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Feminist Ideals for a Healthy Female Adolescent Sexuality: A Critique

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

Keywords Adolescence · Sexuality · Health · Desire · Subjectivity · Pleasure

Introduction

Within academia and academic writing there has been a growth of interest in female adolescent sexuality, almost large enough to rival the media's concurrent interest (e.g. Painter 2002). Some of this scholarly interest stems from concern in the U.S. for public health with regard to pregnancy and STD prevention. In addition to the public health focus, however, a number of articles and books have had a more political focus and are devoted to describing a female adolescent sexuality that opposes an oppressive sexuality handed down in sex education curricula and in media teenage girls consume. This more political focus was the framing argument in Fine's article, "A Missing Discourse of Desire," a piece that launched this discussion in 1988. Since publication, a number of feminist theorists (myself among them), educators, and researchers have taken up the subject of desire in female adolescent sexuality and have attempted to describe a healthy sexuality (and sex education) for girls that would emphasize desire, subjectivity, and pleasure. The word *desire* is used to describe sexually embodied feelings and to suggest girls are similar to boys in wanting sex. *Subjectivity*, contrasts with objectification and is used to describe girls' ownership of their desire. And *pleasure*, is often used synonymously with desire, but generally indicates that girls, like boys, can feel and want pleasure in sex. (More detailed definitions specific to individual theorists appear below.) Advocating a sexuality based on desire, subjectivity, and pleasure appears to be a response to three historically problematic areas for women and girls: objectification; abuse and victimization; and stereotypes of female passivity. I review these problematic areas, explain how a sexuality based on desire, subjectivity, and pleasure is a response to them, and then pose several warnings about our use of these qualities as markers of a healthy sexuality for teen girls.

Fine began this discussion with regard to healthy sexuality by writing in "The Missing Discourse of Desire," that young women were positioned in sex education courses as potential victims of male sexual aggression. The girls she interviewed told her that their sex education only focused on the negative aspects of sexuality and that

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the adults around them overwhelmingly taught them that sex was dangerous. Fine's hope was that through a more comprehensive and positive sex education, girls could experience "entitlement, rather than victimization; autonomy rather than terror" (p. 50). Fine further suggested that denying sexual desire might "actually disable young women in their negotiation as sexual subjects" (p. 42). She wrote, "Trained through and into positions of passivity and victimization, young women are currently educated away from positions of sexual self-interest" (p. 42).

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

Tolman further and explicitly connects desire to sexual subjectivity and agency. In *Dilemmas of Desire*, desire becomes the sine qua non of sexual subjectivity: "developing sexual subjectivity is at the heart of the adolescent developmental task of becoming a 'self-motivated sexual actor'" (Tolman 2002, p. 20). Bay-Cheng (2003) joins Tolman (1999, 2002) in connecting sexual desire with sexual agency which she operationalizes as "the ability to advocate for one's interests in the sexual arena" (p. 65).

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

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

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

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

Other feminist researchers working towards better sex education have noted that not only is female desire an unsafe topic in school curricula, but non-heterosexual

desire (both female and male) is absent, controlled by governmental policies as well as self-censorship by teachers (Harrison et al. 1996; Rasmussen 2004). Rasmussen (2004), in her discussion of "wounded identities," suggests that the disavowal of certain kinds of pleasures in school sex education is harmful and an "ethics of pleasure" could counteract labels used to identify sexuality. An "ethics of pleasure," she writes, would complicate identities and emphasize "an individual's agency in their own conduct and pursuit of pleasure, while concurrently acknowledging the power relations that operate to constrain discourses of pleasure" (Rasmussen 2004, p. 456). Using the Foucault phrase "ethics of pleasure," several other theorists (Allen 2007a, b; Carmody 2005) describe sex education that would depart from pathologizing non-heterosexual sexualities and could open up "new possibilities for being and understanding sexual subjects" (Allen 2007a, pp. 583-584).

Allen, also writing about sex education, asks that the New Zealand government relinquish the disease and pregnancy prevention focus of sexuality education (2007a) and move towards a "pleasurable pedagogy" (2007b). She writes that pleasure is central to human existence but that it is often understood as a luxury or a topic that "seems flippant" given more serious topics in young people's sexuality. She joins U.S. theorists in asking that young people be recognized as "sexual subjects whose sexuality is viewed positively and as legitimate" rather than as a problem to be managed. Pleasure is for Allen a way towards acknowledging sexual subjectivity. And silence about female pleasure may fail to convey a sense of "personal empowerment and pleasurable entitlement to young women" (p. 252, Allen 2007b). On the other hand, Allen's interviews on sexual pleasure (2007b) with teens in New Zealand show them understanding pleasure to mean orgasm rather than the "embodied" pleasure theorists believe might be helpful in combating oppression. This may be also true for U.S. teens.

