ISSN 2832-8663

JOURNAL OF POSITIVE SEXUALITY

Published by The Center for Positive Sexuality

Volume 10 Number 1 April 2024 | Journalofpositivesexuality.org

NCSF national coalition for sexual freedom

CENTER FOR POSITIVE SEXUALITY

caras

TASHRA The Alternative Sexualities Health Research Alliance

THE JOURNAL OF POSITIVE SEXUALITY is a multidisciplinary journal focusing on all aspects of positive sexuality as described in the Center for Positive Sexuality's purpose statement. It is designed to be accessible and beneficial to a large and diverse readership, including academics, policymakers, clinicians, educators, and students.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

D. Joye Swan, Ph.D., Psychology, Woodbury University (USA)

CO-FOUNDERS

DJ Williams, Ph.D., Criminology, Idaho State University (USA)

Emily E. Prior, M.A., Sociology, Center for Positive Sexuality (USA)

PRODUCTION EDITORS

James R. Fleckenstein, B.A., National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (USA)

John Edgar Browning, Ph.D., Savannah College of Art and Design (USA)

EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

Aleah Poncini, Didel Institute for Scientific Research and Development (Australia)

Apryl Alexander, Psy.D., Clinical Psychology, University of North Carolina, Charlotte (USA)

Brad Sagarin, Ph.D.,h Psychology, Northern Illinois University (USA)

Daniel Copulsky, A.B.D., Social Psychology, University of California, Santa Cruz (USA)

Dave Holmes, Ph.D., Forensic Nursing, University of Ottawa (Canada)

Jennifer A. Vencill, Ph.D., Psychology, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN (USA)

Karen Sabbah, M.A., Sociology, Los Angeles Pierce College (USA)

Kat R. Klement, Ph.D., Psychology, Bemidji State University (USA)

Richard Sprott, Ph.D., Executive Director for the Community–Academic Consortium for Research on Alternative Sexualities (CARAS) (USA)

R. Todd Hartle, D.A., Biology and Education, Irvine, California

Zaedryn Rook, Writing and Editing, Oakland, CA (USA)

MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION

Please see the Submission Guidelines at the back of the issue for details regarding submissions. Manuscripts and supporting documents should be submitted as email attachments in Microsoft Word format to submissions@journalofpositivesexuality.org. Any questions or correspondence should be sent to the editor at info@journalofpositivesexuality.org.

©2024 Center for Positive Sexuality

JOURNAL OF
POSITIVE SEXUALITY
Published by The Center for Positive Sexuality

Volume 10, Number 1, April 2024

The journal of the Center for Positive Sexuality, a 501c3 non-profit organization.
Burbank, CA

Table of Contents

Creating Lasting Love: An Ethnographic Study of Sexual Pleasure, Intimacy and Contraception……3

Directness of Communication Mediates Sexual Satisfaction: What We Can Learn from a Positive View of BDSM Practice……..……..……8

PERSPECTIVE

My Body Under Capitalism ……...……...17

Submission Guidelines…….…….23

©2023 Center for Positive Sexuality

JOURNAL OF
POSITIVE SEXUALITY
Published by The Center for Positive Sexuality

Creating Lasting Love: An Ethnographic Study of Sexual Pleasure, Intimacy and Contraception

Victoria Boydell
University College London, Institute of Women's Health
email: v.boydell@ucl.ac.uk

Sexual pleasure and intimacy are key reasons why people have sex, yet it remains underexamined in our understanding of how people make decisions about contraception. This paper draws on ethnographic research of the intersections between sexual pleasure, intimacy and contraception among women using specialist contraceptive services in central London. I describe how contraceptive use and choices are intertwined with how women assess intimacy in their sexual relationship, and not solely a desire to avoid pregnancy. How and when women use contraceptives relays their concerns about creating and maintaining pleasure and intimacy in their sexual relationships. Moreover, this ethnographic account illustrates how women draw on various contraceptive methods in their decision making and use them to increase communication and trust, distinguish relationships and potentially enhance sexual pleasure, which is indexical and necessary for enduring intimate connections. Considering intimacy alongside sexual pleasure also allows us to consider the relational dimensions of contraceptive choice and how these are far from static, one-off decisions. These empirical insights into intimacy illustrate that contraceptive choice is both a reflection of the perceived intimacy in a relationship and is also a "practice of intimacy", particularly when people are navigating the various forms of intimacies available.

Keywords: *Contraceptive decision-making, pleasure, intimacy, London, ethnography*

Introduction

In attempting to understand contraceptive choices, public health professionals and researchers often look at people's motivations to use contraception (or not), and the canon is teeming with studies exploring the relationship between pregnancy intentions and contraceptive choices. Yet the role of sexual pleasure and intimacy in contraceptive choices is rarely examined. This is confusing as sexual pleasure and intimacy are crucial reasons why people have sex in the first place. Jennifer Higgins and Jennifer Hirsh (2007) aptly refer to this theoretical and programmatic oversight as the "pleasure deficit" - the paucity of attention paid to the effects of positive sexual experience on women's contraceptive choices and how seeking pleasure influences these choices.

Even more absent from discussions surrounding contraceptive choices is how they relate to intimacy. Several studies have found that condoms (non)use is often a strategy to find and maintain a primary relationship, establish trust, increase intimacy and distinguish kinds of relationship (Corbett et al., 2009, Hall et al., 2018, Manning et al., 2009). Further research has found that contraceptive choices, e.g., the choice of contraceptive methods, is linked to relationship status (Kusonoki and Upchurch, 2011, Kusonoki and Barber, 2020, Manlove et al., 2014, Harvey et al., 2018; Upadhyay et al., 2016). Though this body of work is insightful, it tends to reduce intimacy to survey categories of relationship status (e.g., married, engaged, living together in a sexual relationship, going steady, or some kind of casual encounter) that are untethered from contemporary theoretical debates and understandings of intimacy.

How we understand intimacy, sexuality and pleasure has evolved over the last thirty years and is hotly contested. Much of our contemporary understanding of intimacy derives from the seminal work of Anthony Giddens (1992) that outlined how intimacy has transformed. He traces how intimate relationships, both conjugal and familial, have transformed from obligatory marital and famil-

Journal of Positive Sexuality, Vol. 10, No. 1, April 2024
©2024 Center for Positive Sexuality
*Author's Note: I am extremely grateful to the entire team at the Margaret Pyke Clinic in London (which has sadly closed) for supporting this research, in particular Professor Judith Stephenson. I am also grateful to all the respondents who have so generously shared their thoughts and insights on often sensitive and complex experiences.

ial relations centred on conjugal sex to reproduce into affective connections between couples and between family members. Giddens, moreover, situates changes in our understanding of intimacy within broader economic and demographic changes that have transformed personal relationships in the service of social reproduction into more egalitarian connections based on emotional attachments, compatibility and sexual satisfaction, what he termed 'pure relationships'. Intimacy is now the outcome of an active and ongoing negotiation of emotional and sexual satisfaction between purportedly equal partners. Central to the transformation described by Giddens is the separation of sex from reproduction (with the assistance of modern contraceptives) in such a way that sexuality takes on its own existence and becomes a means to forge connections with others. Sex has become part of the active process of generating and sustaining emotional, sexual, and social attachment in which sex and sexual pleasure are both the means and outcomes of a good relationship. Sexual relations with a relatively unknown partner may potentially lead to a more serious and emotionally fulfilling relationship: "Sex is, as it were, a sparking device, with romance as the quest for destiny (Giddens, 1992:51)." Counterposed to this understanding of intimacy is Eva Illouz's (2007) notion of 'cold intimacies' where she describes how capitalism has transformed our emotional lives and how the commodification of love and intimacy often shapes our expectations and behaviors in both sex and relationships. Illouz posits that the separation of sex and reproduction under advanced capitalism has resulted in the marketization of sex where more consumerist principles of seeking personal pleasure led to sexual interactions (e.g., one-night stands, hook up, fuck buddies) that do not build intimacy or anticipate a future connection or relationship. In this social arena, sexual encounters are a personal voluntary choice, yet they generate uncertainty and insecurity as there is no potential, or expectation of, future connection. Sexuality and pleasure in this context are ego-centric and work against the formation of intimacy.

In this paper, I use ethnographic material about contraceptive practices in London to reflect on ideas about intimacy, sexual pleasure and contraceptive choice. I bring together conversations about relationships and contraceptive choice with these debates surrounding contemporary forms of intimacy to see if and how they illuminate each other.

Methods

The following analysis is based on ethnographic fieldwork in a public-funded contraceptive service in London. I conducted participant observation in 5 clinics, along with interviews and life histories with people attending the clinics, as well as the healthcare workers and administrative staff that were supporting them and archival and document research on service and commodity related materials. As many of the initial set of respondents were pre-parturient, additional fieldwork was carried out with ante-natal groups and mother-and-baby groups to ensure a wider range of participants were represented. The interviews were a central part of the research and focused on mapping women's encounters with contraceptives, from their sexual 'debuts' until their then-present practices. Sitting in a private room after completing the consent process (REC Reference: 05/Q0511/72), I would start a conversation by asking why they used contraception. This simple question triggered an outpouring of stories, ideas and concerns that touched different public and private social domains and institutions such as family, work, sex and intimacy. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, pseudonyms were added, and identifying details were removed. A total of 69 interviews were collected and transcribed, 42 with those attending the clinic and 17 with those providing services. I used a grounded approach to construct theoretical findings from data through comparative process that informed an iterative coding frame. The codes were driven by inductive reasoning and therefore focused on the categories raised by the respondents in the course of our conversations. The author alone carried out the coding process and across the transcripts, identified the following four main domains of codes emerged: (1) pregnancy, parenthood and contraceptive use; (2) sex, sexuality, relationships and contraception, (2) bodily effects, menstruation and contraception use, and (4) contraceptive effects and embodiment. Cutting across these four broad categories was the gendered tension between private and public lives. In this paper, I present the analysis of the interview data related to the domain of sex, sexuality and contraception use. Of the 42 respondents interviewed, 33 respondents' transcripts (78%) included codes related to sex, sexuality and contraceptive use. Of the 9 respondents who did not comment on this domain, 6 were recruited at mother and baby groups which suggests they had life course-specific concerns that dominated the conversations. I must state my positionality to ensure transparency around my analysis and provide readers with insights into how my experiences, beliefs, and values may influence the framing of my arguments and the selection of supporting evidence. I approach this topic as a cis-gender, white British woman, and my experiences undoubtedly shape my interpretation of the materials discussed here. In addition, my training in British social anthropology has equipped me with a particular lens through which I view and analyze these conversations. Given this, I am open to diverse perspectives and critique of my interpretation.

Results

The majority of women attending the clinic and participating in the research were white British, well-educated, middle-class, unmarried and childless women aged eighteen to forty-five who had migrated to London to study and/or work in the white-collar professions as policy advisors, lecturers, executives, etc. They attended the clinic because it was centrally located and had convenient opening hours that suited their busy work schedules. Across the respondents who spoke about sex, sexuality, relationships and contraception use, there were very similar themes and here I will focus on a handful of accounts to illustrate the emerging themes. Jasmine had recently turned 34 when we first met at the clinic when she was getting a repeat prescription. Sitting in an empty office, she explained that she had re-started the pill three months into her relationship with her then-boyfriend, whom she had been seeing for nine months. Before this point, they had been using condoms. This was the third time she had taken the pill since she was 17. When I asked why she decided to take the pill, she told me she had felt 'secure' with her boyfriend. This pattern of using condoms with a sexual partner until feeling 'secure' and 'trusting' them was the same as when she previously took the pill. She started to take the pill when she felt that a sexual relationship was no longer casual but a more committed and serious attachment. She explained that she came off the pill when a relationship ended because the next time she met someone; she did not want to "just fall into it" but wanted time to be sure about the relationship. She would start to retake the pill when she thought she was getting serious and that they might be together for a while. Taking the pill at this stage took away the anxiety and pressures typically associated with condoms, emergency contraception or the withdrawal method and relieved the potential threat of unintended pregnancy in a burgeoning relationship. For Jasmine, shifting from condoms to taking the pill was closely associated with her assessment of how her intimate relationship was evolving. On a more general level, the women I spoke to often associated taking the pill with the start of a more serious relationship and they often recalled episodes of taking the pill by recollecting their more serious sexual partners. Poppy, like a third of the women I interviewed, had been using the pill continuously without a break regardless of whether they were in a committed relationship or not. Even though she was always on the pill, she didn't reveal this to her sexual partners until she trusted them. She always used condoms with new or casual sexual partners. She told me,

> Remembering back, if you have met somebody and you go back with them, for me it is a no-brainer to use a

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.51681.1.1011

> condom with them anyway. And I was on the pill anyway. It is about that you don't know this person and that makes it so much more personal. You have this barrier. Condoms feel clean. Whereas if you know the person and you love them, it is a very different feeling.

