infections was another frequently referenced topic that participants looked up information about online. Hannah, a twenty-two year-old woman who preferred to leave her sexuality unidentified grew up middle-class in the rural South. She reported having had no sexual education other than some discussion of sexual anatomy in elementary school. When I asked if she had ever used the Internet as a resource for sexual health information she replied:

> Yes. Oh yeah. Which I've actually discovered might be the worst thing to do. Because especially in terms of STDs its just this big fucking scare-fest to freak you out. And when my friend got herpes, I went online and tried to figure out a bunch of stuff. They've got some legit info on there for sure but you've got to sift through a bunch of shit to get to it.

Hannah was eventually able to find information that she thought was useful but for her it was problematic that accurate, honest information wasn't made obvious as she searched on the Internet for information about herpes. In this case Hannah's friend had been diagnosed with herpes and Hannah was hoping to learn more about it because her friend's experience had been "a wake-up call" within their peer group when this happened. This was typical of participants who had been diagnosed or had a friend or sexual partner who had been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection. Comparably, Whitney, a nineteen year-old woman grew up middle-class in the suburbs of a major Midwest city.

After discussing how she and friends had viewed pornography on the Internet I asked if she had ever gone to the Internet to look up accurate information about sex. She replied:

> Yeah. Like STD information. Sexual health information like using condoms and birth control info. And stuff about that, health stuff, definitely. The Internet has been a very good source of education and accurate information, I think.

Whitney described the Internet being useful as a resource for sexual health information that was available when she needed to look up that information. She had more comprehensive sexual education earlier but described feeling that at that time the content did not apply to her. Whitney also had friends with whom she felt she could discuss sexual topics to some extent. The Internet served as a timely and alternative resource to the others she had available.

In the cases where it was friends that had been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection, participants wanted to learn what the potential implications of having contracted that infection were in order to provide support. If the participant herself had been diagnosed she wanted to learn to manage the condition. If a partner or former partner had been diagnosed participants wanted to learn risks of having contracted it themselves as well as to gauge how to respond.

Contraception

Cassie, a nineteen year-old heterosexual white woman who was raised in an upper-middle class family described researching options for contraception online. She described being the first of her friendship group to have started using "birth control." In response to a follow-up question Cassie described her experience getting hormonal birth control in a rural town in the Midwest:

And I'm very careful and calculated about everything. So I did a lot of research on my own before we went to Planned Parenthood. ... And they didn't even ask me what kind of birth control I wanted. They just gave me a prescription for the pill. And I was like actually no, I've thought about this a lot and I would really like the patch. And they were like, "Oh we already called in a prescription." And I was like, "Well I know what I'm talking about."

I asked where she had done her research, to which she replied, "Online mostly. All the teen health websites and stuff like that." While Cassie was unusual in being so outspoken in terms of the type of birth control she wanted, she was similar to other women who research birth control online either prior to starting it or to find out other options or more about it while taking it. Similarly, Katie, a twenty-two year-old woman from a middle-class background who identified as heterosexual and had split her time growing up between the West Coast and the South described looking up information about sex on the Internet:

And as soon as we learned about sex and all that, and as soon as it really started to cross my mind as something I might be interested in, I started researching online everything I could possibly find. Like bad things that happen because of sex, STDs, pregnancy, so birth control, ectopic pregnancy. Everything that could possibly result from sex I wanted to know about. So I became this well of information. My friends would come to me and ask, "Could I get pregnant from this?"

Katie's response includes the primary topics that emerged as by far the most common mentioned by participants including concerns about pregnancy and contraception.. Further, Katie mentions that her friends sought her out as a resource because of the research she had done online. This suggests that this information was in high demand among her friends. The key piece was having a source, in this case a peer, who was knowledgeable and willing to relay this information. The reinforces the earlier discussion of peers as potentially important resources with regard to sexual information because of their relative accessibility.

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Emergency contraception was another topic that both men and women described seeking out information about on the Internet. Trudi, a twenty-two year-old white woman who identified as heterosexual and grew up in a small town in a Rocky Mountain state described having a crisis where her and her partner at the time went to the Internet to find information about emergency contraception:

> I had a condom break. On my birthday! I hate my birthday, I always have the worst luck. It was my eighteenth birthday and me and my boyfriend went online immediately. and we looked it up, and then found a service when doctors around the country would call in a prescription for you without seeing you in person
> some doctor in Ohio called it in to my local pharmacy

This instance that Trudi describes was typical of those participants who sought out information about emergency contraception. In each case it was in response to a crisis moment that they reported going to the Internet to find information. This enabled them to enlist the assistance of a medical doctor.

Discussion

Most participants at some point in their lives prior to the interview had consulted the Internet for sexual health information. Participants most commonly sought out information about either sexual anatomy, sexually transmitted infections, or contraception. The Internet served to supplement or to confirm information that participants had learned elsewhere or some time prior. The Internet also was used in cases where participants felt they could not consult other sources either due to potential embarrassment, disapproval, or simple lack of a reliable source.

A typical complaint about the Internet was the difficulty in finding what participants perceived to be reliable and understandable information. Those participants

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who were told specific websites to consult described using those websites. The ways my participants discussed official government websites, such as the Centers for Disease Control, suggests that young people found the presentation of information to be difficult to understand and not relatable. This suggests that adolescents still recognize the government as a potentially reliable source of sexual health information and working to present information in ways more accessible to young people would likely be beneficial.

VIEWING INTERNET PORNOGRAPHY

This section focuses on use of the Internet to seek out pornographic content as described by participants. Participants described a broad range of experiences seeking out and viewing pornography on the Internet. However, along this continuum of viewing pornography participants did aggregate in patterned ways. While a strict typology of viewing Internet pornography did not emerge from the data, sufficient commonalities made it possible to group participants based on how frequently and enduringly they viewed pornography on the Internet.

I address the variations in intensity of viewing Internet pornography by gender, as well as sexual identity. Women who identified as heterosexual fit into four levels of intensity of viewing of Internet pornography based on frequency and duration: those who abstained entirely from viewing pornography, minimal viewers of pornography, occasional viewers of pornography, and avid viewers of pornography. Men who identified as heterosexual fit into three levels of viewing intensity of Internet pornography. There were men who abstained entirely from viewing pornography, occasional viewers of pornography, and avid viewers of pornography. For the sake of

convenience and clarity of argument I discuss these as distinct categories. However there was some variation of intensity of pornography viewing within each category. I note important distinctions within categories when appropriate in the more detailed sections of analysis that follow. I address men and women separately as there was the additional category of minimal viewers of women as well as gendered differences between viewers of similar intensity. Finally I address women who identified as lesbian, queer, or bisexual separately. The discussion of viewing of pornography by these women was, as a whole, distinct from men and women that identified as heterosexual.

Within the group that abstained there were participants who talked about having seen images online that included nudity on one or two occasions. These participants may have also had some incidental exposure to pornographic video content on the Internet. For example, they may have seen a brief glimpse of pornographic video due to a pop-up window with pornographic content appearing as they were surfing the Internet, or they could have been tricked by friends into seeing a short segment of pornographic video content. These participants claimed to have never actually watched pornographic content, or if they had seen pornography it had been very few times for very short durations. There were both men and women who described abstaining from viewing Internet pornography.

I include a separate category of women who described being "minimal viewers." There were seven women in this category. Minimal viewers reported having seen pornography on the Internet. All of these women mentioned specifically having seen video pornography on the Internet and having been personally motivated to seek it out. However all of these women also reported that their viewing of pornography was isolated

to a one-time occurrence or a phase that was relatively short such as over a period of a few days. These women attributed the motivation to view pornography on the Internet primarily to curiosity about pornography itself. Each also described the pornography that they viewed to be distasteful or appealing. Once their curiosity had been sated they reported not having viewed pornography since.

I use the term "occasional viewers" for the next level of intensity of pornography viewing on the Internet. Occasional viewers had watched pornographic video content on multiple separate occasions, however these occurrences were intermittent and often at the behest of a friend or romantic or sexual partner. Those participants in this category were distinct from minimal viewers in that they did not describe their viewing as isolated to a single time or phase. However, in contrast to avid viewers, their viewing of pornography did not occur consistently, regularly, or over a long period of time.

Avid viewers described having watched pornographic video content consistently, or at least during multiple periods of several months, over the course of more than a year. The avid viewers had sometimes had periods of minimal use for a variety of reasons but often included an account for these breaks from viewing pornography. They reported having a generally positive and interested stance toward pornography.

There were two men who abstained from using the Internet to view pornography, two men who were occasional viewers of pornography online, and eight men who were avid viewers of Internet pornography. Altogether there were five women who abstained from viewing pornography on the Internet, seven women who were minimal viewers, eleven women who were occasional viewers of Internet pornography, and sixteen women who were avid viewers of Internet pornography. Of the eight women who identified as

other than heterosexual, one was a minimal viewer of Internet pornography, two were

occasional viewers of online pornography, and five were avid viewers of pornography.

Of the women who identified as heterosexual and did not indicate they were questioning

that identity, five abstained from viewing pornography on the Internet, six were minimal

viewers, nine were occasional viewers, and six were avid viewers. Women who identified

as other than clearly heterosexual were more likely to view Internet pornography.

Range of Intensity of Viewing Internet Pornography

Heterosexual Women Who Abstain

There were a small number of women participants who reported having never

seen pornographic content. Of these few reported actively avoiding this type of content. It

is interesting that these women claimed to have been able to avoid pornography on the

Internet with limited conscious effort. Often cultural discourse implies it is difficult to

avoid encountering pornography on the Internet (Paul 2005). It is also interesting that

most of these participants did report *having to* consciously avoid it at times. For example,

Cynthia, a twenty year-old white woman who grew up just outside of a college town in

the Midwest and identified as heterosexual said:

> No. No, I've just never really been interested so I've never seen anything
> [pornographic]. I had a lot of girlfriends who would watch it once just cause they
> wanted to know but I feel like I have a general gist of what it is so. ... It just never
> happened. If I was with my girlfriends and they were like let's watch porn I'd be like
> okay, sure. Or like, but it just never happened I guess. ... No. Actually that's a lie. On
> my eighteenth birthday we went and bought *Playboy*. And that was the only time I've
> ever seen it.

Cynthia's narrative was representative of the women I interviewed who reported having

never seen adult video content and minimal other sexually explicit material. Women who

abstained from viewing pornography described generally not liking the idea of

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pornography. The specific reasons that these women found pornography to be distasteful or unappealing were left largely unarticulated.

Heterosexual Women Minimal Viewers

Women who were minimal viewers typically described viewing pornography several times over a relatively short span of time. These explorations into porn were being motivated by a curiosity about sex. For example, Tess, a twenty-one year-old white woman from a lower-class background who grew up in the suburbs of a city in the Midwest described seeking out pornography on the Internet during middle school. She described seeking out pornography online and viewing some one time alone and on another involved a friend in seeking out and viewing pornography on the Internet. She was curious about sex and what it would be like when she was old enough to participate and that she stopped after these few viewing sessions. When I asked Tess if she had continued to view pornography she replied:

> No. It was just kind of like maybe a little phase or something where I was just kind of intrigued by it and then, yeah, I think I just started feeling like bad or guilty for doing it so I was just like well okay, now I know. That's enough.

Tess's experience was typical of heterosexual women who were minimal viewers of pornography particularly those motivated by a curiosity about sexual behavior. Others described being motivated by curiosity about pornography itself. Similarly, Cassie, a nineteen year-old women from an upper-middle class background who identified as heterosexual described seeking out pornography. When I asked when this was and what piqued her curiosity she replied, "It was probably sophomore, junior year of high school because I was curious and I wanted to know what I was doing for whenever I had sex

with my boyfriend." When Cassie explained that she did not continue to view

pornography after this initial viewing she explained:

> I don't know, something about the hard core porn, I just, you don't actually see that when you're having sex. And, I don't know, I just felt like with that kind of stuff I'm kind of watching someone else and it's not really how it goes. So I guess it's just not really attractive to me.

She had sought out and viewed sexually explicit video on both satellite television as well

as the Internet. Cassie was fine with the "softcore" content she had found on satellite

television but as she stated, did not find hard core pornography to be appealing. This

process of having looked at some content and deciding not to view more was more

common for women who abstained than to not have ever viewed it at all. The primary

reason that women who were minimal viewers gave was that they simply did not find the

content arousing. It was also sometimes implied or directly stated that they understood

that pornography was meant to be a masturbatory aid and because the content was not

sexually arousing for them it made no sense to keep viewing it.

Heterosexual Women Occasional Viewers

A majority of the women respondents reported seeing some sort of pornographic

content including video. Common ways that this initially occurred were where

participants had sought out a video example of a specific sexual behavior or else they had

accidentally encountered it. Occasional viewers sometimes viewed pornographic video

with a group of friends at a party. Several described having come across pornographic

content accidentally. This may then have resulted in some further exploration at the time.

The video content that women in this category watched was almost exclusively accessed

via the Internet albeit sometimes indirectly. Sometimes participants reported being shown

pornography by friends, acquaintances, or romantic partners and the source of this was sometimes left unspecified. Women in this category did not consistently seek out sexually explicit material. In the cases where others presented these women with the sexually explicit content this did not happen regularly or numerous times.

There were three primary circumstances under which women who were occasional viewers had seen sexually explicit content. Most commonly, occasional viewers had viewed pornography as a part of a group of women, although there were participants who described occasions where the group included men and women. However, a distinct social script guided the use of sexually explicit material in a social setting.

Viewing in Groups. When women viewed pornography within a group of all women it was primarily curiosity that motivated the viewing. Mallory, a nineteen year-old, woman grew up middle-class in the suburbs of a major west coast city. She described viewing pornography when she was twelve or thirteen years old, with her sister and good friend:

> Me and [my friend] Jill and my sister used to look up YouPorn and videos of blow jobs because we didn't know what they really were. And Jill had a boyfriend so she wanted to learn how to do it, so she went off of the Internet you know. We looked up sex, gay sex, what is a boner ... stuff like that. We would lock the door and it would be our funny little thing. I didn't really tell anyone about it.

Here curiosity about what different terms meant and what particular behaviors were compelled these girls to search for related video on the Internet. This was typical of the descriptions of other women participants regarding viewing pornographic content on the Internet particularly while not yet in high school.

Typically when the viewing included a mixed group it occurred at a social gathering and was described as a source of humor or entertainment for the group. Abby, a twenty year-old Hispanic woman who grew up in an urban environment described watching pornography after parties in high school:

> We, it became tradition, if my group of friends, after a party we would always go sleep at my friend Jimmy's house. Who was my best friend's boyfriend and so it would just be like a large group of friends. And he loved to watch porn. So we started watching porn when we were like seventeen, sixteen. And just for fun. We wouldn't take, I mean maybe some people would take it serious, but we would always make fun of it and be like, "That's crazy!"

In this case Abby describes the pornography as usually "soft-core." From her description soft-core to Abby is consistent with the aforementioned definition. She specifically states later that hardcore was not shown at these gatherings. Abby's perspective was common among respondents, indicating that sexually explicit material is often viewed as a social option. However, the use of sexually explicit material in a social setting with men and women it was guided by a distinct social script from those who used sexually explicit material in groups comprised of only women.

Although many people in the general public use pornographic material for sexual arousal (Laumann et al 1994:135), and more significantly it is popularly assumed that arousal is specifically the motivation for viewing pornography, participants reported viewing such content in a group centered on its novelty and humorous value. Throughout the reports of these occasions it was made clear that pornography in these circumstances was not to be viewed as indicative of sexual interest, arousal, or impending sexual interaction. For example, Sophie, a twenty-three year-old, white, heterosexual, woman had a night job during the summer between her sophomore and junior year of college.

She described that after long shifts she and her co-workers, with whom she had become friends, would watch pornography together:

> I had ended a relationship with that boyfriend so I had all my stuff with me and one of my friends had stumbled across it. I had *Pirates,* the first one. Everyone was like, "Oh, this is supposed to be phenomenal and groundbreaking in pornography." So we just kind of made our way through some of it. In no way possible was it sexual. Even though we were watching these sexual images, we would hold our breaths and stuff and at the end of the morning and by ten AM we were all trying to stumble to bed and everything and we would go our separate ways.