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

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

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

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

Desire, Pleasure, and Subjectivity as a Response to Objectification

Acknowledging and supporting women's subjectivity, pleasure, and desire can be seen as an antidote to the objectification of women which years of empirical and

qualitative studies suggest is harmful to both women and girls. The American Psychological Association's Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (APA 2007) summarized a number of studies that measured the effects of objectification on adult, college-aged women, and high school-aged girls. They reported that exposure to and endorsement of sexually objectifying images (often described merely as "narrow beauty ideals" although such ideals are often objectifying) can affect self-esteem and body image, and can lead to depression and eating disorders or to self-objectification which in turn leads to depressive symptoms, cognitive impairment, and lower self-esteem (APA 2007; Durkin and Paxton 2002; Fredrickson et al. 1998; Hawkins et al. 2004; Lucas et al. 1991; Rivadeneyra et al. 2007; Tolman et al. 2006).

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

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

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

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

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

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

More recently, empirical and theoretical work in psychology has shown that abuse and victimization harm girls in numerous ways but in particular in terms of their developing sexuality. The sexually abused girl may grow up taking on the perpetrator's perspective, viewing herself as good for nothing but sex (Herman 1992). The refusal of perpetrators to respect boundaries may also result in

difficulties asserting boundaries or impaired self-protection (Classen et al. 2005; Quina et al. 2004).

The recognition that sexual violence objectified and harmed women, contributed to seeing girls and women as always or often potential victims. As noted earlier, Fine commented on this in her 1988 piece when she suggested in sex education courses, girls were positioned as potential victims of male sexual aggression. Her hope was that through a proper sex education, girls could experience "entitlement, rather than victimization; autonomy rather than terror" (p. 50). Her depiction of a healthy sexuality was one in which the ability to desire meant that a girl had a sturdy enough sense of self and entitlement that would enable her to protect herself against sexual violence and/or protect herself from a society that seems to tolerate such violence. Thompson (1990) also pointed out the connection of desire to abuse and victimization: "In an uninformed and undesirous state, girls find it hard to distinguish choice and coercion, and they aren't at all certain of how to make such a distinction" (p. 345).

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

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

The notion of female passivity as opposed to male agency permeates much of our understanding of gender differences and has been associated with greater freedoms and privileges for men, particularly if they are white middle class men who not only are imagined as more agentive but more in control of this agency (Hollway 1995). Mohanty (1991) wrote of the binary positioning of masculine and feminine sexualities in a way in which the feminine was always the less powerful, less sexual, and with the most to lose. As this applies to the world of teen sexuality, teen boys, particularly, heterosexual teen boys, masculinity theorists point out, have been pictured as agents, choosers, actors, ready to go, unconfused about their wants and needs, out for pleasure, demanding, and entitled (Kimmel 2005; Kindlon and Thompson 2000; Pleck 1981). Until recently, teen girls' sexuality has been pictured as more hesitant and fragile, full of chaste longing but not sexual in that down and dirty way that boys' sexuality has been represented. And girls who show some sexual agency risk being described as sluts (Attwood 2007; Brown 2003; Lamb 2002; Tanenbaum 2000; Tolman 2002).

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

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

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

In spite of third wave and academic feminists' efforts to undo the binary, the idea of female passivity and the idea that sex is for men live on in women's magazines, "girl talk", and romance narratives (Carpenter 1998; Duffy and Gotcher 1996; Garner and Sterk 1998; Kim and Ward 2004;

Tolman 2000; Walkerdine 1990). Thus, a discourse of pleasure, desire, and subjectivity may be needed to counteract notions of female passivity that girls may receive through the media today.

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

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

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

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

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

(3) A third problem is that whether or not sex is pleasurable may come to mean "good" sex for the teen girl. If the gold standard of whether an act of sexuality is good or not is whether she experiences pleasure, then all sorts of problematic and unethical forms of sex will fall under the category of good sex (e.g. it is wrong and doesn't make sense to weigh a rapist's pleasure against a victim's harm.) Moreover, some experiences of objectification can be sexually pleasurable (Nussbaum 1995). Those teens that the media seem most worried about today, those who call their lap-dancing and breast-flashing empowered (Levy 2006) may be feeling a lot of pleasure. Some clinical

research says no, that objectifying performances aren't connected to physical pleasure (Lamb 2006); however, if these experiences are pleasurable, would that then make these forms of self-objectification right or good in an ethical or personal sense for teen girls? While the current privileging of pleasure for girls and women as a response to centuries' long oppression of women that reflected that their own pleasure didn't count is important, the reverse of this is a problematic position. And while sexual pleasure is a right (WHO 2004), it is important to be wary of views that describe all pleasures as good and as signifying of freedom, naturalness, or innocence, rather than learned and bound up with power (Kellner 1995).

