Addressing Ambivalence:

Implications for a Sexual Citizenship Approach

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**Table of Contents**

Introduction 3

Chapter One: Methodology and Curriculum Selection 6

 *Methodology* 6

 *Introduction to Curriculum* 7

Chapter Two: Sexual Citizenship in Theory and Context 10

 *The Sexual Citizen: Embodiment and Purpose* 10

 *Sexual Citizenship in Context: Rights, Respect, Responsibility* 13

Chapter Three: Addressing Sexual Ambivalence with Sexual Citizenship 20

 *Sexual Ambivalence: Causes and Implications* 20

 *Sexual Scripts*  22

 *Interpersonal Coercion* 26

 *Skill Development Overview* 32

 *Skill Development: Personal Insight* 33

 *Skill Development: Decision Making* 38

 *Skill Development: Communication* 40

 *Skill Development: Resource Access and Evaluation* 42

 *Chapter Conclusion* 45

Chapter Four: Limitations and Conclusions 46

*Limitations of a Sexual Citizenship Approach* 46

*Conclusion* 47

Bibliography 50

Notes 56

*Introduction*

 Sexuality education in the United States is notoriously inconsistent. Formal sexuality education occurring in a classroom or community setting can range from completely nonexistent to fully comprehensive. Although regulations vary largely by state, the federal government very much impacts the quality and accessibility of sexuality education. In the past fiscal year, Congress provided $10 million in funding for abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and $75 million for fear-based abstinence education programs.[[1]](#endnote-1) The availability of formal sexuality education for young women living in rural America has declined from 71% to 48% since 2006, and half of sexually experienced teens have received no formal instruction about contraception before becoming sexually active.[[2]](#endnote-2) It is becoming clear that American teenagers are having sex that they are not prepared for – physically, mentally, or emotionally. Calls for more progressive and comprehensive sexuality education have clashed with steadfast conservative values rooted in American culture, obscuring the growing public health concern of a population that is not receiving the information it needs to practice healthy behaviors. Given how overtly political the realm of adolescent sexuality has become, some recent arguments for improving sexuality education recommend the incorporation of the concept of sexual citizenship into curricula. Sexual citizenship asserts that an individual’s sexual identity and conduct should not be considered solely personal, as it is very much situated in and regulated through the public and political spheres (Evans 1993). Sexuality education that is based in this concept promotes awareness, self-sufficiency, and skill building, and may be well suited to reduce the prevalence of sexual phenomena that threaten public health.

In exploring how a sexual citizenship framework can serve a progressive sexuality education agenda, I will be looking at how the concept engages with one particular issue – sexual ambivalence, or a feeling of uncertainty over whether or not to engage in a particular sexual activity. Feelings of sexual ambivalence are reported in concerning numbers by young people, especially young women, and often result in participation in sexual activity that is not fully desired (Geary et al. 2013; O’Sullivan 2005). Being unprepared for managing feelings of sexual ambivalence has a negative impact on psychological and physical health (Hirst 2013; Walker 1997). Given the sociocultural context of sexual ambivalence and its significance as a public health concern, the socially-situated and rights-based approach of sexual citizenship may be effective in addressing this phenomenon. In order to assess this potential, I will be exploring the following question in this paper: What implications does a sexuality education approach theoretically based in sexual citizenship have for addressing sexual ambivalence among young people in the United States?

 My interest in this topic developed during an internship at RNW Media in Hilversum, The Netherlands in the spring of 2016. My internship task was to find a way to incorporate the topic of consent into the online sexuality education curriculum developed by the organization.[[3]](#endnote-3) While researching sexuality education approaches to teaching consent, I came across an article by Judit Illes (2012) promoting the incorporation of sexual citizenship theory in sexuality education. This article revealed the compatibility of this theory with the aims of progressive sexuality education, namely increasing the sexual self-efficacy and decision-making abilities of young people, and led me to explore further sexual citizenship theory and its potential as a basis for sexuality education. I also grew interested in the concept of sexual ambivalence from research done by Sarah J. Walker (1997), Charlene L. Muehlenhard and Zoë D. Peterson (2007), and Cynthia Waszak Geary et al. (2013). What stood out most to me in these studies was their positioning of sexual ambivalence as a public health concern and the use of interview data to depict how sexual ambivalence is experienced by and affecting young people in their own words. Although the term ‘sexual ambivalence’ was new to me, these testimonies reminded me of conversations I have had with friends and even feelings I have had myself about sexual choices. I felt that the sexuality education I received in the United States was extremely limited and had the potential to address sexual ambivalence, but failed to do so. Ultimately, I committed to investigating new and innovative approaches to addressing complex issues like sexual ambivalence that threaten the development of a positive sexual subjectivity for young people in the United States.

This paper is organized into four chapters. Chapter one includes an overview of the methodology, a description of the material studied, and background information and justification of use for the selected curriculum. Chapter two examines the theoretical framework of the paper, focusing on the principles of sexual citizenship and discourse of its influence on the development of sexual subjectivity. It also seeks to validate my claim that the selected curriculum is an example of a sexuality education approach theoretically based in notions of sexual citizenship. Chapter three presents the concept of sexual ambivalence and, using examples from the curriculum, discusses how a sexual citizenship-based curriculum could effectively address the causes of sexual ambivalence. Chapter four considers the limitations of a sexual citizenship approach to address critiques, offers suggestions for further research, and concludes the paper.

