

A Critique of Sexual Education: The Lack of Discussion Concerning
Female Pleasure and Desire

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) 3D Design, Modelmaking & Digital Art. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mara Matagne', is written over a horizontal line.

Mara Matagne

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Abstract

This thesis puts forth a critique of sexual education and its lack of discussion around female pleasure and desire. It is important to note that the choice of focussing on female pleasure does not dismiss or denigrate the possible social pressures around male pleasure. This thesis's goal is not to blame any particular sexual identity, but rather offer a critique on general sexual education young people receive in a school setting. Throughout the writing, the words 'female pleasure' and 'young women' will be used, but it is important to remember that this includes all people identifying as a woman, as well as those that do not identify to any terminology.

Using academic writings from scholars in the fields of psychology, sociology, criminology, and sexual health, the following chapters critique multiple areas in sexual education in which female pleasure is either disregarded or poorly discussed. The socially created taboo of female desire has brought this thesis to question the ethics of sexual education programs, as thoroughly researched mental and physical health benefits for young people are dismissed. In support of this claim, scientific data collected by academics substantiate the various consequences of inadequate sexual education stemming from lack of discussion around female pleasure.

In contrast, this thesis puts forth the possibilities and benefits of a positive feminine pleasure discourse in sexual education. The studies included provide diversified forms of teachings promoting inclusion and open discussion around sexuality, free of shame and guilt. Proposed alternative tools and works of art in film, literature, fine art, and other media platforms deliver information, as well as representations of beauty and diversity of the female form. This thesis supports numerous scholars' claim of the importance of physical, mental, social, and gendered benefits emerging from these forms of learning.

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Introduction

Sexual health education in western societies is taught through a series of classes meant to help young people gain important knowledge-based skills to navigate through life and make healthy decisions concerning their sexual journeys. The teachings are intended to promote sexual and mental health, values, and principled decision-making relevant to oneself and one's different relationships in society.

Although academic research provides evidence of progress in this field, there is a critique to be made concerning the lack of discussion around female pleasure and desire in sexual education. The following discussion in this thesis is compiled of research, including that of professor of psychology Sarah McClelland, concerning the ongoing lack of sexual health classes in education. This includes the shortage of information that results in the upholding of societal myths around sexual experiences and virginity loss, specifically for women. Academic material in the fields of psychology, sociology, and sexual health is put forth by Donald L. Mosher, Laura Carpenter, and Hanna Cinthio to highlight the normalization of pain frequently endured by women during sexual experiences, and the absence of discussion and information around this essential subject.

Critiquing outdated methods of educating young people on sexual health holds a strong place in this discussion. The negative impacts of abstinence-based teachings and its promotion of sexual guilt, sexual shaming, and sexist values are highlighted. Work put forth by scholars such as Brooke de Heer, Meredith Brown, and Julianna Cheney, reveals the direct impact of young people's lack of understanding of the subject on consent, and the risks they run due to their fragile ability to give, or not to give consent. Relevant to this discussion is the socially created taboo around female sexuality and pleasure. Consequentially, young people may be unaware of the positive physical and mental advantages that are beneficial to youth development and quality of life. These benefits will be thoroughly discussed with the help of research from Alison Bucka and Kylie Parrota in the domain of psychology and sociology.

Directly linked to inadequate sexual education are a plethora of consequences researched at length and proven by scholars. The damaging impact on young women's mental and physical well-being is noticed through their lack of entitlement to their sexual pleasure, as well as an absence of skills to uncover it. Sex-related anxiety is a major concern that has been repeatedly voiced through academic research, such as that of professor of psychology Sarah McClelland. This may also stem from being uncertain of one's identity, as this is not often discussed in sexual health curriculums.

The discussion further dives into the complexities of relationships, critiquing the absence of knowledge shared with young people regarding alternate forms of relationships outside the classic monogamous model. It is relevant to include scholar Jorge N. Ferrer and Juliana Brown's research of the meaning of these different types of relationships and the many values these are characterized by, but not shared with youth. The importance of having the necessary knowledge and tools to explore what is best for oneself, without shame, is firmly put forth in their work.

In further consequence to inadequate sexual education is the centralization of penetration during sexual interactions. The phenomenon of 'the orgasm gap' arises from professor of psychology Laurie Mintz's research, accompanied by many possible factors that result in inequitable sexual experiences for young women.

Lack of information communicated in sexual health classes may also drive young people to search for answers elsewhere, enabling them to be easily influenced by outside sources. Looking closer, research reveals that media is a primary factor leading to negative body images and sexual self-consciousness, pushing many women to become victims of scams and body modification surgery in order to meet socially determined standards.

Most importantly, the following research gathered in the field of psychology from Michelle Fine and Sarah McClelland examines the possibilities and benefits of a positive feminine pleasure discourse in sexual education. Many studies by professors of psychology Louisa Allen and Laurie Mintz put forward diversified forms of teachings promoting inclusion and open discussion around sexuality, free of shame

and guilt. Scholars argue the importance of the physical, mental, social, and gendered benefits emerging from these forms of learning. Alternative tools such as ethical pornography are introduced in academic material with the purpose of positively acknowledging and supporting young people's curiosities and desires. Many works of art in film, literature, art, and other media platforms concerning the representation of beauty and diversity of the female form are presented to demonstrate the important advances in female sexual liberation. This thesis fully supports the integration of diversified forms of teachings in sexual education as the benefits positively impact young people's overall sexual growth, both mentally and physically, better preparing them for all forms of future social relationships.

Chapter One: Critique of Lack of Sexual Health Classes in Education

This chapter dissects the critique of lacking information in sexual health classes in education. Beginning with the introduction to the different concepts of myths around sexual experiences and virginity loss upheld by society, as well as defining them in correlation to the academic writings of PhD professor of psychology Donald L. Mosher. Examples of books, cinema, and other elements of media that support sexual myths will be discussed in accordance to research carried out by professor of sociology Laura Carpenter. Additionally, there will be a focus on PhD researcher Hanna Cinthio's study on the hymen's position as a social construct versus anatomical feature.

The second topic proposed is the normalization of pain women may endure during sexual experiences, and the lack of proactive discussion around identifying possible issues. Relevant factors and causes put forth by Katharina A. Azim, Alison Happel-Parkins, Amy Moses Regine Haardoerfer in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* (2021) will also be discussed. There will be further research presented analyzing outdated teachings of sexual health classes in school curriculum. This varies from defining and critiquing heteronormative teachings by introducing studies from psychology researchers Steven J. Boyer, Tierney K. Lorenz, and Sarah McClelland, to discussing the negative impact of abstinence-based teachings and its promotion of sexual shaming, sexual guilt, and sexist values as well as normalizing the policing of female sexuality.

To continue on, the lacking discussion around consent in a classroom will be put forward with support from scholars' work such as Sara McClelland, Brook de Heer, Meredith Brown, and Juliana Cheney. Highlighted further by its direct impact on young people's understanding and ability to give, or not to give consent, and the risk that accompanies lack of education.

Lastly, the topic of taboo around female sexuality and pleasure is criticized by commencing with the history of female masturbation and its negative reputation discussed in the *International Journal of Sexual Health* (2020). As proven by data

analysis from professors of sociology Alison Bucka and Kylie Parotta, classes rarely successfully teach teens about the full functions of female anatomy, leaving youth unaware of the positive physical and mental benefits of pleasure.

1.1: Myths

The struggle for sexual equality is rooted in history, becoming involved in the political scene when women's battle for sexual liberation was publicly voiced in the 1950s. Yet, the subject of female sexual health in education remains a primary concern for many professors and researchers. Ignorance, stemming from lack of accurate and open sexual education has forged unfounded fears and beliefs that affect women's everyday lives. As quoted from reporter Sophie Smith Galer, 'sexual myths' are suggested as major obstacles upheld by society.

PhD professor of psychology Donald L. Mosher states that a sex myth is a false belief about sexual behavior or physiology that is scientifically inaccurate, and results in sexual guilt that inhibits sexual behavior and seeking information about sexuality.¹ The analysis of these myths is broken down into 7 categories: the "Virginity Myth"², the "Hymen Myth"³, the "Tightness Myth"⁴, "the Penetration Myth"⁵, "the Virility Myth"⁶, the "Sexlessness Myth"⁷, and the "Consent Myth"⁸. They define a woman's sexual history, value, and greatly influence future sexual experiences. Although all myths are inevitably linked, two have been researched at length over the past few decades.

¹ Mosher, Donald L. "Sex Guilt and Sex Myths in College Men and Women." *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 15, no. 3, August. 1979, pp. 224-225. EBSCOhost, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.iadt.ie/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid,sso&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.3812279&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

² Galer, Sophia Smith. "Chapter 1: The Virginity Myth." *Losing It: Sex Education for the 21st Century*, William Collins, S.I., 2023, p. 15-39.

³ Galer, Sophia Smith. "Chapter 2: The Hymen Myth." *Losing It: Sex Education for the 21st Century*, William Collins, S.I., 2023, p. 40-65.

⁴ Galer, Sophia Smith. "Chapter 3: The Tightness Myth." *Losing It: Sex Education for the 21st Century*, William Collins, S.I., 2023, p. 66-91.

⁵ Galer, Sophia Smith. "Chapter 4: The Penetration Myth." *Losing It: Sex Education for the 21st Century*, William Collins, S.I., 2023, p. 92-111.

⁶ Galer, Sophia Smith. "Chapter 5: The Virility Myth." *Losing It: Sex Education for the 21st Century*, William Collins, S.I., 2023, p. 112-137.

⁷ Galer, Sophia Smith. "Chapter 6: The Sexlessness Myth." *Losing It: Sex Education for the 21st Century*, William Collins, S.I., 2023, p. 138-162.

⁸ Galer, Sophia Smith. "Chapter 7: The Consent Myth." *Losing It: Sex Education for the 21st Century*, William Collins, S.I., 2023, p. 163-190.

The predominant ‘virginity myth’ attributes sex to masculine success, turning what should be a healthy, shared experience into a possibly harmful event for both young men and women.⁹ Men suffer from overwhelming pressure to deliver a media inspired experience and women, in coherence, suffer from the idea that virginity loss is something a man does *to* a woman rather than an experience they fulfill together. Virginity has also been considered as something a woman gives away. Mosher speaks of his female subjects as women “in whom sex guilt is a prominent component of personality and emphasize the importance of virginity”.¹⁰ The data collected proves this theory to be correct as the philosophy, otherwise known as the ‘virginity myth’, holds an important position in society.¹¹

Many books, cinema, and media support myths such as the ‘virginity myth’. Influential teen books/film series such as Stephanie Myer’s saga *Twilight*¹² (2005-2008), plays into the metaphor of virginity loss being transformative, turning the main character from a “virginal, weak human into a sexed, powerful vampire”.¹³ These films facilitate myths that influence teens into believing that male penetration is what transforms a woman’s social status from ‘girl’ to ‘woman’, putting significant pressure on a single moment in young people’s lives.

Many studies have been conducted around the subject including the qualitative study of virginity loss in the United States¹⁴ researched by Laura Carpenter, associate professor of sociology at Vanderbilt University. Her analysis is comprised of an interview guide about virginity loss in media (films, television, magazines, pornography, etc). She explores and analyses the use of media to guide young people to a particular interpretation of virginity loss through a series of interviews. She mentions *Pretty in Pink*¹⁵ (1986) and *16 Candles*¹⁶ (1984) as examples of popular

⁹ Galer, Sophia Smith. “Chapter 5: The Virility Myth.” *Losing It: Sex Education for the 21st Century*, William Collins, S.I., 2023, p. 113.

¹⁰ Mosher, Donald L. “Sex Guilt and Sex Myths in College Men and Women.” *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 15, no. 3, August 1979, pp. 233. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.iadt.ie/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid,sso&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.3812279&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹¹ Mosher, Donald L. “Sex Guilt and Sex Myths in College Men and Women.” *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 15, no. 3, August 1979, pp. 233. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.iadt.ie/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid,sso&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.3812279&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

¹² Hardwicke, Catherine, et al., directors. *The Twilight Saga*. Atlantic, 2009.

¹³ Galer, Sophia Smith. “Chapter 1: The Virginity Myth.” *Losing It: Sex Education for the 21st Century*, William Collins, S.I., 2023, p. 16.

¹⁴ Carpenter, Laura M. “Virginity Loss in Reel/Real Life: Using Popular Movies to Navigate Sexual Initiation.” *Sociological Forum*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2009, p. 804-825., <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2009.01137.x>.

¹⁵ Deutch, Howard, director. *Pretty in Pink*. Paramount Pictures, 1986.

¹⁶ Hughes, John, director. *Sixteen Candles*. Universal Pictures, 1984.

teen films where virginity is depicted as a gift.¹⁷ Carpenter's findings lead to the conclusion that negative experiences of virginity loss were extremely common among "gifter women"¹⁸, a term used to identify female teens who believe in virginity as being something special to give away.