For Poppy, not knowing a partner prompted condom use, which, in turn, made sex less "personal", and condoms acted as a physical and emotional barrier. However, she did not use condoms with a known and loved partner because this was "a very different thing". Poppy added "This is going to make me sound old-fashioned, but I am usually, I am pretty certain about the person before I start sleeping with them. Because of that, I tend to know a lot about their [sexual] history, so it is not something that ever comes up. I usually go out with some for a couple of months, my last boyfriend it was three months before I even started sleeping with him. Because this is something I take quite seriously. Whereas the one-night stands at university, we always had a jar of condoms in our bathroom." In her account, changes in her contraceptive choices related to how the relationship with her sexual partner was progressing, Heather, 24 years old, told me about what was usually happening in her relationships when she was considering using the pill: "I always have a conversation with the person about their sexual history but it's not something you really want to talk about in the beginning of a relationship, so I would rather wait for a few months or so until you feel ready to talk about it. I just don't think it is an appropriate conversation to have within in the first few weeks of meeting someone, however necessary, you just don't want to hear". She critically reflected on how contraceptive choices changed as a relationship develops: "If it's somebody who you've been going out with for a year, and you have met them and the rest of their family, they are suddenly not an infection risk. Why is that? It doesn't make them any less of an infection risk, but one day, I don't know anybody who says, oh, I'm gonna go and get tested, and I'm gonna get my partner tested. Then I'm gonna make this commitment and I'm gonna throw the condoms out the window. I don't know anyone that does that. Everyone kids themselves when they do it, and that they would do it. And then they talk very quietly about how safe they are...But what they mean is, if they meet some guy in a nightclub, they'll be safe if they go out with them for six months. Then suddenly that person, because that person is familiar, and friendly, and trustworthy in other ways, suddenly they're not an infection risk. And I'm totally guilty of that." Here Heather comments on how time and knowledge about partner was more relevant to contraceptive choice than actual risk. This was a typical pattern for many respondents. If they were having sex with an unknown, new or casual sexual partner, they would use condoms, but if that sexual relationship evolved into a more serious relationship over time, through disclosing conversations and increasing involvement in each other's life, a degree of trust and stability was built that allowed for a shift from condoms to using the pill (or revealing that they were already on it). In this way, taking the pill can be seen as symbolic of a transforming sexual relationship from a fleeting encounter into something more secure. Changing contraceptive methods as part of a more committed relationship was seen as a "trust thing". Over and over, I was told by women that they had opted to take the pill or revealed they were taking the pill, only once they felt they could trust their partners. Saffron, aged 44 when we first met, explained the 'trust' thing more clearly: "Just being on the pill there is a different level of trust, it is not so much a physical thing actually, just the sort of intimacy. Whereas if you're using a condom or going through that sort of barrier, literally, and also the moment of getting, there's a difference about it. And in instances when I am in a relationship, however short, with somebody, they don't necessarily know I am on the pill. That's my kind of, as a kind of added, making it more obligatory to use the condom. So that the pill gets tucked in the bedside drawer and is not left on the bedside table for those occasions". The trust garnered through increasing communication and knowledge about a partner is indicative of a perceived deepening trust and 'specialness' between sexual partners over time. I would further suggest that using condoms was more than a symbolic reflection on the nature of a relationship but was part of the process of gaining knowledge and communicating with a sexual partner to assess whether a more committed relationship was possible (Holland et al., 1998). Condom use in increasingly frequent sexual relationships requires ongoing communication and collaboration that are more characteristic of enduring connections. This symbolic switch from condoms to taking the pill in increasingly secure relationships affected sexual sensation. On the whole, condoms detracted from sexual sensation in terms of interrupting the moment, concerns about effectiveness, dampening sensation and restricting sexual possibilities regarding availability and ease of use. The texture, smell, sensation and expense, as well as the restriction due to availability, the practicalities involved, and the constant worry they may break or come off, were seen to reduce pleasure, closeness, "romance" and "passion". This contrasts with the association with sex on the pill as uninterrupted, spontaneous, worry-free and intimate, which made women feel more "carefree", "confident" and "relaxed" during sex. For these women, sex on the pill was considered more pleasurable for them and for their partners. For the women I spoke to, taking the pill (or revealing it) was a highly symbolic moment that affected both the status and the sensations of their sexual relationships. It was a moment that showed that the relationship was "special" – the more impersonal and awkward sex using condoms in novel and/or casual relationships gave way to more pleasurable sex on the pill as part of more trusting and enduring sexual relationships. When relationships ended (or were about to end) many women stopped using the pill to mark the end of intimacy. Changing contraceptive method was more than just a symbol of trust and commitment, but a way of affecting choices.

Discussion

Contraceptive choice is a "practice of intimacy"

In these recounted narratives, women are strategically using contraceptives to signal and affect intimacy and pleasure in their relationships. This observation of contraceptive choice as indicative of the nature of a sexual relationship is not unique. Sophie Day's (2007) research among sex workers in London found that barrier methods like condoms were used in more impersonal sexual encounters with paying partners and not in personal and trusting sexual relationships. According to Day, contraceptive choice was seen to effect a separation of public and professional sexual relationships from the more private and personal ones. With more sexual partners in a lifetime, contraceptive choices are ways of distinguishing between multiple sexual relationships and are also part of creating committed attachments. This ethnographic example of a contraceptive choice is a practical illustration of how sex precedes commitment, as demonstrated in how contraceptive choices distinguish different 'kinds" of sex and sexual relationships and can be part of a process of generating intimacy as sexual partners disclose sexual histories and are incorporated into each other's life. Contraceptive choices can be seen as what Lynn Jamieson (2011) described as 'practices of intimacy', practices that enable, generate, and sustain a sense of closeness and "special" quality of a relationship between people. The association of condoms and the pill with the qualities of a relationship and its transformation illustrates the negotiable connection between sexual partners. Periods of using condoms can increase knowledge, communication and trust between partners that are "gambles on love" when people have multiple sexual partners. Later switching to the pill could facilitate more pleasurable, spontaneous, and satisfying sex, further engendering closeness. Through these contraceptive practices, sexual intercourse and pleasure act to hold together an evolving relationship; as a relationship becomes more intimate, sex can be made more pleasurable. In this way, intimacy guides contraceptive choices as contraceptives are used in such a way to build and evaluate affectionate and pleasurable attachments. As a practice of intimacy, contraceptives increase

communication and trust, distinguish relationships and potentially enhance sexual pleasure, which is indexical and necessary for enduring intimate connections. These accounts also provide insights into current conversations about the "pleasure deficit", where the focus tends to be on the sexual and erotic sensation of the sex act itself as a discrete episode and less on the sex act in the context of an evolving relationship. Considering intimacy alongside sexual pleasure also allows us to consider the relational dimensions of contraceptive choice and of pleasure and how these are not static. Moreover, it also illustrates that women's decisions about contraception methods are not happening in isolation, but rather are interrelated and happening in progressing relationships that cannot be reduced to singular relationship categories. Moreover, the findings described here align with several quantitative studies of contraceptive method choice and relationship status, which found that more "serious" couples (characterized by length and self-reported commitment), are less likely to use condoms and are more likely to use hormonal methods (Kusunoki and Upchurch, 2011, Manlove et al., 2011, 2014, Upadhyay et al., 2016). Yet Kusunoki and Barber (2020) point out that none of these studies analyzed change over time in contraceptive use within relationships; rather, they used aggregate characteristics of relationships (e.g., currently cohabiting vs. dating, overall seriousness of the relationship) in relation to contraceptive use. Whereas this qualitative account illustrates the value of connecting contraceptive choices within the context of a specific relationship, not relationships in general.

What does this tell us about debates on contemporary understandings of intimacy?

These accounts also provide empirical insights into the mechanics and logic of contemporary intimacy. Women are engaging in multiple sexual encounters, ranging from more casual hook-ups to burgeoning serious relationships, and these are often distinguished and generated by contraceptive choices. Findings from the national population surveys of sexual lifestyles (Natsal-3) in Britain reveal that the sexual lives of women have changed substantially in the past 60 years–with increased sexual activity and diversity of practices with more male and female partners (Mercer et al, 2013). This would suggest some commonalties with Ilouz's assertion about the sexual lives associated with cold intimacies. Yet when we look at the purported "cold" sexual encounters, casual encounters are not necessarily at the expense of forming intimate relationships. Rather these accounts illustrate that casual encounters have the potential to evolve into something more intimate. Here we see that time is taken to cultivate and assess a relationship, talking and disclosing create security and trust, and physical closeness of sex on the pill aligns with intimacy as a process of engagement and negotiation. People are taking time to find and invest in highly emotionally and physically charged partners and diverse sexual encounters are 'gambles' on these potential connections. These accounts fall somewhere in between Giddens' "pure relationships" and Illouz's "cold intimacies" and suggest the two phenomena are at opposite ends of a possible continuum of intimacy and are not mutually exclusive. More useful is Helen Fisher's notion of "slow love" in which people want to take time to consider their relationship with a potential partner before committing more seriously (Fisher, 2015, Fisher & Garcia, 2018). According to Fisher, today's courtship consists of different forms such as being friends, friends with benefits, casual sex, and living together before marriage, as people are slowly transforming their informal sexual connections into long-term, formally committed relationships. Sex and contraceptive choices are part of the practices of slow intimacy that can create enduring relationships. One of the primary limitations of this study is it reflects a homogeneous sample, predominantly comprised of middle-class, educated white women in highly professional jobs. This characteristic might limit the generalizability of findings to a broader population. The experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of other demographic groups, including women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, sexual orientations, and relationship statuses, may not be represented in this research. The focus on this relatively privileged cohort may overlook the intersecting identities and complexities that influence individuals' experiences and could significantly impact the nuances of their experiences. Another limitation of this study is that I did not interview male partners. This analysis, thus, lacked information from the partners' point of view, which may be important for our understanding of contraceptive decisions, particularly for male-controlled methods like the condom.

Conclusion

How women talk about how and when to use contraceptives relay ideas about intimacy and how it can(not) evolve from a sexual encounter over time. The findings illustrate how contraceptive practices are part and parcel of mobilizing intimacy between sexual partners. More than this, it also helps us to better understand that multiple intimacies may co-exist, pure, cold, or somewhere in-between, and contraceptive choices not only signal relationship status but are also part of the practices of generating it.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, Victoria Boydell. The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

Ethical Clearance

This research was reviewed and approved by the Camden and Islington PCT Institutional Review Board REC Reference: 05/Q0511/72).

References

Agnew, C.R., Harvey, S.M., Vander-Drift, L.E., Warren J. (2017). Relational underpinnings of condom use: Findings from the project on partner dynamics. *Health Psychology*, *36*(7):713-720. doi: 10.1037/hea0000488.

Corbett, A.M., Dickson-Gomez, J., Hilario, H., Weeks, M.R. (2009). A Little Thing Called Love: Condom Use in High-Risk Primary Heterosexual Relationships. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, *41*(4):218–224, doi: 10.1363/4121809

Day, S. (2007). *On the Game: Women and Sex Work*. London: Pluto Press.

Fisher, H. (2015). Slow love: How casual sex may be improving marriage. *Nautilus*. https://nautil.us/casual-sex-is-improving-1americas-marriages-235323/.