**Chapter One**

 **Methodology and Curriculum Selection**

The goal of this paper is to evaluate the potential of a sexuality education approach theoretically based on sexual citizenship for addressing sexual ambivalence among young people in the United States. In this chapter, I will elaborate on my methodological approach, provide background information on the selected curriculum, and explain why this curriculum is an appropriate choice for an analysis of the pedagogical application of sexual citizenship theory.

*Methodology*

 The research material explored for this paper consists of both secondary and primary sources. Using secondary sources, I conducted discourse analyses of three topics. First, I examined discourse on various pedagogical approaches to sexuality education and their efficacy at improving sexual decision-making processes among young people. My goal was to identify successful approaches and areas of sexuality education that are still lacking in addressing the needs of young Americans. The second topic was how sexual citizenship influences the development of sexual subjectivity, focusing particularly on the ways in which it engages with gendered social norms and expectations. From this, I hoped to gain an understanding of the impacts of sexual citizenship on modern notions of sexuality and sexual responsibility, as well as the aspects of sexual citizenship theory that could contribute to public health initiatives aiming to address sexual violence.

The third and final topic of my discourse analyses was sexual ambivalence and its health and wellness implications for young people. This focus yielded insight into the factors contributing to sexual decision-making and the impact of social influences on the development of sexual subjectivity. Discourse analysis was a useful approach here because it allowed me to delve into existing work on these subjects to compare, contrast, and challenge the opinions and theories of different scholars and form my own understanding of pedagogical approaches, sexual citizenship’s impact on sexual subjectivity formation, and the causes, experiences, and effects of sexual ambivalence. This was a necessary prerequisite to conducting an informed curriculum analysis that engages with these topics.

 For primary sources, I have analyzed texts on sexuality education and health released by the United States government as contributions to public health initiatives. I chose to examine the National Sexuality Education Standards (Future of Sex Education Initiative 2012) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2014 School Health Profiles (Demissie et al. 2015) because both these texts were cited by the selected curriculum as guidelines for its development. Additionally, these sources allowed me to observe the engagement of the state with the sexual lives of its citizens and gain a sense of how sexual citizenship operates in the context of the United States. I have also conducted a summative content analysis[[4]](#endnote-4) of a selected American sexuality education curriculum. This summative content analysis called for evaluation of the content of the curriculum’s lesson plans to establish the presence of sexual citizenship themes and examination of the underlying meanings of its messages to students about sexual responsibility and decision-making. I isolated excerpts from lesson plans to demonstrate my points about the potential for a curriculum theoretically grounded in sexual citizenship to address sexual ambivalence.

*Introduction to Curriculum*

 The curriculum I have selected, *Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Sexuality Education Curriculum* (Schroeder, Goldfarb, and Gelperin 2015), was developed by Advocates for Youth, an American nonprofit organization focused on advancing and advocating for comprehensive sexuality education. This curriculum is a fitting site for exploring the potential of a sexual citizenship framework for several reasons. First, it covers the recently published National Sexuality Education Standards (Future of Sex Education Initiative 2012)[[5]](#endnote-5) and the recommended sexual health education components as dictated by the CDC (Demissie et al. 2015)[[6]](#endnote-6), which together encourage a standard approach to American sexuality education that is approved and supported by the state. Second, Advocates for Youth promote the curriculum as offering comprehensive, developmentally- and age-appropriate lesson plans that are inclusive of sexual and gender minorities[[7]](#endnote-7). Third, it addresses the social norms that influence sexual behaviors, rather than positioning sexuality as an autonomous or private phenomenon or focusing solely on the biological and reproductive aspects of sexuality. Lastly, the lesson plans are free and available online.[[8]](#endnote-8) Considering these points, I believe this curriculum is a relatively strong and thoughtful program that represents the forefront of progressive sexuality education in the United States. As such, it is the most appropriate starting point for determining where improvements can be made moving forward. The fact that it is free and available online is significant, as beyond the convenience it offers me as a researcher, it is a highly accessible resource that can be used by any educator, family, or individual with an Internet connection. Given the inconsistency in quality and availability of sexuality education offered in schools in the United States and the often high costs of alternatives, a comprehensive and widely available curriculum like *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* has the potential for great outreach and impact.

 *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* can be downloaded as a package that includes lesson plans, media resources, homework assignments, a teacher’s guide, and assessment items for students in kindergarten through grade twelve. Each grade level has between three and eleven lesson plans that each dictate the necessary advance preparation for the lesson, the learning objectives, a step-by-step teaching procedure, helpful notes to the educator, and homework assignments. These plans also state how the content aligns with the National Sexuality Education Standards, the target grade and estimated length of the lesson, and the materials needed to conduct the session. Lesson plan topics range from family, bullying, and friendships for younger grades to reproductive rights, intimate partner violence, and sexual orientation for upper level classes. Throughout this paper, I will cite examples from the curriculum to demonstrate how sexual citizenship themes are present and the meanings conveyed by these messages. In the citation method I will use for the curriculum materials, the first number refers to the grade level, the second to the lesson plan for that grade level, and the final number or number range will refer to the page or pages of the lesson plan in which that example can be found. Thus, a citation of (5-3:1) would communicate that the original text can be found on page one of the third lesson plan for grade five.