In many societies, the hymen remains the physical representation of virginity. In her academic writings, Hanna Cinthio, PhD researcher specialized in human rights, gender, culture, and sexual health, states that it is important to distinguish between the hymen's position as a social construct, and as an anatomical feature.¹⁹ Her research of teenagers in Swedish society shows that they receive semi-accurate information in school biology books depicting the hymen as a membrane that remains intact until ruptured by sexual activities, followed by bleeding, ultimately defining virginity loss.²⁰ Studies have shown that although the hymen can be torn during vaginal penetration, it is by no means a universal experience.²¹ Some women are born with very little tissue, as some are born with a thicker membrane covering the vaginal opening.²² The hymen is also a flexible tissue that may not necessarily break during sexual encounters.²³ The educational system fails in providing correct information as well as under-managing contexts where significance is associated to the hymen on a symbolic level.²⁴ This representation of virginity loss excludes LGBTQ+ experiences.

Value clarifications are lacking in sexual education as misinformation about sex and the endorsement of sexual myths are harmful to youth, for sexuality is "biologically

¹⁷ Carpenter, Laura M. "Virginity Loss in Reel/Real Life: Using Popular Movies to Navigate Sexual Initiation." *Sociological Forum*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2009, p. 824., <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2009.01137.x>.

¹⁸ Carpenter, Laura M. "Virginity Loss in Reel/Real Life: Using Popular Movies to Navigate Sexual Initiation." *Sociological Forum*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2009, p. 824., <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2009.01137.x>.

¹⁹ Cinthio, Hanna. "'You Go Home and Tell That to My Dad!' Conflicting Claims and Understandings on Hymen and Virginity." *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 19, no. 1, March 2015, pp. 187. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1007/s12119-014-9253-2>.

²⁰ Cinthio, Hanna. "'You Go Home and Tell That to My Dad!' Conflicting Claims and Understandings on Hymen and Virginity." *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 19, no. 1, March 2015, pp. 173. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1007/s12119-014-9253-2>.

²¹ MD, Jonathan Schaffir. "The Hymen's Tale: Myths and Facts about the Hymen." *Ohio State Health and Discovery*, The Ohio State University, 20 February 2020, <https://health.osu.edu/health/sexual-health/myths-and-facts-about-hymen>.

²² MD, Jonathan Schaffir. "The Hymen's Tale: Myths and Facts about the Hymen." *Ohio State Health and Discovery*, The Ohio State University, 20 February 2020, <https://health.osu.edu/health/sexual-health/myths-and-facts-about-hymen>.

²³ MD, Jonathan Schaffir. "The Hymen's Tale: Myths and Facts about the Hymen." *Ohio State Health and Discovery*, The Ohio State University, 20 February 2020, <https://health.osu.edu/health/sexual-health/myths-and-facts-about-hymen>.

²⁴ Cinthio, Hanna. "'You Go Home and Tell That to My Dad!' Conflicting Claims and Understandings on Hymen and Virginity." *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 19, no. 1, Mar. 2015, pp. 173. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1007/s12119-014-9253-2>.

and psychologically central to human living”.²⁵ Inaccurate sexual information leaves teenagers vulnerable to believing and endorsing sexual myths.

1.2 Pain during sexual experiences

Lack of sexual health information and the taboo around female pleasure in education has taken part in the normalization of pain for women during sexual encounters. In *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* (2021), one study concentrated its research on the frequency of painful sexual experiences among college women, also known as Genito-Pelvic Pain/Penetration Disorder (*GPPD*).²⁶ Factored into the causes were psychosocial factors of religiosity, sexual education, and sex guilt. Data was collected from 974 sexually active women from a university in Northeastern United States. Many significant factors were identified, sex guilt being the most common mediator.

Alternatively, in many cases painful sexual experiences stem from medical causes. There is an array of sexual pain disorders that affect women, but that are not discussed during sexual health classes. Vaginismus, for example, is an extremely common medical issue that is rarely taken seriously from the educational program, nor the medical field. Vaginismus is “defined as the involuntary spasming of the pelvic floor when penetration is attempted”²⁷, causing any sexual activity to be extremely painful.

Proactive discussion around painful sex and identifying possible issues is lacking in sexual health classes. The curriculum is dismissing evidence-based discussion on pain-free and guilt-free sexual experiences which holds importance in young women’s sexual journeys.

²⁵ Mosher, Donald L. “Sex Guilt and Sex Myths in College Men and Women.” *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 15, no. 3, Aug. 1979, pp. 231. *EBSCOhost*, <https://search-ebscobhost->

²⁶ Azim, Katharina A., et al. “Exploring Relationships between Genito-Pelvic Pain/Penetration Disorder, Sex Guilt, and Religiosity among College Women in the U.S.” *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2021, pp. 770–782., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2021.02.003>.

²⁷ Galer, Sophia Smith. “Chapter 4: The Penetration Myth.” *Losing It: Sex Education for the 21st Century*, William Collins, S.I., 2023, p. 102.

1.3 Outdated Teachings

Coexisting with the lack of sexual health information in education, are the outdated teachings of school curriculum that may be considered as unethical by certain scholars. Heteronormative teachings are central issues to sexual education programs. Researchers from the department of psychology of two American universities, Steven J. Boyer and Tierney K. Lorenz define heteronormativity as “the idea that heterosexuality is the default sexual orientation. It provides socially defined guidelines for ‘normal’ sexual orientation development and social behaviors.”²⁸ Standard sex education classes (not abstinence-based) that are taught through heteronormative ideas erase any other possibilities of sexual desires and orientation, excluding the LGBTQ+ community entirely.²⁹ Studies have found that same gender, or other attractions, can be considered as immoral in some educational programs.³⁰ This can result in teenagers having access to very little, or no information that will lead them to unhappy social and sexual experiences due to imposed sexual orientation. The feeling of ‘otherness’ causes possible distress and depression in teenagers and young adults.³¹

The teaching of abstinence is also an important variable that has affected the lack of information teenagers receive. In the United States for example, abstinence-only sex education first received US federal funding in 1981 and continued until 2010, within which contraception was firmly rejected.³² In the context of a classroom, many teachers have not had sufficient training, and for those that come from religious backgrounds, nuns are often appointed to carry out sexual health courses. Tradition separates girls and boys, imposing heterosexual sexual orientation as well as

²⁸ Boyer, Steven J., and Tierney K. Lorenz. “The Impact of Heteronormative Ideals Imposition on Sexual Orientation Questioning Distress.” *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, vol. 7, no. 1, March 2020, pp. 91. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1037/sgd0000352>.

²⁹ Fields, Jessica. 2008. *Risky Lessons: Sex Education and Social Inequality*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

³⁰ Gansen, H. M. (2017). Reproducing (and disrupting) heteronormativity: Gendered sexual socialization in preschool classrooms. *Sociology of Education*, 90, 255–272. 10.1177/0038040717720981

Martin, K. A. (2009). Normalizing heterosexuality: Mothers’ assumptions, talk, and strategies with young children. *American Sociological Review*, 74, 190–207. 10.1177/000312240907400202

Martin, K. A. (2009). Normalizing heterosexuality: Mothers’ assumptions, talk, and strategies with young children. *American Sociological Review*, 74, 190–207. 10.1177/000312240907400202

³¹ Robertson, M. A. (2014). ‘How do I know I am gay?’: Understanding sexual orientation, identity, and behavior among adolescents in an LGBT youth center. *Sexuality & Culture: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 18, 385–404. 10.1007/s12119-013-9203-4

Boyer, Steven J., and Tierney K. Lorenz. “The Impact of Heteronormative Ideals Imposition on Sexual Orientation Questioning Distress.” *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, vol. 7, no. 1, March 2020, pp. 91. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1037/sgd0000352>.

³² Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). 2012. “Abstinence-Only Until Marriage Programs.” <http://www.siecus.org/index.cfm?fuseaction¼Page.viewPage&pageId¼523&parentID¼477>

teachings promoting sexual shaming and guilt³³. Teaching teenagers that men and women do not share the same responsibilities that are relevant to all sexes such as contraception, information about sexually transmitted infections (STI)³⁴, pregnancies, sexual desires, consent, or sexual orientation also promotes sexist values and implants false notions of pleasure in sexual education.

Young people become lost to promises of perfect sexual experiences in the confines of marriage, and are therefore not considered to be in need of educative sexual conversations before this time. Professor of psychology Sarah McClelland gives the example of a young woman affirming that she does not feel involved in conversation around sexual health or desire as she will not be experiencing it before marriage.³⁵ Later in the discussion, the young woman realizes that she may not have access to learning about contraception, STIs, or personal desires in the future.

Abstinence-based teaching has normalized the policing of female sexuality by endorsing concepts like virginity, and condemning premarital sexual experiences, as well as any form of exploration of desire. Examples of education condemning sexual activities have been recorded, such as a student from a school in Tennessee in 2013 who documented a sexual educator using scare tactics and teaching false information at a school assembly.³⁶ Another example includes a student speaking out against an abstinence-only program in a school in West Virginia, and who was later threatened by the principal.³⁷ Avoiding the conversation around STIs, contraception, and pleasure, does not alleviate the dangers of teen pregnancies, STI transmission, or an unhappy sex life, but rather amplifies the risk.

³³ Azim, Katharina A., et al. "Exploring Relationships between Genito-Pelvic Pain/Penetration Disorder, Sex Guilt, and Religiosity among College Women in the U.S." *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2021, pp. 770–782., <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2021.02.003>.

³⁴ Sexually Transmitted Infections: A disease caused by infection with certain bacteria, viruses, or other microorganisms that can be passed from one person to another through blood, semen, vaginal fluids, or other body fluids, during oral, anal, or genital sex with an infected partner. These diseases can also be spread through sharing needles, blood transfusions, breastfeeding, or from an infected mother.

"NCI Dictionary of Cancer Terms." *National Cancer Institute*, <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/sexually-transmitted-disease>.

³⁵ Fine, Michelle, and Sara McClelland. "Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing after All These Years." *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2006, pp. 328., <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361687806283122>.

³⁶ Culp-Ressler, Tara. 2013b. "After Abstinence Assembly is Caught on Tape, Health Experts Criticize its Ineffective Scare Tactics." *Think Progress*, May 28. http://thinkprogress.org/78-A-Buck-and-K-Parrotta-health/2013/05/28/2067941/abstinence-assemblytennesseeinaccurate/utm_source=4nar.al&utm_medium=4urlshortener&utm_campaign=4FB

³⁷ Culp-Ressler, Tara. 2013a. "High Schooler Protests 'Slut-Shaming' Abstinence Assembly Despite Alleged Threats from her Principal." *Think Progress*, April 17. <http://thinkprogress.org/2013/04/17/2067941/>

1.4: Consent

Through teaching sexual health classes in education, a discourse around consent is often lacking. Many writers such as Sara McClelland, professor of psychology, continues the critique of education in relation to the lack of discussion around consent in a classroom.³⁸ She states that it is not enough to learn how to say no, as one can be easily influenced by more powerful elements such as media, advertisement, society, an abusive partner, or predator. The consequences of this lack of conversation can also be seen when women find themselves not knowing they are just as entitled and worthy of pleasure, or of resisting aggression. McClelland states that risk and pleasure go hand in hand, and teaching them separately or ignoring the existence of one or the other will not transform human behavior, but rather put young people at risk.³⁹

Many scholars⁴⁰ as discussed in this chapter have criticized the definition of consent and what constitutes “agreement” and/or “freely given” consent.⁴¹ An understanding in sexual education of ‘forced consent’ becomes vitally important. Studies have shown that a high rate of unwanted sexual contact involves the use of coercive manipulative tactics such as threats to gain forced consent.⁴² In volume 16 of *Feminist Criminology* (2021), authors and professors in criminology Brooke de Heer, Meredith Brown, and Julianna Cheney state that in some cases, discussion around consent and sexual violence is dominated by a heteronormative perspective,

³⁸ Fine, Michelle, and Sara McClelland. “Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing after All These Years.” *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2006, pp. 297–338., <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.76.3.w5042g23122n6703>.

³⁹ Fine, Michelle, and Sara McClelland. “Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing after All These Years.” *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2006, pp. 326., <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.76.3.w5042g23122n6703>.

⁴⁰ Examples: Brooke de Heer, Meredith Brown, and Julianna Cheney

⁴¹ Beres M. A. (2007). ‘Spontaneous’ sexual consent: An analysis of sexual consent literature. *Feminism & Psychology*, 17(1), 93–108. [Crossref](#). [ISI](#).

⁴² Adams-Curtis L. E., Forbes G. B. (2004). College women’s experiences of sexual coercion: A review of cultural, perpetrator, victim, and situational variables. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 5(2), 91–122. [Crossref](#). [PubMed](#).

Conroy N. E., Krishnakumar A., Leone J. M. (2015). Reexamining issues of conceptualization and willing consent: The hidden role of coercion in experiences of sexual acquiescence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 30(11), 1828–1846. [Crossref](#). [PubMed](#). [ISI](#).

Koss M. P., Gidycz C. A., Wisniewski N. (1987). The scope of rape: Incidence and prevalence of sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of higher education students. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 55(2), 162. [Crossref](#). [PubMed](#). [ISI](#).

Ray C. M., Tyler K. A., Gordon Simons L. (2018). Risk factors for forced, incapacitated, and coercive sexual victimization among sexual minority and heterosexual male and female college students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(5–6), 2241–2261. [Crossref](#). [PubMed](#).