Fisher, H., Garcia, J. (2018). Slow love: courtship in the digital age. In R. Sternberg and K. Sternberg (Eds.) *The New Psychology of Love*. Cambridge University Press.

Giddens, A. (1992). *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford University Press.

Hall, W.J., Erausquin, J.T., Nichols, T.R., Tanner, A.E. (2018). Relationship Intentions, Race, and Gender: Student Differences in Condom Use During Hookups Involving Vaginal Sex. *Journal of American College Health*, *67*(8), 733–742. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1506788

Harvey, M., Oakley, L.P., Washburn, I., Agnew, C.R. (2018). Contraceptive Method Choice Among Young Adults: Influence of Individual and Relationship Factors. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *55*(9), 1106-1115. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2017.1419334

Higgins, J.A., Hirsch, J.S. (2007). The Pleasure Deficit: Revisiting the "Sexuality Connection" in Reproductive Health. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, *39*, 240-247. https://doi.org/10.1363/3924007

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.51681.1.1011

Holland, J., Ramazanoglu, C., Sharpe, S., Thomson, R. (1998). *The Male in the Head: Young People, Heterosexuality and Power*. Tufnell Press.

Illouz, E. (2007). *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Polity Press.

Jamieson, L. (2011). Intimacy as a Concept: Explaining Social Change in the Context of Globalisation or Another Form of Ethnocentrism? *Sociological Research Online*, *16*(4). https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.2497

Kusunoki, Y., Barber, J.S. (2020). The Dynamics of Intimate Relationships and Contraceptive Use During Early Emerging Adulthood. *Demography*, *57*(6), 2003-2034. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-020-00916-1

Kusunoki, Y., Upchurch, D.M. (2011). Contraceptive method choice among youth in the United States: the importance of relationship context. *Demography*, *48*(4),1451–1472.

Manlove, J., Welti, K., Wildsmith, E., Barry, M. (2014). Relationship types and contraceptive use within young adult dating relationships. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, *46*, 41–50.

Manning, W.D., Flanigan, C.M., Giordano, P.C., Longmore, M.A. (2009). Relationship dynamics and consistency of condom use among adolescents. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, *41*(3), 181-90. https://doi.org/10.1363/4118109.

Mercer, C.H., Tanton, C., Prah, P., Erens, B., Sonnenberg, P., Clifton, S., Macdowall, W., Lewis, R., Field et al. (2013). Changes in sexual attitudes and lifestyles through the lifecourse and trends over time: Findings from the British National Surveys of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal). *Lancet*, *382*, (9907), 1781-1794.

Upadhyay, U.D., Raifman, S., Raine-Bennett, T. (2016). Effects of relationship context on contraceptive use among young women. *Contraception*, *94*(1),68-73. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.contraception.2016.02.025

JOURNAL OF
POSITIVE SEXUALITY
Published by The Center for Positive Sexuality

Directness of Communication Mediates Sexual Satisfaction: What We Can Learn from a Positive View of BDSM Practice

*Anabel Carty**
University of East London, School of Psychology

Adam Davidson
University of East London, School of Psychology

BDSM practitioners typically report higher sexual satisfaction than the general population (Botta et al., 2019; Joyal & Carpentier, 2017; Strizzi et al., 2022). One possible reason for this is that the BDSM community prioritizes open communication and challenges traditional sexual scripts. In a sample of 376 individuals, we found a positive association between BDSM participation and sexual satisfaction which was fully mediated by direct communication about sex. These results build upon previous literature that emphasizes the vital role of communication in sexual satisfaction, broadening this result to a more sexually diverse population. In addition, the frameworks used by BDSM communities could inspire the use of similar strategies to improve communication and sexual satisfaction in non-BDSM populations.

Keywords: *BDSM, Communication, Kink, Positive Sexuality, Sexual Satisfaction*

Introduction

Men and women of all ages (even those not sexually active) agree that sex is important: sexual satisfaction contributes to overall well-being, quality of life (Flynn et al., 2016; Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2014) and mental and physical health (Dundon & Rellini, 2010). It is associated with lower rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide risk, as well as increased life expectancy (Brody, 2010; Ibrahem et al., 2023; Scott et al., 2012). Sexual satisfaction overlaps with intimacy and relationship satisfaction while decreasing familial, financial, and work-related stress (Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2014). Sexual dissatisfaction is a common reason for seeking relationship therapy (Duncan et al., 2020). Low self-esteem due to sexual dissatisfaction (Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2014) increases the likelihood of alcohol and drug use or disordered eating (Arsandaux et al., 2020), while individuals who experience a decline in sexual excitement may seek novel sexual experiences outside of their relationships (de Oliveira et al., 2021). Infidelity is the leading cause of separation and divorce (Lehmiller, 2019) and profoundly impacts individual and relational well-being (Morgan et al., 2018). Traditionally, diverse sexual practices were stigmatized by society and pathologized by researchers, medical professionals, and counsellors (Mulé, 2018; Wright, 2010, 2014). However, a healthy psychological attitude towards sex and sexual health is essential for growth and development (Mosher, 2017), and there may be much to learn from BDSM practitioners. Individuals who participate in BDSM (Bondage, Discipline, Domination, and Submission, Sadism-Masochism) or identify as having a BDSM orientation appear to be more sexually satisfied than the general population (Botta et al., 2019; Joyal & Carpentier, 2017; Strizzi et al., 2022). Previous attempts to understand the mechanism of this relationship have focused on the BDSM role an individual adopts (Botta et al., 2019; Joyal & Carpentier, 2017) yet failure to find conclusive evidence may suggest another mechanism can offer a more feasible explanation. The directness of communication about sex employed by the BDSM community may explain this relationship more consistently. Boundaries of play and consent are continually negotiated through clear and consistent communication (Rubinsky & Roldán, 2021). In the BDSM community, challenging traditional sexual scripts, peer-facilitated education, and everyday safety and communication frameworks aim to increase pleasure and prevent nonconsensual physical or psychological harm (Rittenhour & Sauder, 2023). These facilitators of communication could have broader applications in improving relationships for all. Sexual communication is critical for sexual satisfaction (Mallory et al., 2019; Mallory, 2022), and many psychological interventions to improve sexual satisfaction include communication skills training (Xu et al., 2022). Research is required to understand if communication

Journal of Positive Sexuality, Vol. 9, No. 2, April 2024
©2023 Center for Positive Sexuality
*Corresponding Author: Anabel Carty, School of Psychology, University of East London, University Way, London, E16 2RD, United Kingdom | Email: anabel@coequalcoaching.co.uk. This research adheres to ethical guidelines and has been approved for studies involving human participants by the School of Psychology Ethics Committee at the University of East London.

Issue DOI: https://doi.org/10.51681.1.101

is the reason for greater satisfaction in BDSM practitioners. The current study examines whether communication mediates sexual satisfaction and how lessons from this marginalized group can be applied more broadly outside BDSM practice.

Communication and Sexual Satisfaction

Communication is vital for sexual satisfaction, yet candid communication about desire is rare, with individuals expressing fear of partner rejection, vulnerability, embarrassment, and shame around self-disclosure (Rubinsky & Roldán, 2021), especially in the infancy of a relationship (Montesi et al., 2011). However, even in long-term relationships, only two-thirds of individuals know what their partners find sexually satisfying (Byers, 2011). Resistance to disclosing sexual desires is complicated further if the sexual preference is stigmatized, with a heightened perceived risk of ostracism from their social network (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Individuals are likely to weigh the risks and benefits of disclosure before revealing their sexual preferences (Brown & Weigel, 2018). If these disclosures are then met with hostility and create conflict, the disclosure is unlikely to promote intimacy or an understanding of the sexual preferences needed to foster sexual satisfaction (Mallory, 2022). The broader systemic Sexual Scripts Theory (SST; Simon & Gagnon, 1986) considers how partner communication may be inhibited by the unconscious compliance and internalization of socio-cultural, interpersonal and intrapersonal traditional sexual scripts (TSS), such as beliefs that women are passive, innocent gatekeepers of sex and men are emotionally stoic and sexually assertive (Gauvin & Pukall, 2018; Machette & Montgomery-Vestecka, 2023). Disclosure fears associated with this compliance may result in avoiding conversations or using indirect communication methods, reducing sexual satisfaction (Theiss, 2011b; Theiss & Estlein, 2014). Direct sexual communication and self-disclosure act as positive mechanisms to rewrite internalized TSS (Masters et al., 2013) through negotiation and interactions (Simon & Gagnon, 2003).

BDSM and Communication

The BDSM community has rejected, rewritten and reworked TSS through extensive negotiation. Frameworks such as the 4Cs (Communication, Consent, Caring, Caution; Williams et al., 2014), Risk Aware Consensual Kink (RACK; Kaak, n.d.), and Safe, Sane and Consensual (SSC; Langdridge & Barker, 2013) underpin this cultural norm and provide guidelines for BDSM activities. Communication patterns are tied to community norms that encourage extensive sexual negotiations before, during and after sexual activity (Faccio et al., 2014; Gunning et al., 2023., Rubinsky, 2018) to minimize risk and maximize enjoyment at every stage of sexual activity. Simply having an awareness and understanding of alternative scripts increases the practitioner's autonomy and motivation to diverge from them (Rittenhour & Sauder, 2023). The "Kink" (another term used to describe BDSM) script centralizes explicit expression of sexual desire in all genders, encouraging female sexual assertion and pursuit of sexual desire (Rittenhour & Sauder, 2023). Power imbalances and the infliction of pain in this community are anticipated and conscious, consensual decisions. While play carries some physical and psychological risks, members of the BDSM community seek to be risk-aware, informed, prepared and willing (Langdridge & Barker, 2013). The BDSM community applauds affirmative consent, in contrast to the traditional script, where consent is assumed with an absence of "no" (Barker, 2013). Members distinguish between harm and injury, taking extra precautions to reduce extensive injury, maintain consent and provide adequate aftercare (Newmahr, 2011). During negotiations, especially before a "scene", individuals will set limits, discuss safe words that result in the immediate ending of an activity, and share sexual desires (Rittenhour & Sauder, 2023). Given the cultural norms within the BDSM community around sexual communication, negotiation and consent, this population is expected to communicate more directly about sex than the general population. This study aims to investigate the following research question:

> Does the directness of communication around sex mediate the relationship between BDSM participation and sexual satisfaction?

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were over eighteen, spoke English and required access to the internet. Participants were required to be sexually active with at least one partner. In order to recognize that BDSM can transcend traditional sexual scripts (Faccio et al., 2014), that practitioners may practice ethical non-monogamy (ENM), and to be inclusive to LGBTQ+, any activity an individual experiences as sexually satisfying was considered suitable. Suggested sample sizes when conducting mediation analysis vary, with Fritz and MacKinnon (2007) suggesting requirements from around 400 to over 20,000. Due to the difficulties in recruiting this hard-to-reach population and the limitations of time and funding for the project, a sample size of 400 participants was targeted. The final participant pool included 376 participants, of which 100 (26.6%) participants did not practice BDSM, and 276 did practice BDSM (73.4%). The sample identified primarily as female (n = 236, 62.8%), with 114 identifying as male (30.3%) and 26 (6.9%) gender minorities who, for reasons of anonymity, have been grouped as "gender diverse". The mean age of the total sample was 41 years (ranging from 20-73, SD = 10.8). Most participants resided in the United Kingdom (68.6%) and the United States (19.7%), were employed (66.8%) or self-employed (15.2%) and were educated to at least a lower University level (71%). Just under half of the participants identified as heterosexual (44.9%), with bisexuality (19.1%), pansexuality (11.2%), heteroflexibility (8%), queer (2.9%) and the remaining participants (13%) grouped as alternative diverse sexual orientations. Relationship status was varied, with 100 (26.6%) participants being married, 97 (25.9%) in a relationship, 43 (11.5%) in a casual sexual relationship, and 118 (32.3%) practicing consensual nonmonogamy either as polyamorous (19.2%), in an open relationship (9.3%), or as a relationship anarchist (3.6%). Of those participants who practiced BDSM, 134 (48.5%) were also ENM, compared to 2 participants (2%) who did not practice BDSM. Recruitment occurred via online social media platforms and community groups, as well as paper advertisements in BDSM community play spaces and at BDSM events, with the permission of hosts and event organizers. Snowball sampling was used: participants were encouraged to share the study with friends both within and outside the BDSM community. Data collection took place between May and June 2023. Before completing the survey, participants were informed that participation was voluntary and anonymous and required to provide informed consent.