This experience of watching pornography was specifically entertainment, not for sexual arousal. This sort of de-sexualization of pornography when watching with friends was mentioned frequently with regard to mixed gender viewing of pornography.

The women participants who viewed pornography in social settings with women did so at younger ages than those who viewed pornography in social settings with men and women. Women only social gatherings where pornography was viewed started earlier than mixed gender gatherings, typically in elementary and middle school. The ages of participants ranged from ten to fourteen and the occasion was often a "sleepover." This allowed somewhat more time and privacy for viewing content online. In these cases the motivations described by participants were curiosity about sexuality and excitement about looking at and seeking out something sexual. That it was sexual content they were seeking out meant that it was understood as forbidden particularly for women. This was in contrast to those who viewed pornography in social settings with men. These mixed gender social gatherings happened later in adolescence or early adulthood; ages ranged from fourteen to twenty. The novelty of pornographic content still remained, but by this time the expectation was that it was humorous or merely entertainment. This indicates that my participants as adolescents, particularly during later adolescence were unimpressed or unfazed by access to pornographic content or at least were socially

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expected to do so. This is consistent with nationally representative survey research regarding wanted viewing of online pornography by adolescents (Wolak et al 2007). While this evokes concerns about de-sensitization from a psychological perspective, here the concern is how adolescents are understanding and making sense of this increased access to pornographic content in the cultural and situated context of their lives.

Viewing with Romantic Partners. A few participants reported having viewed sexually explicit content with a romantic partner. Of those women that were occasional viewers who viewed pornographic material with a romantic partner, none reported being the partner who initiated the idea of viewing together. While these women did not initiate the behavior, many reported indifference or a positive experience viewing pornography with a partner. While some reported this as a positive experience it was not something that compelled these women to more regularly use pornography or to use it at all on their own. Even for women that were occasional viewers, viewing pornography was not described as a regular occurrence even with partners with whom they had watched pornography.

Heterosexual Women Avid Viewers

Several of the women who participated in this research were avid and ongoing viewers of pornography. Although I was unable to specifically ask participants about masturbation, most women who were avid viewers indicated this as the motivation. These women overwhelmingly accessed sexually explicit material online. On rare occasion

some of these women would visit an adult store seeking out pornography. Others reported their initial encounters with pornography as initiated by a sibling or friend.

All women who were avid viewers began viewing pornography prior to the age of eighteen. A few women reported having seen pornographic content that was noticeably upsetting or distressing. However, participants also described exiting from web pages when they did find unappealing video. It is unclear if the participants counted these instances when they stopped viewing video they reacted to as viewing distressing content. Those that did describe seeing problematic pornographic content cited three general types of such content. First women expressed distaste for material that depicted behaviors that were interpreted as non-consensual (such as rape fantasy porn). Second, women interpreted content as negative in which the woman or women depicted were seen as not clearly enjoying the activity. Third, women found shock style videos (such as two girls one cup[1]) to be particularly abhorrent. It was typical for these women to indicate that they felt at least some pornography allowed for a more realistic and accurate representation of bodies and activities. Of the women who were avid viewers of pornography many specifically mentioned preferring amateur pornography because of its "realism." For example, when I asked Marion, a twenty year-old white woman from a middle class background if the pornography she watched was "mainstream pornography" she replied:

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[1] Two Girls One Cup is a video that gained infamy on the Internet for being particularly shocking and offensive. It involves two women alternately defecating or vomiting in a cup followed by the consumption of that waste in turn by the other woman. The women are naked. It spawned a phenomenon whereby people would show the video to those who hadn't seen it and film the reaction of the first time viewer. A large number of these reaction videos were then posted to the Internet.

Yeah some of it [was mainstream]. I mean I found amateur stuff too. And I actually prefer the amateur stuff. Because I feel like it is more realistic. ... They [people in amateur pornography] are putting on an act, but I think it's also even more of a realistic act than porn, like the porn industry. They look more real, they act more real.

In comparison to the pornography that she understood as produced by pornography production companies Marion preferred those videos that appeared to have been made by amateurs. These women also compared amateur pornography to other media sources in terms of realism. Sophie, a twenty-two year-old, white woman who identified as heterosexual discussed her preferences regarding pornography.

A lot of the stuff I was stumbling upon, you have a lot of the Hollywood-type versions of stuff but then you also have a lot of the amateur stuff. ... I mean, [amateur porn] does a surprisingly good job of varying everything and so I never felt intimidated or bad about myself. I found that, you know looking at, in some ways looking at, *Seventeen* magazine and stuff like that hurt me more because it was showing me the same girls over and over again. It was showing me the same way to look and you know, television shows and media. And all that was more: you are supposed to look this way and this is how, these are the only ways that men are going to desire you. These are going to be the ways your going to get a boyfriend or a husband and obviously I didn't look like that. And, but I mean with [amateur] porn and everything, like, you could have all ranges and sizes of women and all different sexual orientations or skin color... I don't know if that's why I gravitated towards it, just because it was more, it can be for anyone.

Sophie explains that in comparison to other media sources particularly television shows and women's magazines particularly the amateur pornography that she viewed included a much more diverse range of people in terms of ethnicity, sexuality and body types. Sophie described that she didn't consider herself attractive at this time in her life. She found the diversity of people in the amateur pornography that she was viewing to be reassuring that she too could, at some point, participate in sexual behaviors. For her this contrasted with what she felt mainstream media sources portrayed. In television shows and magazines the message was that she would not likely be able to participate in romantic or sexual life because she was dissimilar in appearance from those who were

able to do so. These women also viewed the pornography they found from a critical perspective and selectively chose content that suited their interests.

Heterosexual Men Who Abstained

I had only one man who deliberately and effectively abstained from watching sexually explicit material of any sort including on the Internet. This participant described a confluence of reasons that led to his abstention. Jonas, a twenty year-old, white man who identified as heterosexual and grew up in a middle class family explained

> I ended up in seventh or eighth grade, I masturbated twice and I looked at porn a few times. Porn being like pictures on the Internet. Me and my neighbor would look at, we decided we were going to look at porn and we decided we were going to do it together, so we both felt less guilty. So three or four times we looked at on the Internet.

Since then Jonas had refrained from masturbation or looking at sexual explicitly images altogether. He reported never having viewed pornographic video. He attributed this to his religious beliefs as well as concerns he had about the women who appeared in such content were exploited or abused. Later in the interview Jonas described his not viewing pornography or masturbating as "kind of a unique aspect of my sexual progression." Even amongst his friends who were also religious he understood his forgoing these activities to be different from that of other men.

One additional man, Timothy, a nineteen year-old white man who grew up in a middle-class family located in a small town in the Midwest, reported having recently deleted his cache of pornography. He did this after participating in a religious "retreat" where one of the speakers specifically advocated doing so. Toward the end of the

interview I asked Timothy if there was anything else that would be important to include in the discussion. He replied:

> I went on that retreat like I said with the church last weekend. Ever since then I haven't looked at porn or masturbated so I would say that religion has, the more you are involved with religion you are the less sexually active, or sexually sex thoughts you think of for present, maybe. It was really interesting because he was, one of the speakers said if you want to be a truly powerful person you need to not look at porn. You need to like delete all your porn and as soon as I got home I always deleted all of my porn off my computer.

He was newly committed to forgoing use of pornography in the future though skeptical about maintaining this stance. Prior to this renunciation Timothy would more accurately have been described as an occasional viewer as he described viewing pornography only intermittently. He also described having gone through the process of making an effort to do without pornography in the past.

This lack of men participants that abstained from viewing sexually explicit material may be a function of the limited number of men I was able to recruit to participate in an interview. This may also be because past research has shown that men are more likely to consume pornography than women (Laumann et al 1994). Viewing pornography and sexual content in general is more consistent with hegemonic gendered expectations for men than for women (Zilbergeld 1992). As I have only one participant who fit completely in this category any discussion should be considered limited in scope of applicability to others.

Heterosexual Men Occasional Viewers

Two men participants described occasionally getting online specifically for the purpose of seeking out sexually explicit content. These two men who were occasional

viewers did seek out sexually explicit content but did not do so regularly or continuously. Men who were occasional viewers of pornography most commonly sought out the content alone or with one other friend who was also a man. This is in contrast to women who were occasional viewers and who typically saw pornography as part of a group or were shown pornography by romantic partners. Although, as described earlier, women reported viewing pornography in groups that sometimes included men. The small number of participants that were men may partially explain this discrepancy.

Heterosexual Men Avid Viewers

The majority of the men I interview reported being avid and ongoing viewers of pornography. Altogether eight men had viewed pornography regularly and over a long period of time. Men typically were introduced to sexually explicit content via the recommendation of friends or older siblings who were men. A few men participants reported first finding pornography on DVD or videotape and then moving to accessing pornography online. This may be in part due to the older average age of men in my sample, women were on average 21 years old while men were on average 23.1 years old at the time of the interview. Indeed, men at the younger end of the sample and were avid viewers of pornography all described accessing most of the pornography they had viewed on the Internet.

Men described frequently referencing pornography for ideas regarding intimacy. Specifically, men who were avid viewers often described noting what they perceived as new "techniques" or "tips" in pornography that they felt could be employed to better satisfy a partner. I asked Michael, a twenty-nine year-old white man who grew up on the

East coast in a middle-class family and identified as heterosexual, if what he did with

sexual partners had changed over time he replied:

> Yeah. There's a learning curve. The first time was the worst time. You know I think
> what really expanded my options as far as sex education goes are porn videos. I
> learned how to give a woman cunnilingus by watching lesbians do it on themselves.
> They were probably the single best teachers. Because women know what women like.
> I've also coached my girlfriend to give me a better blowjob by watching porn of a
> great girl giving great head. So, yes, it has progressed. You know you learn new
> things. You learn new tricks. You implement those tricks.

Despite having had several sexual partners and experiences prior to having seen

pornography, Michael specifically attributed his changing interests in sexual behaviors to

pornographic videos. Although there was variation in the order of experience versus

viewing pornography described by other participants, Michael's comments were

indicative of how men reported referencing pornography for specific behaviors. This was

most often discussed without referencing a specific partner and was mentioned as not

necessarily applying to a specific partner.

While some women, more so the few who were avid viewers mentioned

referencing pornography as the source of possible positions or activities they might

consider, women never mentioned the idea of "techniques." Women described sexually

explicit video as a source of ideas about sexual behaviors or activities to possibly engage

in generally. Men were much more likely to discuss sexually explicit video as a reference

for very specific approaches to pleasuring a woman sexual partner. This gender

difference is partially explained by the cultural notion that men are expected to be the

initiator of sexual interaction, to instigate development of a sexual encounter and to be

sexually skilled in the sense of being able to bring a woman partner to orgasm.

Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Undefined Women Viewers

While I have no gay men in my sample, I did interview a number of women who identified as lesbian, gay, queer, bisexual, or preferred to leave their sexuality undefined. Altogether eight women identified as one of these sexual identities. The women who identified specifically as gay, lesbian, or queer were very critical of pornography because the pornography they had encountered did not represent anything familiar or close to their experiences or desires. Women who identified as bisexual or chose not to identify or label their sexuality were also critical of pornography but focused their criticism differently as discussed below. Nonetheless all of these women reported either occasional or avid use of pornography on the Internet. Betsy, a twenty year-old Hispanic lesbian woman, who grew up in the suburbs of a college town in the Midwest, described identifying and coming out as a lesbian as early as fourth grade. She was an occasional viewer of pornography and was very critical of the content. Her comments are worth quoting at length:

> Well you know again, this is kinda the weird thing that lesbians are in society. Is that there is a lot of pornographic material that involves two women. You can assume that neither one of them is gay. That they are doing this because another man is present. It's hot for him. And even I think being a younger person that is kind of obvious they might be "lesbians" but they're not lesbians like I'm a lesbian. Like that's not real. ... But if you're a lesbian you might come across, oh there's two girls kissing, and now they're fondling one another and now there's a guy present and he's doing something to both of them at the same time. So I came across it but it did not register as gay to me. It registered as two straight girls doing gay people things for straight people. You know, so that's not, it never affected me in a legitimate pornographic way, this isn't real porn, this is for the show, this is just a circus.

Betsy identifies a fundamental disconnection between her self-awareness and identification as a lesbian and the sexual interaction between two women in the pornography she found on the Internet, which she described as "*entirely* heterosexual."

Betsy reported being initially motivated by curiosity and accessed explicit material on the Internet when she was afforded the privacy to be able to do so. However she and other lesbians described a profound disconnect between the content they found and their own sexual interests.

Other women who currently identified as bisexual, were questioning their heterosexuality, or chose not to identify as a particular sexual orientation reported not becoming self aware or self-identifying as these identities until later in adolescence or young adulthood. These women were less inclined to discuss alienation from pornography with intensity comparable to the women who were aware earlier in life. The pornography they viewed consistently over time was predominantly from the Internet. Juliette, a nineteen year-old woman who identified as bisexual said this:

> Once I felt like I kind of knew the basics [of anatomy] then I was just like this is fun anyway. You know it got me turned on and stuff so. ... I'm trying to remember back because it's not something I usually think about. I think when I first started looking it [pornography] up it was for information, I started using the pictures even for pleasure, and masturbating and stuff. And then I got into the videos for kind of the same informational purposes and then like going from there again into pleasure if that makes sense. ... That was probably around eighth grade.

Here Juliette described derives sexual pleasure from viewing pornography. Juliette's comment is also notable because she indicates that initially she viewed pornography as a source of information about sexuality.

Similarities and Differences

Men in my sample were more likely than the women to regularly consume pornography and were more likely to consume pornography consistently and over a longer period of time. This is consistent with past research (Laumann et al 1994).

However there were a significant number of women who were occasional viewers as well as a significant number of women who were avid viewers of pornography including several who watched alone and as masturbatory aid. This is somewhat different from other research into pornography consumption especially for women who have been shown to watch porn most often as part of a coupled experience. I did have a number of participants who reported almost exclusively watching pornography with sexual partners. However, I also found evidence that some young women are likely to consume porn individually and for pleasurable reasons.

A clear difference arose in the way that women who were occasional or avid viewers spoke about how they referenced pornography for possible sexual ideas in comparison to those of men who were occasional or avid viewers. For men in both these groups, a frequent component of consumption of pornography was to glean "techniques," positions, or other ideas to possibly be explored with a sexual partner. This included times when men were not in a romantic relationship or did not have any anticipated potential sexual experience with a partner. These men spoke of keeping a mental file of ideas taken from pornography to be held for if, and when, it might be possible to explore them with a partner.

In contrast, when women who viewed pornography on occasion, described referencing pornography for positions or activities it was that they came across these incidentally as a result of watching something pornographic. Women who were avid viewers who discussed referencing pornography for sexual behaviors, positions, et cetera did so exclusively within the context of a long term monogamous committed relationship. For these women, the ideas taken from pornography were to be explored specifically

within the context of an ongoing sexual relationship. This could be partially a result of the different gendered expectations operating in sexual behavior. It could also be reflecting expectations for how women are "supposed to" be talking about sex or more specifically *not* be talking about sex (Tolman 2002). For these women being in a long term monogamous committed relationship made it more permissible for them to be interested in sex and to explore sexual possibilities.

Both women and men who were either occasional viewers or avid viewers of pornography reported deliberately carrying something from pornography into the bedroom. Participants reported both successes and failures with the activities or positions that they tried that were inspired by pornographic video. Given that much pornography is cinematic in the sense that it is constructed to present an illusion of fluidity and mask preparatory steps this is hardly a surprise.

Men occasional viewers reported seeking out sexually explicit content in contrast to women occasional viewers who were unlikely to have personally sought out the content. Men occasional viewers were also much more likely to have had pornography in the form of a videotape or DVD rather than exclusively online. Women occasional viewers with two exceptions described owning pornography on a physical medium. Women were specific in stating that this was due to concerns about it being discovered. Several women with brothers pointed out what they felt to be a double standard in how they perceived parents would respond to their consuming porn in comparison. As a result, they were diligent in taking measures to keep their pornography use secret. Women reported awareness that their own use of sexually explicit material was likely to be judged more harshly by others than that of men.