**Chapter Two**

**Sexual Citizenship in Theory and Context**

 In this chapter, I will explore my theoretical framework, which is based upon David T. Evan’s theory of sexual citizenship. I examine the defining features of the theory and how I am framing and applying them specifically in this paper to address my research question and make the theory compatible for incorporation into sexuality education. I will evaluate the *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* curriculum to identify relevant messages to validate my claim that it is an example of a curriculum theoretically based in sexual citizenship.

*The Sexual Citizen: Embodiment and Purpose*

Citizenship is a complex, ever-shifting, and often problematic concept. Notions of citizenship vary by cultural context, but generally citizenship at its roots refers to the relationship between an individual, the state, and society (Yuval-Davis 1997:4). The concept of sexual citizenship focuses on this relationship in the context of sexuality – how an individual’s sexual life, including their choices and behaviors, relates to the state and the society in which they live. Sexual citizenship as a theory was notably developed by David T. Evans (1993) and dictates that there is no boundary between the private sphere and the public sphere, nor between the personal sphere and the political sphere. Rather, society influences individuals’ sexual choices and their sexual choices influence society. Sexuality can no longer be considered part of an individual’s personal life, protected by privacy norms; in fact, sexuality itself is materially constructed by social and state influences and is not an autonomous phenomenon at all. Given this link between society and sexuality and the implications of each for the other, Evans considers an individual’s sexual choices and behaviors to be a form of civic engagement that is subject to state regulation in the interest of public health and order.

Citizenship in general creates degrees of "belonging" which grants rights to certain individuals and denies them to others, all depending upon their behavior in a myriad of areas in their life (Corboz 2009:3). Under sexual citizenship, choices and behaviors which may previously have been considered private become another aspect of an individual’s lifestyle which may be subject to public and political scrutiny and regulation. As a form of civic engagement, sexuality can yield benefits or detriments depending on how it is performed. Gayle Rubin (1984) engages with this idea in her essay “Thinking Sex,” arguing that modern Western societies hierarchize sex acts, ascribing more sexual value to behaviors and choices like heterosexual marital reproduction, which play a significant role in maintaining the status quo. Meanwhile, sexualities divergent from the norm are stigmatized, absent from the ‘national imaginary’ and prevent the achievement of full citizenship status (Phelan 2001:7). Evans is critical of sexual citizenship as a state-serving form of overreaching control of the masses; situating sexuality as part and parcel of citizenship subjects it to state control and allows for further interference in individuals' lives. Rubin notes that linking sexual behaviors to degrees of respectability and the rewards of citizenship serves as an “effective sanction against those who engage” in stigmatized behaviors, moving beyond punitive measures and actually seeking to preemptively address and prevent these behaviors and any threats to the status quo which may accompany them (1984:151). Thus, linking sexuality to citizenship can be harmful to sexual minorities who face increased discrimination and become unable to rely on privacy rights for protection. It gives the state the power and opportunity to shape society through another channel of regulation.

 Acknowledging the negative aspects of sexual citizenship, and of tying citizenship to sexuality, is it possible to present the theory in a more constructive way? I believe the solution lies in the framing of the responsibility accompanying citizenship. Yuval-Davis (1997) promotes T.H. Marshall’s definition of citizenship as “’a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community’ (1950:14),” arguing that through “formally linking citizenship to membership in a community rather than to the state, as liberal definitions of citizenship do, Marshall’s definition enables us analytically to discuss citizenship as a multi-tier construct” (5). Defining a citizen first and foremost in relation to the state creates a sense of responsibility to authority above all else. Instead, for the purpose of sexuality education, the citizen is best defined in relation to their community. Through this framing, students can focus on the tangible impacts their choices have on those around them and the climate of the environments they frequent. Explicitly discussing the consequences of individual choice on friends, family, neighbors, classmates, and lovers is part of helping students to understand the power they have as a citizen. It is crucial to bring citizenship down the personal level, illuminating for students the agency they possess and their potential for influencing society. Sexual citizenship in sexuality education should focus on leading students to the realization that they are part of a larger community and have the agency and responsibility as a citizen within it to keep it functioning in a way that serves and protects everyone. The state, meanwhile, should be presented not as something that citizens must serve, but which exists to serve the citizens. As such, discussions of the state and higher powers governing society should focus on the existing legal protections that reinforce the rights-focused discourse of sexual citizenship.

 So who is the ideal sexual citizen? A good sexual citizen takes responsibility for their own personal health and makes informed choices, protecting their own individual rights as well as the rights of their fellow citizens (Illes 2012:621). In an American context, notions of idealized sexual citizenship are promoted by the government through a variety of outlets. One is the Health Action Zone program, which asserts that “good citizens” care for and assume responsibility for their own health and that of their children; they are expected to exercise “informed choices” about eating, drinking, and intimate practices (Richardson 2000:106). Another example is visible in the ‘Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior’ (2001) by Dr. David Satcher, the Surgeon-General of the United States (as referenced in Bancroft 2002:9-10). This announcement defines sexual responsibility as personal responsibility for one’s own health status, an understanding and awareness of one’s own sexuality and sexual development, respect for oneself and one’s partner, avoidance of physical or emotional harm, ensuring that pregnancy occurs only when desired, and a recognition and tolerance of the diversity of sexual values within a community. These points reflect notions of good citizenship at large, namely the respect of universal rights and the defense of a safe, informed, and inclusive society, but in the context of sexual choices. However, the message is not just that citizens must fulfill their share of responsibility, as the text continues to state that a healthy society also requires culturally appropriate sexuality education, sexual and reproductive healthcare and counseling, latitude to make appropriate sexual and reproductive choices, and freedom from stigmatization and violence on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation (10-11). These points reinforce that the state recognizes and will be held accountable for the duty it has in cultivating a society where it is actually possible for each individual to carry out their sexual responsibilities. A similar approach can be taken by sexuality education programs. The programs themselves cannot take complete responsibility for producing sexual citizens, nor can they expect that students will be fully capable to embody these ideals on their own. Instead, it must be something of a collaborative effort, a shared responsibility – a program must commit itself to fostering an environment where students can succeed, and students should be expected to take advantage of the skills and knowledge shared with them to guide their own sexual development.