Testa M., VanZile-Tamsen C., Livingston J. A., Koss M. P. (2004). Assessing women’s experiences of sexual aggression using the sexual experiences survey: Evidence for validity and implications for research. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 28(3), 256–265. [Crossref](#). [ISI](#).

excluding lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual minoritized individuals' (LGBTQ+) experiences.⁴³

Lack of sexual education has a direct impact on teenagers and their understanding of, and ability to consent or not consent to sexual activities.⁴⁴ The authors further critique abstinence-based sexual education in particular, by stating that it “does not actually teach young people about *how* to consent or withdraw consent” [...] “and purposefully disregards LGBTQ+ relationships, further marginalizing this population”.⁴⁵ Ensuring youth acquire a full comprehension of the notion of consent will greatly aid young people to carry out safe and consensual sexual experiences.

1.5: Taboo around Female Pleasure and Sexuality

Once consent is given and sexual relationships commence in a safe and healthy manner, sexual education rarely puts forth a discussion around female pleasure and desire. The *International Journal of Sexual Health* (2022)⁴⁶ affirms that female masturbation in particular has historically been considered as harmful, abnormal, sinful, inappropriate, shameful, and socially deviant in most cultures.⁴⁷ The taboo around female masturbation remains today in many societies, resulting in lack of discussion in sexual education around the full female anatomy, desire, masturbation, and its mental and physical health benefits.

⁴³ De Heer, Brooke, et al. “Sexual Consent and Communication among the Sexual Minoritized: The Role of Heteronormative Sex Education, Trauma, and Dual Identities.” *Feminist Criminology*, vol. 16, no. 5, 2021, pp. 701–721., <https://doi.org/10.1177/15570851211034560>.

⁴⁴ Wodda A., Panfil V. R. (2021). *Sex positive criminology*. Routledge.

⁴⁵ De Heer, Brooke, et al. “Sexual Consent and Communication among the Sexual Minoritized: The Role of Heteronormative Sex Education, Trauma, and Dual Identities.” *Feminist Criminology*, vol. 16, no. 5, 2021, pp. 701–721., <https://doi.org/10.1177/15570851211034560>.

⁴⁶ Csako, Rita I., et al. “Female Sexuality in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Factors and Sexual Response Associated with Masturbation.” *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 2022, pp. 1., <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2022.2099499>.

⁴⁷ Coleman, E. (2003). Masturbation as a means of achieving sexual health. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 14(2-3), 5–16. https://doi.org/10.1300/J056v14n02_02

Ruan, F. F. (1991). *Sex in China: Studies in sexology in Chinese culture*. Springer Science & Business Media. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-0609-0>

Verma, K. K., Khaitan, B. K., & Singh, O. P. (1998). The frequency of sexual dysfunctions in patients attending a sex therapy clinic in North India. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 27(3), 309–314. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1018607303203>

Aneja, J., Grover, S., Avasthi, A., Mahajan, S., Pokhrel, P., & Triveni, D. (2015). Can masturbatory guilt lead to severe psychopathology: A case series. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 37(1), 81–86. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0253-7176.150848>

Bullough, V. L. (2003). Masturbation: A historical overview. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 14(2-3), 17–33. https://doi.org/10.1300/J056v14n02_03

Bullough, V. L., & Bullough, B. (2019). ‘Sin, sickness and sanity: A history of sexual attitudes’. Routledge.

Maines, R. P. (1999). *The technology of orgasm: "Hysteria," the vibrator, and women's sexual satisfaction*. JHU Press.

In their writings, professors of sociology Alison Bucka and Kylie Parrotta state that many young women who enter college may not know the names for parts of their own sexual organs, and have had little to no prior discussion of sexual pleasure or sexual experiences in the context of relationships or other sexualities.⁴⁸ Information taught during classes rarely successfully teach young people the full functions of a vulva with the inclusion of the clitoris, also known as the female sex organ. Many traditional cultures and religions believe that the appropriate aim of sexual behavior for women is reproduction,⁴⁹ therefore this organ is often left out of sexual conversation, as it has no reproductive function. Many teenagers are therefore left unaware of the positive possibilities of pleasure. To uphold a healthy sexual journey, it is primordial that young people be in a safe space open to discussion, free of guilt or shame of their sexuality and desires.

In light of information collected from professors of psychology, sociology, and PhD researchers, this chapter has per goal of delivering a supported critique of the lack of sexual health classes in education. This has been brought about by the discussion of sexual myths and their negative sociocultural impact on a woman's value. The symbolism of these myths holds an influential place in society, providing anatomical features with socially constructed positions. Lack of ethical knowledge shared with young people consequentially leads them to unintentionally believing and upholding false notions. The normalization of pain during sexual activities has been instilled in sexual education, as the subject often remains excluded from curriculum. This may lead to questioning education's interest in the physical and mental well-being of their female students.

Outdated teachings fail to relay the importance of a complete sexual education, with the inclusion of all sexes, to acquire equal responsibility in learning important health and value-related knowledge. The topic of consent and its complexities remains a norm that has rarely been instilled in sexual health curriculum, despite its importance

⁴⁸ Buck, Alison, and Kylie Parrotta. "Students Teach Sex Education: Introducing Alternative Conceptions of Sexuality." *Sex Education*, vol. 14, no. 1, January 2014, pp. 67. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/14681811.2013.830968>.

⁴⁹ Csako, Rita I., et al. "Female Sexuality in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Factors and Sexual Response Associated with Masturbation." *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 2022, pp. 1., <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2022.2099499>.

for teenager's physical and mental well-being. The unbroken taboo around female pleasure deprives young people of sufficient knowledge about their own bodies, leaving them unaware of the positive mental and physical aspects that may benefit them as individuals. This once again questions education's real purpose concerning the health of students.

Chapter 2: Consequences of Inadequate Sexual Education

This chapter addresses the consequences of lack of sexual health classes in education. This critique will begin by highlighting the numerous damaging impacts on a young woman's mental and physical well-being supported by the academic writings of scholars such as Sara McClelland. She states that a main damaging consequence is young women's lack of entitlement and skills to discover their pleasure. Women's rights activist and author Lynne Segal ascertains that sex-related anxiety is a major obstacle to women's sexual liberation. School curriculum will become a relevant point in the conversation, following the *Journal of Contraception's* critique of education's motives when comparing the importance of standardized branches such as math and science, and that of sexual health classes, to the welfare of their students' futures. Mental health will be discussed with the help of professor of psychology Hogg's 'uncertainty-identity theory', as well as consequences such as the absence of LGBTQ+ identities.

The discussion will open with the complexities of monogamy and non-monogamy defined by psychologist Jorge N. Ferrer. A critique of the normalization of monogamous heterosexual relationships in sexual education is carried out with the support of PhD candidate Juliana Brown's research. Ferrer proposes a series of paths to discovering sexuality, which will be relevant to the idea that young people are entitled to having the choice of relationships, without shame or guilt. The lack of knowledge and skill presented by sexual education is considered as an impediment on young people's exploration of sexuality.

A detailed critique of the centralization of penetration in sexual experiences will be carried out with support from psychology professor Laurie Mintz's 'orgasm gap' theory. Factors causing this proven phenomenon is discussed as elements resulting in inequitable sexual encounters for young women. Studies from New Zealand, Canada, and the United States will further legitimize this critique.

Lastly, the subject of scams and body modifications as a direct consequence to lack of sexual education will be examined. As a result, sexual self-consciousness becomes

a key element enabling media to negatively influence young people. Highlighted further are factors contributing to women engaging in surgical body modifications such as magazines, advertisement, pornography, and television. Examples of misleading and dangerous products are put forward from simple search results on the internet, easily accessible to teenagers.

2.1: Physical and Mental Health Issues

Harm to a woman's physical and mental health brought about by the lack of knowledge young people receive in sexual education can be seen in numerous forms. Professor of psychology Sara McClelland's studies have shown that denying young women sexual education will lead to insufficient knowledge of their full anatomy, lack of a sense of entitlement and absence of skills to discover their pleasure.⁵⁰ Author and activist Lynne Segal states that "[...] we might [...] see it [sexual liberation] as the struggle to combat the manipulation of people's fears and anxieties around gender and sexuality [...]"⁵¹ In other words, sex-related anxiety is an obstacle that hinders women from owning their sexuality and demanding equitable sex.⁵² Consequences such as poor mental health, unplanned pregnancies, and STIs, are all associated to this lack of education.

In the journal *Contraception*, authors Stewart, Shields, and Hwang, make a valid point when comparing the motive of sexual health classes in education. The group of physicians and medical researchers assert that sexual education seems to be the only subject, if included in school curriculum, that is taught to be exclusively applicable to young people's present situation. They state that school is meant to teach teenagers skills they will need in the future. Math and science are not questioned, although few have a need for algebra in their possible future lives. Teaching abstinence or incomplete standard sexual education will only provide a constricted

⁵⁰ Fine, Michelle, and Sara McClelland. "Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing after All These Years." *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2006, pp. 327–338., <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.76.3.w5042g23122n6703>.

⁵¹ Segal, Lynne. "Chapter 7: Sex in Society : social problems, sexual panics." *Straight Sex: Rethinking the Politics of Pleasure*, Verso, London, 2015, pp. 311.

⁵² Galer, Sophia Smith. "Chapter 2: The Hymen Myth." *Losing It: Sex Education for the 21st Century*, William Collins, S.I., 2023, p. 63.

form of education comprised of danger, shame, guilt, and ignorance, rather than healthy conversation and shared knowledge.⁵³

Lack of this form of learning reverberates in examples such as being afraid and/or ashamed of speaking of STDs or contraception to a teacher or health practitioner, being ashamed and/or afraid of speaking of sexual assault experiences, and being afraid and/or ashamed of speaking of one's sexuality. Questioning and not understanding one's sexuality are psychologically stressful moments in a young person's life. As a professor of social psychology, Hogg's 'uncertainty-identity theory' centralizes 'uncertainty-related distress' which he describes as feeling different from the typical social group (in this case the heterosexual norm). This may lead to uncertainty and anxiety about one's self-identity.⁵⁴ In the *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* (2020), researchers found that heteronormative teachings and the absence of information about LGBTQ+ identities were associated with higher levels of distress and negative emotions.⁵⁵ This, in turn, may have harmful physical effects to teenagers in these situations.

2.2: The Complexities of Monogamy/Nonmonogamy

Sexual education is also lacking in normalizing understandings of alternative identities and relationships that may be part of young people's sexual journeys. In her writings, PhD candidate and doctoral assistant in psychology Juliana Brown critiques the normalization of monogamous heterosexual relationships within education.⁵⁶ Qualitative data from her study supports that heterosexual monogamy is considered as the ideal relationship type and remains the dominant discourse in western society. Psychologist Jorge N. Ferrer defines monogamy as "traditionally

⁵³ Stewart, F. H., Shields, W. C. & Hwang, A. C. (2004, May). Faulty assumptions, harmful consequences: Coming to terms with adolescent sexuality. *Conception*, 69 (5), 345-346. Retrieved August 4, 2006, from <http://www.arhp.org/files/jouraleditorialmay2004.pdf>

⁵⁴ Hogg, M. A. (2007). Uncertainty-identity theory. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 39, pp. 69–126). San Diego, CA: Elsevier Academic Press.

Hogg, M. A. (2012). Uncertainty-identity theory. In P. A. M. van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (pp. 62–80). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222.n29>

⁵⁵ Boyer, Steven J., and Tierney K. Lorenz. "The Impact of Heteronormative Ideals Imposition on Sexual Orientation Questioning Distress." *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, vol. 7, no. 1, March 2020, pp. 99. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1037/sgd0000352>.

⁵⁶ Brown, Juliana. "'Non-Monogamy Is the Hardest Thing to Disclose': Expressions of Gender, Sexuality, and Relationships on the University Campus." *Women's Studies Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1/2, December 2020, pp. 107. EBSCOhost, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.iadt.ie/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid,sso&db=a9h&AN=147241210&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

referring to sexually exclusive, pair-bonding romantic relationships”, and nonmonogamy as “including open relationships, polyamory, swinging, casual sex and promiscuity – are usually regarded as antagonistic binary opposites”.⁵⁷

Polyamory is also considered as a form of consensual monogamy defined as “based on principles such as nonexclusivity in romantic relationships and sex, mutual transparency and honesty, deep appreciation of intimacy, partner focus, equality, consent, and communication”.⁵⁸ Nonmonogamy is rarely included in discussions, limiting conversation strictly around monogamous relationships. The information young people receive is limited, reducing possibilities to strictly monogamous relationships.

Ferrer opens the discussion to discovering one’s sexuality through a series of ‘paths’: ‘the fluidity path’, ‘the developmental path’, ‘the definition path’, ‘the interpersonal path’, and ‘the contextual path’.⁵⁹ This assemble of paths convey multiple ideas that are often absent in conversations. Researchers put forward the importance of creating a safe space in relationships for malleability and the redefinition of commitment and boundaries depending on people’s changing needs and desires.⁶⁰ The idea of having a choice of monogamy or nonmonogamy depending on one’s life phases is also relevant to a healthy lifestyle.⁶¹ Fidelity is a concept mentioned in regards to its meanings that may range from “sexual and emotional, to sexual but not emotional, neither sexual nor emotional”.⁶² Data also highlights the importance of people one might meet, and recognizing different people may inspire different sexual and

⁵⁷ Ferrer, Jorge N. “Beyond the Non/Monogamy System: Fluidity, Hybridity, and Transcendence in Intimate Relationships.” *Psychology & Sexuality*, vol. 9, no. 1, March 2018, pp. 5. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/19419899.2017.1400459>.