Heterosexual women often reported being critical of the manufactured appearance of porn stars, the unlikelihood of the scenarios in pornography that led to sex, and even the unrealistic behavior of particularly the women actresses in pornography. However, in contrast lesbian and bisexual women were more likely to describe an overall and fundamental criticism of content of pornography as unrealistic and not relatable and primarily the purview of men.

Seeing Before Experiencing

People have had opportunity to witness other people having sex for ages. This could have been because of crowded sleeping quarters, accidentally or surreptitiously watching parents or others engaging in sex, or a myriad of other scenarios. At least since the widespread use of VCRs as well as the videotape pornography industry it has also been possible to view *video* of sexual behaviors prior to engaging in them. Reliable and accurate data on the extent of this is limited if not non-existent for the United States. However, with high-speed Internet access came arguably considerably easier access for young people to sexually explicit video in general and pornographic video specifically. The distinction between witnessing people engaged in sexual behaviors including intercourse and viewing pornographic video of people engaged in sexual behaviors including intercourse is crucial. Pornographic video, particularly that which is professionally produced tends to adhere to certain behaviors and an ordering of those behaviors. In addition, the sexual behaviors filmed and distributed for professional pornographic video are often specifically done precisely because they make for better film. Professional pornography actors and actresses are doing a job, not necessarily

participating in sexual behaviors that are personally preferred (Abbott 2001). Arguably

no generation prior has had the ease of access to the extent and variety of pornographic

video available to the young people since the rise of searchable high-speed Internet with

pornographic video content. While the sexualization of younger adolescents has been cast

as cause for alarm particular concern has been devoted to the "pornographization" or

"pornification" of adolescent sexuality (Levy 2005; Paul 2006).

A number of participants described seeing video of explicit sexual behaviors prior

to engaging in them. Most of these participants did report this having some influence on

their expectations of those sexual behaviors. For example, Jack a twenty year-old white

heterosexual man from an upper middle class family on the east coast described watching

a variety of hard-core sexually explicit material prior to engaging in any physical sexual

interaction with other people. When I asked him if he felt there was any connection

between what he saw in the pornography he had seen and his first experience with sexual

intercourse he replied:

> I definitely was nervous. I knew where things went and how things are supposed
> to be done generally. I was more nervous about kissing than anything else. The
> other stuff I was like whatever, that's not that big of a deal. I was more worried
> about the kissing. Cause that's something like, I've beat off [masturbated] before
> so I know what that feels like. But I don't know what it feels like to kiss another
> person. *That* made me nervous. ... It [having seen pornography] definitely didn't
> hurt. I mean, it helped me just cause I knew, like I said, I sort of figured out where
> things went and all that stuff. But I mean as far as the actual interaction between
> me and the other person, that was something that took like trial and error. That
> was something that was way hard to figure at first. To know when the right time
> to do this is. And how to act. And what to say. And what not to say.

For Jack pornography served as a reference that shaped his expectations of sexual

behaviors in that he felt more confident about the mechanics of sexual intercourse and

behaviors that he had seen in comparison to the aspects of the experience that he had not.

This was true for both women and men in my sample. Often with women describing these as an opportunity to safely explore and consider behaviors.

The Internet and Intermediate Scripts

As participants with Internet pornography often only watched a short segment from a scene this segment could and often did serve as a model for a particular sexual behavior. For example, Katie, a twenty-two year-old white woman who identified as heterosexual stated, "I have seen porn where I've been like, 'I'm gonna suck a dick like that next time.'" Arguably the significant factor here is that the widespread availability of information, especially Internet pornography, provided a number of participants with visually and aurally explicit examples of specific sexual behaviors in action that they referenced. These examples of sexual behavior provided an *intermediate* script that was more specific and personal (to the participants) than a cultural scenario and yet did not involve direct interpersonal interaction as with interpersonal scripts. While often participants were skeptical or somewhat critical of the examples that pornography provided, it is nonetheless unprecedented to be able to call up and see a video example of a particular segment of a sexual encounter. For example, Juliette, a nineteen year-old white woman from a middle class background described consulting porn online in exploration of sexual options. This was prior to her having sexual experiences with another person. She explained that having viewed pornography made her feel more prepared for a sexual interaction. When I asked to expand on what she meant by being more prepared, she responded:

> "I think what I enjoyed as far as touching myself. So how if a guy were to touch me. And then also, you know, different positions it seems would be good and stuff. I

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mean obviously I had no experience so I was going off what I thought. So getting into a relationship like you know I wanted to try those things, so. ... My boyfriend and I, we'll watch porn together and we'll try different variations.

Juliette was able to explore aspects of sexual interactions by viewing video examples online. These were not cultural scenarios because they are specific and not widely agreed upon and understood examples of what "everyone knows." Rather, these are numerous particular examples that range as wide as the variety of the content available on the Internet for any sexual behavior. This is shown in part by the absence of discussion of mechanics of sexuality in other forums such as sexual education. Juliette alluded to this earlier stating that initially she turned to the Internet because her sexual education omitted the mechanics of sex. When I asked her about what she remembered of her middle school sexual education she replied in part that, "Because I don't feel like I really knew anything about male anatomy. Like how does stuff [genitals] interact. All of that kind of stuff was missing. Just because I didn't really know that much. But then also the Internet was very helpful in that. So that was more like my sex ed." Juliette's discussion was representative of a number of participants who were interested in seeing models of a particular sexual position, behavior or activity. As did Juliette, participants then went on to negotiate their own interpersonal script by incorporating some aspects of what they viewed.

Sexual positions were by far the most frequently discussed inspiration from pornography by women. Men also frequently mentioned sexual positions as something they learned from pornography but men were also likely to mention other aspects of a sexual experience. Given the variety of content on the Internet participants could and did

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explore viewing a range of possibilities of any given sexual position, activity, and interactions.

CONCLUSIONS

As remembered and reported by my participants a variety of sources such as mainstream television and movies, books and magazines as well as parents, peers and romantic partners all continue to play a variety of roles in how sex is learned. In addition, this shows that the Internet has begun to play an important role in this process as well. As they got older, participants as a whole were more likely to describe use of the Internet for sexual content and information. Younger participants and participants with earlier access because of family or class factors were also more likely to describe the Internet as playing a larger role in their learning about sexuality in comparison to older participants and those with later access. Among these participants this suggests that as the Internet has become more accessible both broadly as well as individually young people are using it as an important source of sexual information.

The content available on the Internet is particularly important as it serves as a source of intermediate scripts. The widespread availability of searchable sexually explicit content allows people to access a variety of examples of particular sexual interactions. While cultural scenarios in the past certainly been influenced by media, particularly mass media, the pornographic media on the Internet are not necessarily widely accessed or agreed upon. Further, in the past cultural scenarios were broad instructions for behavior and informed interpersonal interactions that were negotiated in the formation of scripts. The video examples available on the Internet are multiple specific examples that are then

drawn upon to varying degrees by individuals in interpersonal interaction. This content marks a new level of sexual scripts.

While increased access to the Internet has often in the past been cast as a cause for alarm and regulation my research strongly indicates that the Internet is often a helpful and beneficial resource for young people. This is particularly true for those in my sample who were excluded from other sources of sexual information. There is clearly still great concern about anyone under the age of eighteen viewing pornographic content. A sizable number of the participants in this research did view pornographic content, either images or video prior to the age of eighteen. This research suggests that the availability of pornographic content on the Internet is a contributing factor to their accessing the content. However, many of these participants also viewed that hard-core sexual content with a critical eye in terms of realism, representation, and the messages it conveyed. Moreover, several participants saw pornography as a way to consider sexual behaviors and possibilities in a safe way that ultimately benefited them as sexual beings either in that they were able to recognize sexual practices they did not want to participate in or in that they drew in various ways form the pornographic content to enrich their own sex lives. In these ways, I assert that the access and consumption of pornography found on the Internet is influencing the sexual scripts of young people. However, it is important to note that these results indicate this is primarily happening at the level of interpersonal and intra-psychic scripts. Many young people are referencing sexually explicit media especially on the Internet for what is appealing and possible to do with a sexual partner or internally but are almost completely rejecting the cultural scenarios of pornography. This is true of both men and women who were critical to the point of derisive of the scenarios

in pornography leading up to sexual behaviors. In other words, participants were loathe to report that they thought a woman hitchhiker or a housewife with a broken sink would be willing to suddenly begin to engage in sexual behaviors with the occupants of a passing car or a repairman; nor would this be particularly desirable.

DISCUSSION

The Internet and especially the availability of sexually explicit video content on the Internet is changing the sexual landscape of the participants in this study. As alternative scripts such as "hooking up" (Bogle 2008) have emerged among young people, particularly those in college, the expectation of romantic involvement with the same individual that someone may be having sexual interaction with has dissipated.

Interpersonal and Intrapsychic Sexual Scripts

Friends, sexual partners and experiences, particularly early sexual partners and experiences, as well as mainstream media were identified most frequently by my interview participants as the most significant factors in the development of interpersonal sexual and relationship scripts. However, those who did not abstain from use of the Internet for sexually explicit material also referenced that content as influential in the formation of interpersonal and intra-psychic sexual scripting. At the same time they consistently were critical of Internet sexual content providing the context–or lack of such–of sexual encounters. In other words, they rejected the cultural scenarios for sexual interactions presented in pornographic content on the Internet but referenced it and often sought it out to inform interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts. This was true generally for

both heterosexual men and women but gendered in different ways in scope and specific points of reference and types of criticism.

Romantic and sexual scripts tend to come from differing sources with family and mainstream movies providing more influence in the shaping of romantic scripts while peers and pornographic movies provide more influence in the shaping of sexual scripts. Throughout the data women's sexual pleasure and comfort was still either omitted or marginalized including in the pornography that the participants viewed. In some cases women have responded to this by seeking out the information and demanding their desires be addressed by partners. While laudable this still requires this additional effort and energy on the part of women and thus men are still left in the privileged position of having their desires be the foremost concern.

At the same time a number of participants including men understand that men are to be responsible for women's pleasure. Men described this expectation as producing a considerable amount of anxiety and stress. Interestingly, while men understand this to be their responsibility they see few options for assistance in figuring out how to "produce" pleasure in their women partners other than pornography.

The polarized nature of the discourse on sexuality in our culture has left a swath of un-described and un-acknolwedged aspects of sexuality with little or no information or opportunity for discussion. The aspects of sexuality that are commonly presented to adolescents are the dangers of sexual interaction with others via sexual education, the idealized romantic notions of relationships in mainstream films, and the physical mechanics of sexual interaction in pornography. As adolescents these partcipants were left to figure out if and how these integrate, relate, and inform one another. Those with

peers that were open to discussing sexuality had at least some realm where this discussion

is possible However, the participants in this research who had a parent, older sibling, or

another trusted adult to discuss these issues with generally described their experiences

with sexuality more positively. For many others it is simply trial by fire as they sort out

these competing discourses in their early sexual experiences and relationships. While this

is not necessarily problematic many participants described dissatisfaction in various ways

with their relationships.

CHAPTER SIX

Almost Civilized: Exclusion, Censorship and Panic

In this chapter I draw upon the experiences of my participants as adolescents to explore the connections between the concepts of adolescence, sexuality, citizenship, panics, and the role of the Internet. I present more elaborate stories from some of the participants in this research in order to illustrate the experience of exclusion and thwarting commonly shared by a majority in my research as they sought out information about sexuality from family, formal education, and mass media.

I also argue that being able to access information serves as the foundation for the ability to make informed choices. This concept applies to sexual information as much as it does other realms of life. As articulated by Paulo Freire, "Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (1970:16). One need be aware of the available possibilities in order to weigh them. This is in part why sexual information itself is the fundamental divide that Luker (2006) identified as separating sexual conservatives from sexual liberals. Once adolescents become aware of options for sexual behavior, sexual identity, contraception, et cetera they may then choose an option that is not aligned with what their parents, community, or state hopes. As illustrated by

these participants many as adolescents were unaware of how or where to find out sexual information that they wanted or needed.

As these participants remembered being prevented from learning about aspects of sexuality they were also less prepared to participate in life as sexual beings. Many participants reported seeking out information about sexuality, particularly information that helped them make more informed decisions and alleviated anxieties about engaging in sexual behaviors. They sought information from what sources that were available to them individually. This primarily turned out to be peers and the Internet. With regard to providing information about sexual topics, peers occupied an interesting position as they were often similarly excluded from access to sexual information. Finally I show that the Internet was experienced as a helpful resource for those participants to whom it was available. The stories of Angela, Sandra, Gretchen, Oliver, Juliette and Mackenzie represent a range of individual biographies along this continuum of availability and agency in learning about sexuality. Their individual stories serve as indicative and theoretically intriguing case studies as key elements of their narratives were directly comparable to experiences of other participants, and together they give a good indication of the sample as a whole.

Throughout the chapter I draw upon the experiences of these participants when they were adolescents to connect the cultural position of adolescents more broadly to the ideas of citizenship and moral panics. I work to clearly establish the link between the lived experiences of my participants and this wider cultural discourse. One of the primary arguments that informed this research is that diametrically opposed ideologies about adolescent sexuality push the cultural discourse to polarized ends while leaving

adolescents themselves ignored and without resources. In short, the cultural debates take place in the abstract. By placing the stories of my participants as adolescents firmly within the discussion of these issues I intend for the structure of the chapter itself to reflect the problematic results of the recent and ongoing approach to these issues.

From the experiences of adolescents that my participants described of consistent and often complete exclusion from being recognized as having a legitimate voice in their sexual agency I began to investigate reasons that this exclusion is perpetuated. This led to me reconsidering the arguments of scholars such as Rubin (1984) who have argued that claims of protecting children from sexuality has proven to be a particularly effective political strategy. I considered the history of adolescence as a life stage as compared to childhood and adulthood. A better understanding of why adolescent sexuality has arguably worked as particularly effective fodder for moral panics that reflect larger social anxieties especially in the last thirty years (Herdt 2009) would help shed light on why the exclusion of adolescents from sexuality has perpetuated and arguably been exacerbated. I assert that the effectiveness of moral panics surrounding adolescents may be better understood within the context of their position with regard to the civilizing process and citizenship. These concepts can be seen as the (mostly implicit) crux of debates where issues of sexuality are involved. Sexuality has been historically and socially constructed to be culturally understood as a core component of the self *and* of the United States national character. Adolescence, since it's widespread acceptance as a separate life stage in the early years of the 20th century, has also been considered particularly important to the self and the United States national character because it is the stage of life understood as when sexual selfhood is established.

These factors have resulted in a long history of state involvement in issues of sexuality including special emphasis on adolescent sexuality. This suggests that the debates about adolescent access to sexual content on the Internet, both sexual health information and pornography, reveal more than competing cultural ideologies about youth and sexuality but also tap into larger political discourses that involve the role of the State. During the first decade of the 2000s, while my participants were going through adolescence and exploring sexuality on the Internet, in the United States there has been a resurgence of political efforts to redefine the role of the state and to redefine citizenship in order to exclude particular groups.

Gretchen

Gretchen was a twenty-one year-old white woman who grew up in the Midwest. She lived in a college town with her parents and three younger siblings until she was a sophomore in high school. At that time the family moved to a suburban home in a smaller town not too far from the college town they had lived prior. Gretchen enthusiastically participating in gymnastics until this move after which she drifted out of involvement in the sport. Gretchen was a participant who described having minimal access to sexual information throughout her adolescence.

Sexual education was not a part of Gretchen's school experience. When I asked her if she had any sexual education in school she replied, "No. I had a health class but it was like Teen Choices and we never talked about sex or anything like that. We watched movies and they were not in any way shape or form related to sex." Sexual education clearly did not factor into her learning about sex.