*Sexual Citizenship in Context: Rights, Respect, Responsibility*

 Before it is possible to use the selected curriculum as an example of how sexual citizenship can address sexual ambivalence, it is first necessary to establish that *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* is in fact a curriculum theoretically based on sexual citizenship. In order to do so, I will evaluate the content of the program to determine if it promotes the most defining principles of sexual citizenship: the expansion of traditional citizenship to include children and historically marginalized minorities and the role of sexuality as a form of civic engagement. I will expand upon these principles and cite examples from the lesson plans to demonstrate how themes of sexual citizenship are presented within the curriculum and validate the claim that *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* can be considered an example of a sexuality education approach based on sexual citizenship theory.

 Traditional notions of citizenship are structured by the divide between public and private life. Sexual citizenship asserts that this divide does not exist, and an individual's sexuality - traditionally considered private - is actually connected to, structured by, and regulated through the public sphere. Sexuality can no longer be considered natural or innate, as it is revealed to be the product of social organization and serves a political agenda. Given the interaction between sexuality and society, an individual's sexuality can and should be understood as a form of civic engagement (Illes 2012:617). Groups who are denied sexual rights and recognition are denied this opportunity for civic engagement, casting them as incomplete citizens and putting them at a further disadvantage. One of the most significant of these groups is children. Evans condemns what he calls the “pedagogisation of childhood” as an idyllic, asexual stage of pre-adulthood, and the resulting perspective that children are innocent and pure and must be protected, through cultural and legal advances, from the potential corruptions that threaten them (1993:209). In order for the benefits of sexual citizenship to manifest, it is essential that children be refitted with the citizenship status that has been denied to them. Successful sexuality education requires a perspective that treats young people as autonomous sexual agents and which takes them seriously as participants in their society. It must give them decision-making power and treat them as smart and capable of making choices and evaluating information (Illes 2012:618).

 If children and adolescents are not given the space to consider themselves as autonomous agents, they cannot effectively consider and enact critical thinking and decision-making skills necessary to develop a healthy and positive sexual subjectivity.

 Young people who are beginning sexuality education have already received messages about sexuality and respectability just by virtue of existing in American society. These messages lead to a culture where the sexuality of young people is consistently problematized, and it becomes shameful to discuss sex, even with trusted adults or friends (Simon and Daneback 2013:306). Undoing these stigmas is an inherent part of sexuality education simply by providing a space specifically for speaking about sexuality, but can be furthered far more by emphasizing and reinforcing children’s autonomy and power. Consider the following excerpt:

Ask the children to consider why it is that some people make decisions about what children can and can’t do. Discuss that children and grown-ups have choices and may like to do all kinds of things. (1-1:2)

This step in the lesson plan asks children to start considering their role in society from a young age. It acknowledges their incomplete citizenship, but encourages them to question these restrictions. It conveys that more freedoms will come as they age – but that more choices and decisions will accompany these freedoms. Children should begin to see themselves as subjects from a young age, and exploration of their subjectivity should be encouraged as they grow.

In the seventh grade, you may not always be able to change how the school works – but we can take your ideas and pass them along to the principal, which I plan to do. In the meantime, you do have the power to look at the language you use, how you behave with others, and how others act. (7-10:4)

Messages such as this one are honest about the limited influence young people may face, but highlights actions they can take to extend their influence through processes already available to them for change-making. Rather than instructing children to sit back and accept their limited citizenship until they come of age, it provides a pathway where young people can still exercise their agency and contribute their ideas – which are no less valid than those of adults – to their community.

 As students enter adolescence and gain more confidence in their role as citizens, it is important to nuance their position by informing them of the laws and rights that situate them in society. Many *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* lesson plans at the high school level focus on the legal rights of teenagers relating to healthcare, reproduction, and sexual interactions. Rather than using fear-based tactics or emphasizing absolute authority of the law, the curriculum presents this information in a neutral, informative way.

No matter how you feel about any of these rights, or the laws governing them, the fact is that laws exist relating to whether, when and sometimes even how we as human beings can reproduce. There are unique laws that specifically pertain to all of you who are under the age of 18. The best thing you can do is to hold on to this list of organizations as a reference, so that if you are in a situation where you need to choose what to do about a pregnancy, you know what your rights are. (12-1:2)

This message reinforces the laws without promoting them, and focuses on the responsibility and empowerment that comes from knowing the laws and relevant resources rather than on the repercussions that could come from transgressing them. Such an approach is in accordance with calls for sexuality education that frames topics in a affirmative way – highlighting the benefits that stand to be gained from practicing healthy behaviors – rather than a negative way that focuses on the harmful consequences of failing to do so (Aggleton and Campbell 2000:284).