Ferrer, J. N. (2017a). Mononormativity, polypride, and the “mono-poly wars. Manuscript submitted for publication

Jenkins, C. S. I. (2015). Modal monogamy. *Ergo: An Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, 2(8), 175–194

McKeever, N. (2015). Is the requirement of sexual exclusivity consistent with romantic love? *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. doi:10.1111/japp.12157

⁵⁸ Klesse, C. (2011). Notions of love in polyamory: Elements in a discourse on multiple loving. *Laboratorium*, 3(2), 4–25.

Montali, Lorenzo, et al. “The Discursive Construction of Polyamory: Legitimising an Alternative to Monogamy.” *Sexuality & Culture: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Nov. 2022, pp. 1. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1007/s12119-022-10044-0>.

⁵⁹ Ferrer, Jorge N. “Beyond the Non/Monogamy System: Fluidity, Hybridity, and Transcendence in Intimate Relationships.” *Psychology & Sexuality*, vol. 9, no. 1, March 2018, pp. 5-7. EBSCOhost, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/19419899.2017.1400459>.

⁶⁰ Eda, H. (2012). Intimate agency: A radical sexual revolution. Retrieved from <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wpcontent/uploads/2011/08/edagpaper.pdf>

⁶¹ Conley, T. D., Ziegler, A., Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., & Valentine, B. A. (2012). A critical examination of popular assumptions about the benefits and outcomes of monogamous relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 17(2), 124–141. doi:10.1177/1088868312467087

Michaels, M. A., & Johnson, P. (2015). *Designer relationships: A guide to happy monogamy, positive polyamory, and optimistic open relationships*. Jersey City, NJ: Cleis Press.

⁶² Wosick, K. R. (2012). *Sex, love, and fidelity: A study of contemporary romantic relationships*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press. Ziff, B. H., & Rao, P. V. (Eds.). (1997). *Borrowed power: Essays on cultural appropriation*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

relationship desires.⁶³ Ferrer reinforces the idea that wanting nonmonogamy has no correlation with more or less love or attraction felt, and does not represent lack of care whatsoever.⁶⁴ He also gives the example of someone who is traveling, and points out that variables such as socio-political circumstances, geography, and cultural environment greatly influences the choice of relationship and social behaviors.⁶⁵

The lack of positive discussion around the complexities of relationships and the choice of relationship one is entitled to, does not equip young people with the knowledge, or the skills, to safely explore what coexists with their desires. Monogamy is presented as the only path, and nonmonogamy is disregarded as corrupt and shameful. Open discussion would be particularly useful to young women in helping them claim their sexual desires and act upon them without being affected by shameful labels and objectification created by society. It is also important to be mindful that some prefer to avoid any categorization of identities and relationship modes.

2.3: The Centralization of Penetration in Sexual Activities

Sexual health education has been critiqued for using an inaccurate definition of what constitutes sex, resulting in the negative impact of young people's sexual health and wellbeing. A study in the *American Journal of Sexuality Education* (2016) reported that medical student participants agreed that penile-vaginal penetration is sex. However, more than 25% did not agree that other forms of sexual activities such as genital-genital contact without penetration, oral sex, sex toy play, or anal sex as "real sex".⁶⁶ It is unsettling to note that future medical professionals do not consider all forms of sexual activities as part of sex, therefore it is unfortunate, but not unexpected, for sexual education classes to centralize discussion around vaginal-

⁶³ Ferrer, J. N. (2017a). Mononormativity, polypride, and the "mono-poly wars. Manuscript submitted for publication.

⁶⁴ Ferrer, Jorge N. "Beyond the Non/Monogamy System: Fluidity, Hybridity, and Transcendence in Intimate Relationships." *Psychology & Sexuality*, vol. 9, no. 1, March 2018, pp. 7. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/19419899.2017.1400459>.

⁶⁵ Ferrer, Jorge N. "Beyond the Non/Monogamy System: Fluidity, Hybridity, and Transcendence in Intimate Relationships." *Psychology & Sexuality*, vol. 9, no. 1, March 2018, pp. 7. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/19419899.2017.1400459>.

⁶⁶ Talley, Heather, et al. "Analyzing Medical Students' Definitions of Sex." *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2016, pp. 129–137., <https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2016.1168756>.

penile penetration. Not only does this exclude LGBTQ+ experiences, it also creates false assumptions on young women's sexuality.

Realities of women's pleasure, masturbation, and orgasms suffer from this lack of open conversation around the complexities of sex. In 2020, Laurie Mintz, professor of psychology at the University of Florida, puts forth the idea of 'the orgasm gap'⁶⁷. The orgasm gap is "the disparity between straight-identified men and women in the frequency of orgasms during partnered sexual activity.

Specifically, men are more likely to reach orgasm in partnered heterosexual sexual activity than women."⁶⁸ To demonstrate the scale of the orgasm gap, one study of university students in the United States found a 91% (men) to 34% (women) ratio of students usually experiencing an orgasm with a partner.⁶⁹

Another study of 12,295 undergraduates across 17 American universities show a 31% (men) to 10% (women) ratio concerning orgasms on first-time sexual encounters and an 85% (men) to 68% (women) ratio of reaching orgasm during sexual activities in committed relationships.⁷⁰ Although the ratio goes up when comparing types of relationships, the orgasm gap remains significant between men and women.

Many argue false statements such as the female anatomy being more complicated, or a woman's orgasm being more connected to her mental state. However, research reports that the ratio of reaching orgasm during masturbation is highly similar (98% of men and 94% of women)⁷¹, as well as women being more likely to orgasm during sex with a female partner⁷². This supports the claim that the orgasm gap stems from a social phenomenon rather than a biological one.

⁶⁷ Warshowsky, H., Mosley, D. V., Mahar, E. A., & Mintz, L. "Effectiveness of Undergraduate Human Sexuality Courses in Enhancing Women's Sexual Functioning." *Sex Education*, vol. 20, no. 1, January 2020, pp. 1–16. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/14681811.2019.1598858>.

⁶⁸ Warshowsky, H., Mosley, D. V., Mahar, E. A., & Mintz, L. "Effectiveness of Undergraduate Human Sexuality Courses in Enhancing Women's Sexual Functioning." *Sex Education*, vol. 20, no. 1, January 2020, pp. 1. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/14681811.2019.1598858>.

⁶⁹ Wade, L. D., E. C. Kremer, and J. Brown. 2005. "The Incidental Orgasm: The Presence of Clitoral Knowledge and the Absence of Orgasm for Women." *Women Health* 42 (1): 117–138.

⁷⁰ Armstrong, E. A., P. England, and A. C. K. Fogarty. 2012. "Accounting for Women's Orgasm and Sexual Enjoyment in College Hookups and Relationships." *American Sociological Review* 77 (3): 435–462

⁷¹ Warshowsky, H., Mosley, D. V., Mahar, E. A., & Mintz, L. "Effectiveness of Undergraduate Human Sexuality Courses in Enhancing Women's Sexual Functioning." *Sex Education*, vol. 20, no. 1, January 2020, pp. 2. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/14681811.2019.1598858>.

⁷² Garcia, J. R., E. A. Lloyd, K. Wallen, and H. E. Fisher. 2014. "Variation in Orgasm Occurrence by Sexual Orientation in a Sample of U.S. Singles." *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 11 (11): 2645–2652.

In her research, Mintz proposes that lack of education contributes to young adult's absence of knowledge of the female sexual anatomy and functioning as a possible reason for this orgasm gap. A study found that 33% of men and 25% of women mistakenly thought that women generally reached orgasm from penetrative intercourse alone. This is the result of lack of information on the importance of the clitoris, as well as the lack of knowledge that men and women do not orgasm the same way.

A 2022 study in New Zealand reports that 76% of women practice clitoral stimulation during masturbation, which is rated as the most common and effective way of reaching female orgasms.⁷³ This is consistent with research showing that vaginal penetration is not relied on during masturbation, therefore is not the primary practice that will result in orgasms for women during sexual encounters.

The lack of priority of a woman's pleasure may also be due to lack of discussion around its existence in sexual education. It is considered as a contributing factor to the orgasm gap. The study shows that a man's pleasure is set higher in importance to a woman's, in casual sexual encounters. This facilitates pressure women may face when verbalizing their sexual needs. A study in Canada⁷⁴ reports that many women are not comfortable to express their sexual desires as they are afraid of the consequences of hurting their partner's feelings and egos. This goes to show that many women do not feel they are entitled to the same sexual pleasure as their partner.

The dominant cultural script that considers a male orgasm to be primary, and sex to be over when orgasm is reached, is another major factor to the orgasm gap.⁷⁵ Qualitative studies have shown that many participants (both male and female) are uncomfortable with the unconventional sexual script in which a woman

⁷³ Csako, Rita I., et al. "Female Sexuality in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Factors and Sexual Response Associated with Masturbation." *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 2022, pp. 13., <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2022.2099499>.

⁷⁴ Salisbury, C. M. A., and W. A. Fisher. 2014. "“Did You Come?” A Qualitative Exploration of Gender Differences in Beliefs, Experiences, and Concerns regarding Female Orgasm Occurrence during Heterosexual Sexual Interactions." *Journal of Sex Research* 51 (6): 616–631.

⁷⁵ Mintz, L. 2017. *Becoming Cliterate: Why Orgasm Equality Matters—And How to Get It*. San Francisco: HarperOne.

orgasms first.⁷⁶ They also express the idea that it is a man's responsibility to make his partner orgasm during intercourse, considering penetration as the main form of intercourse and excluding any other form of play. A woman's role in this script is determined as being restrained as the receiver. This results in a high percentage of fake orgasms from women (the study shows 64% of college women in the United States⁷⁷).

2.4: Scams and Body Modifications

Meager knowledge around important sexual health information, shame placed on women's bodies, and the lack of safe spaces open to discussion, results in teenagers being far less likely to speak openly about their issues or queries. Studies have also found that negative body images lead to sexual self-consciousness, which in turn lessens sexual pleasure.⁷⁸ Feelings toward women's own genitals seem to be a particular aspect that thrives off insecurities.⁷⁹ Popular culture has put forth the image of a woman's body as young, smooth, and deprived of hair.⁸⁰ Media such as magazines, advertisement, mainstream pornography, and television have been identified as promoting uniform vulva appearances. This determines them as important factors that contribute to women engaging in genital modifications.⁸¹

As sexual education lacks in giving young people the tools to form critical minds, external sources can easily negatively impact a young person's perception. In media, women are often objectified and sexualized for the pleasure of the male gaze, linking

⁷⁶ Muehlenhard, C. L., and S. K. Shippee. 2010. "Men's and Women's Reports of Pretending Orgasm." *Journal of Sex Research* 47 (6): 552–567.

⁷⁷ Muehlenhard, C. L., and S. K. Shippee. 2010. "Men's and Women's Reports of Pretending Orgasm." *Journal of Sex Research* 47 (6): 552–567.

⁷⁸ Sanchez, D. T., and A. K. Kiefer. 2007. "Body Concerns in and Out of the Bedroom: Implications for Sexual Pleasure and Problems." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 36 (6): 808–820. 7

Aubrey, J. S. (2007). The impact of sexually objectifying media exposure on negative body emotions and sexual self-perceptions: Investigating the mediating role of body self-consciousness. *Mass Communication and Society*, 10(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205430709337002>

Markey, C. N., & Markey, P. M. (2009). Correlates of young women's interest in obtaining cosmetic surgery. *Sex Roles*, 61(3–4), 158–166. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9625-5>

⁷⁹ Algars, M., P. Santtila, P. Jern, A. Johansson, M. Westerlund, and N. K. Sandnabba. 2011. "Sexual Body Image and Its Correlates: A Population-Based Study of Finnish Women and Men." *International Journal of Sexual Health* 23 (1): 26–34.

⁸⁰ Moran, C., & Lee, C. (2018). 'Everyone wants a vagina that looks less like a vagina': Australian women's views on dissatisfaction with genital appearance. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 23(2), 229–239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105316637588>

⁸¹ Maki, Samantha M., et al. "An Analysis of Vulva Appearance in Video Pornography." *Sexuality & Culture: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Nov. 2022, pp. 1–16. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1007/s12119-022-10014-6>. Braun, 2019; Li & Braun, 2017; Obst et al., 2019

appearance to their identities.⁸² This unhealthy influence unfortunately pushes women to meet socially determined body standards, and many fall into the abyss of medical and product scams.

Research has proven an increase in the number of women undergoing surgical procedures such as labiaplasties⁸³ for esthetic reasons only.⁸⁴ Other medical practices and scams that thrive from myths, social beauty standards, and poor sexual education include hymenectomies⁸⁵, vaginoplasties⁸⁶, and vulvoplasties⁸⁷. These practices uphold the negative, patriarchal standard of the unrealistic image of women's vulvas. It idealizes the juvenile vulva, taking away a woman's body's right to change and age naturally.

This myth feeds sexual insecurities and encourages women to buy misleading and dangerous products. Some scam products for 'vaginal rejuvenation' including "vaginal tightening pills"⁸⁸, the "18 again cream"⁸⁹ and the "vaginal stick for tightening"⁹⁰ are sold on sites easily accessible such as Etsy and Amazon. Examples below of plausible internet searches shows that scams overpower medical professional forums.