Gretchen had two awkward conversations with her mom about sex while growing

up. When she was about ten and had started puberty her mom first had a talk with her

about sex. Gretchen reported that the conversation was basically, "Sex was something

you did when you loved each other. And that's how you made babies. That was really

kind of it." Later, her mom had one other conversation with her about sex. This

conversation happened in high school once Gretchen had begun dating. "Oh yeah. And I

guess we talked again when we talked about birth control. But it was more the birth

control aspect than it was the sex part." Gretchen continued, "Well like I said my mom

was a physician's assistant so she talked about the ramifications or how birth control

worked, pros and cons and then how she felt about me using it." At first, in response,

Gretchen denied needing birth control to her mother:

> She brought it up but at the time I didn't want to admit I was having sex so I was like,
> No, no. And then, an incident occurred, and I was like okay, maybe we should
> probably try. And then when I brought it back up to my mom she was like, "Oh," and
> kind of tried to take back what she said. "I'm not sure I want you to be on it." She
> was like, "I don't want you having sex in my house." Then she was like, "Well I'd
> rather you not get pregnant." So then I went on it.

It was clear to Gretchen that her mom disapproved of her engaging in sexual intercourse

and the willingness to help her get on hormonal birth control was begrudging at best. I

asked Gretchen what counted as an "incident" to which she replied that a condom had

broken while she was having intercourse with a partner. I asked what they did in response

to this, which prompted the following exchange:

> Gretchen: Nothing. Well I was seventeen and I didn't really know what to do. I was
> too scared to tell my mom at that point in time so we just crossed our fingers and
> hoped nothing happened.

> Me: Okay.
> Which is really bad I know.

Me: I'm not here to judge. But you didn't, I don't know, there wasn't a friend or somebody else you would've talked to?

Gretchen: I'm sure there was. But in the moment we were so panicked I didn't even think about it. I knew about Plan B but I didn't know the availability of it. So I guess at seventeen I could've gotten it, but I didn't realize I could. So.

Gretchen was too uncomfortable discussing such a scenario with her mom even to ask for help. She was also too uncomfortable to ask sources like friends or via the Internet. Having had hardly any exposure to issues related to sexuality when Gretchen and her boyfriend had a condom break during intercourse the response was panic. She mentions having some vague awareness of emergency contraception in the form of Plan B, but she did not know how to translate that abstract knowledge into being able to actually acquire it. This contrasts directly with Trudi's experience of finding out about emergency contraception on the Internet. Trudi was also able to find out how to work through the logistics of contacting a doctor that would prescribe it and getting the emergency contraception in a timely manner. This incident did not result in Gretchen getting pregnant but she nonetheless endured panic and intense anxiety that was exacerbated but her lack of understanding of how to even begin to respond to an unexpected event such as having a condom break.

Prior to her sophomore year Gretchen did not discuss sexual topics with her friends at all. She primarily socialized with the other women who were involved in gymnastics and she described their time being consumed with the sport. However, after she moved Gretchen reported that sex was a topic of conversation. "Well before having sex we would talk about what it would be like. Things we had done other than engaging in sex. Foreplay. We would talk about people who were having sex and what they were doing. Stuff like that." While she and these friends talked about sexual topics the scope of

their discussion was limited. When I asked Gretchen how she compared to her circle of friends with regard to sexual experience she replied, "I think in my group of friends I was the first to lose my virginity." I prompted asking if she then became an expert to her friends. She answered, "Yeah. Which I thought was weird because I mean it wasn't much longer 'til they had sex. So it wasn't like I knew much more but everyone wants to know what it's like." When I asked Gretchen what sex was like for her and what she told her friends about the experience she replied, "Nerve-wracking. Painful. I don't even really remember it that well because it was a long time ago too. But it was kind of a blur of pain and adrenaline. Not very memorable." As I describe earlier women and men in my sample often reported expecting that sex would be painful for women the first time. Gretchen's experience speaks to how that expectation is created and also how a lack of discourse about how to make it less so exists.

While Gretchen reported being at least temporarily considered an expert among her friends due to her experience she felt she had precious little information about sex available to her. She and her boyfriend planned an occasion to first have sex. During this interaction Gretchen stopped because she had a "panic attack that something bad would happen." I asked her what she remembered thinking would happen. This prompted an interesting discussion about her preparedness for sexual intercourse. Gretchen first said, "It was more I wanted to make sure I was ready to undertake something like that and deal with consequences whether it be an STD or pregnancy or something like that. That I was ready to handle something like that as opposed to not knowing what to do." I followed by asking if she sought out information about those sorts of issues given her anxiety.

Kind of. I guess not really. We knew how to use a condom and I guess that's all we thought we needed to know. I guess I was thinking more emotionally and mentally

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prepared. I don't know. I really don't know what my hesitation was, if it was just still that mentality of that I had to be with the right person at the time and the right situation under the right circumstance. I'm not sure what my hold up was.

Gretchen was very nervous and concerned about participating in sexual intercourse but seemed woefully unprepared to even know how to seek out information about the topics she was so concerned about. I then asked how she and her boyfriend knew how to use a condom. She replied, "I left it up to the guy to know how to use a condom quite honestly." I prompted again asking if this was something she had tasked him with finding out to which she responded, "I just assumed he would know."

Gretchen did not consult the Internet for sexual health information. She had attended schools that did not provide sexual education, had parents who clearly disapproved of her engaging in sexual behavior and were not available to discuss it with her, and had friends with little knowledge themselves. Gretchen is illustrative of an experience of adolescence where she was sheltered from information about sexuality. She had relatively limited access to even advice from people with experiential knowledge such as a parent or more experienced peers. This proved perilous for Gretchen.

ADOLESCENCE AND THE CIVILIZING PROCESS

Adolescence in the United States can be understood as having emerged as a culmination of the civilizing process of separation of childhood and adult spheres (Elias 1978). This occurred along with other broad social changes such as the late 20th century massive urbanization and shift to a wage economy that allowed for young people to subsist individually and delay marriage. Once these processes culminated in a thorough and complete separation of the life stages of childhood and adulthood, adolescence filled

the space between (Moran 2000). While this would soon come to mean that adolescents were insulated from some of the demands of full citizenship such as protections from excessive labor and distinct standards of government punishment. Adolescents are also restricted from some of the benefits such as voting rights and this age was not reduced from twenty-one to eighteen until the era of the Vietnam War and passage of the 26th amendment. Significant changes have occurred in the century since adolescence was named as a life stage in 1904 but these tensions are still apparent. Indeed, these tensions can be better understood within this historical context as they offer a means of analyzing issues connected to adolescent sexuality including sexual education.

The modern notion of citizenship is intertwined with that of the nation state. In recent history it has been by definition that one must be recognized as a citizen of a country in order to lay claims to the rights of citizenship. This is relevant here for several reasons. First, adolescence is a liminal category not only in life course but in access to the right to have rights that citizenship is meant to offer as well. Second, as adolescents are considered less than fully ready to participate in society they can be thought of as still "to be civilized" to trope the vocabulary of Elias. Similarly, children were discussed by Marshall in his early theorization of citizenship as "citizens in the making" (1950:25). Elias (1978) argued that the civilizing process is a crucial component of the development of the modern nation state and in turn citizenship. Indeed, children can be understood to be made into citizens via the process of "drive transformation, in the course of which young children are brought from free expression of drives to the level of drive regulation required by adult society" (Elias 2008:27). Self-regulation of sexuality is a crucial aspect of this drive regulation that is expected to occur in order to emerge into adulthood as a

full citizen. This transformation and internalization of self-regulation is much of what is expected to happen during adolescence and is thus assumed to be incomplete or imperfect until adulthood. This helps to explain why adolescent sexuality is rendered with greater cultural significance than adult sexuality and is also more likely to be cast particularly as a social problem. However, increasingly in the United States we expect this process to have progressed more completely and earlier for adolescents than in the recent past. Indications of this include our willingness to punish adolescents according to adult standards (U.S. Department of Justice 1999). Last, adolescents occupy a position in U.S. culture that antagonizes the question of responsibility for social control. In comparison to much of the past, political debates about adolescent sexuality can be understood as part of a larger debate about where to draw the line between state and parental/familial responsibility for behavior.

Elias's (1978; 2008) primary theoretical contribution has been toward understanding the process of civilization. He argues that rather than an innate predisposition toward becoming more "civilized," it too is a process that is shaped by history and culture. Elias was careful to "develop the concept of civilization into an ideologically neutral, fact-based term" (2008:9). Rather than imply that as "survival units" (Elias 2008:4-5) -- families, tribes, countries, et cetera -- become more civilized they are progressing in some measure of supposed superiority he framed his discussion of the concept specifically to identify a shift in the balance between constraints. Elias offers changes in childhood, the very "discovery" of childhood, as an example of the process of civilization. Moreover, "an intermediate stage of ten to twenty years now intervenes between childhood and social adulthood ... this long learning period of each individual

person also includes the development of a capacity for self-steering which is highly complex, variable, stable and many-sided" (Elias 2008:13). While Elias avoids using the term adolescence specifically it is clearly at least part of this "intermediate stage." Elias highlights that over many centuries in Western Europe this particular process of civilization included the internalization of self constraint particularly with regard to sexuality. Corresponding to this, "the notion spread that children were human beings who were still free of the sin of sexuality, who in this respect were as innocent as angels" (2008:19). For Elias, Freud was the one most responsible for this "discovery." This acknowledgment of childhood sexual potential "has remained an unwelcome message to the present day" (2008:19). Within Elias' theorization of civilization, sexuality is a crucial component.

The civilizing process for Elias (2008) is the processual shifting balance between internal self-constraints of individuals and external constraints imposed by others with whom they interact. Elias identified the emergence of embarrassment and shame for needing to address "natural needs" such as defecation, masturbation, and sexual behavior, as an important component of the civilizing process. This separation of engaging in these behaviors only in private and specific physical areas occurred concurrently with the separation of childhood and adulthood. Elias argues that the teaching of this separation and shame around certain behavior and needs is part of the civilizing process. "This is how the 'uncivilized' child becomes a more or less 'civilized' adult" (2008:30). This is also a time during which considerable anxiety is invoked, as the potential exists that this civilizing process will not successfully occur.

Elias (1978) also discusses the shift in authority and responsibility between the family and the state for this successful "civilizing" of young people. This occurred as a result of reduction of parental authority, the decline in number of children, as well as the changing position of children's roles within the family. The role of children in industrialized states such as the United States has shifted from a position largely of additional labor for the family farm or business to an investment in the future and a marker of successful participation in society including evidence of heterosexuality. There is also an expectation of greater autonomy for each individual within the family, in particular adolescents, relative to the past. Currently adolescents in the United States are granted comparatively greater autonomy within the family than in the past, and play a significant role in consumer culture, but remain subject to considerable authority of the state.

This process was further influenced by the rise of Foucault's ([1978] 1990) concept of erotic speciation whereby individuals in the United States and parts of Western Europe came to be largely defined as individuals based upon their sexual inclinations and behaviors. As sexuality became the crucial defining measure of maturity and character the importance of regulating sexual drives was highlighted. While Elias' approach to this sexual component of identity arises from a different place, it is generally consistent with Foucault's assertion that during the nineteenth century sexuality came to be understood as the key aspect of modern identity ([1978] 1990). In this way Elias contributes a historical context for understanding the anxiety and discomfort associated with adolescent sexuality.

In this context adolescence became the pivotal time when individuals either did or did not appropriately regulate and channel their sexual drives. This also meant the regulation of sexual drives by adolescence became tied to not only the character and identity of individuals but of the character and identity of the country. Finally, this also meant that regulation of sexuality was melded to modern notions of citizenship. "What was an inchoate and vague sort of opposition between citizenship and perversion in the early twentieth century became a hard and clear line by mid-century" (Canaday 2009:9). Unstated but fundamental in this point is that also during this time period adolescence emerged as the life stage during which individuals were expected to develop a sexual identity. Therefore the sexuality of adolescents, and the "proper" regulation of the sexuality of adolescents, was understood as very directly determining the future character of the country. Adolescents were thought of as still to be civilized. This meant that they were also still to properly regulate and direct their sexuality, and as a result insuring that this process occurred "successfully" that is according to the measures hegemonic masculinity and femininity including heterosexuality became a grave public concern. This meant heightened concern devoted to scrutiny of this process as well as efforts directed specifically toward *how* this is to be done successfully. Failure for an appropriate masculinity to be perpetuated was seen as a failure to participate in the successful perpetuation of the nation. In Connell's discussion of organized groups for boys that were emerging during the first decade of the 1900s, such as the Boy Scouts in the United States, her conclusion is "The scouting movement celebrated the frontier, but it was actually a movement for boys in the metropole. Here it took its place in a long series of attempts to foster particular forms of masculinity among boys" (2005:195). Boys groups

were among the efforts to address concerns about the masculinity of young people such as the "excessive" influence of women resulting in feminization, homosexuality, etc. (Connell 2005). The fact that homosexuals were actively excluded from military service, a fundamental obligation of citizenship, further tied the sexuality of adolescents to the character and future of the nation as popularly and politically imagined.

Women and perpetuation of hegemonic femininity are of less concern because during this time they were seen as auxiliary to the importance of men. Women had yet to earn suffrage and other rights afforded the men who were recognized as citizens. Throughout this discussion it is important to recall that ethnicity and class were factors that were necessarily excluded as achieving appropriate masculinity.

Recent Developments in Adolescence

Elias (2008) argues that during the twentieth century in industrialized states generally there has been a marked increase in the role of the state for successfully civilizing young people. While this is accurate in broad historical terms, more recently in the United States there has re-emerged a political movement to shift responsibility for adolescents back onto the family and away from the state. This is only one component of a rise in neo-Conservative politics that relies on a mythologizing of the traditional family, individual ability and accomplishment, and demonization of government broadly (Somers 2008). Restrictions on adolescents particularly in terms of sexuality have been a key area where United States Neo-conservative policies have been able to be successfully implemented where they are otherwise not as successfully applied. In particular the Religious Right movement has been effective in imposing restrictions on sexual health

and reproductive choices, especially abortion, as well as sexual education for young people (di Mauro and Joffe 2009).

The civilizing process is theorized and discussed by Elias as complex and involving multiple factors that sometimes work consistently but may also be offset by contradictory forces. The overall point is that adolescence since its inception has been situated as a life stage characterized by ambiguity as well as particular importance for national politics. Adolescents in the United States have been and are still seen as a group that are placeholders of the imagined future state of families, cities, and the country as a whole. Because adolescents are also still seen as more malleable than adults they serve as a symbolic vessel for the potential changes that particular groups would prefer for the future, either insuring the status quo or drivers of change. The anxiety about adolescent sexuality is emphasized by and serves as an example of the re-emergence of larger cultural tensions between the role of the state and the role of the family. If the United States can be described as generally consisting of groups marked but distinct ideologies, liberal and conservative (Hunter 1992; Hunter and Wolfe 2006), for both groups adolescents are looked to for vindication or refutation of existing policies, current social conditions, and future changes.

As sexuality is also directly constructed as a core indication of individual identity (Giddens 1991) as well as the character of United States society, adolescent sexuality is even further highlighted as a marker of current and future successes and failure of the country. In short, as a country the United States considers adolescent sexuality to be an indication of where we are as a country and where we are going. It is important here to acknowledge that the assumption about sexuality and youth is that sexual knowledge and

participation in sexual behaviors are by default negatively viewed (Rubin 1984; di Mauro and Joffe 2009). With the regulation and internalization of the regulation of sexual drives tied directly with the historical civilizing process we are prone to construct any perceived loosening of these internal regulations as a threat to the progression of "American exceptionalism" and the future potential of the United States as a preeminent society (Mennell 2007). This contributes to the explanation of deviation of adolescent sexuality from earlier generations as strictly problematic rather, for example, than merely an understandable product of a generational difference in social circumstances.

As adolescent sexuality has become a marker of the current and future state of United States civilization, and cultural divides have increasingly polarized (Hunter 1992), the use of adolescent sexuality becomes a crucial and particularly valuable piece in the debates over how the country should be run, the role of the family, and the role of schools (di Mauro and Joffe 2009; Herdt 2009). In short, adolescent sexuality is imbued with such cultural significance because of its place within the discussion of civilization it is readily usable and seen as a comparatively significant issue to use in arguing for policies via moral panics. This helps to explain why there is such concern about adolescent sexuality and why moral panics that are based on adolescence are common and effective. Further, because adolescents themselves are denied recognition of full citizenship, awareness, maturity, and political voice they themselves are structurally denied the self-definition and determination to resist other social and political actors speaking for them or to use their own experiences as an argument for their particular stance. Their voice can be dismissed as simply unaware of the "actual" state of affairs because of the naiveté of youth. The United States' longstanding values and discourse about the sanctity of

childhood, the innocence of youth, and the importance of protecting children situate advocating for greater freedom for youth to be tantamount to exposing the vulnerable population of young people to the worst of adult society.