Measures

Demographic questions collected information on age, gender, country of residence, nationality, employment status, level of educational attainment, relationship status and sexual orientation. Free-text responses were often used instead of pre-defined options to allow more freedom and inclusivity in responses.

The Indirectness of Communication about Sex Scale (Theiss, 2011a). The 5-item scale utilizes a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Questions include "I have never openly discussed my sexual desires with my spouse" and "I have directly talked to my spouse about appropriate sexual behaviors". For this study, the term "spouse" was changed to "partner". Theiss (2011a) provides a Cronbach's alpha for the full scale of 0.8. Cronbach's alpha for the research sample was consistent at 0.82. Individuals with multiple partners were asked to consider one of their partners who meets the eligibility criteria.

Sexual Satisfaction Scale (Theiss, 2011c). This 6-item scale utilizes a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Questions include "My partner and I have a fulfilling sexual relationship" and "There are parts of our sexual relationship that need improvement". Theiss (2011c) gives a Cronbach's alpha for the full scale of 0.85. Given the nature of sexual interaction for some BDSM participants, where orgasm is not always a central focus of sexual satisfaction (Simula, 2019a), one question ("My partner always makes sure I achieve orgasm") was removed. An updated Cronbach's alpha for the 5-item version was 0.86.

BDSM Participation Questionnaire. These questions were designed by the primary researcher to measure the participants' frequency of participation in BDSM, how often BDSM features in their sexual practices, the role they generally identify with, and their favorite BDSM practice. Response options for levels of BDSM participation were adapted from those used on Fetlife.com, a BDSM-friendly community of over one million practitioners who have self-defined profile options providing a more inclusive approach to understanding BDSM participation. These options included "I live the lifestyle when I can", "I live the lifestyle 24/7" and three further options. Two additional levels were added to classify non-BDSM participants ("I do not participate in BDSM" and "I do not participate in BDSM but I am curious to try it"). Further questions were asked regarding favorite BDSM practices, preferred BDSM roles, and how often BDSM was featured as part of their sexual practices to gauge a broader sense of the sample population and for exploratory analysis. If participants did not participate in BDSM, further participation questions were skipped.

Results

Data from Qualtrics were exported to IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28). Incomplete questionnaires were understood as withdrawal from participation and were not included in the analysis. There were no missing data for the variables needed for mediation analysis. Heteroskedasticity (Breusch-Pagan test, $p < .05$) and outliers in the data meant the data failed to meet the assumptions required for a standard regression, so heteroskedasticity-consistent standard error estimators (HC3) and bootstrapping using Hayes' (2022) PROCESS was used.

Hypothesis Testing

To explore whether indirectness of communication mediates the relationship between BDSM participation and sexual satisfaction, the 4-step Baron and Kenny (1986) method was followed to conduct a simple mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro developed for SPSS by Hayes (2022). Using 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals, we found evidence of a total effect of BDSM participation on Sexual Satisfaction (unstandardized B = 0.151, SE = 0.026, CI = 0.101-0.201, $p < 0.001$), whereby individuals who participate more frequently in BDSM report higher levels of sexual satisfaction. There was also evidence of an indirect effect of BDSM participation on sexual satisfaction through indirectness of communication (unstandardized B = 0.134, SE = 0.019, CI= 0.098 – 0.171). When controlling for the indirect effect, the direct effect of BDSM participation on sexual satisfaction became nonsignificant (unstandardized B = 0.018, SE = 0.025, CI = -0.032 – 0.067, p = 0.484), evidencing a complete mediation. Indirectness of communication fully mediates the relationship between participation in BDSM and sexual satisfaction. BDSM participants appear to be more sexually satisfied because they seem to communicate more directly about sex than those who do not participate in BDSM.

Exploratory Analysis

To test the robustness of the mediation, the analysis was rerun with each of the demographic variables added to the model. All were nonsignificant covariates across the whole mediation model; age

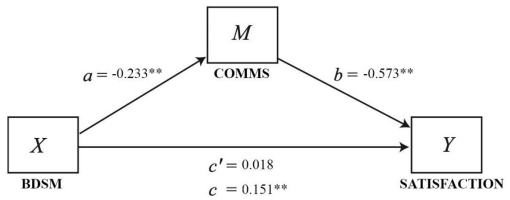

FIGURE 1. Simple mediation model depicting the total (c), direct (c') and indirect effects (ab) of BDSM participation on sexual satisfaction. ** $p < .001$

(p = 0.929), gender (p = 0.511), relationship status (p = 0.391) and educational level (p = 0.053).

Previous literature (Botta et al., 2019; Joyal & Carpentier, 2017) tested BDSM role as a mechanism underlying the relationship between BDSM participation and sexual satisfaction but the findings are contradictory. Thus, we tested this relationship with our sample as an exploratory analysis. The data failed to meet the assumptions required for a one-way ANOVA, so Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to compare medians between submissive (n = 124), dominant (n = 72) and switch (n = 80) groups. Median distributions of sexual satisfaction scores were not significantly different (n = 276, p = 0.279) between BDSM roles.

Discussion

The current study examined the mediating role of the directness of communication in the relationship between BDSM participation and sexual satisfaction. Consistent with the study's hypothesis, BDSM participants reported higher levels of directness of communication about sex, which increased reported levels of sexual satisfaction. However, when controlling for the mediator, the direct effect of BDSM participation on sexual satisfaction disappeared, demonstrating that the directness of communication completely mediates the positive relationship between BDSM participation and sexual satisfaction. Up until now, evidence has suggested that the BDSM population are reportedly more sexually satisfied (Botta et al., 2019; Joyal & Carpentier, 2017; Strizzi et al., 2022), yet the role of communication in that relationship was unexamined. This research bridges that gap in the literature. In line with previous research highlighting the positive impact of direct communication about sex on sexual satisfaction (Mallory et al., 2019; Mallory, 2022) and the theoretical underpinnings of

BDSM practice on direct communication (Gunning et al., 2023; Rittenhour & Sauder, 2023), it was not surprising to find this result. This study confirms that direct communication about sex is crucial in understanding the relationship between BDSM participation and sexual satisfaction, expanding the existing literature from non-BDSM participant samples (Mallory, 2022) to a more diverse sexual community. Additionally, BDSM participants were shown to communicate more directly about sex than the non-BDSM participants, which may have implications for the general population, and applications to healthcare settings, therapeutic practice, and broader social systems.

The BDSM community, as depicted in the literature, actively deviates from traditional sexual scripts, rewriting their own "kink" scripts through extensive interaction and communication (Gunning et al., 2023), taking control of their sexuality and owning it. All relationships may benefit from the lessons outlined by the BDSM community to increase awareness of these unconscious societal scripts and in doing so provide agency in their sexual experiences and relationships, feeling empowered by scripts that align with their values and desires. Researchers studying communication and sexuality can increase knowledge of alternative scripts outside of TSS in the general population by presenting guiding information about positive sexuality, relationships and communication skills training programs. In this way, knowledge sharing may help shift societal norms, leading to more inclusive attitudes and policies

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.51681.1.1012

regarding sexuality.

An alternative, indirect explanation for the increased levels of direct communication displayed by BDSM practitioners may be due to community affiliation and partner responsiveness. Direct conversations in intimate settings are shrouded with fears of partner rejection, vulnerability, shame and judgment around sexual self-disclosure (Rubinsky & Roldán, 2021). The BDSM community provides an accepting space for emotional security, belonging, validation and education (Graham et al., 2016), which may ameliorate fears around direct sexual communication, spotlighting the importance of social support, partner/community responsiveness, acceptance and guidance. If the environment or listener were unresponsive to disclosures, hostile or created conflict, it is unlikely that the conversation will be conducive to increased sexual disclosures and sexual satisfaction (Brown & Weigel, 2018; Mallory, 2022; Tassone et al., 2023). The community also provides various educational opportunities for newcomers to learn about BDSM and the cultural framework (Graham et al., 2016), which may not be found in mainstream media and may indirectly increase their ability to communicate more directly about sex.

Those who participate in BDSM behaviors but are unaffiliated with a BDSM community do not appear to have the same level of communication practices (Rittenhour & Sauder, 2023). Practicing BDSM in isolation may lead to assumptive sexual practices and indirect communication due to disclosure fears and a lack of adequate education and exposure to community communication guidelines and frameworks. BDSM has appeared more in mainstream media since the release of the book "50 Shades of Grey" (James, 2012). The book and film adaptation misrepresented fundamental features of BDSM, including nonconsensual activities, barely any negotiation, and sexual coercion, depicted BDSM as a mental incapacity and reinforced TSS. Self-learning BDSM from mainstream media and popular culture, alongside unconscious compliance to TSS, can result in an increased risk of unwanted sex, sexual compliance and sexual violence, particularly for women (Rittenhour & Sauder, 2023). Given the potential risk of harm, there is a pressing need to support this population. Professionals should seek to expand the research on self-learning practitioners and help direct them to healthcare resources, educational frameworks and community support. People who do not participate in BDSM can benefit from the example shown by those communities to improve relationship communication and sexual satisfaction. Building support networks, creating safe spaces to disclose sexual preferences, using frameworks and guidelines to aid negotiation, and questioning TSS are all lessons that can be applied to positive sexuality outside of the BDSM community. These strategies could be helpful to therapists, practitioners and coaches working with clients who struggle to communicate directly about sex. Although not directly measured through questioning, recruitment of BDSM participants for the current study took place mainly through an online BDSM-friendly community (Fetlife) and community snowballing, and therefore it is likely that the majority of the BDSM sample in this study had some level of affiliation to a BDSM community. Historically, much BDSM research has been centered on individuals within BDSM communities either in the earlier "club scene" or the later "online community" such as Fetlife. Due to methodological challenges, finding individuals who have "self-taught" BDSM is challenging; however, future research would benefit from investigating this population to reduce the risk of harm, analyze their communication practices, gain a broader view of their experiences of sexual satisfaction, and understand the indirect benefit of community belonging on communication practices.

Despite the multiple strengths of this study, it is crucial to consider potential limitations. The results of this preliminary investigation are based on a relatively small sample of participants, especially to interpret a complete mediation instead of a partial mediation. Participants were primarily located in the United Kingdom or the United States. Individualistic cultures show stronger positive associations between sexual communication and sexual satisfaction (Mallory, 2022), highlighting a cultural difference in practices that requires further investigation. Countries with significant gender inequality had a weaker association between the two variables (Mallory, 2022). Future research investigating cultural gender inequality and consensual gender inequality, such as that in 24/7 power dynamics in mixed-sex BDSM couples, could provide further insight into the relationship between sexual communication and sexual satisfaction. Another limitation is self-selection bias. People who volunteer for sexuality studies tend to differ from those who opt out of participation. They tend to be homogenous in race, and females tend to participate in sexuality studies more frequently, which is consistent with the sample of this study. Furthermore, respondents answered towards the extreme ends of the options available on the scales, leading to several outliers that may have represented valid responses. Participants may have felt inclined to report being more sexually satisfied and communicating more directly due to social desirability bias. Finally, the current study relied on participants' self-identification with BDSM rather than selecting from a list of behaviors. This self-identification may have led to individuals under-reporting engagement in BDSM if they do not recognize those behaviors as BDSM (due to mainstreaming or normalizing certain behaviors such as spanking), or do not wish to be affiliated with BDSM due to stigma. More inclusive scales and language are needed to fully represent the richness and diversity of sexual satisfaction and sexual variety in the BDSM population. Even the term BDSM is limited, only covering behaviors referring to bondage, dominance, submission, sadism, and masochism.