⁸² Moran, C., & Lee, C. (2018). 'Everyone wants a vagina that looks less like a vagina': Australian women's views on dissatisfaction with genital appearance. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 23(2), 229–239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105316637588>

Weaver, A. D., & Byers, E. S. (2013). Eye of the beholder? Sociocultural factors in the body image and sexual well-being of heterosexual women. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 25(2), 128–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2012.737446>

Weaver, A. D., & Byers, E. S. (2018). Young women's perceptions of the impact of their body image on their sexual experiences. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 27(1), 69–78. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjhs.2017-0015>

⁸³ Labiaplasty: "surgery to reduce the size of the labia minora – the flaps of skin either side of the vaginal opening."

For more information see: *NHS Choices*, NHS, <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cosmetic-procedures/labiaplasty/>.

⁸⁴ Braun, V. (2019). Female genital cosmetic surgery: Selling a perfect vulva? Selling a 'normal' vulva. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108394673.003>

Sharp, G., Tiggemann, M., & Matiske, J. (2015). Predictors of consideration of labiaplasty: An extension of the tripartite influence model of beauty ideals. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 39(2), 182–193. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684314549949>

Sharp, G., Tiggemann, M., & Matiske, J. (2016a). Factors that influence the decision to undergo labiaplasty: Media, relationships, and psychological well-being. *Aesthetic Surgery Journal*, 36(4), 469–478. <https://doi.org/10.1093/asj/sjv270>

⁸⁵ Hymenectomy: "is a minor surgical procedure where an opening is created in the hymen. It is often done when the hymen is abnormally thick, has excess tissue, or is otherwise obstructing the flow of menstruation (imperforate hymen)."

For more information see: Norman, Abby. "What Is a Hymenectomy?" *Verywell Health*, Verywell Health, 24 October 2022, <https://www.verywellhealth.com/an-overview-of-hymenectomy-4584378#citation-1>.

⁸⁶ Vaginoplasty: "A procedure to construct or repair the vagina (...) one type of procedure to improve the vagina's appearance or function." For more information see: "Vaginoplasty: Procedure Details, Risks, Benefits & Recovery." *Cleveland Clinic*, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/21572-vaginoplasty>.

⁸⁷ Vulvoplasty: A procedure that "reshapes the outer part of the vagina."

For more information see: "Vaginoplasty: Procedure Details, Risks, Benefits & Recovery." *Cleveland Clinic*, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/21572-vaginoplasty>.

⁸⁸ *Isosensuals Tight Vaginal Tightening Pills - 3 Bottles - Amazon.com*. <https://www.amazon.com/IsoSensuals-Tight-Vaginal-Tightening-Pills/dp/B00K6ZQ2GU>.

⁸⁹ Klurfeld, Alison. "Marketing Pleasure: Buying and Selling Sexual Enhancement through Elective Vaginal Tightening Surgery." *Amazon*, Amazon, 2007, <https://www.amazon.com/vaginal-tightening/s?k=vaginal%2Btightening>.

⁹⁰ *Amazon.com : Vagitight | Instant Result Tightening Rejuvenation Stick ...* <https://www.amazon.com/Instant-Tightening-Rejuvenation-Natural-Approved/dp/B08MDTJDSN>.

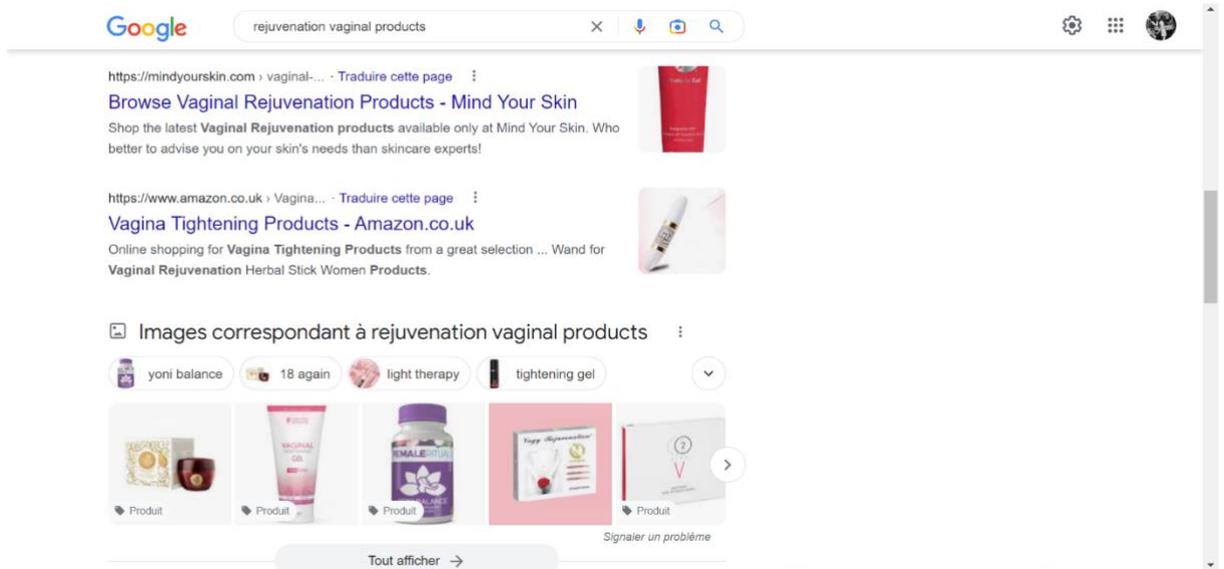


Figure 1: Google search screengrab ⁹¹

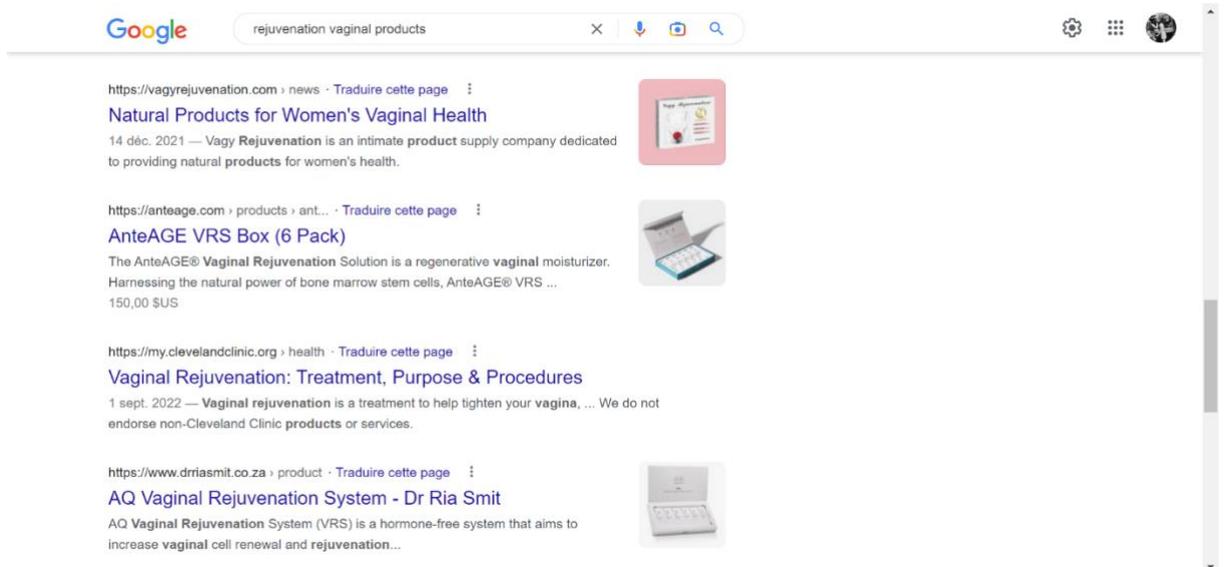


Figure 2: Google search screengrab ⁹²

⁹¹ Screengrab of google search. Google, February 2023.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=rejuvenation+vaginal+products&oq=rejuvenation+vaginal+products&aqs=chrome..69i57.73l2j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

⁹² Screengrab of google search. Google, February 2023.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=rejuvenation+vaginal+products&oq=rejuvenation+vaginal+products&aqs=chrome..69i57.73l2j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

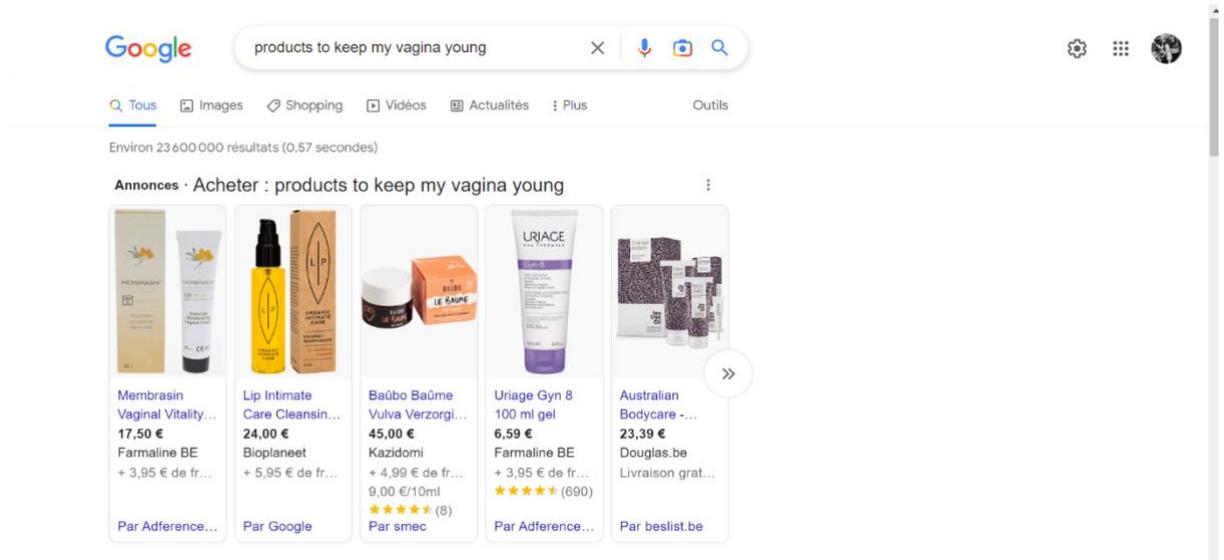


Figure 3: Google search screengrab ⁹³

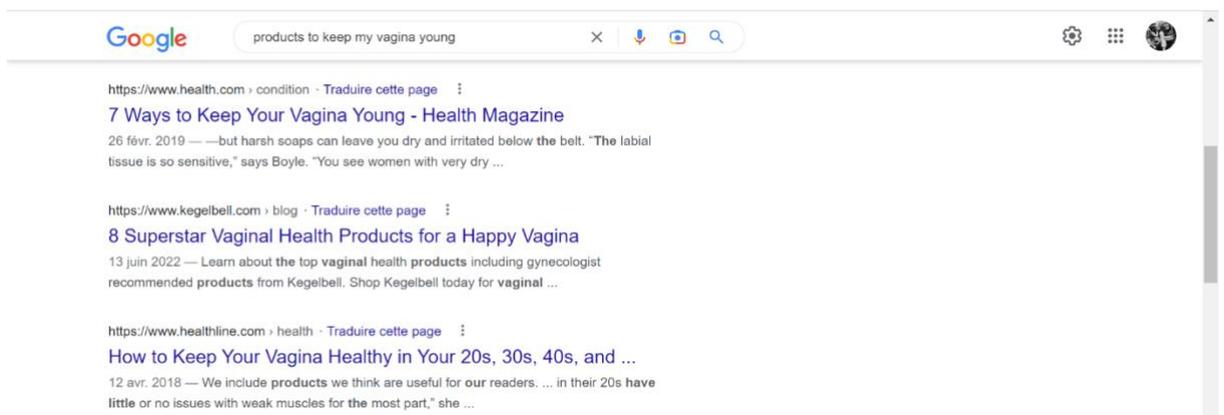


Figure 4: Google search screengrab ⁹⁴

⁹³ Screengrab of google search. Google, February 2023.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=products+to+keep+my+vagina+young&oq=produ&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j69i59j35i39j69i60j69i65l2j69i60l2.23231j1j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

⁹⁴ Screengrab of google search. Google, February 2023.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=products+to+keep+my+vagina+young&oq=produ&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j69i59j35i39j69i60j69i65l2j69i60l2.23231j1j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

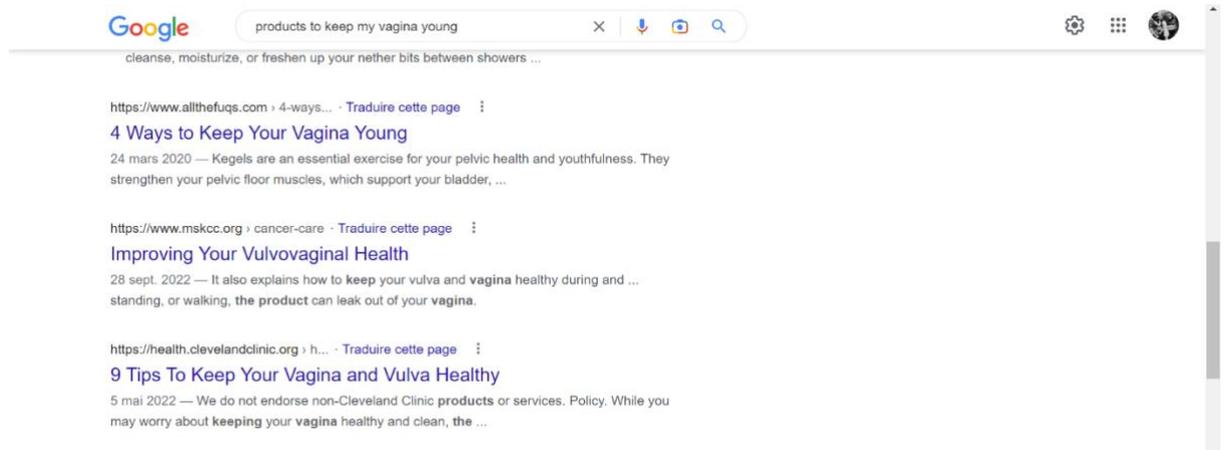


Figure 5: Google search screengrab ⁹⁵

Unfortunately, useful, medically-based information is buried underneath fake rejuvenating products and unnecessary medical procedures, impeding on women's search for helpful and scientific material.