THEORIZING CITIZENSHIP

With regard to modern sociological theorizing Marshall was instrumental in bringing citizenship into focus (Heater 2004:113). Marshall (1950) asserted that citizenship included civil, political and social rights that stood in tension with class privilege and status. This categorization of rights allowed for recognition of citizenship as involving individual claims to benefits provided by the state (social rights) but also freedom from excessive state intervention in everyday lives (civil rights) (Macpherson 1985:23). A recent resurgence in so-called "citizenship studies" has been ongoing since the late 1990s (Somers 2008:12). This work has produced a number of contributions to the sociological analysis of citizenship since Marshall.

This more recent sociological work regarding citizenship has focused on empowering groups that are marginalized, silenced, or otherwise excluded from participation in claiming full access to the rights of citizenship. However adolescents are still almost completely omitted from this work. This research has examined how women (Lister 2002); the poor (Phillips 2003), the disabled (Marks 2001), as well as people who identify as gay and lesbian (Plummer 1995; Weeks 1998) and bisexual (Lorber 2000) remain excluded from full enjoyment of the claims to benefits and privileges of citizenship including in the United States. This can be understood as a democratization of political participation and involvement though success has been uneven and variable.

Lister argues that overall, "[c]alls for the voices of marginalized groups to be heard in policy-making and campaigning are becoming more vocal" (2007:53). However, this has rarely applied to adolescents, particularly with regard to sexuality. The few open calls to empower adolescents' claims to sexual freedoms and agency have been met with hostility (Levine 2002). Although Lister's (2007) example is based on improving inclusion of people living in poverty in shaping policies that are meant to address issues of poverty, we can see how adolescents in U.S. culture are not afforded "equal social and political recognition" as well. As discussed earlier the term adolescence was coined specifically to designate a stage of life that was distinct from both childhood and adulthood. Adolescents are excluded from full participation *as citizens* in the political and social processes that are meant to address issues related to them, though the processes and results are different.

Childhood is useful here as a counterpoint to adulthood in the sociological exploration of citizenship. Childhood, like adolescence, is a stage of life excluded from access to the privileges of the adult world. The separation of childhood and adulthood was a key part of the civilizing process (Elias 1978) and that separation paved the way for the formation of adolescence. Children's citizenship has only very recently begun to be investigated (Lister 2007:54). While work has begun on children's citizenship adolescence presents its own unique issues with regard to citizenship. What little work that directly addresses citizenship and adolescents is based on data collected in England, which although in some ways comparable to the United States, had distinct factors involved (Hart 2009).

Somers' in particular is noteworthy for her recent contributions to the conceptualization of citizenship within sociology. She asserts that rather than citizenship

being defined as a social position imbued with a particular set of rights, "Citizenship is

the *right to have rights*" (emphasis in original 2008:xiv). Somers continues by asserting

that this approach allows an analysis that is

> ... comparatively about citizenship regimes as variable, along a continuum from lesser
> to greater degrees of democratic and rights-based social inclusiveness. ... It is only
> this primary right of inclusion and membership that makes possible the mutual
> acknowledgement of the other as a moral equal, and thus worthy of equal social and
> political recognition (Somers 2008:6).

It is the *access* to demand and participate in social institutions such as the education,

legal, and political system that is the defining factor of citizenship rather than the

particular set of rights that are afforded those who are able to participate in those social

institutions. This is a different theorization of citizenship than either common

understandings or past sociological approaches as they relied on the assumption that

citizenship itself meant having rights. Instead Somers highlights that the eligibility to call

upon the rights of citizenship is itself the significant component of citizenship.

Somers (2008) illustrates and develops her theories of citizenship using examples

of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the historical example of the Holocaust, and more

recent efforts to define some as stateless by the market fundamentalist U.S. political

movement, all with an eye on the role of citizenship in the process of globalization. The

recognition of adolescence as a category of the population with limited acknowledgment

as fully entitled to the privileges of citizenship informs our understanding of the

boundaries and intensity of debate over adolescent sexuality in the U.S.

Recent Citizenship Debates in the United States

As these debates about the state and citizenship have intensified, there has been a

recent resurgence of sociological interest in these topics. Arguably this is somewhat in response to the administration of George H. W. Bush enacting policies that specifically created categories of people, such as "enemy combatants," who would be excluded from the rights and privileges of citizenship (Somers 2008). While clearly the battle of being able to fully exercise the rights afforded a citizen of a country is another level of concern, there are those that are excluded from even invoking the access to those rights of citizenship. This is relevant because adolescents are recognized in the United States as citizens if they meet certain criteria such as being born in this country, however even those adolescents recognized as citizens are still denied the ability to entirely invoke the rights of citizenship. The most obvious right of citizenship that adolescents are excluded from invoking is the ability to vote in political elections. This exclusion from the entitlements of citizenship not only partially defines and perpetuates the category of adolescence, but also informs the cultural discourse surrounding adolescents, and contributes to an understanding of how adolescents are a marginalized group in United States society.

While young people are expected to develop into civilized and responsible adults over the course of their adolescence this presupposes that they are not yet appropriately or completely able to engage in civil society in the same ways as adults. This situates adolescents as a group that is fundamentally less able to participate in public discourse and decision-making regarding issues that affect them directly. This is particularly true for issues directly related to adolescent sexuality. As to the issue of adolescents even accessing sexual information they are spoken about rather than with. This was consistently demonstrated by the experiences of these participants. They made clear that

they understood they were not to ask questions of parents or in sexual education, and if they did get on the Internet to investigate they needed to do secretly.

Sexuality remains a controversial and crucial piece of identity that is also inextricably linked to citizenship. As a result the issues of adolescence and sexuality are related to citizenship as well. By exploring adolescent sexuality with an awareness of the debates about citizenship and rights the table is set for a revealing discussion of all three of these issues. In turn, discussions about citizenship, sexuality, and adolescence uncover new understandings of how moral panics are effectively constructed, deployed and are utilized by political actors for particular ends. Finally, these discussions are connected to the difficulties in regulating the content of the Internet. As a technology that is profoundly influential in the current cultural landscape of the United States, and one that clearly plays a role in a number of ways with regard to these issues, we can understand the continued and intense battles over its regulation, ownership and policies regarding content and access to it.

The results of this research challenge the widely circulated claim that the Internet is dangerous to adolescent sexual development and physical safety primarily because it allows young people to access sexual information. Based upon the data and conclusions of my research I assert reconsideration of policies and attitudes toward adolescent access to sexual information that assume it is harmful. This included supporting the existing research that also casts doubt as to if the current approach to sexual education is justified. ""Curiously, in the U.S. education system seldom is it affirmed that the primary goal of sexuality education is the right of youth to know about human sexuality--nor is it understood as an inherent 'right to know' " (Herdt 2009:74). Sexual education is not

discussed in this way, at least in part, because access to sexual information is not recognized as a right of adolescents.

While my participants did not speak in terms of citizenship or political rights they did consistently offer descriptions of how they had been or had felt excluded from the ability to demand access to sexual information, to participate in sexual behavior, or to enact sexual expression.

Angela

Angela was a nineteen-year white woman from an upper-middle class background. She grew up in the suburbs of a major city in the West. Angela's parents were married but her father had confessed to an extramarital affair when she was sixteen. She had felt very close to her father prior to this and understood the affair as a betrayal of her trust. Angela had very limited experience with boys prior to meeting her boyfriend at the time of an interview while working in an ice cream shop. They had been together for two and a half years and she described being very much in love. While Angela did not identify as particularly religious her boyfriend was a practicing Catholic. They planned to marry each other once they were finished with college and were abstaining from sexual intercourse until that time. Angela reported having limited options for learning about sex while growing up. We first talked about her sexual education experience. During her response she included a discussion of other issues as well and so I quote her at length:

> Pointless. But yeah, I mean it's partly the parents' responsibility to talk about stuff like that. Fill in the gaps that the sex ed in school didn't. My parents were super awkward about that. We had sex ed in 8th grade. My science teacher actually came in and presented our sex ed to my band class. So it was like, I don't even remember how long it was, I feel like it was maybe a two day segment. I mean all I remember, literally was the menstruation bead necklace, there was this beaded necklace and it

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had white beads, and it had red beads to simulate ovulation and menstruation. We watched the beginning of some movie ... *Look Who's Talking*. We watched the beginning of that movie. I remember that. And the menstruation bead necklace. And I remember a couple of discussions of STDs. I think there were a couple of nasty pictures. Oh my god. I just feel like they're not telling kids anything. I feel like my parents didn't really tell me anything. My parents were just like well you need to be careful about not getting pregnant. It wasn't like here's how to put a condom on. The guys should know that, but the girls can also know that. It wasn't here's your options for birth control, here's other types of sex, not just heterosexual man-woman sex.

She was clear during middle and high school that she wouldn't be participating in much if any partnered sexual interaction. Nonetheless she felt that her sexual education experience was disappointingly incomplete. Further she articulates the often-implicit cultural approach that parents are to supplement that minimal biological approach to sexual education taken in schools. This approach fueled much of the conservative and religious arguments against teaching more comprehensive sexual education curricula in schools. The argument was that sexual information is basically never value free and it was the entitlement of the parents to decide what values to impart to their children. Therefore sexual education should be constrained to medical facts as much as possible. (Moran 2000; Luker 2006)This approach was morphed to include that abstinence is the only sure way of avoiding certain sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy as social conservatives gained more political power through the 1990s (di Mauro and Joffe). In practice, as with Angela, for many of my participants, their parents were reluctant or unwilling to openly discuss sexuality and they rarely or minimally filled in gaps of knowledge. Finally, it is important to recall that Angela also ended up going to the Internet for sexual information regarding pregnancy and the normalcy of the sexual behaviors that she was engaging in with her partner.

> Well I guess like, so, like my boyfriend and I don't have sex. Like we, I haven't had sex ever. I'm waiting for marriage. I feel like that's very rare. Most of my friends are

like you're a virgin? Oh my god. I can't tell my friends and I definitely can't tell my parents. And so we were like what are we doing? I don't know, let's see if it's normal. That's also part of the reason I was so, "what's sex? I don't know." I think that's probably the only time I ever really sought out sex information was to find out the life of sperm. He definitely comes [ejaculates]. I would freak out and be like, "What if I get pregnant through my clothes?" There was definitely a time I went to [the Internet] to see if the stuff we were doing was normal. For awhile we would just make out and grind kind of and I was like, I feel like that is *so* weird. Like no one I know is doing that. Oh heavy petting. Reading about it is so funny. I was like I can't tell my friends. I definitely can't tell my parents. What are we doing, I don't know, let's see if its normal. I think that's probably the only time I've sought out like sexual information. Cause I was very concerned about like getting pregnant somehow through my jeans. Or like if what we were doing was normal. I mean I think we Googled it. We were on the computer sometime and we Googled it. I don't remember what website it was. There's like a word for it. Not fromage, that's cheese, there's a word …

After her thinking for a moment I interjected and asked if the word was frottage. Angela confirmed and continued to say,

> Yeah. So we were like Googling frottage. But yeah I mean I think we just like urbandictionary or something for other words. I don't know. I just, there was some book at the city library something about sexual behaviors or something. And I flipped through that and I was "Oh, okay, I guess it's okay were doing that and I guess I won't get pregnant." It was reassuring.

Angela was atypical in her decision to remain abstinent until marriage but her experience was typical in that she sought out accurate information on the Internet and found that information to be helpful. This information from the Internet later provided her was immensely reassuring to her and greatly relieved her considerable anxiety both about the normalcy of her behavior and factually regarding pregnancy.

Angela had virtually no access to sexual information from sources such as sexual education, parents or peers. However, she did have the resources and the initiative to be able to seek out specific information on the Internet. In contrast to Gretchen's experience Angela was able to garner knowledge that helped her and her boyfriend to be able to

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engage in the sexual behaviors they preferred with confidence that they were aware of any risks.

ADOLESCENCE AND POLITICS

The notion of adolescence as a separate stage of life originated from a historical confluence of changing social institutions and demographic trends. The meaning and significance of adolescence in the United States continues to shape and be shaped by social forces including the family, the economy, the education system, and the legal system. In the early 20th century, mass migration from rural to urban areas, culmination of a long historical process separating childhood and adulthood as distinct phases of life, and new wage labor opportunities for young people resulted in the identification and therefore "discovery" of adolescence. Current trends in the United States such as the resurgence of Neoliberal market ideologies and the alliance of evangelical Christians with the Republican political party are now influencing the bounds of adolescent rights and privileges (di Mauro and Joffe 2009).

In the early 21st century adolescents and immigration are again key political issues in the United States. Notions and conditions of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood are changing as some bemoan the death of childhood (Buckingham 2000) while others question if adolescence is being prolonged for many into their twenties. The United States remains in an economic crisis of high unemployment, stagnant wages, and the greatest inequality of wealth and income since the 1920s (Domhoff 2011). Within these larger social forces young people are growing into adulthood and making sense of themselves and the world as they do so. There is research showing that a considerable

number of adolescents are interested and involved in various aspects of civic engagement (Montgomery and Gottlieb 2006). Yet adolescents remain a comparatively voiceless demographic group as they are denied full rights of citizenship in the United States and have not coalesced to form an identity movement of their own (Fields 2004). Youth ages ten to nineteen are a significant part of United States society making up 13.9% of the population as of 2009 (United States Census). However, adolescents are not entirely excluded from rights and privileges that are afforded adults, such as having a voice in custody decisions, being held accountable for certain crimes, driving, and later voting. With the position that sexuality occupies in our cultural discourse as fundamentally indicative of the morality of individuals and the nation as a whole these rights and privileges sometimes extended to adolescents do not apply. In fact, with regard to access to sexual education as well as the ability to make sexual health decisions adolescents have been further constrained over the last twenty years. The increase in number and scope of parental notification laws for adolescents in need of abortions (di Mauro and Joffe) are a strong indication that adolescents are not politically recognized as entitled to rights and privileges when related to sexuality. It is this liminal and changing status that contributes to the importance of examining and understanding the discourse on adolescence as it reveals other issues of sociological importance–citizenship in particular.

Oliver

Oliver was a twenty-two year-old, white man who identified as kinky (believed in practicing ideals of the bondage, dominance, submission, masochism community), was raised in the Midwest in an upper-middle class family. When I asked if his parents ever

talked with him about sex he described having one conversation when he was in elementary school where he asked, "Where do babies come from?" His mother replied with a one sentence answer. Other than that sexuality was not discussed in the home. This was understood rather than explicitly stated. When I asked about this Oliver replied:

> That's something I understood. My parents were really non-helpful in that regard. Like in elementary school when I asked my mom where do babies come from that was about it. When I hit puberty my mom went to the library, checked out all the old 70s "Your Body's Changing" books and left them on my bed. And I was like, "What are these books?" And she said, "I thought you might need them." I never got the birds and the bees talk.

I prompted asking if his parents ever offered that they would answer questions if he had them. He replied, "Not really." It was clear to a number of participants that sexuality was not a topic they could discuss with their parents.

Oliver's experience does bring up one of the few ways that several participants reported their parents did provide sexuality information to them. This was by presenting participants with books about sexuality or making books with sexual information available to them. However, the majority of participants described that these books were not something they found particularly helpful. Many described them as outdated, limited to topics such as pubertal changes, or otherwise unappealing. This is interesting as books such as *Our Bodies, Our Selves* (The Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1973) was a landmark in making sexual information available. Use of the Internet by adolescents to look up sexual information may be serving in a similar capacity to that which these kinds of books served a generation ago. This could be more a function of the sharp increases in use of the Internet for reference and knowledge-seeking rather than a complete dismissal of these books as several participants did find books helpful. Nonetheless, these

participants as adolescents typically were not satisfied with the information in books if they were provided or made available by parents.