Conclusion

The current study is the first to highlight the role of direct communication about sex in the relationship between BDSM participation and sexual satisfaction. The directness of communication about sex completely mediates the effect of BDSM participation on sexual satisfaction, highlighting the pivotal role of open dialogue around sex for sexual satisfaction. The direct and indirect benefits of BDSM participation can be applied to non-BDSM participants in ways that do not include taking up BDSM, such as building communication skills and the use of frameworks, raising critical awareness of traditional sexual scripts, and encouraging community engagement in networks that promote positive sexuality.

References

Arsandaux, J., Montagni, I., Macalli, M., Bouteloup, V., Tzourio, C., & Galéra, C. (2020). Health risk behaviors and self-esteem among college students: Systematic review of quantitative studies. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, *27*(2), 142–159. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12529-020-09857-w

Barker, M. (2013). Consent is a grey area? A comparison of understandings of consent in Fifty Shades of Grey and on the BDSM blogosphere. *Sexualities*, *16*(8), 896–914. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460713508881

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *51*(6), 1173–1182. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.51.6.1173

Botta, D., Nimbi, F. M., Tripodi, F., Silvaggi, M., & Simonelli, C. (2019). Are role and gender related to sexual function and satisfaction in men and women practicing BDSM? *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *16*(3), 463–473. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2019.01.001

Brody, S. (2010). The relative health benefits of different sexual activities. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *7*(4), 1336--1361. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2009.01677.x

Brown, R. D., & Weigel, D. J. (2018). Exploring a contextual model of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction. *Journal of Sex Research*, *55*(2), 202–213. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2017.1295299

Byers, E. S. (2011). Beyond the birds and the bees and was it good for you? Thirty years of research on sexual communication. *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie Canadienne*, *52*(1), 20–28. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022048

Chaudoir, S. R., & Fisher, J. D. (2010). The disclosure processes model: Understanding disclosure decision making and post disclosure outcomes among people living with a concealable stigmatized identity. *Psychological Bulletin*, *136*(2), 236–256. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018193

de Oliveira, L., Rosa, P. J., Carvalho, J., & Nobre, P. (2021). A cluster analysis on sexual boredom profiles in a community sample of men and women. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *59*(2), 258-268. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2021.1931798

Duncan, C., Ryan, G., Moller, N. P., & Davies, R. (2020). Who attends couples counseling in the UK and why? *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, *46*(2), 177–186. https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2019.1654584

Dundon, C. M., & Rellini, A. H. (2010). More than sexual function: Predictors of sexual satisfaction in a sample of women age 40-70. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *7*(2, Pt 2), 896–904. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-6109.2009.01557.x

Faccio, E., Casini, C., & Cipolletta, S. (2014). Forbidden games: The construction of sexuality and sexual pleasure by BDSM 'players'. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, *16*(7), 752–764. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2014.909531

Flynn, K. E., Lin, L., Bruner, D. W., Cyranowski, J. M., Hahn, E. A., Jeffery, D. D., Reese, J.B., Reeve, B. B., Shelby, R. A., & Weinfurt, K. P. (2016). Sexual satisfaction and the importance of sexual health to quality of life throughout the life course of U.S. adults. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, *13*(11), 1642–1650. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2016.08.011

Fritz, M., & MacKinnon, D. (2007). Required sample size to detect the mediated effect. *Psychological Science*, *18*, 233–239. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01882.x

Gauvin, S., & Pukall, C. F. (2018). Sexual problems and sexual scripts: Overview and future directions for bisexual-identified individuals. *Sexual & Relationship Therapy*, *33*(1/2), 34–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2018.1426851

Graham, B. C., Butler, S. E., McGraw, R., Cannes, S. M., & Smith, J. (2016). Member perspectives on the role of BDSM communities. *Journal of Sex Research*, *53*(8), 895–909. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2015.1067758

Gunning, J. N., Rubinsky, V., Aragón, A., Roldán, M., McMahon, T., & Cooke-Jackson, A. (2023). A preliminary investigation into intersections of sexual communication in bondage, domination, sadomasochism and disability. *Sexuality & Culture*, *27*, 1163-1179. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-022-10058-8

Hayes, A. F. (2022). *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach*. (3rd ed.) Guilford Publications.

Ibrahem, R. A. L., Soliman, S. S., Shehata, W. A., & EL Sheikh, G. M. M. (2023). Sexual satisfaction; Prevalence, Cofactors and its Relation to Mental Health of Egyptian Married Women. *Egyptian Journal of Hospital Medicine*, *90*(1), 248–254. https://doi.org/10.21608/EJHM.2023.279532

James, E. L. (2012). Fifty shades of grey. Arrow.

Joyal, C. C., & Carpentier, J. (2017). The prevalence of paraphilic interests and behaviors in the general population: A provincial survey. *Journal of Sex Research*, *54*(2), 161–171. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2016.1139034

Kaak, A. (n.d.). RACK, PRICK, SSC... An entree of acronym soup and kink. Retrieved 16 March 2023, from https://www.academia.edu/25376462/B_and_D_S_and_M_D_and_S_RACK_PRICK_SSC_An_entree_of_acronym_soup_and_kink

Langdridge, D., & Barker, M. (2013). *Safe, sane and consensual: Contemporary Perspectives on Sadomasochism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Lehmiller, J. J. (2019). *The Psychology of Human Sexuality*. John Wiley & Sons.

Machette, A. T., & Montgomery-Vestecka, G. (2023). Applying sexual scripts theory to sexual communication discrepancies. *Communication Reports*, *36* (2), 123-135. https://doi.org/10.1080/08934215.2023.2175004

Mallory, A. B. (2022). Dimensions of couples' sexual communication, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *36*(3), 358–371. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000946

Mallory, A. B., Stanton, A. M., & Handy, A. B. (2019). Couples' sexual communication and dimensions of sexual function: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Sex Research*, *56*(7), 882–898. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1568375

Masters, N. T., Casey, E., Wells, E. A., & Morrison, D. M. (2013). Sexual scripts among young heterosexually active men and women: Continuity and change. *Journal of Sex Research*, *50*(5), 409–420. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.661102

Montesi, J. L., Fauber, R. L., Gordon, E. A., & Heimberg, R. G. (2011). The specific importance of communicating about sex to couples' sexual and overall relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *28*(5), 591–609. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407510386833

Morgan, P. C., Durtschi, J. A., & Kimmes, J. G. (2018). Sexual and relationship satisfaction associated with shifts in dyadic trajectories of depressive symptoms in German couples across four years. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *44*(4), 655–670. https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12302

Mosher, C. M. (2017). Historical perspectives of sex positivity: Contributing to a new paradigm within counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *45*(4), 487–503. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000017713755

Mulé, N. J. (2018). CHAPTER 6: Kink and the dsm-5: Pathologisation, regulation, stigmatisation. *At the Interface / Probing the Boundaries*, *110*, 131–155. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004392298_008

Newmahr, S. (2011). *Playing on the Edge: Sadomasochism, Risk, and Intimacy*. Indiana University Press.

Rittenhour, K., & Sauder, M. (2023). Identifying the impact of sexual scripts on consent negotiations. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2023.2182266

Rubinsky, V. (2018). 'Sometimes it's easier to type things than to say them': Technology in BDSM sexual partner communication. *Sexuality & Culture: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, *22*(4), 1412–1431. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-018-9534-2

Rubinsky, V., & Roldán, M. (2021). Disrupting Sexual Communication: An Exploration and Application of Boundary-Setting Conversations in BDSM, Polyamorous, and LGBTQ Relationships. In A. Cooke-Jackson & V. Rubinsky (Eds.), *Communicating Intimate Health*. Lexington Books.

Sánchez-Fuentes, M. del M., Santos-Iglesias, P., & Sierra, J. C. (2014). A systematic review of sexual satisfaction. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology*, *14*(1), 67–75. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1697-2600(14)70038-9

Scott, V. C., Sandberg, J. G., Harper, J. M., & Miller, R. B. (2012). The impact of depressive symptoms and health on sexual satisfaction for older couples: Implications for clinicians. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, *34*(3), 376–390. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10591-012-9198-2

Simon, W., & Gagnon, J. H. (1986). Sexual scripts: Permanence and change. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *15*(2), 97-120. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:QUAS.0000005053.99846.e5

Simon, W., & Gagnon, J. H. (2003). Sexual scripts: Origins, influences and changes. *Qualitative Sociology*, *26*(4), 491-497. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:QUAS.0000005053.99846.e5

Simula, B. L. (2019a). A "different economy of bodies and pleasures"?: Differentiating and evaluating sex and sexual BDSM experiences. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *66*(2), 209–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1398017

Strizzi, J. M., Øverup, C. S., Ciprić, A., Hald, G. M., & Træen, B

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.51681.1.1012

(2022). BDSM: Does it hurt or help sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and relationship closeness? *The Journal of Sex Research*, *59*(2), 248–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2021.1950116

Tassone, D., Gauvin, S. E. M., Flores, L. E., & Pukall, C. F. (2023). "It happens to everyone" vs. "You're not a real man": The relationship between intimate communication and men's sexual difficulties. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2023.2214544

Theiss, J. A. (2011a). Indirectness of communication about sex scale. *PsycTESTS*. https://doi.org/10.1037/t26960-000

Theiss, J. A. (2011b). Modeling dyadic effects in the associations between relational uncertainty, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction for husbands and wives. *Communication Research*, *38*(4), 565–584. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650211402186

Theiss, J. A. (2011c). Sexual satisfaction scale. *PsycTESTS*. https://doi.org/10.1037/t60140000

Theiss, J. A., & Estlein, R. (2014). Antecedents and consequences of the perceived threat of sexual communication: A test of the relational turbulence model. *Western Journal of Communication*, *78*(4), 404–425. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2013.845794

Williams, D. J., Thomas, J. N., Prior, E. E., & Christensen, M. C. (2014). From "SSC" and "RACK" to the "4Cs": Introducing a new framework for negotiating BDSM participation. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality*, *17*(5), 1-10.

Wright, S. (2010). Depathologizing consensual sexual sadism, sexual masochism, transvestic fetishism, and fetishism. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *39*(6), 1229–1230. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-010-9651-y

Wright, S. (2014). Kinky parents and child custody: The effect of the DSM-5 differentiation between the paraphilias and paraphilic disorders. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *43*(7), 1257-1258. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-013-0250-6

Xu, J., Xue, B., Li, L., Qiao, J., Redding, S. R., & Ouyang, Y. (2022). Psychological interventions for sexual function and satisfaction of women with breast cancer: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, *32*(9-10), 22822297. https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.16194

Appendices

Appendix A

Indirectness of communication about sex scale (Theiss, 2011a)

PsycTESTS®

doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t26960-000

Indirectness of Communication About Sex Scale

Items
(1) I have never openly discussed my sexual desires with my spouse.
(2) I have never been direct with my spouse about sexual behaviors I find satisfying.
(3) I have directly talked to my spouse about appropriate sexual behaviors. (reverse coded)
(4) I have openly discussed my sexual desires with my spouse. (reverse coded)
(5) I can openly talk to my spouse about our sexual relationship. (reverse coded)

Note. Participants recorded their agreement with a series of items on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree).

Sexual Satisfaction Scale (Theiss, 2011c)—Unedited version—For the purpose of my study, question 3 was removed and the word partner was used instead of spouse.

PsycTESTS®

doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t60140-000

Sexual Satisfaction Scale

Items
(1) My partner and I have a fulfilling sexual relationship.
(2) I find the sexual contact that I have with my partner to be satisfying.
(3) My partner always makes sure that I achieve orgasm.
(4) I am content with the sexual aspect ofour relationship.
(5) There are parts of our sexual relationship that need improvement (reverse coded).
(6) I am generally dissatisfied with our sexual relationship (reverse coded).

Note. Measure utilizes a 6-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree).

 ©2024 Center for Positive Sexuality

Appendix B

Demographic questions

What is your age? (Numerical input)

What is your gender? Please state how you identify your gender below.

In which country do you currently reside?