Considering evidence-based research used in support of its claim, this chapter has per goal of presenting possible damaging consequences resulting from lack of sexual education. Based off studies from acclaimed psychologists such as Sara McClelland, Laurie Mintz, Hogg, Juliana Brown, Jorge N. Ferrer and others, consequences young people may endure include mental and physical health issues. This exposes lack of interest from educational systems as these issues are proven to critically impair young people's well-being during, and outside the education portion of their lives. Lack of knowledge of the complexities of possible forms of relationships, denounces curriculum's tendency to be non-inclusive, promoting social scripts normalizing monogamous heterosexual relationships. Lack of knowledge constricts youth's important right to choose.

Upon reflection of the undeniable data collected, the decentralization of penetration appears to be in young people's best interest. Thriving for equitable sexual experiences for all participants alongside promoting healthy discussion and exploration within relationships are beneficial aspects to include in sexual education.

⁹⁵ Screengrab of google search. Google, February 2023.
<https://www.google.com/search?q=products+to+keep+my+vagina+young&oq=produ&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j69i59j35i39j69i60j69i65l2j69i60l2.23231j1j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

Sexual self-consciousness has been proven to be an important factor impeding on young people's mental health. The lack of more extensive conversation around body positivity, diversity, and self-love within classes results in teenagers being negatively influenced by outside sources. Becoming victims of scams and body modifications is a common proven phenomenon. This leaves to question if young people's futures are truly a concern to educational programs.

Chapter 3: The Path to Pro Feminine Pleasure and its Benefits

This chapter examines the possibilities and benefits of a positive feminine pleasure discourse in sexual education. Diversified forms of teaching are examined, beginning with distinguished professor of psychology Michelle Fine's analysis of sexual curriculum in the 1980s, and her negotiations for inclusion of lesbian and gay sexuality. She argues that all young people are entitled to discussions about their sexuality. Fine's writings have inspired many scholars such as Sara McClelland, Louisa Allen and Laurie Mintz, whose research supports this chapter's claim to the physical, mental, social, and gendered benefits of the inclusion of an erotic discourse in sexual education.

The topic of ethical pornography introduced within sexual education classes as a more comprehensive, ethical alternative to positively acknowledge young people's curiosities is discussed with support from numerous academic studies. This chapter proposes ethical pornography to be a useful tool that values inclusivity and directs teens in a healthier direction to explore their sexuality.

Lastly, example of positive feminine pleasure in art, film, books, and other media are put forth. They have been individually chosen as they represent important work promoting knowledge, pleasure, beauty, diversity, and many other aspects important to the battle for female sexual liberation.

3.1: Diversified Forms of Teaching

Many texts have been influenced by Michelle Fine's journal article *Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire* published in 1988.⁹⁶ Fine's article analyzes desire, fears, and fantasies that are both silenced and voiced concerning sexual education curriculum in the 1980s. The author analyses these teachings and negotiates for the inclusion of lesbian and gay sexuality.

⁹⁶ Fine, Michelle. "Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire." *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 58, no. 1, 1988, pp. 29–54., <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.58.1.u0468k1v2n2n8242>.

Interviews and observations are gathered from sex education in the city of New York at the time.⁹⁷

Fine challenges the state by asserting that “adolescents are entitled to a discussion of desire instead of the anti-sex rhetoric which controls the controversies around sex education, SBHCs, and AIDS education.”⁹⁸ She argues that the absence of the discourse of desire and the verbalization of victimization may lead to lacking development of sexual responsibility in students.

More than 20 years later, in the early 2000s, this discourse continues to be insufficient, yet its relevance and importance remain. Many writers such as Sara McClelland, professor of psychology, continues this critique of education and introduces her concept of ‘thick desire’⁹⁹ as a tool to evaluate what is missing in the discussion, and voice what needs to be set in place.

The importance of a school classroom is pointed out and proven, recognizing it as a place where students spend more than 30 percent of their day. Evidence from McClelland’s analysis has suggested that classrooms be paramount for young people to talk, learn, and build skills.¹⁰⁰ They are the best place for teenagers to engage in “safe, critical talk about bodies, sexuality relationships, violence, contraception, abortion, disability rights, LGBTQ+ struggles, gender equality and sexuality as a human right.”¹⁰¹ It is clear from her research that young people are asking for more conversation around what they think, and what they would like to know about their sexualities.

The author associates sexual agency, and how crucial it is to develop these skills in everyday life. It is not enough to learn how to say no, as one can be easily influenced by more powerful elements such as media, advertisement, society, an abusive

⁹⁷ Fine, Michelle. “Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire.” *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 58, no. 1, 1988, pp. 29–30., <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.58.1.u0468k1v2n2n8242>.

⁹⁸ Fine, Michelle. “Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females: The Missing Discourse of Desire.” *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 58, no. 1, 1988, pp. 49., <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.58.1.u0468k1v2n2n8242>.

⁹⁹ Fine, Michelle, and Sara McClelland. “Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing after All These Years.” *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2006, pp. 297–338., <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.76.3.w5042g23122n6703>.

¹⁰⁰ Fine, Michelle, and Sara McClelland. “Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing after All These Years.” *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2006, pp. 327., <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.76.3.w5042g23122n6703>.

¹⁰¹ Fine, Michelle, and Sara McClelland. “Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing after All These Years.” *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2006, pp. 326-328., <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.76.3.w5042g23122n6703>.

partner, or predator. Learning these skills early on in a classroom will enable youth to “undertake critical analysis, trusting conversation, and help-seeking, to negotiate risk and pleasure”¹⁰² in social situations. Comprehensive sexual education in youth development is key to helping young women and men navigate through the dangers and pleasures of life. Importance lies in the insertion of a framework for healthy conversation around desire in the discussion of sexual education and social policies in public institutions. McClelland has made an attempt through ‘thick desire’.

Feminist literature has revealed that the inclusion of a discourse of desire in education can offer young women a sense of entitlement and empowerment, and young men a wider range of sexual experiences than the confined heterosexual expressions¹⁰³. This would dismiss the dominant position of male heterosexuality, and allow a more equitable relationship between partners. In her article, professor of psychology Louisa Allen argues for a need of positive and empowering incorporation of desire and pleasure within sexual education programs.¹⁰⁴ Her research explores gender consequences on the sexual well-being of young people from lack of erotic discourses in sexual education.¹⁰⁵

The author asserts that regardless of gender and sexuality, everyone has the right to experience sexual pleasure. Creating dialogues within these programs to legitimize and positively integrate young people’s sexual desire would set a new norm vital to practicing safer sex and enhancing sexual health and well-being in social relationships. More specifically, positively incorporating feminine desires and pleasure would empower young women to demand equitable sex and feel entitled to their sexual desires.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Fine, Michelle, and Sara McClelland. “Sexuality Education and Desire: Still Missing after All These Years.” *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2006, pp. 327., <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.76.3.w5042g23122n6703>.

¹⁰³ Allen, , Louisa. “Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Constituting a Discourse of Erotics in Sexuality Education.” *Gender & Education*, vol. 16, no. 2, June 2004, pp. 151. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/09540250310001690555>.

¹⁰⁴ Allen, , Louisa. “Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Constituting a Discourse of Erotics in Sexuality Education.” *Gender & Education*, vol. 16, no. 2, June 2004, pp. 151–67. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/09540250310001690555>.

¹⁰⁵ Allen, , Louisa. “Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Constituting a Discourse of Erotics in Sexuality Education.” *Gender & Education*, vol. 16, no. 2, June 2004, pp. 163-164. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/09540250310001690555>.

¹⁰⁶ Allen, , Louisa. “Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Constituting a Discourse of Erotics in Sexuality Education.” *Gender & Education*, vol. 16, no. 2, June 2004, pp. 163-164. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/09540250310001690555>.

It is important to note that introducing erotic dialogues would not disregard discussions around unwanted outcomes of sexual activities such as STDs, pregnancies, and so on, but rather offer a new way of communicating these messages, all the while acknowledging and affirming young people's right to desire and pleasure.¹⁰⁷ Culminating research affirms that the inclusion of these elements in sexual education would be a major contributing factor to the sexual well-being of all young people on their sexual journeys.

In addition to including erotic discussion in sexual education, research has noted the importance of decentralizing penetration in sexual education. They relay the idea that sexual experiences are comprised of explorations of multitudes of ways of giving and receiving pleasure, rather than the rigid heterosexual norm of asserting male over female dominance.

Professor Mintz's study of 'the orgasm gap'¹⁰⁸ demonstrates that a well-designed undergraduate human sexuality course can counteract the factors contributing to the orgasm gap, and enhance awareness of the female pleasure system to improve a woman's sexual experiences. A diversified form of sexual education with the inclusion of erotic discussion, as well as the teaching of the full female anatomy is proposed. According to results of academic research from New Zealand, the United States, and Canada,¹⁰⁹ it is appropriate to assert that accurate sex education and erotic discussion would be highly beneficial to unrooting misinformation such as 'orgasm-gap' factors. This would allow sexual experiences to expand further than penetrative sex, to more healthy and equitable sexual explorations.

¹⁰⁷ Allen, , Louisa. "Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Constituting a Discourse of Erotics in Sexuality Education." *Gender & Education*, vol. 16, no. 2, June 2004, pp. 152. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/09540250310001690555>.

¹⁰⁸ Warshowsky, H., Mosley, D. V., Mahar, E. A., & Mintz, L. "Effectiveness of Undergraduate Human Sexuality Courses in Enhancing Women's Sexual Functioning." *Sex Education*, vol. 20, no. 1, January 2020, pp. 2. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/14681811.2019.1598858>.

"This study compared women university students enrolled in this course to those in a Psychology of Personality course (i.e., no sexual content) and a Human Sexuality and Culture class (i.e., sexual content but not specifically covering the orgasm gap). Participants (N = 271 women) answered pre-test and post-test questions regarding their sexual practices, attitudes towards women's genitals, cognitive distraction during sexual activity, entitlement to sexual pleasure, orgasm quality, and partner communication during sexual activity"

¹⁰⁹ Csako, Rita I., et al. "Female Sexuality in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Factors and Sexual Response Associated with Masturbation." *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 2022, pp. 13., <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2022.2099499>.

Salisbury, C. M. A., and W. A. Fisher. 2014. "'Did You Come?'" A Qualitative Exploration of Gender Differences in Beliefs, Experiences, and Concerns regarding Female Orgasm Occurrence during Heterosexual Sexual Interactions." *Journal of Sex Research* 51 (6): 616–631.

Mintz, L. 2017. *Becoming Cliterate: Why Orgasm Equality Matters—And How to Get It*. San Francisco: HarperOne.

Muehlenhard, C. L., and S. K. Shippee. 2010. "Men'S and Women'S Reports of Pretending Orgasm." *Journal of Sex Research* 47 (6): 552–567.

It may be considered as vital to destress the taboo around self-exploration and masturbation, particularly for women. This can be achieved by its inclusion in sexual education in the form of a discussion around its mental and physical health benefits. A recent article in 2022 set in New Zealand¹¹⁰ examines numerous studies that have shed light on understanding of sexual health, placing masturbation as a pillar of healthy sexual development. Masturbation allows young people to discover their bodies and sexual inclinations, as well as enhancing sexual pleasure. Masturbation is the leading practice that can improve one's ability to orgasm¹¹¹, which has led it to being highly recommended and effective in treatment of sexual health disorders (ex: female sexual dysfunction), in sexual therapy, in relaxation, stress reduction, sleep quality, pain relief, and in strengthening the pelvic floor muscles.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Csako, Rita I., et al. "Female Sexuality in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Factors and Sexual Response Associated with Masturbation." *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 2022, pp. 1–19., <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2022.2099499>.