Oliver did not discuss sex with friends. When I asked him about this he replied flatly, "It was still pretty individual. ... We didn't really talk about it." Oliver was not typical of other men who did talk about sex with their friends. As mentioned earlier in chapter three, the sexual discussions of men participants were most likely to be limited to the events of a particular sexual interaction rather than sexual health information. In neither case were these men involved in conversations with friends about the significance of sexual experiences, safer sex practices, or a myriad of other potential topics. As a whole, men were also largely excluded from accessing information about sexuality from parents, friends or in sexual education.

Sandra

Sandra, a twenty year-old white women who identified as heterosexual and who grew up in a middle class family in the Midwest. She grew up in a smaller city and her parents still lived in the same home that she was raised in. Sandra had gone to a magnet high school that focused on the arts where she played in the orchestra. While in middle school and high school she participated in the youth group associated with the church she went to with her mom. Her mother was religious and involved in the local church though her father was not. She was currently enrolled for her third year at a state university and studying a humanities discipline. Sandra's parents were still married. She had a younger brother. At some point while in college Sandra had rejected her religious upbringing. Sex was not something that was discussed in her home. Sandra described sexual education,

her parents, as well as her peers as decidedly less than helpful or informative when it came to sex.

In regard to sexual education Sandra described not participating though she did not recall exactly why. She did remember her peers at the time talking about the content. "Yeah I heard about sex ed but it just made, it just was nonsense to me. I just didn't think about it. None of it registered with me." I then asked Sandra if her parents talked with her about sex. She replied:

> Nope. My dad came and asked me once when I was seventeen and asked me if my mom needed to have a talk with me. I was just like, "I'm seventeen." It's like, "What are you going to do now?" No. No. Not at this point. And then when I got to college my mom was like, if you need birth control just let me know. And like that's it. That's all I got from them.

I then asked Sandra if there was somewhere she did go to learn about sex. She reported listening to the program *Loveline* on the radio to learn about sex.

> I learned pretty much everything I know, well I mean, I learned pretty much everything from *Loveline*. Yeah. I had a friend who was like, "I love this show *Loveline*." The radio show. I listened to it like every night when I went to bed for like a few years. Really that's how I learned so much about sex. Because like no one had ever said anything to me about it and all of a sudden I'm just listening to this radio show where people are calling with all their crazy sex problems and I'm just like, whoa. What is this?

For Sandra this was the one venue that afforded her information and discussion about sexual topics. Sandra was unique in that *Loveline*, a radio program, was her primary source of information about sex. According to www.lovelineshow.com, "Loveline follows the call-in question-and-answer model with the primary goal of helping youth and young adults with relationship, sexuality, and drug addiction problems." Loveline is began in California in the mid 1980s and still airs nationally on many radio stations. Her situation nonetheless speaks to the lack of options she had for information about sex. She

described being wholly disconnected from the sexual education that was offered in her school. Nor did Sandra have any dialogue with her parents about sexuality. Given that these other options were not available to Sandra I asked if she spoke with friends about sex. Sandra replied, "I only really had one friend who was having sex. And I mean she would be like, "We had sex the other day. And it was raining." I'd be like, "Oh."" I prompted her and asked if she would then ask her friend more detailed questions, to which she replied, "I didn't really. She should've known how ignorant I was, but at the same time I didn't want to reveal how ignorant I was, and I would try to play up, "Oh yeah. Totally I know what you're talking about." So like I didn't ask." Sandra was caught in a bind where she was without information about sex though to admit this would be a cause for embarrassment amongst her peers. Sandra was typical of many participants who reported a social stigma to ignorance about sex by peers while at the same time having few options for learning about sex. When I asked Sandra in hindsight what she thought of the information that she learned from *Loveline* she replied,

> I feel like it served me well. I feel like I'd be so much more clueless without [having listened to it]. Because even my friends, I've never had the experience of my friends telling me explicitly like what this and that was like. Or like, so I just feel like without *Loveline* I wouldn't have known anything really.

Loveline was the one resource that Sandra found where she had access to sexual information. While most of my participants described turning to the Internet rather than radio when the traditional sources of sex information such as parents, peers, and sexual education were unavailable or uninformative the dynamic parallels exactly.

Discussion

As discussed in chapter four that focuses on analysis of sexual education many

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participants were critical of their sexual education. For the following analysis I include some comments made by participants that indicated they would have benefitted from more or different content in sexual education.

Family members, particularly parents, are recognized as a longstanding source of sexuality information. As aforementioned much of the argument against providing formal sexual education beyond the most basic is that that would impart values and this is the purview of parents. However, participants in my research often described that parents were not a source of sexuality information directly. This sometimes included parents who were unwilling to discuss sexuality with participants as well as sometimes being participants who were unwilling to discuss sexuality with their parents. Regardless of the concern, parents were often not recognized as an option for information about sexuality. This ranged from a virtual moratorium on discussion or expression of sex in the home to a generally understood disapproval of the topic that translated into minimal talk.

The experiences that Gretchen, Sandra, Angela, and Oliver described were stories I heard time and again from participants. They mentioned either not having sexual education or the content of sexual education being either remain abstinent or use a condom. They mentioned parents that avoided the issue of sexuality altogether, had one or two talks with participants, or otherwise participants had decided it would be painfully awkward to discuss sex with them. Friends were one of the few resources for asking about sex for many participants. As was the case however with Oliver and Sandra this was not the case as asking too many questions could reveal inexperience and ignorance which was stigmatized by other adolescents. Gretchen's case was another common experience. One friend who had engaged in a sexual behavior first among a group of

friends would be sought out as the expert. Those participants who were the friend to have

experience early describing talking more about who, where, and what it felt like. While

these are all important topics and they seemed earnest in making an effort to tell their

friends what they knew they often felt there was little reason they should be thought of as

experts. The men in this sample who were in this situation described omitting details of

awkwardness, incompetence or displeasure for fear of embarrassment. Those that did

have Internet access used it. This was often the one venue where they felt they could

explore sexuality whether that was finding information about birth control or looking at

pornography. Sometimes it was both. I asked Joan, a twenty year-old white woman from

a working-class background if there was anything else that was important in how she

learned about sex that was not included in the interview. Her response also implies a

dissatisfaction with the approach to sexual education that she experienced:

> I just think in school they just need to be more open. I know ... I don't know if it's a
> school thing or a law. They just need to be more open. Kids know about sex. Hate to
> break it to you but they do. And, I mean if kids have siblings that are any older than
> them, they've probably heard about it before they've reached middle school. In
> middle school sex ed classes are just about what's inside. Kids are waiting for the day
> when you pull out a penis. To you, you might think they're innocent and they don't
> know about sex. But you're not, not only not stopping unwanted teen pregnancy,
> that's huge right now, the spread of STDs, so many people I know are like I didn't
> know a [dental] dam or that a condom could stop that. And its like, where did you
> grow up? So yeah. I think if you were just more open with it it could help so much.

Joan took this question as an opportunity to argue that while she didn't necessarily

understand the origins of the policies that resulted in the constraints on sexual education

curriculum but that she thought they were fundamentally misguided. Joan grew up in a

family that did not discuss sexuality other than her parents and older brothers told her not

engage in sexual behavior. Joan also grew up with minimal Internet access. However,

when I asked if she thought she would have used the Internet to look up sexual

information she responded adamantly, "Definitely. And now I do." Much of Joan's

sexual information had come from her friends and teammates in high school. Joan felt

empowered to learn for herself about sexuality primarily via the Internet. The freedom

and opportunity to do so was not only moving to come to college but also the opportunity

and freedom to seek out information on the Internet.

The differences in how participants described sexuality as adolescents and as

young adults were important in indicating the limitations of their access to sexual content

and expression. Marion, a nineteen year-old white woman who identified as sexual grew

up in a small town in the Rocky Mountain region. When I asked her about what she

remembered from sexual education she replied:

> I don't remember that much actually. Probably because it wasn't like that much new information I guess because they don't really talk about like, we read in books and stuff in class, not about how you can have sex and prevent pregnancy it was just how you shouldn't have sex. Like they say, it was just like that in my school. Like when you get to college and they hand this package of condoms and lube and all this stuff and you know a lot of stuff parents would not be okay with. It would almost be better to do that earlier because then at least you have like options.

Here Marion contrasts the availability of condoms and other sex-related items being

made available to her as an adult in college with her experience of high school. Clearly,

the shifts in social context between high school and college, particularly when that

includes no longer living at home are also a factor, but that sexuality was such a notable

difference for many participants suggests the significance.

The few participants who did have options among more traditional sources of

information, such as Mackenzie who is described below, typically attributed them with

having the most significance for learning about sex. They sometimes still did consult the

Internet but it played a different role.

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ADOLESCENCE AND CITIZENSHIP

In terms of citizenship adolescents are a special case. For adolescents the tension between claims to benefits and freedom from state or parental intervention is different than for adults. For example adolescents have claims to benefits that are not necessarily available to adults such as access to free public education or government health insurance such as the State Children's Health Insurance Program recently re-established by the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-3). Simultaneously adolescents are required to attend school until a certain age and are prevented by law from participating in a number of activities to which adults are entitled such as consumption of alcohol. Adolescents are also prevented from accessing certain kinds of information that are options for adults such as sexually explicit material. Furthermore the position of adolescents within this tension changes as they age with generally increasing freedom from state intervention and access to privileges in society. This approach is intended to prepare adolescents for participation as adult citizens and gradually introduce them to rights and responsibilities of adulthood as they age toward that status.

This tension of adolescent claims to benefits and the restrictions imposed on them is most pronounced with regard to issues of sexuality. Restrictions on adolescent sexuality that do not apply to adults abound. These include age of consent (Levine 2001), access to reproductive care such as emergency contraception or abortion (di Mauro and Joffe 2009), access to honest and accurate sexual health information (Fields 2008) to name a few. Altogether, adolescent sexuality is overwhelmingly cast as a social problem (Lesko 2001; Fields 2004).

United States culture views sexuality overall, including adult sexuality, as suspicious and problematic unless redeemed by motivations of love or procreation (Rubin 1984). However, even within this broader cultural sentiment adolescents remain a special case. Adolescent pregnancy does not redeem this sexual expression as it does for married, heterosexual adults (Higginson 1998; Kefalas 2005) Adolescents are largely legally excluded from marriage without parental consent and/or court approval (Legal Information Institute 2010). Furthermore, recent gains in access to sexual rights for other marginalized groups such as people who identify as gay and lesbian are often specifically dependent on adulthood in order to be able to claim access. As Fields highlights, "Both the Lawrence [v. Texas] decision and the expanding definition of marriage to include same-sex partnerships rest on notions of consent, privacy, and majority status–notions to which young people do not have access" (Fields 2004:14). This overall negativity about adolescent sexuality and exclusion from benefits and privileges afforded adults intersects as well with gender (Tolman 1994), ethnicity (Ferguson 2001, Collins 2004), sexual identity (Pascoe 2007), class (Edin and Kefalas 2005), religiosity (Wilkins 2008) and other axes of stratification. However, even for the relatively privileged white, upper middle class adolescents who participated in this research they face restrictions to sexual expression and constraints from services and information that adults do not. Claims to sexual rights and privileges are specifically discussed in United States culture as the purview of adults.

Mackenzie

Mackenzie was a twenty-four year-old white woman who grew up middle-class in

a college town in the Midwest. Her parents divorced when she was young. She described

her father as an orthodox Jew who was "very minimalist in terms of emotions and

conversation." Her mother was Buddhist who lived a "completely hippie commune

lifestyle." Mackenzie spent several days a week with each parent until she was thirteen

and legally allowed to choose to stay with her mom. She also had a godmother who was

actively involved in raising her. Her father provided her with a book about sexuality

when she was ten that Mackenzie described as "so inconsequential to her upbringing" as

to be barely memorable. Meanwhile her mother and godmother lived in a commune and

spoke openly with her about sex.

Mackenzie was exceptional in that very few of my participants felt they could

openly discuss sexuality with their parents. Even those participants who described talking

with their parents about sex presented it as a limited number of isolated instances where a

specific question was asked and answered. Mackenzie was typical of the few who did

have ongoing and more involved discussions about sexuality with their parents.

Mackenzie described feeling that she really benefitted from being able to talk openly with

her mother and godmother as a resource:

> My mom was really, really, open with me about everything with me. And she
> continues to be. She really nurtured this relationship of, it's okay to talk to me about
> things because I'd rather know than not know, and we'll deal with the consequences
> later. That was really helpful.

Mackenzie discussed sexuality as being another aspect of life that was integrated and

acknowledged by her mother as well as in other areas of her life. When I asked

Mackenzie if sexuality was something acknowledged within the commune where she

lived until she was sixteen she replied, "Yeah. I mean we lived with other couples.

Sexuality was inherent. You know. And I lived with like four other kids so we would like

talk about it." Again, Mackenzie had opportunity to participate in discussion of sexuality with others both her peers and adults.

The participants who had parents that were willing to openly dialogue with them about sex also typically had more comprehensive sexual education experiences. Mackenzie had an experience of sexual education that was different than that of most participants but similar to those who had more comprehensive sexual education. She described her formal sexual education as follows:

> My high school offered a woman's group that met once a week. And we got out of class for it and we'd sit down and talk about sex. We'd talk about our partners and our relationships and what was happening and like where to go if we needed something and they'd pass out on condoms at the end of the meeting. And it was totally great, it was totally great. I don't know if they do that at my high school anymore. But it was totally great. It was very helpful. And that's where I got a lot of my information actually.

Mackenzie described feeling confident in making decisions and in hindsight being glad she made the decisions she did. This was facilitated by her ability to discuss these issues in her sexual education groups at school as well as with her mom. Later in the interview Mackenzie described talking with her mom about considering engaging in sex with her first boyfriend:

> And so I sat down with [my mom] and I was like, "You know, I'm thinking I might want to have sex with Patrick and this that and the other thing." She said, "Okay, I just want to stress that sex is not just the act of sex. It is an incredibly emotional and vulnerable thing, especially for women, and she talked about it and it really changed my whole perspective on sex. And I actually waited and I did not have sex with him and waited until I was eighteen to have sex. Because I realized at 15 that I wasn't emotionally evolved enough to be able to have that type of interaction with someone. And so I didn't and that worked out very well.

Mackenzie's experience constrasted sharply with the experiences with parents that most of the participants described. Having an ongoing honest dialogue with her mother about sexual topics was helpful and beneficial for Mackenzie. She also mentioned specific

points where she was not comfortable talking with her mom, such as the details of specific sexual experiences, but she was able to establish those boundaries as well. As evidenced in the above quote she typically felt informed and empowered to make decisions for herself about her sexuality. Mackenzie also described not having Internet access until she was approximately sixteen. Though even after she did have her own computer and Internet access Mackenzie never mentioned seeking out accurate sexual information via the Internet. She did discuss watching pornographic content on the Internet but that was later in her college career. Mackenzie was a participant for whom other more traditional institutions such as her family and her school provided the information and opportunity for discussions that the Internet offered for many others. Other participants described having parents who were similarly open to dialogue about sexuality, had more comprehensive sexual education, and had peers with whom they could talk about sex honestly sometimes did still seek out sexual information on the Internet. However, they spoke of the Internet as one among many options and typically a resource for supplemental or refreshing their knowledge about a particular topic.

Mackenzie is illustrative of both how helpful and empowering having a variety of options for finding sexual information to draw can be as well as the fact that none of these options were guaranteed for her. Mackenzie was largely treated as a person who deserved and was entitled to an awareness of sexuality, answers to questions about sexuality, and to participate in sexual behaviors of her choosing when she felt ready. This was true of her mother, her experience of formal sexual education, and her friends. Rather than focusing specifically on encouraging or discouraging Mackenzie was able to consult a number of people in her life to help her make decisions that worked for her.