 In addition to learning about relevant legal restrictions, students should be given opportunities to consider the norms that informally govern society. One homework assignment at the ninth grade level instructs students to go to the store and try to obtain condoms. It acknowledges that the students might encounter judgment or uncomfortable behavior when attempting to purchase contraceptives, but reinforces that social norms can and should be challenged in the interest of sexual health.

[T]here is no minimum age at which you can get condoms – you have a right to access them at any age. So if any adult were to make a comment about your age, be sure to tell them that you know that using condoms is the responsible thing to do and that you have a right to get them if you wish. (9-11:4)

Informing students of their sexual rights – and of the obstacles they may encounter when trying to exercise them – shows confidence in their capability to negotiate their own health, further contributing to a healthy sexual subjectivity.

 Beyond the need to establish subjectivity and a sense of citizenship and provide information on sexual rights, a sexual citizenship approach also necessitates the consistent message that others have those same rights as well, and students must respect others just as they respect themselves.

Treating people with dignity and respect means treating them well and showing appreciation for other people’s beliefs, ideas, and how they live (what they eat, how they dress, how they celebrate holidays, etc.) even if they are different from us or we don’t agree with their ideas or beliefs. (3-1:2)

A benefit of stressing equality in such a way is the potential to expand notions of traditional citizenship by highlighting the rights of marginalized groups (Illes 2012:615). Although teaching respect for others and their customs is not explicitly related to sexuality, discussing this topic early in children’s education can prepare them to have an open mind in discussing sexual minorities in future classes.

 The final mark of a sexual citizenship approach is an emphasis on the interconnectedness between individuals in order to build a more complete perspective of the community and the public and political impacts of personal choice. Students should be encouraged to see themselves as individuals, but should understand that their choices are a form of civic engagement with society and thus have an impact beyond their own lives.

We all benefit when everyone is treated well. . .creating a world in which everyone is treated with dignity and respect takes a lot of ongoing work. One lesson is not enough. It is up to each of us to keep our commitment to this goal and to remind one another of how important it is for everyone to do their part. (3-1:3)

The benefits of a harmonious community can be reaped by all, but only if each individual within it assumes their share of the responsibility. In later grade levels, more specific sexual contexts can be used to discuss this sense of shared social responsibility.

A key point about STDs and your risk for them is that one person has to have an STD in order to give it to someone else. . .This means that just as you can be exposed to them by someone who has one, you can take specific steps to lower or eliminate your chances of getting one. (7-5:2)

This message emphasizes how one individual’s choices can ripple through society and affect others, forcing students to think about the underlying meaning of their choices and the impacts they have on those around them. It communicates that it takes a commitment to shared responsibility to ensure the health of all – but also reiterates that an individual is ultimately the one responsible for safeguarding their own health.

 As a whole, *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* closely incorporates the principles of sexual citizenship into its curriculum. It seeks to instill in children a sense of agency and autonomy and identifies ways in which they can still exercise power as sexual citizens despite certain limitations. By highlighting the legal restrictions on child and adolescent sexuality, it seeks to develop citizens who are well educated on their rights. However, it also points out the interference of politics with sexuality as a way to demonstrate the false logic of a public/private binary. The curriculum focuses heavily on communicating to students how all of their choices, even sexual ones, are a form of civic engagement with significance and consequences on the social level. The theoretical underpinnings of *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* make it a sound example of a sexual citizenship approach, and designate it as an appropriate site for analyzing how such a curriculum can engage with the topic of sexual ambivalence in a productive way.

**Chapter Three**

**Addressing Sexual Ambivalence with Sexual Citizenship**

In this chapter, I will introduce the concept of sexual ambivalence in more detail and discuss how current understandings of consent preclude the incorporation of this topic into conversations about sexual decision-making. I will reveal why sexual ambivalence is a public health concern warranting more attention in sexuality education and draw on my discourse analysis to identify the main causes of sexual ambivalence – sexual scripts, interpersonal coercion, and lack of skill development. Then, I will examine how a sexual citizenship approach to sexuality education could prove effective in addressing these causes, citing examples from *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* to illustrate my points.

*Sexual Ambivalence: Causes and Implications*

 The primary goal of sexuality education is to prepare students to practice a safe, healthy, and fulfilling sexuality. However, this sexual preparedness is not always achieved because of a failure to nuance sexual feelings and choices in a way with which young people can actually relate. One area in need of more attention is sexual ambivalence - a “gray area” that is commonly faced but rarely discussed. It refers to a feeling of uncertainty over whether or not to engage in a particular sexual activity. The term itself is of ambiguous origin and not uniformly used, with scholars sometimes referring to the phenomenon as “saying ‘no’ but meaning ‘yes’” (Muehlenhard and Rodgers 1998; Osman 2003), “saying ‘yes’ but meaning ‘no’” (O’Sullivan 2005), or “rape by acquiescence” (Basile 1999). However, I prefer the term sexual ambivalence, as it refers to the experience rather than the outcome. Sexual ambivalence is the feeling of confliction and uncertainty; sometimes it is navigated successfully to reach an appropriate decision, and sometimes it results in a decision that is contrary to what one truly wants. Sexual ambivalence itself is not necessarily a problem, as feelings of ambivalence can naturally accompany any decision-making process. However, it can quickly become a problem when these ambivalent feelings are so overwhelming that they result in poor decisions. Combatting the likelihood that sexual ambivalence will lead to harmful behaviors requires a reconsideration of binary notions of consent to acknowledge and prepare for the middle ground in sexual decision-making.