¹¹¹ Rowland, D., Donarski, A., Graves, V., Caldwell, C., Hevesi, B., & Hevesi, K. (2019). The experience of orgasmic pleasure during partnered and masturbatory sex in women with and without orgasmic difficulty. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 45(6), 550–561. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2019.1586021>

Rowland, D. L., Hevesi, K., Conway, G. R., & Kolba, T. N. (2020). Relationship between masturbation and partnered sex in women: Does the former facilitate, inhibit, or not affect the latter? *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 17(1), 37–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2019.10.012>

Rowland, D. L., Kolba, T. N., McNabney, S. M., Uribe, D., & Hevesi, K. (2020). Why and how women masturbate, and the relationship to orgasmic response. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 46(4), 361–376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2020.1717700>

¹¹² Both, S., & Laan, E. (2008). Directed masturbation: A treatment of female orgasmic disorder. In W. T. O'Donohue & J. E. Fisher (Eds.), *Cognitive behavior therapy: Applying empirically supported techniques in your practice* (pp. 158–166). John Wiley & Sons.

Coleman, E. (2003). Masturbation as a means of achieving sexual health. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 14(2-3), 5–16. https://doi.org/10.1300/J056v14n02_02

Heiman, J. R., LoPiccolo, J., & Piccolo, L. L. (2010). *Becoming orgasmic: A sexual and personal growth programme for women*. Hachette UK.

Laan, E., & Rellini, A. H. (2011). Can we treat anorgasmia in women? The challenge to experiencing pleasure. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 26(4), 329–341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2011.649691>

Phillips, N. A. (2000). Female sexual dysfunction: Evaluation and treatment. *American Family Physician*, 62(1), 127–136.

McCarthy, B. W. (2004). An integrative cognitive-behavioral approach to understanding, assessing, and treating female sexual dysfunction. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*, 15(3), 19–35. https://doi.org/10.1300/J085v15n03_02

Zamboni, B. D., & Crawford, I. (2003). Using masturbation in sex therapy. *Journal of Psychology & Human Sexuality*, 14(2–3), 123–141. https://doi.org/10.1300/J056v14n02_08

Burri, A., & Carvalheira, A. (2019). Masturbatory behavior in a population sample of German women. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 16(7), 963–974. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2019.04.015>

Fahs, B., & Frank, E. (2014). Notes from the back room: Gender, power, and (in)visibility in women's experiences of masturbation. *Journal of Sex Research*, 51(3), 241–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.745474>

Leonard, A. (2010). An investigation of masturbation and coping style [Paper presentation]. 38th Annual Western Pennsylvania Undergraduate Psychology Conference.

Lastella, M., O'Mullan, C., Paterson, J. L., & Reynolds, A. C. (2019). Sex and sleep: Perceptions of sex as a sleep promoting behavior in the general adult population. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 7, 33. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2019.00033>

Ellison, C. R. (2000). Women's sexualities: Generations of women share intimate secrets of sexual self-acceptance.

Komisaruk, B. R., & Whipple, B. (1995). The suppression of pain by genital stimulation in females. *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 6(1), 151–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10532528.1995.10559904>

Masters, W. H., & Johnson, V. E. (1966). *Human sexual response*. Brown.

Levin, R. J. (2007). Sexual activity, health and well-being – The beneficial roles of coitus and masturbation. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 22(1), 135–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681990601149197>

In the New Zealand studies, women participants stated other important reasons for masturbation, apart from sexual pleasure including, stress relief and relaxation (60.7%), decreased sexual tension (41.7%), and overcoming feelings of depression/anxiety (20.7%).¹¹³ Many women responded that masturbation helped them improve physical health aspects such as strengthening the pelvic floor muscles before and after childbirth, as well as dealing with chronic pain issues. Some former sexual assault survivors also responded that it helps with other aspects of mental well-being such as reconnecting with one's body after trauma. The use of masturbation for women has been established to stem from many different physical and mental reasons, thus proving itself to be highly beneficial in sexual education, as mental and physical health is primordial to a teenager's development.

3.2: Ethical Pornography

Ethical pornography is described as “pornographic content created ethically. The scope of ethical pornography [...] is driven by ethical concerns and necessities that require actions to be fair, equitable and just for all stakeholders involved throughout the production process.”¹¹⁴ In sexual education, including ethical pornography in the erotic discourse provides a means of countering “competing discourses of ‘erotica’ in mainstream pornography”.¹¹⁵ Mainstream pornography has gone viral this past decade and platforms such as PornHub¹¹⁶ are easily accessible to young adults of all ages. Due to lack of conversation around desire and pleasure, it has become the main source of learning for youth. This form of erotica denigrates and objectifies women, rather than identifying them as their own subject. It also promotes double standards concerning age and ethnicity. Professor Louisa Allen delivers evidence suggesting that including ethical pornography within sexual education will both acknowledge young people's curiosities and desires, relay sexual education teachings, and steer them in a direction that better aligns them

¹¹³ Csako, Rita I., et al. “Female Sexuality in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Factors and Sexual Response Associated with Masturbation.” *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 2022, pp. 1–19., <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2022.2099499>.

¹¹⁴ Ergen, Fulden. “An Analysis on the Impact of Ethical Porn Discourse on the Communication of Pornographic Content Online.” *Uppsala Universitet*, 2018, pp. 63.

¹¹⁵ Ergen, Fulden. “An Analysis on the Impact of Ethical Porn Discourse on the Communication of Pornographic Content Online.” *Uppsala Universitet*, 2018, pp. 63.

¹¹⁶ “Home.” *Pornhub Porn Videos*, <https://www.pornhub.com/>.

with their personal interests.¹¹⁷ Putting women's (as well as members of the LGBTQ+ community of all cultural backgrounds') sexuality forward in a sex-positive way, by promoting women's pleasure as equal to men's, is crucial to teaching young people about equitable sexual experiences.¹¹⁸

Within the pornography industry, ethical pornography is an alternative that emerged in 2010 thanks to Web2.0.¹¹⁹ It prioritizes and reveals labor conditions and consent in the production process. Descriptions of producers and actors may also be included to allow complete transparency. Scholars have underlined ethics as a major component of ethical pornography, putting this practice equivalent to fair-trade business models.¹²⁰ It has therefore been categorized as "socially responsible pornography"¹²¹ as the models highlight workers' rights. Components of business ethics highlighted include equal pay and equal working opportunities for all performers regardless of experience, race, or sexual identity. This differs from mainstream pornography websites for it has been recorded that people of color earn less than their colleagues¹²²

Jiz Lee, activist, performer, and editor of *Porn Studies Journal*, wrote an interesting article on the subject: "Ethical Porn Starts When We Pay for It"¹²³. She states that paying for pornography enables basic labor rights for all performers involved. It also lessens the possibility of exploitation of actors, as piracy of paid material is reduced.

Alongside videos of pornography, these platforms propose various other mediums such as podcasts, books, journals, cartoons, and illustrations. This

¹¹⁷ Allen, , Louisa. "Beyond the Birds and the Bees: Constituting a Discourse of Erotics in Sexuality Education." *Gender & Education*, vol. 16, no. 2, June 2004, pp. 163-164. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1080/09540250310001690555>.

¹¹⁸ Stewart, Robert Scott. "Is Feminist Porn Possible?" *Sexuality & Culture: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 1, March 2019, pp. 254–70. *EBSCOhost*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.iadt.ie/10.1007/s12119-018-9553-z>.

¹¹⁹ Ergen, Fulden. "An Analysis on the Impact of Ethical Porn Discourse on the Communication of Pornographic Content Online." *Uppsala Universitet*, 2018, pp. 63.

¹²⁰ Ergen, Fulden. "An Analysis on the Impact of Ethical Porn Discourse on the Communication of Pornographic Content Online." *Uppsala Universitet*, 2018, pp. 12.

¹²¹ Ergen, Fulden. "An Analysis on the Impact of Ethical Porn Discourse on the Communication of Pornographic Content Online." *Uppsala Universitet*, 2018, pp. 22.

¹²² Ergen, Fulden. "An Analysis on the Impact of Ethical Porn Discourse on the Communication of Pornographic Content Online." *Uppsala Universitet*, 2018, pp. 55.

¹²³ Lee, J. "Ethical Porn" Starts When We Pay for It.", 21 Jan. 2015, <https://medium.com/@jizlee/ethical-porn-starts-when-we-pay-for-it-8a6f266ab473#fxwwd2.v3l>.

expands learning possibilities to forms better adapted to a classroom context, enabling teachers to convey important information in more stimulating ways.

When searching for content, ethical pornography platforms break from mainstream pornography by eliminating the use of tags or insensitive language to define the user's fantasies. More inclusive language adaptations are purposely used to identify performers and genres. Allowing young people access to platforms such as GetCheex¹²⁴ and Lust Confessions¹²⁵ in sexual education classes would enable them to learn about their desires in a sex positive, equitable manner. Education would communicate to teenagers that sexual curiosity is a normal part of adolescence. Proposing this as an alternative could potentially sway teens away from denigrating, objectifying mainstream pornography to a sex-positive platform that aligns itself better to their personal desires.

3.3: Art/books/films/media examples of pro feminine pleasure

Media has always been a tool to promote positive feminine pleasure and desire. In the 70s, director Anne Severson created the short documentary film *Near the Big Chakra* (1971) that was intended to be an educational film by and for women. It was an assemblage of close-up colored photographs of women's vulvas. The film was controversial, but the images were considered by many as "powerful, teasing, and pleasurable, suggesting intricate delicacy, complexity, varied shapes, and different hues making up the 'whole' female genitalia".¹²⁶ It is important to portray diverse female genital anatomy in a positive light, as sexual education very often forgets to do so.

Recently, Netflix released *Sex Education*¹²⁷ (2019), a series focusing on discussing sex positiveness in a teenage high school setting. Its famous scene of

¹²⁴ "Login." *CHEEX*, 8 November 2022, <https://getcheex.com/login/>.

¹²⁵ "Home to Crowd-Sourced Porn." *XConfessions*, <https://xconfessions.com/>.

¹²⁶ Segal, Lynne. "Rethinking Heterosexuality: Women with Men." *Straight Sex: Rethinking the Politics of Pleasure*, Verso, London, 2015, p. 225.

¹²⁷ *Sex Education*. Directed by Jennings, Jon, Eleven Film, Netflix, 2019.

“vulva cupcakes” promotes diversity and beauty of all vulvas in the form of sweet snacks.



Figure 6: *Sex Education*, (2019). Vulva Cupcakes ¹²⁸

Books have also been a creative source, proposing easy reads to people of all ages to help them understand their sexual identities. *Jouissance Club*¹²⁹ (2020) is one of many examples of colorfully illustrated books that can appeal to teens and adults, promoting body positivity and important hygiene and anatomical information through its writing. It also stands against societal rules, encouraging exploration and self-love.

In art, female pleasure has been represented throughout history in a multitude of different forms. One recent example is *The Great Wall of Vulva* sculpted by artist Jamie McCartney¹³⁰. The creation is an 8-meter-long sculpture of 400 plaster casts of vulvas painted completely white to avoid any racial discrimination or pornographic connotations. The artist’s aim was to create body

¹²⁸ *Sex Education*. Vulva Cupcakes. 2019. <https://www.estadao.com.br/emails/tv/sex-education-netflix-distribuiu-cupcakes-em-formato-de-vagina-para-fas-da-serie/>

¹²⁹ Plã Jüne. *Jouissance Club: Une Cartographie Du Plaisir*. Marabout, 2020

¹³⁰ “Vulva Artist Transforms Colorado Women’s Vaginas into Body-Positive Art.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 30 March 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/mar/30/jamie-mccartney-vulva-casts-boulder-colorado-red-tent-revival>.

positive art to show the public that vulvas come in all shapes and sizes, sharing equal beauty. His wall is composed of 10 panels portraying 40 vulvas. It is both spectacular and educational, conveying the message of female empowerment. The female contributors range from 18-76 years of age, and belong to multiple ethnic background, creating a work of art that exposes the viewers to a high variety of possible genital esthetics.

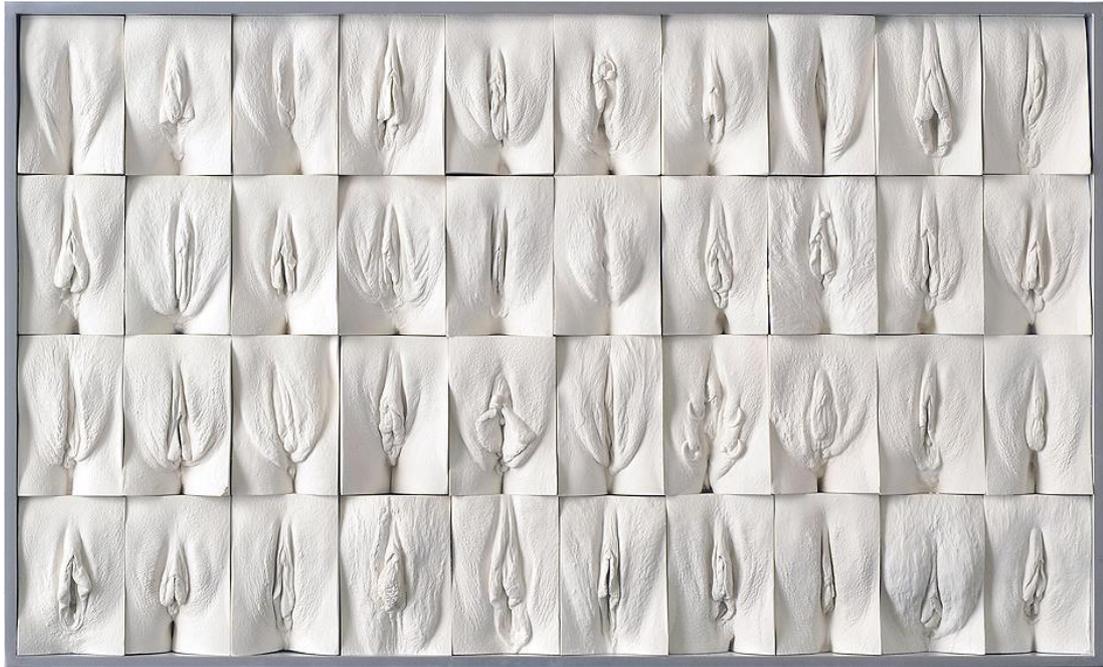


Figure 7: *The Great Wall of Vulva*, (2006). Jamie McCartney ¹³¹

Although he was criticized for not including pubic hair in his sculpture, this element was impossible as it is not advised to apply plaster on body hair¹³². Since hairlessness is part of a social aesthetic deriving from mainstream pornography, McCartney addressed this issue by delivering a second artwork, *The Sum of Our Parts*¹³³. Using new media such as a document scanner, the artist creates portraits comprised of individual body parts and natural pubic areas.