THE INTERNET

The Internet fits within all of this in a number of ways. The civilizing process has long trended toward an isolation of physical needs and sexual behavior between children, adolescents and adults. This separation was arguably successful for many years and this separation was seen as an indicator of status and propriety. As standards of living grew in the United States over the course of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, one of the key points of separation for class was accomplishing raising children that internalized self regulation particularly including that of sexuality (Elias 2008). The poor and ethnic minorities have long been characterized as less worthy of status and resources, because of their supposed lack of self-regulation especially sexual self-regulation. Accusations that marginalized groups were "too sexual" as indicated by their fertility rates, variations in sexual behavior from an implicit white, upper-middle class norm, semi-public or public engagement in behaviors construed as sexual have long been used to justify sexual and other oppression of a variety of groups. With the Internet this physical and social separation of any number of categories of behavior including sexuality and bodily functions was (once again) collapsed. After arguably centuries of a process whereby sex and bodily wastes were isolated and restricted to particular places at particular times and by particular people, walls and social boundaries were essentially smashed as it became possible for, for example, a suburban teenager to go into the bedroom with a laptop and call up on the Internet people participating in a great variety of sexual and otherwise "uncivilized behavior." Whereas centuries resulted in the separation of youth from the sexual realm of adults, and this was associated as a deeply held positive value within United States culture, the Internet broke through the barriers that had been established to continue this

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separation in the face of other technological developments such as the VCR. With videotapes there were additional structural restrictions and issues that adolescents would face when seeking out pornography. Pornographic tapes could only be rented or purchased from a proper store with photo identification. For adolescents during the 1980s and 1990s then pornography had to be surreptitiously acquired or offered by another person willing to ignore the federal laws restricting showing pornographic content to minors. Further, if a videotape was to be secured for later use it had to be kept somewhere that was potentially discovered by an adult or other authority figure. While these restrictions were certainly imperfectly imposed they did arguably prevent many adolescents from the amount and range of pornographic content in comparison to the Internet.

As a culture the United States does not trust adolescents to self-regulate especially with regard to sexuality; thus adolescents are not trusted to conform to this process that has served as a marker of successful citizenship, parenting, etc., to not watch the sex and body function-related content available on the Internet. This was and is particularly frightening to the cultural conservatives of the United States who had been terrified by the loosening of the sexual standards and historical authority structures that characterized the late 1960s. With the election of Reagan the conservative movement in the United States had begun to accomplish a re-establishment of "traditional values" through government policy. The election of George W. Bush in 2000 could be understood as the culmination of a generational fight in response to the successes of the liberal "Left" and identity politics of the 1960s. Just as Bush was becoming President of the United States the mature Internet was also coming into being and that long hard fought success to move

back to the mythic Right "traditional family values" was deeply threatened. While the political Right was arguably very much able to restrict and repress sexuality in existing institutions and venues (support for "traditional" families, restriction of access to sexual information in schools (Fields 2008), restrictions on and manipulation of science related to contraception and pregnancy (Irvine 2004)), the Internet existed outside of these and not only allowed all of what the Right was trying to keep from coming through but much more. Considerable efforts were made to police the content of the Internet particularly under the guise of protecting children from online sexual predators. However, these policies and laws largely were focused on direct communication between participants. Meanwhile, a significant increase in the variety and availability of sexual content on the Internet was occurring and young people were beginning to take advantage of this repository of otherwise forbidden information.

The presumption remains in United States culture that with regard to adolescents and sexuality in general the necessary approach is "to protect youth from potential harm as opposed to providing youth with appropriate services and sufficient information with which to make decisions and protect themselves" (di Mauro and Joffe 2009:74). While this is the approach of many parents, educators and policy makers, adolescents themselves have begun to realize that they want and could benefit from access to sufficient information in making informed decisions about their bodies and sexual behaviors. While expressly denied this information by parents and educators, and with details excluded from mainstream media precisely to protect young people from "exposure" to such content, adolescents took it upon themselves to search for this information on the Internet. Moreover, in hindsight my respondents overwhelmingly

reported that they disagreed with most restrictions on content and access to sexual

information by adolescents. Even those who reported specific negative instances of

encountering pornographic or otherwise disconcerting video content were loath to

characterize these experiences as somehow fundamentally damaging to them.

Juliette

Juliette was a nineteen year-old white woman who identified as bisexual at the

time of the interview. She was a double major at a state university in the West and

worked in the campus residence halls. Juliette grew up in "more of a poor minority

neighborhood" with both of her parents, who were still together, and an older brother.

She felt that she got along well with her family. However, as was the case with many

participants, including those who similarly described getting along well with parents, she

did not talk with them about sex. In response to my question as to if she got along with

her parents she replied,

> Yeah we got along really well. I talk to my mom a lot so like I'll tell her pretty much
> everything except anything that's sexually related or in my relationship. I have a
> boyfriend right now. And then my dad and I will hang out but I won't tell him
> anything too personal. He like to lecture and stuff. So, just to save myself some time.

Juliette had learned not to discuss sexuality with her parents throughout her childhood

and adolescence. While they had an earlier "sex talk" that was awkward and, in

hindsight, she felt too early to be helpful it was a conversation about her first boyfriend

that was crucial in this regard.

> Just the once when I asked about puberty. She told me like what happens, like what I
> can expect to happen. And she also told me how STDs are transmitted. And
> considering I didn't really know anything. This was like the 5th grade I was like,
> whoa, what's going on here? She didn't even call them STDs she called them, like
> you can get an infection. And like I didn't really know what that meant. But then

finding it out later what it was in high school and middle school a little bit. So I kind of knew what she was talking about. But like she framed it in a really simplistic way and so now I can see that like that wasn't really that effective. I don't know why she told me that. And then I think sophomore year when I had this boyfriend where we were doing like heavy petting, he was three years older than me. And they were fine with that as long as we were being good, I guess. But she like gave me a condom and started crying and then said I'm sure you know how to use it. And I'm like, "Okay, thanks." And she started crying. I mean she walked in and was like, "I want you to have this." Then burst into tears and said, "I'm sure you know how to use it. Just put it on and unroll it. He'll probably know but you need to be safe because there is no guarantee that he will be." She was telling me to be smart about it. It was kind of overwhelming and whoa. Now I know never to talk with her about this stuff, it's kind of crazy.

For her parents Juliette's involvement in a romantic relationship and the possibility that she could be engaging in sexual intercourse was cause for tears and a last minute effort to encourage her to use protection. From this she learned that it would be awkward and unwelcome to discuss the issue with her parents. While her mother took the step of offering her daughter a condom she did not offer to discuss the issue or answer questions.

Juliette described herself as shy during middle school and somewhat of an outcast because she was focused on school and her family was unable to afford the styles that other kids were wearing. In high school she was able to find friends who were also interested in and focused on academics. However, when I asked if she talked with her friends about sexual topics, Juliette replied,

Not in middle school especially. In high school the friends I had, one of 'em was really religious so she was really prude I guess you would say. The guy friends I had would joke about it. They would joke about something and I would be like "I don't understand" and they would explain it to me or something like that. It wasn't actually like sex. Like what masturbation means because I didn't know.

So Juliette had neither friends nor parents as a viable resource for her questions about sex. Her experience of sexual education was that it was very focused on anatomy. This was a new who had been viewing sexually explicit material online since the age of

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twelve, what she thought about the argument that accessing pornography under the age of

eighteen. She replied:

> I don't think [accessing sexually explicit material under the age of eighteen] is
> terrible at all. That it will cause people to do all this stuff they wouldn't otherwise do,
> or experimenting, I could see how they could say that ... but I actually considered
> what's real and what's not real and that it can be different. If people saw more of the
> violent porn. They could take that the wrong way and think that's how it should be or
> something like that. It could be taken the wrong way. But, I think overall it's a good
> thing. Kids shouldn't be exposed to it. But if they want to access it, if they are curious
> I think stuff like that should be made available. Images can be helpful. Because if
> they're always told in sex class, you know it's going to be like this. Or this is what it
> looks like. Even the drawings are not realistic. So if they're exposed to something that
> is more realistic. I think it would be a good thing. If they want. Obviously, only if
> they want it.

Notice that Juliette argues that the decision should be placed squarely on the shoulders of

the imagined young person who would be interested in sexually explicit material or

information related to sexuality. Admittedly, Juliette and most of my respondents occupy

privileged positions in our culture as almost all were from a middle class background and

almost every participant had had some college education. Juliette implicitly

acknowledges this in her disclaimer that she doesn't want to presume she is more capable

of making decisions that others but nonetheless argues that it should be the individual

adolescent who should make the decision. This critical approach to not just sexually

explicit material but all media is something to recognize as an important skill for

adolescents in a media landscape that is allowing more and more people to access more

and more types of content. For these participants the Internet was a valuable and

important part of their sexual socialization simply because it was an option. As

adolescents learned that they were not welcome to inquire about sexuality from parents,

were given incomplete information in formal sexual edcuation, and had friends with

various levels of knowledge and willingness to talk, the Internet was one place to explore

sexuality in relative safety and with minimal fear of judgment. Given the options this was often very appealing and helpful for my participants. The functioning of moral panics help to explain how and why these approaches to adolescent sexuality continue to dominate cultural discourse and perpetuate policies that exclude consideration of the experiences of adolescents themselves.

MORAL PANICS

It is also important to situate the concept of moral panics (Cohen 2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994) within the discussion of adolescence and citizenship. I assert that the endurance and effectiveness of moral panics that draw upon concerns about adolescent sexuality are due to the liminal state of adolescence within the current political debates regarding citizenship.

Adolescence and Moral Panics

Moral panics endure about the dangers of sexuality for adolescence. Whereas moral panics in the past have relied on a notion of folk devils and innocent victims, panics about adolescent sexuality are also particularly effective because they draw upon concerns about a group thought of as still to be civilized. This can be seen in the ongoing perpetuation of notions of sexual education as inciting sexual behavior among adolescents. Stories of younger and younger adolescents' rampant and explicit sexuality consistently re-appear in popular news. The argument remains that viewing sexually explicit material will corrupt and damage not only young people but as a result the very fabric of United States society. These issues consistently emerge as the basis for moral

panics with resultant calls to further regulate the Internet (COICA), to further regulate

options for sexual health (e.g. Gardasil, Plan B), to further restrict sexual education to

promotion of one particular familial model. The social conservative movement in the

United States has recognized the enduring anxiety about adolescent sexuality as ongoing

fodder by which to effectively pass policies that advance their agenda. This has proven

particularly effective because of the liminality of adolescence thereby allowing the

almost complete exclusion of their own voices in the popular and especially the political

realm. As shown in the descriptions of my participants, adolescents are learning well that

they are not entitled to learn about sexuality. Many participants had neither someone to

speak to about sexuality nor an understanding of *how* to go about learning about

sexuality. Further, the framing of sexuality as a negative and destructive force

particularly for young people has been emphasized consistently for so long that rebuttal

to these limitations becomes cast as tantamount to sexual exploitation. In other words, as

demonstrated and argued by Levine (2002) it becomes virtually impossible particularly as

an adult to argue for adolescent expression of sexuality, access for adolescents to honest

sexual information, access for adolescents to sexual health care, and in particular access

to sexual pleasure. Doing so at virtually any level places one in the position of being

accused of sexual predation or advocating sexual molestation of young people, reviled

statuses in our culture. As my results show, adolescents have largely been left to their

own devices to find out about sexuality, make decisions about sexual behaviors, and seek

out sexual health care. Many participants described having taken it upon themselves to

find out other information about sexuality, and the Internet played a crucial role in their

ability to do that. However, many participants also described wanting a trustworthy, informed adult with whom they could have honestly and directly discussed sexuality.

As a culture we can continue to drive young people to the Internet for their sexual education, models of relationships, and information about sexual health, or we can begin to have a reasoned and realistic discussion about more comprehensive sexual education, how to have honest discussions with and how to recognize adolescents as having sexual selves.

CONCLUSION

Adolescent sexuality serves as particularly effective grist for moral panics for a number of reasons. Adolescent sexuality raises questions about the extent of the social, cultural, and civil rights by pressing the issues of access to information, sexual identities and behaviors, and the role of the Internet as components of these rights. This in turn, raises questions of the limits of citizenship for young people in a culture that increasingly expects them to participate in other realms such as the market place, the legal system, the labor market, and the education system as adults. It reveals our enduring skepticism about how to continue the civilizing process as globalization of culture continues. The experiences of my participants demonstrate clearly that these expectations do not extend to include the realm of sexuality. As was the case with many of my participants they are left without the resources to make fully informed decisions about sexual behavior or sometimes even an understanding of their bodies. For these participants this lack of information resulted variously in great anxiety and unpleasant experiences.

Adolescent sexuality also continues to force the issues of the role of the state versus the family in the socialization of young people. Social conservatives have been remarkably effective at manipulating this argument to accomplish limiting the scope of sexual education and imposing additional limitations on adolescent sexual health decisions. Meanwhile, as described repeatedly by my participants adolescents are bearing the burden of these policies and attitudes. They are left to fend for themselves: to negotiate, understand, and learn about sexuality. All of these issues connect in various ways to the larger cultural divide between social conservative and social progressive politics. For the participants of this research they were left to fend for themselves in the fallout. Though they often proved immensely resourceful given their resources and options it was also much to their detriment.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

In this chapter I discuss the theoretical and applied policy implications of this research, suggestions for future research, as well as the possible impact on public discourse focused on adolescent sexuality. I first consider suggestions for policy changes around sexual education, the Internet, and the availability of sexually explicit material for adolescents that would be supported by my data and analysis. Next, I discuss directions for future research. Then, I place the theoretical contributions of my findings, particularly with regard to sexual scripting, in the context of extant sociological knowledge. Last, I address some of the limitations and problematic outcomes of the current public discourse regarding adolescent sexuality in the United States. This includes challenges to that discourse and strategies for subverting the current paradigm regarding adolescents and sexuality with the (perhaps heretofore unheard of) goal of improving the lives of adolescents.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Sexual Education Curriculum

Among my participants very few found their sexual education was not particularly helpful. Most found that sexual education was a socially awkward experience and it omitted discussion of topics that they would have found beneficial. For this sample it seemed this was not the fault of teachers or parents but a byproduct of the constraints

placed on the teaching and discussion of these topics. There was minimal opportunity to ask questions or to discuss issues beyond the bare basics that were taught. For the vast majority of participants formal sexual education topics were almost always limited to sexual anatomy, symptoms of sexually transmitted infections, and possibly that there are contraceptive options.

Other research that has looked more broadly at policies and curricula have found that content is restricted by policies related to funding requirements, conservative school boards and concerns over "community standards" (Irvine 2004; Luker 2006). Similarly, as Fields (2008) found, the sexual education curriculum itself is typically separated from all other subject matter. This conveys to adolescents that the information they receive as part of their formal sexual education is unimportant or "optional." Finally, the almost exclusive focus on the dangers of sex reinforces the cultural notion or "ideological formation" (Rubin 1984:278) that sexuality itself is a threat surrounded with potential and sometimes inevitable negative consequences. These participants overwhelmingly described experiences of sexual education that are consistent with the findings of this earlier research. My research has indicated that creating this expectation, particularly in young women, does not necessarily protect them from the aforementioned negative consequences such as unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections. Further, women in this research discussed sexuality in ways that indicated they are less likely to expect and demand the conditions necessary to have enjoyable and safer sexual experiences. There was a marked difference between the few women who had sexual education that also dealt with relationships, communication, and a more thorough curriculum and those who had the more minimal sexual education that was most typical

of this sample. For these women they described being more confident in making decisions as to whether or not to participate in sexual behaviors, including often waiting to do so, being able to assert and demand that their boundaries be respected during sexual experiences, and being able to identify and negotiate relationships and experiences that were personally satisfying and pleasurable.

Current official federal policy supports abstinence-only sexual education. This approach promotes a curriculum and educational experience that was remembered by these young adults as unrealistic and detached from their lived experience as adolescents. As a result, my participants as adolescents remembered being frequently dismissive of the content of sexual education as unimportant or irrelevant. My findings show that the sexual education that was most helpful and useful among these participants included ongoing consistent opportunities for discussion of a variety of issues and topics with a trusted adult or older peer. However these opportunities were few and far between for these participants. A more comprehensive sexual education experience were primarily available to the participants who attended alternative or private schools or who were involved in the Our Whole Lives program due to their religious participation.