Often consent is presented as a dichotomous concept with only two possible outcomes – consent or non-consent (Murray, Sutherland, and Milhausen 2012:5). However, this is unrealistic, and to present consent in such a binary and seemingly clear-cut way fails to prepare young people for the many factors and pressures that can influence their sexual choices. As an alternative for dichotomized thinking about consent, Muehlenhard and Peterson (2007) have offered a new model, building upon Morokoff et al.’s (1997) Sexual Assertiveness Scale[[9]](#endnote-9) to conceptualize “wanting” and “consenting” as two distinct concepts. “Wanting” refers to feeling desire or inclination to engage in a given act, while “consenting” refers to being willing to or agreeing to do so. To illustrate “consenting without wanting,” Muehlenhard and Peterson cite the example of consenting to go to work on a Monday morning, even though you do not want to, because it is necessary to make money; to exemplify “wanting without consenting,” they present the scenario of not going to a party, despite wanting to go, because you must stay home and study for a test (73). Nuancing consent in this way reveals the true complexity behind sexual decision-making.

 Sexual ambivalence is reported in concerning numbers by young people, especially women. In studying narratives of young women’s first-time sexual experiences, Geary et al. (2013) determined that feelings of ambivalence were widely present and often resulted in participation in sexual activity that was not fully desired (437). Lacking the necessary critical and decision-making skills to navigate sexual ambivalence can make an individual especially vulnerable to sexual coercion and assault, which can have extremely harmful psychological, physical, relational, social, and cultural impacts (O’Sullivan 2005:3). Given the risks and dangers associated with sexual ambivalence, it can and should be considered a public health issue and addressed explicitly and thoroughly in sexuality education. Understanding and minimizing feelings of sexual ambivalence among young people requires an understanding of where and why these feelings originate. Scholars studying sexual decision-making and ambivalence have identified three root causes of sexual ambivalence: sexual scripts, interpersonal coercion, and a lack of skill development for sexual decision-making (See O’Sullivan 2005; Walker 1997; Jozkowski et al. 2015; Kennett, Humphreys, and Patchell; Geary et al. 2013; Cameron-Lewis and Allen 2013; Hirst 2008; Muehlenhard and Peterson 2007). For the remainder of this chapter, I will elaborate on these scholars’ work, consider each cause, and discuss how it can be addressed in sexuality education. I will continue to use excerpts from *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* to demonstrate possible approaches.

*Sexual Scripts*

 It is widely agreed that sexual scripts are the primary cause of sexual ambivalence. In their 1973 book *Sexual Conduct*, John Gagnon and William Simon assert that sexual behavior is not innate, but rather learned through the norms and expectations that govern a society. These socially defined norms and expectations yield a kind of “script” for what is considered appropriate sexual behavior and how sexual encounters should progress. Sexual scripts in the United States define rigid gender roles and set the scene for the development of sexual subjectivity in young people. Traditional masculine scripts associate male sexuality with procreation, performance, and dominance; traditional feminine scripts set limits on female sexuality, positioning it as a threat to marriage, family, and society, and calling for careful monitoring and control (McCarthy and Bodnar 2005:225).[[10]](#endnote-10) The normalization of these sexual scripts and the stigmas that are associated with anyone who diverges from them ensure the reproduction of these stereotypes. Children are confronted with sexual scripts from an early age, so it is crucial to begin challenging them early as well.

 *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* introduces the topic of gender as early as possible – kindergarten – by explaining that although most people are cisgender, some are transgender or intersex, and a person’s body parts are not necessarily indicative of their gender (K-2:1). The first lesson on gender roles comes the following year and requires students to consider a short story about a male princess and the gender role stereotypes he encounters. The lesson plan instructs the teacher to ask students to speak out about gender stereotypes they have experienced and discuss how they could offer help to a friend who feels they cannot participate in certain activities because of their gender (1-2:3). This plan is effective in helping children identify and put a name to the pressures they may face because of their gender, and encourages them to resist these expectations in pursuit of their own happiness – and to help others do the same. The emphasis on taking a critical perspective of gender roles continues throughout the curriculum. In grade six, students are asked to make a list of “girl” and “boy” traits that they could use to explain these roles to an extraterrestrial being who is meeting humans for the first time. Afterwards, the teacher is instructed to respond as follows:

The most important question you can ask as you process these lists is, “Why do you think this is?” In asking them to reflect on what they generated on the lists, you can help them to challenge the gender norms that have been taught to them from their earliest ages. In addition, learned homophobia is likely to come up – where boys in particular will say that doing something on the ‘girl’ list means that a boy is ‘gay.’ Again, challenge this idea by asking, ‘Why?’ and pointing out that they didn’t say the same thing about girls doing something that was on the boy list. (6-2:2)

This lesson plan is particularly effective for two reasons. First, sourcing examples for the list from the students themselves ensures that the discussion will be centered on their lived experiences. This is a smart approach, as students respond more positively to lessons when they feel that the information being discussed is directly relevant to their lives (Limmer 2010:352). Second, asking the students questions about gender stereotypes instead of lecturing about them still gets across the key point that these stereotypes are socially constructed and thus can and should be challenged. However, it achieves that point in such a way that allows students to reach it themselves – fulfilling the objective of an approach that addresses young people as “knowledgeable and savvy” and avoids preaching pre-determined outcomes (Bragg 2006:322).