What is your nationality?

What is your employment status?

1. Employed
2. Self-employed
3. Unemployed
4. Retired
5. Student
6. Other

What is your highest level of educational attainment? Measurement/ Coding system copied from Strizzi et al., (2022)

1. Primary school (6-8 years in school)
2. Lower secondary school (9-11 years at school)
3. High School/ Higher Secondary school/ college (U.K.)/sixth form (11-13 years at school)
4. College (U.S.)/ lower university level (Bachelor degree level or similar)
5. Higher University level (Master's, Doctorate, PhD or similar)

What is your current relationship status?

1. Casual sexual relationship
2. In a relationship
3. Engaged
4. Married
5. Polyamorous
6. Open relationship
7. Relationship anarchist

How long have you been in your current relationship?

1. Under 6 months
2. 6 -12 months
3. 1 – 3 years
4. 3-5 years
5. 5-10 years
6. 10+ years

What is your sexual orientation?

 ©2024 Center for Positive Sexuality

Appendix C

BDSM Participation Questionnaire

How often do you practice BDSM (Bondage—Discipline, Dominance—Submission, Sadism—Masochism) in your sexual relationship? (If you have multiple partners, please consider the partner that you most frequently engage in BDSM with, that you also have sex with).

1. I do not participate in BDSM in my current sexual relationship/s
2. I do not participate in BDSM, but I am curious to try it in my sexual relationship/s
3. I practice BDSM occasionally
4. I practice BDSM only in the bedroom
5. I live the lifestyle when I can
6. I live the lifestyle 24/7

I have sexual experiences in my sexual relationship without incorporating BDSM…

1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Often
5. Always

I would best describe my role within my BDSM practice in my sexual relationship as:

1. Dominant/Top
2. Submissive/Bottom
3. Switch

My favourite BDSM practice in my sexual relationship is:

1. Dominance/Submission
2. Sadism/Masochism
3. Bondage/Discipline

 ©2024 Center for Positive Sexuality

JOURNAL OF
POSITIVE SEXUALITY
Published by The Center for Positive Sexuality

PERSPECTIVE |

My Body Under Capitalism

Jenny Hedley
RMIT University,
School of Health and Social Care
email: s3682678@student.rmit.edu.au

This creative-critical personal essay unpacks the structural mechanisms and invisible biases that allow gendered violence and the whore stigma to flourish. I embody my role as unsympathetic victim-survivor of sexual assault, refusing to conform to societal pressures around virtue and propriety. Resisting the temptation to point the finger at any one perpetrator, I explore the co-option of women's bodies and my demons with a subversive literary arsenal, using humor, volatility and disruption as weapons. This essay-in-fragments explores consent culture, objectification and the commodification of my body as I engage in transactional sex and sex for pleasure, with an aim to subvert expectations around sex workers, who are often accused of "asking for" rape.

Keywords: *sex work, consent, objectification theory, sexual assault, creative writing*

Introduction

I first turned to sex work after I was raped on camera at a film audition in Los Angeles. The production studio was just a large warehouse with a lit set, the wall behind the camera lined with thousands upon thousands of MiniDV cassettes, the blinking red light of the camera my only witness. Two security doors, one after the other, each required multiple keys to lock or unlock so I knew that there would be no quick escape. That moment which was captured on freeze frame forever was the moment I became aware of the cost of living as a woman under patriarchy. It was a scene which thrust my previously confident sexuality into an existential state of crisis, after which I would renegotiate my relationship to sex and capitalism, finding my way again to a place of sexual empowerment. From the time I first had sex when I was sixteen with a guy I met online in a Prodigy chatroom, I was instantly addicted to the high that sex promised and delivered. I took pleasure in the total annihilation of self I experienced every time I wrapped long sweaty limbs around another person or two or three. Although I was raised to think of sex as something shameful and forbidden—my grandmother would admonish, "The last granddaughter to fall pregnant gets all my pearls!"—sex for me was a creative outlet, a way of expressing my affection where words failed. I was diagnosed at an early age with major depression, social anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorders. Existing in the world, finding myself in complex relation to other people, never came easy. With sex I could lean into the unspoken, languaging my body instead. I could lose myself in the friction, heat and chemistry that dissolved boundaries between self and not-self without worrying about filling awkward silences. With youth on my side, there was no question that I incited desire, and from this I drew a sense of power. I fucked and I wanted to be fucked. This power, however, was stripped from me by the Hollywood producer who asked me to remove my clothes and bend over for the camera before he penetrated me.

In that white-hot moment under the spotlights, as the camera continued to roll, I was no longer a subject. My rapist made me an object, put me to use to satiate (in less than three seconds) his own desire. Afterwards I froze, I fawned: typical trauma responses brought on by abject fear. In the aftermath of my rape, I questioned whether I had—as the saying goes—*asked for it*. Whether somewhere in the consent form I had signed, I had unknowingly agreed to my own violation. Although I had already fucked close to a hundred men and women, I had never felt debased in my sexuality until that moment. Had my overt sexuality made me a target? I knew that if I went to the police I would not be believed. If anything, I would be publicly shamed. My history of promiscuity, recreational drug use and psychiatric illness would make me an object (again, that word) of ridicule. I stayed silent; I learned to forget what was taken from me. Instead, I reclaimed my subjecthood by taking charge of my own objectification. If men wanted me that bad, they could pay for it. I could leave my eight-dollar-an-hour job and monetize by body as needed to subsidize my self-searching and utmost need for artistic expression.

I was a creative writer then, as I am now. I have also been a documentarian, a digital artist, a painter, a poet, a maker of collage. In an effort to make sense of my relationship to a patriarchal society which treats women's bodies as less than, and which treats some bodies as more "deserving" of rape than others, I began to explore the relationship between my body and capitalism in a series of written fragments. The collage-like nature of this fragmentation both reflects the traumatic nature of the incident which sparked this article's inquiry; the fragment, slash or jump-cut is also a feminine mode of address which resists prescribed norms established by a mostly dead/white/male literary canon. As a PhD candidate in the field of creative writing, my research inquiry is as much

Journal of Positive Sexuality, Vol. 10, No. 1, April 2024
©2024 Center for Positive Sexuality

Issue DOI: https://doi.org/10.51681.1.101

grounded in my body as it is in critical practice. The body I live in is neurodiverse, it has suffered trauma, and therefore my mode of communication will differ from traditional (read: removed, impartial) academic address: it mimics the rhythms and associative nature of my thoughts.

In Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick* she challenges us to "universalize the 'personal' and make it the subject of art" (2006, p. 195). As Lauren Elkin writes in *Art Monsters* (2023), Kraus is not purporting that one woman represent all women, so much as that any woman has the right to claim their own lived experience as worthy of attention. I agree with Elkin that personal testimonies will lay the foundation for a more ethical world. This article will not do the work of drawing conclusions for the reader but will serve as provocation, to raise awareness and spark reform: I am willing to make myself an art monster to deconstruct the whore stigma. In the following dispatches I will self-mythologize through performative writing that exemplifies the personal as political. Here is my testimony.

Sex and Capitalism on My Mind

I've been thinking about the relationship between male entitlement and capitalism and the female body (non-cis included) as commodity. One thing I've struggled with throughout my life, while being unable to extricate myself from the mercilessness of the male gaze, is how to weigh my intrinsic self-worth against the value of my object-body as defined by my gender, my appearance, the way I take up space in this world. "Feminism and capitalism are at odds," Rebecca Solnit writes, "if under the one women are people and under the other they are property" (2019, p. 93). The central concern of this essay is the problem of living in a feminized body under a patriarchal capitalist system and how this affects one's ability to thrive, let alone survive.

I feel a certain way about capitalism, which is perpetuated almost entirely by wealthy white men who operate in a world I've occasionally glimpsed by opening my legs, and I feel a certain way about sex, although these feelings are shaped and molded by my amorphous way of existing in this world. They are most certainly influenced by structural inequality, which is something I am less at the mercy of than trans women or women of color, for example. The one thing I know to be true is that I'm finally aging out of the sex kitten category—my all-access pass may have been revoked when I gave birth—and I welcome the oncoming invisibility.

"How does it feel to not be beautiful?" my friend asks, as we run our children around the park. Each of us became single parents due to domestic violence and meanwhile slipped into the anonymity of middle age, so her question is less an insult than provocation. Falling under the radar of the patriarchal gaze, I think, feels a lot like respite.

Existing Outside of Patriarchy's Gaze

Film theorist Laura Mulvey's influential work on the male gaze in cinema describes how women's exhibitionist role is coded for erotic and visual impact and connotes "to-be-looked-at-ness" (2014, p. 533). When Kathy Acker searches for her body as it "exists outside its patriarchal definitions" she finds it impossible (1997, p. 166). We are looked at, flesh turned object, whether we like it or not. Mostly I don't like it, but even when we I do, displays of flesh are not the same as an invitation. A hand up a skirt, a grope of a breast, sexual innuendo, catcalls, public masturbation and more: whatever we wear or don't wear, we're said to be "asking for it"—fatally mistaking symptom for cause, according to Jacqueline Rose—and are therefore condemned for provoking our own assault(s). "Harassment is always a sexual demand, but it also carries a more sinister and pathetic injunction: 'You will think about me,'" writes Rose in *On Violence and On Violence Against Women* (2021, p. 37). Those who harass are demanding attention, whether good or bad. To withhold that attention can spark the harasser's homicidal tendencies.

Reading up on objectification theory, I question if it was in my "nature"—if there even is such a thing—to be a man's sexual plaything, and whether I arranged myself as such to affirm what men want to see: high heels and silicon, come-hither sexuality. According to Sally Haslanger (2002), objectification occurs when what's assumed to be in someone's "nature" is attributable to social forces, as opposed to being immutable facts. I've experienced my own sexual appetites as fluid and mutable and I think that's also "natural". In my teens and twenties, driven by hormones, I turned seduction into a pursuit to be won at any cost without regard to my health. I saw myself reflected in man's fantasized images—the ones from *Playboy* or *Penthouse*—and thought that if I called the shots—*put your hand here, your tongue there*—I could beat *them* at their game. But given that patriarchy's influence leaves nothing unmolested, there was no victory and no escape. The performative nature of my sexual persona left me wholly unsatisfied except when the only one watching was me.

I Have the Right to Define Myself

In *The Right to Sex* Amia Srinivasan counters that "a feminism that trades too freely in notions of self-deception is a feminism that risks dominating the subjects it presumes to liberate" (2021, p. 82). I'm reminded of how radical feminist Catharine MacKinnon denies women the right to enjoy and participate in pornography: "What a woman is, is defined in pornographic terms; this is what pornography does" (1987, p. 59). While rejecting MacKinnon's stance on pornography as a civil rights violation and along with it the Andrea Dworkin school of thought—I don't need to be saved from myself—objectification theory helps me deconstruct how what I see on screen and sometimes mimic in real life might have less to do with my desires than with expectations.

For instance: there's a sex tape of me fucking a gorgeous man. (This tape is fully authorised by me, which makes it different from a couple of the others.) In this particular video I appear to be having fun in reverse cowgirl (Who even names these positions?), but I'm just performing for the camera. I'm so busy not-feeling—worrying about whether my thighs are dimpling as they slap against Matt's, whether my sex face is as ugly as my reformer pilates face—that I deprive myself of any authentic physiological or emotional response.

Amia Srinivasan likens porn to a "mimesis-machine, incapable of generating its own novelty" (2021, p. 70). Here I'd fallen into a simulacrum of sex tapes, mirroring pornographic behaviors of actors imitating pornographic behaviors they'd modelled off of other actors. Who would I be as a lover in absence of porn?

Renowned gender theorist Judith Butler describes the performative dimension of sexuality as a "forced reiteration of norms" which is "neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation" but, rather, a ritualized reiteration under and through prohibition, taboo and constraint (2011, p. 59). It wasn't the panoptical sex, but what came before, what happened after the camera stopped rolling, that really turned me on. The sensation of lips on lips, of embrace, of insatiable longing that saw two beings collide in momentary need, obliterating the sky for a moment—an hour, maybe forever—of embodied pleasure. Our bodies clung together, writhing and rhythmic, leaving no room for the digital eye.