Assuming that a renewed effort to integrate discussion of sexuality more comprehensively into the curriculum is politically unrealistic (Herdt 2009), small but significant changes could still be made. Bringing together the analysis of experiences of my participants with other research on the effectiveness of different sexual education programs (Irvine 2004; Luker 2006; Fields 2008; American Academy of Pediatrics 2010) I offer several curriculum suggestions. Given that my sample is not representative further research would need to be done before widespread policy reconsideration would be

appropriate. However, this exploratory research provides support for the argument that it would be worthwhile and justified to conduct such research. This is further supported by the similarities in findings between this project and the aforementioned related research.

Based on the reports of these participants, the following changes would be important considerations for most sexual education curricula. First, sexually transmitted infections should be addressed realistically and from a position other than invoking fear of sex in adolescents. Participants in this research were never presented with a range of symptoms and information regarding disrupting routes of transmission in their formal sexual education. Rather they were shown only the worst-case scenarios. Strategies other than abstaining from sexual intercourse or using condoms were rarely presented. Even when these options were presented, very few participants remembered discussion of how or why these strategies would or would not work. This left many participants fearful but without the ability to accurately assess the risk of participating in particular sexual experiences. Moreover, it left them unable to recognize milder symptoms of sexually transmitted infections. This led not only to sometimes intense emotional distress but also unnecessary doctor visits. For those with access to such care or had other resources available this may have been the extent of the resulting problems. In a country where health care is still an indicator of privilege rather than a universal entitlement, those who are unable to consult a medical professional could experience great anguish over possible symptoms related to sexual health. In addition, lack of awareness of symptoms or sexually transmitted infections such as human papillomavirus (HPV) that often do not manifest in physically visible symptoms could result in them remaining untreated. For these participants a fear-based approach to sexually transmitted infections primarily

accomplished instilling anxiety and unease. My findings do not indicate that it prevents

adolescents from seeking out sexual experiences and engaging in partnered sexual

behaviors.

Future sexual education that would be more useful and helpful for adolescents,

according to my participants, would involve discussion of relationships, advice on

establishing boundaries and making decisions about sexuality, and means of

communicating about sex with partners and potential partners. Those participants who

had elements of this type of sexual education felt more confident in their decisions about

sexual behavior. In addition, among my participants more comprehensive and honest

sexual education did *not* necessarily lead to adolescents having more sexual partners,

earlier sexual experiences, or engaging in a greater variety of sexual behaviors.

Internet Freedom, Safety, and Access

For these participants as adolescents, the Internet was either a valuable resource, a

place to safely explore sexuality, a means of participating as a sexual being without a

partner, or something to ignore. Overwhelmingly participants described being aware of

the dangers of online sexual predation to such a degree that following precautions was

compared to the maxim of a generation ago that one should not trust strangers with

candy. Cynthia, a nineteen year-old woman who grew up in an upper-middle class family

made a claim to this effect. I replied to that privacy on the Internet was a different

"common sense" than what I grew up with, which was that you should not talk to

strangers in real life. She elaborated further stating:

> I would say that anyone under the age of twenty-five would say that [not revealing
> personal information to anyone unknown on the Internet] falls under the category of

common sense. It just, and I mean, but the thing you have to remember I've had a computer since I was ten. We had Macs in my school since I was in third grade. It's just something I've grown up with, the same way everyone else grew up with the other warnings of not walking home alone. It's the same thing to me.

In her experience awareness of, and controlling, who could access personal information about her on the Internet was second nature.

Two participants mentioned that they remembered knowing someone who as an adolescent had negative experiences on the Internet. I refrained from asking more about these experiences as it potentially could have violated the human subjects board constraints on my study. Online sexual predators are still something to be taken very seriously. Though most participants attributed their awareness of privacy to parents or simply "common sense," formal education that reinforces this approach is something that should be explored further. These cases were based on communications with other people on the Internet rather than accessing content that was disturbing or upsetting.

For these adolescents the imposition of restrictions on Internet access to particularly content was typically ineffective. When parents imposed such restrictions participants described that the result was they were more careful about privacy and worked to more effectively hide that they accessed such content. They did not stop seeking it ought as a result of parents imposing restrictions.

The Internet was particularly helpful for adolescents for whom other sources of information about sexuality were unavailable. Adolescents whose families did not speak with them about sex, who had no formal sexual education or minimal formal sexual education, and those who did not have friends who they could or would discuss sex with, often found the Internet to be an invaluable resource. Rather than the Internet being a dangerous and threatening place for these adolescents it was often the only resource

where they could fine a safe haven to have questions answered and explore topics that adults and peers were unable or unwilling to discuss.

While these findings are not representative the participants in this research show that young adults and adolescents can provide thoughtful insight regarding these issues. Adolescents and young adults could be productively included in sexual education debates. Asking adolescents themselves about their experiences with sexuality, sexual education, and negotiating adolescence would arguably be a valuable resource in addressing the sexual health issues facing the young people of the United States.

Pornography

A significant minority of participants in this sample were viewing sexually explicit material prior to the age of eighteen. As the details and variety of sexual content is limited in most mainstream media and excluded from sexual education, the Internet became *the* option for many of these participants as adolescents to have their questions answered and their curiosity satisfied. As participants explored went to the Internet to explore sexual topics introduced elsewhere in the culture, most frequently in sexual education or mainstream media they frequently also encountered pornographic content. However, these participants, even as adolescents described being very adept at policing themselves when either encountering pornography incidentally while seeking out sexual information or when looking for and viewing pornography. These participants overwhelmingly did *not* experience the Internet as a slippery slope of pornographic content where those who began by viewing nude photos ended up seeking out extremely violent or child pornography. Rather, participants who masturbated to pornography were

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able to locate content they found arousing and they viewed that. They described sticking with what worked. Rather than looking for new and different material for this purpose they were hesitant to explore or seek out other options often precisely because they were fearful of what they might find. Those who did explore online pornography further primarily did so due to curiosity about sexual positions or behaviors. Viewing these in video content online they perceived as much safer than would be trying such positions or behaviors in person. Many were curious about a particular sexual behavior and upon viewing an example in pornographic content decided they were not in fact interested in trying it.

Those who saw video content on the Internet they reported as upsetting or disturbing most frequently referenced "shock videos" rather than pornographic content. Shock videos are different that pornography in that they are not meant to titillate but meant to be somehow upsetting and disturbing, shocking. Very few of my participants, all of whom were men, described seeking out these videos but many reported having seen them. Friends and peers show these videos to others specifically to evoke disgust, supposedly with humorous intent. The motivations and experience of this are beyond the scope of this project but further research into this phenomenon would be interesting.

Adolescents increasingly have access to technology that allows for recording and distribution of video content. They are also part of a culture focused on investigating and viewing the personal lives of celebrities and common people alike. There are some initial indications that adolescents are increasingly involved in "sexting," or taking pictures and recording video that sometimes include sexual content and sending it to peers (Hoffman 2011). As a culture we will need to decide how we are going to address these issues

(Santi 2011). Shall we treat these adolescents as child pornographers and impose harsh and lengthy prison sentences? Perhaps we can recognize that these are young people and as this research shows, many are actually integrating sexuality back into their lives-making their way without much guidance other than "Danger! Keep Out!" An approach for which there is mounting evidence that it simply does not work well.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Among these participants a proportion of them as adolescents were viewing pornography on the Internet. For those participants who as adolescents viewed pornography, most reported that doing so could actually be a positive experience or option. However, further research that is based on representative sampling that inquires as to how widespread this is and how to better prepare adolescents to avoid unwanted and undesirable content is warranted. Given the nature of this research and the limitations that affected participation it is possible that those who were more likely to view pornography as adolescents were over-represented in this sample.

Similar research that is able to include participation of adolescents from a more diverse sample will be important to conduct as well. This research was directed at inclusion of people who were more likely to have high-speed Internet access as adolescents. Therefore I recruited participants from middle to upper class backgrounds and were as a result were more likely to have had Internet access younger in comparison to participants from lower and working class backgrounds. As this project is exploratory research that was primarily concerned with adolescents who had Internet this focus on middle class and wealthier families was justified. However Internet availability is still

increasing due to lowered costs as well as improvements to access in rural and poorer communities. Differences in adolescent use of Internet access based on class background will be important to investigate. This research is also based on a sample with limited ethnic diversity. Given research that shows class and ethnic differences in sexual values and sexual behaviors, as well as different experiences of education generally (Ferguson 2001), and sexual education specifically (Fields 2008), research that includes greater diversity along these lines would be valuable.

A number of gay, lesbian and queer women participated in this research. This offered some insight into the different experiences of learning about sexuality for women who identify as such. Within even sample there were notable differences in learning about sexuality and maturing through adolescence for these women. Additional exploration of these experiences for adolescent women who identify as gay or lesbian would be interesting. This research did not include the participation of men who identified as gay. This research also did not include the participation of any participants who identified as transgender or intersexed. Future work that investigates the experiences of adolescents from these groups would contribute significantly to a larger understanding of the changing experience of learning about sexuality for adolescents.

As this research shows that evaluating knowledge claims regarding sexuality is particularly useful while also being particularly difficult for adolescents, analysis into how to promote critical thinking skills regarding sexual information would be an important contribution.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The Internet has ushered in an unprecedented expansion of a wide variety of type and content of video that is accessible to an increasing portion of the population. This includes adolescents. Gagnon and Simon's scripting theory of sexuality provided the theoretical foundation for this research. While their theoretical framework is still useful, I assert that an additional level of sexual scripts are operating for these participants who used the Internet to look up video examples of sexual behaviors and interactions. The development of the Internet in ways that include access to searchable streaming video that is further parceled into short segments of particular behaviors has facilitated referencing these as examples. On a broad scale, adolescents (and adults) have the ability to call up video enactment of all sorts of sexual activity that was previously unavailable. Adolescents sometimes view these enactments as an initial exploration of the behavior or practice. This in turn informs their interpersonal negotiations and intra-psychic dialogue regarding the acceptability or appeal of participating in these behaviors. I term this level of sexual scripts as intermediate. The use of video segments of sexual behaviors are not widespread general knowledge of sexual behaviors that would place them within the realm of cultural scenarios. Nor are these videos a type of mediated interpersonal interaction as would be and has been the case with threaded discussion of sexual topics on websites where a person is actually responding to a posted question. These video segments serve as intermediate scripts that dynamically influence each of the other levels of scripts. This dynamic influence is consistent with the framework as proposed by Simon and Gagnon. Further exploration into how these scripts are influencing other levels of sexual scripts would be well justified.

These videos that are referenced by adolescents for sexual behaviors or practices are interesting as well because the videos are typically created for the pleasure and interest of the viewer rather than the people engaged in the behavior. So when looking at sexually explicit video in order to consider a behavior or sexual interaction what adolescents are seeing is typically that behavior or interaction as presented for filming. While there has been a significant increase even more recently in amateur pornography websites these videos tend to take cues from professionally produced pornography that adhere to specific genre conventions. Nonetheless the variety of content that the rise of amateur pornography has resulted in is changing the landscape of Internet pornography. Arguably the increasing presence and popularity of amateur pornography on the Internet is challenging what consistency in pornography genre conventions that did exist Further study into these phenomena would be interesting as well.

This research also contributes to the sociological understanding of the significance of adolescence in terms of citizenship. Adolescents as a whole remain largely excluded from the full privileges of citizenship and this reinforces the dismissal of their voices in regard to policies particularly as related to sexuality. While this data does not directly address these topics it is clear from my participants that they often felt alienated from the topic of sexuality generally and sexual education specifically. Further development of these ideas could result in a deepening of our understanding of citizenship and human rights. In the future it would be interesting to explore the views of adolescents themselves regarding the larger debates on adolescent sexuality. Focusing on adolescents who have made efforts to publicly participate in addressing sexual topics may

be particularly useful for understanding how adolescents could participate in these discussions.

PUBLIC DISCOURSE

The public discourse regarding adolescent sexuality overwhelmingly characterizes it as a social problem. The default assumption is that adolescent sexual expression and behavior are to be prevented and constrained at all costs with one exception. As a culture we seem to be fundamentally unwilling to attempt presenting adolescents with accurate information and honest discussion of implications and possibilities for sexual experiences and trust them to make decisions. Only a very small subset of this sample had experience where honest and comprehensive content and talk of sexuality was a possibility. Thus the experiences of participants in this research are consistent with this claim. This approach and these assumptions are couched in the rhetoric of protecting and preventing adolescents from having harmful sexual experiences. However, for the participants in this research efforts to insulate adolescents from information and opportunities most commonly left them to learn on their own. While some participants as adolescents had the ability to find some of this information from the Internet, and do so with some success, some did not. Moreover, these participants typically reported they would much prefer to be able to discuss these issues and topics with people that they know and trust. They primarily turned to the Internet when this was not an option.

This research indicates that despite claims to the contrary the current discourse of protecting adolescents from hard is not necessarily actually accomplishing this. Rather, it

serves as a useful political issue for groups invested in setting policies that are only tangentially related. While these broader debates are occurring at community, state, and federal levels it is important to remember they do impact the lived experience of adolescents. This has proven to be a remarkably effective political strategy and thus there are political groups and parties particularly invested in maintaining this discourse without including the voices of adolescents themselves. The mainstream media is also well served by promoting stories of "scandalous" adolescent sexual behaviors and practices. While this may attract viewers and readers it does so at the expense of actually addressing the sexual experience of adolescents. Ultimately the current dominant discourse regarding adolescent sexuality is a powerful figure in the larger political efforts of the religious and neo-conservative groups who are re-asserting their agenda in all levels of government. One step toward challenging and escaping this discourse and thus moving beyond the political gamesmanship toward actually dealing with the issues confronting adolescents is to give voice to them and to seriously weigh what they are saying. By dismissing their understanding of their experiences as unaware, childish, ignorant or otherwise less than valid and legitimate we exclude a fundamental means of advancing the debate beyond the current divide.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As a culture many if not most adults have abdicated the responsibility of discussing sexuality with adolescents. Much of the argument behind reducing or eliminating sexual education from schools was that there was no way to teach the content without also imparting values with which some parents would disagree. The argument

rested on the notion that parents *would* actually discuss values, context, relationships, dating, communicating with partners and whatever else was omitted from formal sexual education. At the very least it was the privilege of parents to decide whether or not to have these conversations with their children. Among these participants such discussions were uncommon and infrequent. They described that as adolescents they would have greatly benefited from greater access to accurate information and discussion of sexuality. There were particularly critical of the often inaccurate and incomplete presentations regarding sexually transmitted infections that was the climax of their sexual education.

Adolescents who matured during the 2000s were the first generation to have ready access to an alternative source for these sorts of topics and questions and that is the Internet. Among these respondents, those who had the option of consulting the Internet did so. They reported that this was of great benefit. Critics argue that this sort of access will result in further "corrupted" adolescent sexuality. In sharp contrast this research shows that these adolescents overwhelmingly were thankful and well served by having the Internet as an option. While this sample is not representative these results do provide some indication that suspicions that accessing sexual information and content on the Internet does not necessarily negatively impact adolescents. The most significant issue adolescents had with the content of the Internet was sifting through to find what they wanted to know. As they were left without a trusted definite resource that they could turn to for final word they developed an overall mistrust of information about sexuality as a whole. Given that even supposedly trusted resources such as the CDC have knowingly manipulated the data they present on their websites (Irvine 2004) this skepticism is warranted. This fits within a larger cultural debate that arguably can be characterized as a

challenge to empiricism. The conservative and religious Right has proactively developed misinformation and undermining the best scientific results as a political tactic.

In comparison to other cultures and countries that can still at least agree on the facts, the United States is still battling over the legitimacy of and the validity of empirical evidence related to sexuality. This is problematic for a host of reasons. In this case it means that adolescents who are already dealing with the anxiety of bodily changes and scrutinized sexuality they also face the additional burden of being left without the ability to have questions answered with a certainty they can trust. These problems emerged from interviews with young adults, many of whom are among the most privileged in our society. Other adolescents are almost assuredly facing greater problems and more difficult choices. The Internet has proven to be one option that has been helpful for the adolescents who have had the option of accessing it. It is not a panacea but increased availability of Internet access as well as easy to find sexual information on the Internet directed at adolescents can be a valuable asset for them.

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