 Identifying and challenging sexual scripts early and regularly is an effective way of minimizing gender policing and encouraging young people to stand up for their own and each other’s rights to self-expression. However, it is a major goal in addressing sexual ambivalence because of the effect sexual scripts can have on the development of sexual subjectivity, especially for girls. Sexual scripts position women as second-class citizens, definable primarily in relation to their husbands, families, and life at home; the happiness of the people she cares for is the measure of a woman’s success. As a result, girls’ identities develop largely around the importance of facilitating the needs of others, even at the expense of their own needs, and of maintaining significant relationships at any necessary cost (Walker 1997:161). Essentially, the internalization of sexual scripts can cause young women to value their own rights less than the rights of others, and to yield to the social control and regulation of their sexuality. In studies of testimonies of young women experiencing sexual ambivalence, it was revealed that the socially constructed belief in male entitlement was so pervasive that many women felt coerced or threatened into giving consent without any actual physical force from their partners (Geary et al. 2013:439). Further, young women cited reasons such as avoiding relationship tension and fulfilling perceived relationship obligations as explanations for why they have consented to unwanted sexual activity in the past (Kennett, Humphreys, and Patchell 2009:343). Clearly, sexual scripts set women up for decision-making that is not centered on their own safety and desires.

Although far less research has been done into sexual ambivalence among men, it is apparent in existing work that sexual scripts do influence the sexual decision-making of boys as well. In examining young men’s motivations for engaging in sexual activity, a leading factor was the desire to be seen as “impressive” by male peers for being sexually accomplished, or at the very least to fulfill the expectation that any “normal” teenage boy will pursue girls for sex (Kempadoo and Dunn 2001:20). These testimonies reflect the scripted link between aggressive sexual performance and masculinity and imply that, at times, consent was given more out of external pressures than out of true desire. Thus, sexual scripts can cause feelings of sexual ambivalence regardless of gender, and do so by building pressure to fulfill an expected role. Personal desire becomes secondary to feelings of social obligation.

Identifying and deconstructing internalized pressures and emotions young people might feel when deciding to have sex is important, but can only come at later stages in the curriculum when students begin discussing sexuality more explicitly. Something more is needed that can be implemented earlier – and that is the concept of autonomy. Teaching students about autonomy, combined with challenges to gender roles and sexual scripts, is a strong approach to addressing sexual ambivalence that can begin at a young age. A sexual citizenship approach is well suited to teaching themes of autonomy because of its focus on individual development and universal rights. It is important to specify at this point that messages about making and maintaining boundaries and giving consent in sexual situations are also relevant to the topic of autonomy, but are more applicable in the next section and will be discussed further there. For the purpose of combatting sexual scripts specifically, the most useful messages about autonomy focus on empowerment and ownership of the self. Consider the following two excerpts:

This is your body and you have a right to know what the different parts are called. . .it’s also important that everyone with a body knows how their body works and how to take care of it so we can all be healthy. (K-2:3,1)

No one has a right to tell someone else how they are supposed to express their gender. Society will continue to give messages – whether that’s in the media or from family or culture or religious groups. But in the end, every person has the right to discover who they are and to let others know in ways that feel right to them. (9-5:4)

The first excerpt is pulled from the second lesson of the curriculum. It communicates that each individual maintains ownership of their body. In addition to that, it establishes that there are rights and responsibilities that accompany this ownership. According to a study done using anatomically explicit dolls, children are likely to use slang words learned from parents or peers to refer to body parts rather than the correct anatomical terms (Schor and Sivan 1989:526). Emphasizing ownership of the body and the right to know the proper terminology to discuss its parts not only stresses autonomy and responsibility, but counters the shame or discomfort children might feel when they have been told parts of their body are “private parts” that are not appropriate to talk about. The second excerpt comes later in the curriculum and addresses bodily autonomy in terms of how the body is presented. It acknowledges outside pressures that may influence ideas about acceptable presentation, but reinforces that the body can be an empowering tool for self-expression and should be respected as such. This message of staying true to oneself is valuable in encouraging young people to resist the social pressures resulting from sexual scripts and think about how their sexuality could be a site to exercise power against its control and regulation.

*Interpersonal Coercion*

 Although it is generally understood that socialization patterns and their resulting pressures are the most influential contributor to sexual ambivalence, interpersonal coercion also plays a role. Interpersonal coercion is any attempt at forcing an individual into sexual activity through violence, threats, verbal insistence, or deception (Heise, Moore, and Toubia 1995:6). A gender-neutral approach to teaching autonomy is useful to establish the universality of self-ownership, but once a solid groundwork is laid and students near adolescence, it is necessary to nuance the topic of autonomy. Although men and women are both subject to feelings of sexual ambivalence and the negative effects of sexual scripts, this should not have an equalizing effect or render gender irrelevant; it is important to note that for both the young men and women in the studies, the most common motivation was related to receiving gratification and approval from the men in their lives. Engaging with gender in education is difficult to navigate, as data reflect that women are victims of sexual assault at a significantly higher rate than men (Black et al. 2011:1-2). However, focusing on young women as victims in sexual assault prevention lessons is counterproductive, as such approaches are already critiqued as placing the burden of responsibility for health and safety disproportionately on women (Quinlan and Bute 2013:54; Carmody 2005:466). At the same time, focusing on young men as perpetrators runs the risk of putting male students on the defensive and threatens the perceived credibility of the teacher or curriculum – an aspect of young men’s perceptions of sexuality education programs that is among the most significant in determining how receptive they are to the information and how likely it is to actually result in positive behavioral changes (Limmer 2010:352). A careful approach is necessary to communicate to students that gender plays a meaningful role in sexual assault prevention without alienating any students.