The presence of an embodied voyeur, however, with eyes like globes, was something I wanted. I desired being desired when I wanted to be desired, and apart from that I liked being left alone.

Sluts and Whores Like Me

Women like me, prone to exhibitionism maybe, confident and sometimes queer in our sexuality, are called sluts and whores I think out of fear as much as revulsion. We're meant to be sexy but not slutty; we're either too submissive or too controlling (Taylor, 2020). Women's desire is feared, according to French philosopher Luce Irigaray, "as a sort of insatiable hunger, a voracity that will

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.51681.1.1013

swallow you whole" (1985, p. 29). The Macquarie Concise Dictionary (Butler, 2013) defines a slut as an indiscriminate woman with many sexual partners, and a whore as a promiscuous woman or prostitute. A prostitute supposedly debases herself by having sex for financial gain, putting her talents to unworthy use. Whore is also a verb: to whore or consort with whores, to debauch.

Indiscriminate. Unworthy. Debased.

In Grand Theft Auto V players can hire a sex worker in game play, fuck her, then kill her to steal back the money (Gabbiadini et al., 2016).

Witness the glorification of hate crimes in a cyber-incel universe.

We should "know better now than to blame sex workers," writes Elena Gomez, "& most still don't" (2017, p. 101):

> Because so long as there are women who are called whores, there will be women who are trained to believe it is next to death to be one or to be mistaken for one. And so long as that is, men will feel they can leave whores for dead with impunity. (Grant, 2014, p. 127)

We're not sympathetic victims: sex crimes against us generally go unpunished. "Whores are among the most oppressed of women workers" (p. 57) argues psychotherapist-researcher Gail Pheterson, who describes how a woman might lose her civil liberties and human rights "as a result of negotiating her sexuality" instead of giving it for free (1993, p. 43). Today the Nordic Model aims to halt sex work by criminalizing the men who purchase sex, a model which, in contrast to decriminalization, drives sex work underground.

Anyone who is or who has been a sex worker deserves to be heard. Marxist feminist Kollontai (1972) rages against sex work as a soul-emptying practice that cripples one's ability to feel passion or love, forever corrupting and impoverishing the persons involved, but hers is a simplistic view that vilifies the sex worker, denying nuance. Maryse Choisy calls sex work a "provisional marriage between the man-hater and the woman-hater" (1961, p. 30) as if marriage itself were immune to such malignance. The reasons men "buy sex can have as much to do with vulnerability, failure, sorrow, loneliness and fear, as with power," notes Katherine Angel in her powerful work on consent (2021, p. 107).

Postcard from a Five-Star Hotel

I once attended a five-star hotel where I'd been hired to relieve a boy (legal, only a few years younger than me) of his virginity. People wouldn't say that I deflowered him (although there were rose petals on the bed) but, rather, that I'd made him a man. (Funny: that.) The experience was sensual and voluptuous—and why not? Choisy proposes that a "man who pays cannot be potent sexually with a woman he does not despise" (1961, p. 61) but I did not feel despised as such.

Perhaps experiences like these spoiled me: I want to fuck in luxurious places, in the realm of fantasy, with men or women who aim to please.

Often I write about gendered violence, but when I recount my experiences of sexual assault I am not writing about transactional sex: no one who paid for my time has physically abused, coerced or raped me, except maybe the guy who gave me hundreds of dollars to spank me. I'd said yes to spanking, which shot me right back to my childhood trauma. The difference here is consent: I did not suffer posttraumatic stress from the spankings I was paid for.

Cha-ching.

When Those Who Are Meant to Love You Stigmatize You Instead

The only time I truly felt prostituted was when my auntie dragged me up on stage at a political rally in the 1980s. I despised her husband, a small man with a mean temper, and by extension I hated his brother, who stood at the pulpit. I was maybe seven so my protests didn't count. I couldn't put into words at the time how it felt for my body to be used to sell a candidate I would later vote against.

"She acts like a prostitute," I heard that same auntie telling my late grandmother, years after she pushed me onstage.

This memory still creates a visceral tightening in my guts, brings heat to my cheeks; I forget to breathe. The fact that it bothers me still, like it's the worst insult in the world, troubles me even more.

> There is also an alarming air, in some feminists' responses to slut shaming, of assumed distance, that the fault in slut shaming is a sorting error: *No, she is certainly not a "slut"!* (Grant, 2014, p. 77)

No matter how much I intellectualize and deconstruct and try to reclaim in a positive sense words like slut or whore, my reflexive response is to dodge and deflect these invectives. Technically speaking, I identify (or have identified in the past) with each of these descriptors; the trouble, I think, is with the intention of the speaker. The trouble, I also think, is with my puritanical upbringing. Whores are sinners and sinners go to hell, the Bible tells me. The same Bible which, according to author Meggan Watterson (2019), erased the truth of Mary Magdalene from the gospel.

Survival Under Patriarchy

I've transacted my body opportunistically in the past to recover from debt. Paying my bills with sex felt a lesser evil than begging for assistance from family members who looked down upon me for my mental health conditions and life choices. Growing up in the eighties and nineties, everywhere I looked there were men in positions of power. The women I saw on the covers of magazines were pouty-lipped supermodels and movie stars. These often hypersexualized images hinted at how I could succeed under patriarchy, by fashioning myself into a Hollywood bombshell. Ellena Savage observes: "To never engage in sexualized labor is, for a woman, to fail at working under patriarchy" (2019, para. 10). Inga Muscio declares:

There are two ways to make money in a capitalist, patriarchal setting:

(1) Fuck other people over faster and more efficiently than they fuck you over.
(2) Whore. (2018, p. 250)

I've had the pretty-enough privilege of being choosy in terms of what Kollontai calls *mercenary sex* and have escaped many of the dangers that sex workers face. However, I have not escaped the dangers that men pose to all women (cis or trans). Because when we talk about the dangers of sex, it is men who are perpetuating the violence. Ninety-five percent of sexual assault perpetrators are men (ABS, 2021). Their victims include and are not limited to cis women and trans women, cis men and trans men, nonbinary; gay, straight, queer, bi, poly, pan and asexual; sex workers and office workers; people with disabilities and those who are able-bodied. They prey on people of all cultural backgrounds; however, Black and Indigenous women are grossly overrepresented as victims of sexual assault, compared to white women; they are also less likely to be believed (NOW, 2018) and more likely to be overlooked by social justice warriors and change makers than their white counterparts.

The question is not *How do I avoid being assaulted?* so much as *How do we get men to stop perpetrating assault?* Taking away sex work doesn't stop the fact that men will rape and murder.

Flasher, Flasher, Read All About It

A memory I feel is significant here: the first time I ever saw a penis.

I was maybe seven or eight, investigating *Babysitter's Club* books at the public library. Mother was probably dropping my brother off at soccer practice—it was the 1980s, era of free-range

Issue DOI: https://doi.org/10.51681.1.101

parenting. The library should have been a safe enough space; we thought so at least. But I could barely speak the words to Mother when she returned. I was kind and stupid and naïve enough to retrieve and hand over, more than once, a coin that a middle-aged white man dropped in order to lure me to a position where he could not be seen by anyone but me.

The shiny silver coin fell from my small palm as I turned and sought shelter from the flasher in the Dewey decimals of Dawn and Stacey and Marianne. Already I associated money with male desire, acts of kindness with subterfuge.

In her essay titled "The Problem with Sex Is Capitalism" (2019) Rebecca Solnit points out how it seems to be objectionable to some men that sex—as opposed to rape—must be something that two people do together because they both want to. "Women-as-bodies are sex waiting to happen—to men—and women-as-people are annoying gatekeepers getting between men and female bodies" (p. 92).

When the John Tries To Be Funny

A cranky old business owner said, "Don't quit your day job" when I was singing to myself—a strictly anti-capitalist pursuit, anathema to a man consumed with building empires. He told himself it was free will and not money that kept me occasionally at his side: I'd overheard him bragging about me like I was a new Porsche. I was in a dressing room trying on clothes he wanted to buy for me, to make me fit a certain image. The walls echoed, or maybe it was the brash, nasal intonation of a pompous trophy hunter. It must have been a nice fantasy, if one could afford such a thing; a *Pretty Woman* kind of love story even, if you muddled the plot with a pregnancy of questionable paternity terminated by RU486.

"You do your best work on your back," he said—a cheap-shot line paired with a more expensive one—and I got back on my feet and walked out the door.

I am the bought, never the procurer, but as long as my legs walk, I can amend the terms of the sale. Although this is not that story.

—It is a little bit that story.

What's a Body Worth Anyway?

What's a body worth, I wonder—I mean for men who wish to bribe their way past the gatekeeper? Professor W Kip Viscusi (2021) estimates the value of a statistical life (VSL) to be $11 million USD in America. By comparison, Australia's VSL is $8.7 million USD. Viscusi arrives at the VSL by calculating the "local rate of trade-off between money and small risks of death" (p. 1067), which equates to a value that workers themselves deem acceptable for risk of death, weighed against the risks of mortality. As a dual resident I wonder if I'm worth the average of the two figures, or whether my value shifts according to what soil I stand on.

Let's Play a Tasteless Game!

What if I calculate the worth of my body as sexual object by dividing my VSL by the average number of sexual encounters a person has in a lifetime? I'm only factoring sex into my dodgy equation because patriarchal capitalism dictates that sex (and breeding) is all we're good for and sex pays more than anything else for those with limited options. $8,700,000 VSL % 5,778 average sexual encounters in a lifetime (Moss, 2016) = $1506 per shag. I'm not sure what I'm trying to communicate with this shoddy exercise in statistics except maybe to compare this figure with those of the trade.

The Prurience of Trauma Porn

In the past I have used my body to subsidize my art because artists and writers are notoriously underpaid. Having a Universal Basic Income as advocated by John Lanchester (2019) in the *London Review of Books*, might have allowed me to turn down work that was underpaid, situations that put me at risk, relationships maintained in order to survive: in which case my writing would have a different focus than it does today. Less trauma porn, more...I don't know.

In an essay on sexual abuse documentaries Maya Gurantz describes how Oprah Winfrey, who filmed 217 episodes on child sexual abuse alone—and Phil Donahue before her—trained viewers in the role of witness, making and popularizing the notion that "public vulnerability is both a healing act and a heroically powerful one" (2021, para. 25). Gurantz points out that underneath such sentimentality is "sensation: the prurient erotics of horror, with its mix of titillation and disgust" (para. 32).

As in abuse docs, the villain in my work is not the individual perpetrator; rather it's the systemic apparatus (patriarchy, exploitative capitalism, rigged justice systems, unconscious biases) that facilitated my abuse. The trouble with turning suffering into commodity, Gurantz argues, is that "no individual's therapeutic story-sharing can replace the collective action an unjust world requires for any remedy" (para. 61). But I believe that speaking up, where silence and shame are expected, is a subversive, political act which resists alienation.

Why Rapists Rape

Rape is the ultimate patriarchal weapon used to subjugate and punish women, to "correct" us, to keep us living in fear.

While rape victims aren't responsible for explaining why men rape, my recovery involves biblio- and narrative therapy. Seeking answers, I look ass-backwards to phallic-fixated Freud (1964) who says that sexuality is motivated as much by the fantasy of the forbidden as by the desire to evade threat of punishment for the retrieval of that same forbidden object.

My first rapist—much like Harvey Weinstein—weighed his rape fantasy against the fear of reprisal and decided it was worth it. In a sexist society a woman who is perceived to be a slut is positioned as deserving of rape and exploitation (Duschinsky, 2013).

I never stood a chance.

My second rapist—an ex who was once the love of my life—tried to impregnate me, to lay claim to my body with rape sperm. Rape is an act of colonization, of entitlement, a power move that claims ownership over and strips a person of their humanity.