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

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

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

The conflating of the choice to take on traditionally oppressive versions of being sexy with empowerment has led, as recent journalists and theorists have written (Levy 2005; Paul 2005; Sarracino and Scott 2008), to a close association of the sexual with the pornographic. Indeed many of the images today of a young woman in charge of her sexuality come from the world of pornography and reproduce very old exploitative scenes of male voyeurism and women's victimization and/or oppression (Levy 2005; Sarracino and Scott 2008). And this porn image of sexuality is marketed to younger and younger girls as a teen sexuality they can aspire to (APA 2007; Lamb 2006; Lamb and Brown 2006; Levin and Kilbourne 2008). In this version of

sexuality, a teen girl can feel empowered by *choosing* to lap dance, strip tease, strut it, flash it, flaunt it, and give it away, always in charge though because she's an autonomous agent who is having fun. In addition, because she's choosing, and because it's fun and even pleasurable, voyeurs are not exploiters; they're admirers.

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

In Search of Authentic Embodied Sexuality

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

Psychology offers two explanations of why her pleasure-seeking shouldn't count as agentive teen sexuality. The first explanation describes her choices as heavily influenced by the rewards her community gives her for it; that is, she expresses sexuality through a pole dance (for example) because she's ruled by rewards in a system that doesn't support other forms of female agentive behavior (Bussey and Bandura 1999; Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). The system she is rewarded by is patriarchy or a specific male-privileged system that would reward girls and women who perform a sexuality pleasing to them.

The second perspective does not present her as looking for rewards from privileged men but as having developed a false kind of subjectivity. This perspective was described generally by the philosopher Althusser (1971) who explained the process in which an individual might believe he or she is acting autonomously but that ideological discourse has recruited them as representatives. Individuals identify with certain value positions that are supported ideologically by systems in power but believe they are the authors of their meaning. Applied to the teen girl, she believes she is autonomous, choosing to be the kind of object that has been defined as sexy by an all-male highly marketed media-influenced audience, just as she believes her choice to wear name brand clothing over generic brands is a free one, but this choice is restricted by discourse and traditional ideologies of what it means to be heterosexual, sexual, and sexy for a woman. She becomes a part of, even a representative of, the commercial discourse that defines her subjectivity within a framework of choice, equality, and freedom (McRobbie 2007).

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

Theorists use the word "authentic" to describe a kind of sexuality that is agentic and embodied (Chalker 1994; Daniluk 1993; Kegan 1997; Lamb 2002; Lorde 1984; Martin 1996 as cited in Welles 2005; Thompson 1990, 1995; Tolman 1991, 1992, 2002; Welles 2005). , When an authentic girl becomes sexual she doesn't self-sexualize because self-sexualization is a performance (performance is differentiated from authenticity). Instead, she looks within and gets to know her own desires, separate from the marketplace. Impett et al. (2006) describe this as sexual self-efficacy, an embodied responsible girl in touch with her own feelings.

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

2006, p. 305), to be uncovered and treasured by a savvy interviewer or otherwise exploited by boys and men.

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

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

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

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

New Ways of Defining a Healthy Sexuality for Teen Girls

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

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

A different alternative to the directive of looking within for an authentic sexuality, finding one's hidden or suppressed desire and then making healthy choices (an empowerment model that in the end makes a teen girl alarmingly, solely responsible for her own sexuality) is a model of mutuality. One might ask why not love? Teen girls do all sorts of self-destructive sexual things in the

name of love so it hasn't worked very well as a model to date (Holland et al. 1998; Lamb 2006; Thompson 1990, 1995; Tolman 2000). In the very least, we can describe a sexuality to girls that has to do with mutuality using liberal ideals of equality, making the case that equality and mutuality is an ethical ideal to aim for while sometimes hard to achieve. Of course liberal ideals of equality have their own problematic tradition and are not offered here as the one and only alternative to the present discourse. But this ideal is not quite as perfectionistic and does not make teen girls quite so uniquely responsible for the kind of sexual lives they will embark on. It contextualizes their sexuality in relationship. And if it asks them to be choosers within a context of limited choices, it's choosing to give as well as to receive, to seek pleasure within and from without, to love, have sex or play, with an eye towards fairness and an underlying ethos of caring and compassion.

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

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

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