¹³¹ McCartney, Jamie. *The Great Wall of Vulva*. 2006. <https://hypebae.com/2022/11/erotic-art-jamie-mccartney-great-wall-of-vagina-vulva-wilzig-museum/>

¹³² AFPL Ghostscript 8.53. "Material Safety Data Sheet 91/155/EEC - Mbf files.co.uk." *Mbfg*, 22 Oct. 2007, https://www.mbf files.co.uk/datasheets/crystalal_r_msds.pdf.

¹³³ McCartney, Jamie. "The Sum of Our Parts." *Jamie McCartney*, 4 May 2020, <https://jamiemccartney.com/sum-of-our-parts/>.

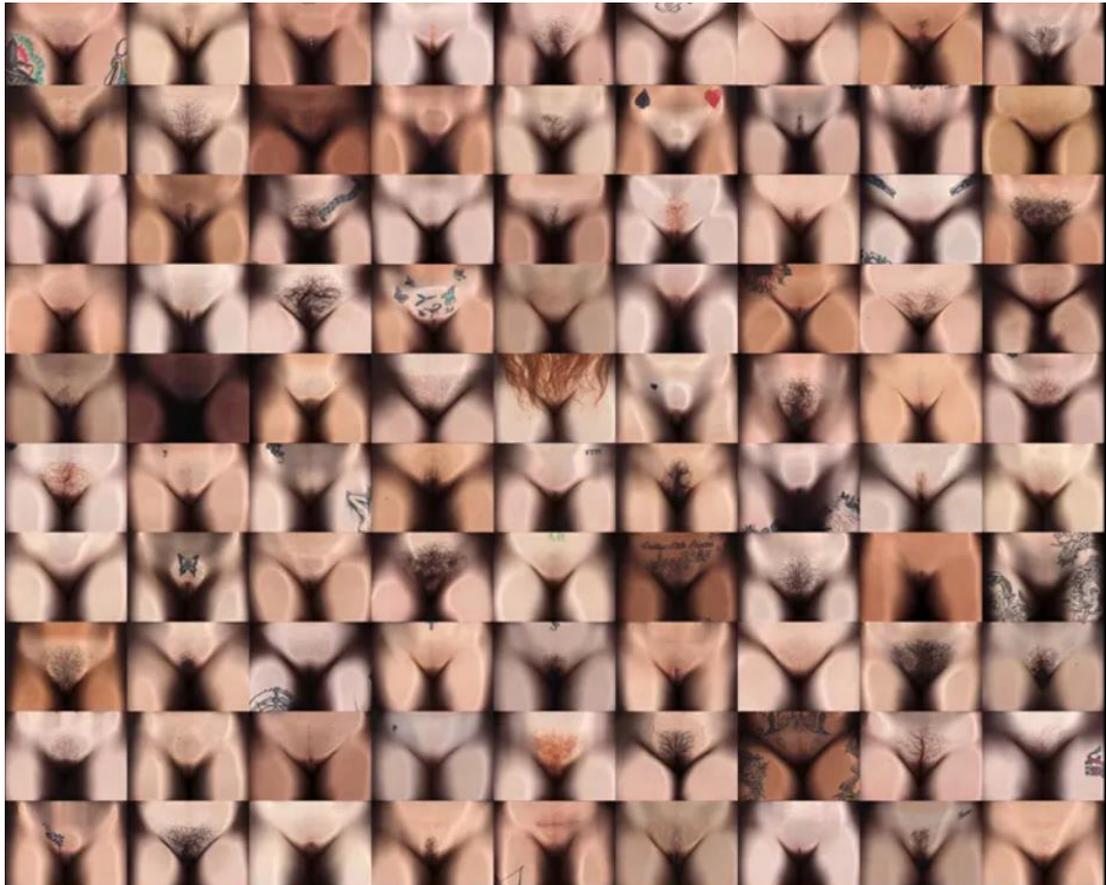


Figure 8: *The Sum of Our Parts*,(2014). Jamie McCartney ¹³⁴

Taking note of the numerous studies and academic journals examined as supporting material, this chapter is confident in the mental, physical, social, and gendered benefits of introducing erotic discussion in sexual education. This would provide educational programs with a safe and open sexual health curriculum fully taking into consideration their students’ best interests. From the inclusion of discussion around masturbation, to presenting solutions to “the orgasm gap”, to the possibility of orienting youth to healthier learning options such as ethical pornography, the goal is to introduce sexual experiences as healthy and equitable as possible, free from any form of shame. Learning to embracing one’s desire and pleasure may go a long way to improving not only one’s personal growth, but also navigate through the dangers and pleasures of social relationships. Research has proven that creating a new norm in sexual education will improve teenagers’ quality of life.

¹³⁴ Screengrab of artist website. February 2023. <https://jamiemccartney.com/sum-of-our-parts/>.

The ongoing battle for feminine sexual liberation can be seen through inspiring scientific articles, artworks, film, literature, advertisement and more. Exposing teenagers to these different forms of expression, through an education system that prioritizes their well-being, may illustrate that having the right to one's sexuality is a major positive contributor to mental and physical health.

Conclusion

In light of data collected from numerous academic writings, results analyzed in the preceding chapters support the initial critique of lack of sexual health classes in education. Many important aspects of these classes are insufficient or absent, lacking consideration specifically for women. In occurrence this brings into question important issues of ethics. Many young people are leaving school not having learned the knowledge-based skills they are meant to be equipped with to navigate through their sexual journeys safely and without taboo.

As discussed through the work of mentioned psychologist Donald L. Mosher, sociologist Laura Carpenter, and sexual health researcher Hanna Cinthio , scientifically inaccurate sexual myths shape sexual behavior and physiology, ultimately defining a woman's value. The absence of open discussion around these topics is where the education system is failing students. The critique of a negative ethical impact, as well as a sociocultural impact on students is made through these chapters. The inability to break the taboo only solidifies the symbolism of sexual myths, leaving young people vulnerable to believing and unintentionally endorsing them. Youth may easily fall under the influence of film and other media, as they are rarely linked and critiqued in the context of sexual education. Distinguishing between what is myth and what is not is very difficult when not equipped with sufficient knowledge. Anatomical features such as the hymen may quickly acquire a socially constructed position, opening a narrative that has been used by society time and time again, with the purpose of restricting women's sexual liberation.

Due to female anatomy often being discussed purely for biological purposes, women's pleasure, or lack of it, has led to numerous questions kept unanswered. The unspoken aspect of frequent sexual health issues that may impair a woman's pleasure, takes part in the normalization of pain during sexual experiences. As guilt about sex is proven to be the most common mediator, it is important to recognize this as a factually based cause to women's decline of physical and mental health. If sexual education thrived to break the taboo around women's pleasure, a safe and open conversation of possible sexual guilt or other health problems may go a long way to decreasing this phenomenon.

In order to do so however, it is important to remedy central issues concerning outdated methods of educating young people on sexual health. As previously defined and discussed by psychology researchers Steven J. Boyer and Tierney, heteronormative teachings promoting social ‘normativity’ is a leading issue in sexual behavior and sexual orientation development. Following the research of professor of psychology Sarah McClelland, abstinence-based teachings remain the epitome of conversation avoidance and fact deformation, resulting in a loss of essential information consequential to all sexes. The morals and principles meant to be shared with young people are erased and replaced with false notions of purity and sexist values, ultimately endorsing the policing of female sexuality.

Also absent in discussions is the subject of consent. It has been made clear through scholars’ critiques, such as those made by professors in criminology Brooke de Heer, Meredith Brown, and Julianna Cheney as well as professor of psychology Sarah McClelland, that it is not enough to learn to say yes or no. Education must strive to present young people with the knowledge and tools to understand the essence of the word, as risk and pleasure are directly linked in social situations. Conversations inclusive to all genders around sexual violence may become less difficult if normalized in school curriculum.

The taboo around female pleasure remains significant as its content is rarely discussed within the four walls of a classroom. Knowledge of the full female anatomy, desire, and masturbation have been proven to play a positive role to women’s mental and physical health, yet research from professors of sociology Alison Bucka and Kylie Parrotta proves that the topic is rarely present in sexual education. Open discussion allowing young people to ask questions and learn without shame, is a primordial element to living a happy and healthy sexual journey.

Upon proper analysis and reflection of the numerous studies designed to research the consequences of inadequate sexual education, it is imperative to recognize the resulting negative themes. Women’s mental and physical health hang in an unbalanced society. According to research from professor of psychology Sara McClelland, the lack of entitlement to female pleasure, absence of skills, sexual anxiety, poor mental health, unplanned pregnancies, and STIs are important

obstacles that deserve to be acknowledged and remedied. Some scholars such as Stewart, Shields, & Hwang, go as far as to question the ethical motives of sexual classes in education.

Incomplete standard sexual health classes leave little room for youth to voice their questions and concerns about sexual experiences. The negative impact of heteronormative dialogues excludes LGBTQ+ identities from any form of conversation. The proven harmful result of feeling ashamed of, or afraid to speak of one's sexuality is a direct consequence, as discussed in Hogg's 'uncertainty identity theory' centralizing 'uncertainty-related distress'.

As recognized in the field of psychology by scholars such as Juliana Brown and Jorge N. Ferrer, sexual education is lacking in the normalization of open discussion about alternate types of relationships and identities that young people may experience along their sexual journeys. Although the positive values and benefits of non monogamy, such as equality and respect, have been thoroughly studied, this information is not communicated with young people. This impairs their right to sufficient knowledge to make positive relationship choices. Recognizing alternate orientations by no means denigrates monogamy, but rather levels all forms of relationships.

An additional dominant theme greatly discussed in this thesis is the centralization of penetration in sexual activities. It is important to recognize all aspects of sexual encounters as sex, regardless of one's sexual identity or orientation. In concern to female sexual pleasure, the vast data collected by researchers such as Laurie Mintz clearly proves that there is more to pleasure than penetration alone. In order to close the 'orgasm gap' between men and women, it is important for sexual education to include discussions around the female pleasure organ, as well as promote healthy communication and exploration between partners. Prioritizing a particular sex's pleasure is where sexual health classes are failing youth, teaching dominant culture scripts, and rendering sexual experiences inequitable.

It has also become clear from the absence of safe spaces for open discussions about sexual health that young people must turn to outside sources such as the internet and

mainstream pornography to acquire information. Unfortunately, sexual self-consciousness is a leading issue among youth, stemming from negative body images seen in numerous media platforms. This, once again exposes, the lack of ethics in education, as classes do not recognize the importance of communicating positive body images. As a result, many young people become victims to product scams and body modification in order to meet socially determined standards.

Having put forward a critique of inadequate sexual education, and reviewed its numerous proven consequences, it is most beneficial to observe the positive outcomes recorded from alternative forms of teaching. Diversifying sexual health classes and promoting inclusion and open discussion about all aspects of sexuality brings about numerous benefits. Researched in the field of psychology by Michelle Fine and Sara McClelland, normalizing pleasure and recognizing it as a major factor of social situations will enable young people to make informed decisions to navigate through the dangers and pleasures of life. Including pleasure in open discussions will also offer many women a sense of entitlement and empowerment, promoting equitable sexual experiences.

As noted in proposed research by professors of psychology Louisa Allen and Laurie Mintz, creating a dialogue within sexual education programs that legitimizes and positively integrates young people's desires will promote safer sexual experiences and enhance health and well-being. Instilling a new norm would be highly beneficial to neutralizing the factors contributing to the 'orgasm gap'. Breaking the taboo around self-pleasure and masturbation would enable to teach young people the many mental and physical benefits argued in the above writings.

With media expanding and becoming increasingly accessible to all ages, this thesis proposes the introduction of alternative tools, such as ethical pornography, to counteract the negative principles of mainstream media. Louisa Allen's positive results on the inclusion of ethical pornography within sexual education reinforces this thesis's claim. Incorporating books, films, and art that promote positive and diverse feminine pleasure and desire may also go a long way to creating safe spaces for youth to freely question, converse, and learn about their sexual curiosities. This thesis denounces the socially acceptable, yet psychologically

unsuitable norms, analyzes, and promotes research-based alternative methods of teaching to form young minds with the ideas of body positivity, equality, acceptance, and self-love.

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