Where attraction is frustrated, according to Freud, the libido focuses on the image of the child's primary object-choice, then carries out a sensual current of masturbatory activity that strengthens that incestuous fixation. A person might then divide their capacity to love into two distinct categories: the sacred, which is worthy of their love; and the profane, or animal, which they desire but cannot love. Such a person experiences pleasure only "in a psychical *debasement* of the sexual object" (Freud, 1964, p. 183). Perhaps for my rapists I was that despised, debased object.

Which Bodies Are Worthy of Concern?

There's no literal price tag attached to my body: the valuation of body as commodity demands a level of decipherment. Mauss proposes that exchange goods are not just "things-in-and-of-themselves" (1966, p. 291); they are transformative rather than static; they may be of material and emotional value, charged symbolically by their association with power and hierarchy; and are shaped further by social, political, and spatio-temporal forces. In this rotten world a woman's value rises and falls according to her association with patriarchal power. Decisions about who is worthy of moral concern are swayed by unconscious bias: "Given that the objectified are denied both mind and humanity, they may be considered less worthy of moral concern" (Loughnan et al., 2013, p. 456).

Lesley Sharp (2000) touches on historical concerns in relation to the commodified body: slavery and breeding of slaves, domestic and child labor (legalized enslavement), and *body trafficking* of workers of low socioeconomic worth. Sharp notes that the process

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.51681.1.1013

of commodification "render[s] some categories of bodies invisible" (p. 294). My white skin makes me more visible; my mental illness, fluid sexuality and history of addiction and promiscuity make me less visible.

A Plague of Anxieties

What can I say about the fact that I remember every single transgression against me, sexual and otherwise—excluding maybe some memories that I haven't yet recovered; that my instinct is to cut myself off from people in the belief that I am unlovable; that I have an intense and confusing relationship with God, a complicated relationship with my father and a non-existent relationship with half my family; that I have a fear of never making it as a writer, paired with an arbitrary and ever-shifting goalpost of success that's always just out of reach; a fear of poverty and the not-choices it entails; a fear of endangering my child with my storage-cube-size container of neuroses; a fear of relapsing into disassociative behaviors, of institutionalization, of letting anything disturb my now neatly-structured life; and, conversely, a fear of normalcy, of cookie-cutter behavior?

And what can I say about the fact that I've faked every penetrative orgasm I've ever had? Performing satisfaction to reassure heterosexual men that they are virile is far less dangerous than withholding a fictitious orgasm while waiting for a real one, writes MacKinnon (1987), and I agree the threat to penile ego is real. Rebecca Solnit notes how "fury and desire come in a package, all twisted together into something that always threatens to turn *eros* into *thanos*, love into death" (2015, p. 27).

From 2014 to 2019 the Tumblr project *When Women Refuse* tracked violence against women who refused men's sexual advances. When men feel vulnerable or powerless, writes Jess Hill, "it's their *entitlement* to power that fuels their humiliated fury, and drives them to commit twisted, violent acts" (2019, p. 140).

What would it be like to say no without fear of reprisal?

(In)conclusion

I'm fed up with the moral outrage that demands justice for some victims and not others. I want to change the conversation. It's not about vilifying any one individual man: for every wholesome Bri Lee and Chanel Miller who secures a conviction against her rapist, out of 100 perpetrators the other 98 will walk free (RAINN, *nd*). Rape culture allows gendered violence to flourish; it allows women's testimony to be disbelieved, discarded, diminished (Solnit, 2017). And within rape culture, coercive control thrives. Jess Hill compares coercive controllers to magicians working a sleight of hand: they redirect their "partner's attention away from *his* abuse to *her* faults: if she wasn't so *this*, he wouldn't be so *that*" (2019, p. 28). "All too often, what 'he said' matters more," author Roxane Gay writes, "so we just swallow the truth" (2017, p. 45).

Like Jess Hill, Jacqueline Rose (2021) has written convincingly on male entitlement as precursor to violence, and when the UN surveyed 10,000 men they found that over 80% of rapists raped because they felt *entitled* to sex (Fulu et al., 2013). Rose writes: "As if hovering in the ether, [entitlement] relies for its persistence on a refusal to acknowledge that it is even there." Once we discover this deception it becomes impossible to ignore its pervasiveness. Despite my years of hyper-sexualization, I'm not a lesser victim-survivor of sexual assault or domestic abuse than those judged by society to be less object-like and therefore more human than me; to argue otherwise is to shift the burden of responsibility away from the true criminals, and to perpetuate this culture in which victims are blamed and shamed into silence.

References

Acker, K. (1997). *Bodies of Work: Essays*. Serpent's Tail.

Angel, K. (2021). *Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again: Women and Desire in the Age of Consent*. Verso.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Recorded Crime—Offenders*, 2019–20 [dataset].

Butler, J. (2011). *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* Routledge.

Butler, S. (2013). *Macquarie Concise Dictionary*. (6th ed.) Macquarie Dictionary Publishers Pty Ltd.

Choisy, M. (1961). *Psychoanalysis of the Prostitute*. Philosophical Library.

Duschinsky, R. (2013). What does sexualisation mean? *Feminist Theory*, *14*(3), 255–264. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700113499842

Elkin, L. (2023). *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art*. Chatto & Windus.

Freud, S. (1964). On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love (Contributions to the Psychology of Love II). In J. Strachey (Ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 11, pp. 179–190). Hogarth.

Fulu, E., Warner, X., Miedema, S., Jewkes, R., Roselli, T., & Lang, J. (2013). Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Quantitative Findings from the United Nations Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific. UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV. https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/publications/why-do-some-men-use-violence-against-women-and-how-can-we-prevent-it

Gabbiadini, A., Riva, P., Andrighetto, L., Volpato, C., & Bushman, B. J. (2016). Acting like a Tough Guy: Violent-Sexist Video Games, Identification with Game Characters, Masculine Beliefs, & Empathy for Female Violence Victims. *PloS One*, *11*(4), e0152121–e0152121. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0152121

Gay, R. (2017). *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body*. HarperCollins.

Gomez, E. (2017). Militant spring. *The Lifted Brow*, *33*, 97–102.

Gomez, E. (2018). *Body of Work*. Cordite.

Grant, M. G. (2014). *Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work*. Verso.

Gurantz, M. (2021, April 15). Negative Space: Close Reading Trauma Porn. *Los Angeles Review of Books*. https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/negative-space-close-reading-trauma-porn

Haslanger, S. (2012). On Being Objective and Being Objectified. In S. Haslanger (Ed.), *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (p. 0). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199892631.003.0001

Hill, J. (2019). *See What You Made Me Do: Power Control and Domestic Abuse*. Black Inc.

Irigaray, L. (1985). *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Cornell University Press.

Kraus, C. (2006). *I Love Dick*. Semiotext(e).

Lanchester, J. (2019, July 18). Good New Idea. *London Review of Books*, 41(14). https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v41/n14/john-lanchester/good-new-idea

Loughnan, S., Pina, A., Vasquez, E. A., & Puvia, E. (2013). Sexual Objectification Increases Rape Victim Blame and Decreases Perceived Suffering. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *37*(4), 455–461. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684313485718

MacKinnon, C. A. (1987). *Feminism unmodified: Discourses on life and law*. Harvard University Press.

Mauss, M. (1966). *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Cohen & West.

Moss, R. (2016, June 10). This Is How Many Times The Average Person Will Have Sex In Their Lifetime. *Huffpost UK*. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/how-may-times-you-have-sex-in-a-lifetime-study_uk_57f624ede4b00df730dc0379

Mulvey, L. (2014). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (UK, 1975). In *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures* (1st ed., pp. 359–370). University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520957411-103

Musico, I. (2018). *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence (20th anniversary edition)*. Seal Press.
National Organization for Women Foundation. (2018). *Black Women and Sexual Violence*. http://now.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Black-Women-and-Sexual-Violence-6.pdf
Pheterson, G. (1993). The Whore Stigma: Female Dishonor and Male Unworthiness. *Social Text*, *37*(37), 39–64. https://doi.org/10.2307/466259
Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN). (n.d.). *The Criminal Justice System: Statistics* [dataset]. http://rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system
Rose, J. (2021). *On Violence and On Violence Against Women*. Faber.
Savage, E. (n.d.). I want to live in a classless society. *Sydney Review of Books*. Retrieved December 16, 2023, from https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essay/i-want-to-live-in-a-classless-society/
Sharp, L. A. (2000). The Commodification of the Body and its Parts. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *29*(1), 287–328. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.29.1.287
Solnit, R. (2014). *Men Explain Things to Me*. Haymarket Books.
Solnit, R. (2017). *The Mother of All Questions*. Granta.
Solnit, R. (2019). *Whose Story Is This?: Old Conflicts, New Chapters*. Granta.
Srinivasan, A. (2021). *The Right to Sex: Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
Taylor, D. J. (2020). *Why Women Are Blamed for Everything: Exposing the Culture of Victim-Blaming*. Constable.
Viscusi, W. K. (2021). Economic lessons for COVID-19 pandemic policies. *Southern Economic Journal*, *87*(4), 1064–1089. https://doi.org/10.1002/soej.12492
Watterson, M. (2019). *Mary Magdalene Revealed: The First Apostle, Her Feminist Gospel & the Christianity We Haven't Tried Yet*. (1st edition.) Hay House, Inc.
whenwomenrefuse. (n.d.). When Women Refuse [Tumblr]. We're Collecting Stories of Violence Inflicted on Women Who Reject Sexual Advances. Share Yours Here. View: News Stories | Personal Stories. Retrieved December 16, 2023, from https://whenwomenrefuse.tumblr.com/

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.51681.1.1013

Submission Guidelines

We invite the submission of original manuscripts on any topics relevant to positive sexuality. We encourage submissions from diverse epistemological perspectives, and we welcome a wide range of quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches, as well as theoretical and conceptual essays. Alongside the work of scholars and students, we are interested in contributions from community, clinical, and other nonacademic professionals, especially contributions that help strengthen the connection between the study and practice of positive sexuality.

While the *Journal of Positive Sexuality* has a preference for shorter manuscripts (2,000–3,000 words), longer manuscripts up to 10,000 words will be considered. In preparation for submission, authors should observe the following guidelines:

- Manuscripts should have a clear sex-positive focus.
- Given the diverse readership of the journal, authors should write in a straight-forward and non- technical manner, avoiding jargon when possible. Manuscripts should be written such that they can be easily understood by scholars and professionals outside of one's own field or discipline.
- Manuscripts should be written in a style consistent with the latest edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA). Please include DOIs for all references when available. Instead of endnotes, please use footnotes when necessary.

New submissions should be emailed to submissions@journalofpositivesexuality.org, and should include the following Microsoft Word attachments:

- A title page, including: (1) the title of the manuscript; (2) names, institutional affiliations, and contact information for each author; (3) the word count of the main manuscript; (4) a statement certifying that the submission has not been previously published and/or is not currently under review elsewhere; (5) any pertinent information about the approval or regulatory process for human subjects research; (6) any acknowledgements that the authors would like to include for publication.
- A fully-blinded manuscript, including: (1) the title of the manuscript; (2) a brief abstract, 100 words or less; (3) the body of the manuscript; (4) references
- Tables or figures can be submitted in separate files in either Microsoft Word or Microsoft Excel format, or embedded in the manuscript. If tables or figures are being submitted separately, please provide the preferred location as a reference note within the manuscript.

Manuscripts will be reviewed initially by the Editor-in-Chief and/or Associate Editors. Appropriate manuscripts will then be sent out for double-blind peer review by at least two reviewers. While not always possible, the *Journal of Positive Sexuality* strives to return editorial decisions within two months of submission.

Editorial decisions may include acceptance, minor revisions, major revisions, or rejection. In the case of requested revisions, authors will be asked to resubmit their revised manuscripts within two months. When submitting a revised manuscript, authors will also be asked to provide a detailed response to the reviewers.

Accepted manuscripts will be copy edited, and proofs will be sent to authors for correction and approval prior to publication.

To submit manuscripts for review or inquire about submissions, please email submissions@journalofpositivesexuality.org.

For all other questions, comments, or concerns, please email info@journalofpositivesexuality.org.

 ©2024 Center for Positive Sexuality