 Discussing interpersonal coercion is crucial to addressing sexual ambivalence, but the topic carries sensitive gendered implications. Telling boys that they are more responsible for preventing coercion than girls because they are more likely to be coercive will not be well received; the majority of boys will not identify with a tendency towards coercion nor with the responsibility it claims to justify, and they will reject the message as irrelevant to them (Albury et al. 2011:342). Instead, sexual citizenship can be useful for framing this topic. Its value lies in its focus on socially situating issues in relation to citizenship, or the amount of social privilege an individual maintains. An effective curriculum can build on the understanding of sexual scripts that it has already cultivated in students in order to contextualize the issue of coercion in a more clear and receptive way. The main message should be that everyone is responsible for preventing coercion, but since patriarchy allows men to enjoy increased social power in their communities, they must accept increased social responsibility as a consequence and result of this privilege.

In *Rights, Respect, Responsibility*, the relevance of gender to coercion and sexual assault is established briefly but clearly.

Even though anyone of any gender can assault a person of any gender, the vast majority of rapes and sexual assaults in the world are committed by men. So in addition to helping people who are survivors of rape and sexual assault, we need to focus on trying to keep boys and men from ever believing they have a right to force someone else to do something sexual. (8-7:3)

This message directly acknowledges that men are the primary perpetrators of sexual assault because of feelings of sexual entitlement. It does not shy away from the fact that it is the attitudes of men that must be changed as the end goal. However, it also takes a big-picture perspective that social norms are ultimately responsible for this entitlement. It’s use of “we” in stating the need to combat socially ingrained ideas of entitlement among men communicates that it takes the work of everyone in a community to rewrite sexual scripts. This inclusive perspective avoids casting women as victims, allowing them full agency and responsibility by virtue of their citizenship in the community to take part in changing the status quo. Meanwhile, it avoids casting men as responsible for sexual assault – implying guilt - in favor of positioning them as responsible for preventing it – implying agency and influence.

 In the rest of its sexual violence prevention material, *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* takes a mostly gender-neutral approach. It conveys that sexual coercion and assault can happen between people of any gender or sexual orientation, leaving room for each student to identify with the material. Much of the relevant content focuses on the importance of boundaries and consent. Disambiguating consent and teaching students how to recognize valid consent is a way of informing students of their sexual rights and cultivating respect for the rights of others. Consent should be introduced as early as possible.

These are our bodies – and so we have the right to say whether and how we want someone else to touch them. That also means we need to listen and stop touching others when someone else says they don’t want to be touched. (K,3:2)

At the kindergarten level, consent and touching is mostly discussed in a non-sexual context. It addresses how to confidently exercise ownership of one’s body in situations children may face, such as when a friend will not stop poking them or they are expected to give a kiss to a relative at a family event. In later grades, these ideas transition into a sexual context.

[A]sk whether anyone has ever had someone not respect their physical boundaries, and how that felt. Finally, ask whether anyone is willing to share a time when they didn’t respect someone else’s boundary. . . Explain that rape usually involved some kind of forced sex – vaginal, oral, or anal – but that if a person does other sexual things to another person who didn’t want to do those things, it’s considered sexual assault or abuse, and is just as wrong as rape is. (6-3:2-3)

No one should do anything sexual in a relationship that they do not feel 100% ready to do. (7-9:2)

The lesson plans containing these excerpts explain how devastating it can be to have one’s boundaries violated. The curriculum centers the topic on students’ experiences, asking them for examples and probing them to consider their own negative feelings regarding boundary violations and how they might have caused others to feel this way at some point. This approach is useful in building compassion in students and encouraging them to consider the impact they have on others.

However, describing the act of pushing boundaries as “wrong” implies a certain morality behind the message. Instructional material grounded by a specific morality has a controversial place in public education, and any curriculum must carefully consider how its content may be interpreted as promoting a particular moral doctrine. In fact, even the ability of sexuality education programs to promote the principle of mutual consent has been questioned. This principle states that clear and informed consent must be given by all participants in a sexual act – and that, if this is the case and no harm is done to third parties, any kind of sexual practice is permissible.

What does getting consent mean?. . .If you haven’t communicated about what you each feel comfortable doing, sometimes even if you have, you need to ask for consent each and every time. Silence does not mean yes. Only yes means yes. (11-2:3)

*Rights, Respect, Responsibility* specifies that consent must be voluntary, free of coercion, given from a sober and sane state of mind, completely clear, and ideally verbalized (10-1:2). Its attitude towards the role of consent in sexual relationships promotes the principle of mutual consent. The right of the state to implement sexuality education advocating for the principle of mutual consent has been challenged as unconstitutional for forcing a specific morality onto citizens. However, an evaluation of this claim concluded that the state does have the right to implement sexuality education with a particular moral content provided this moral content stays within the limitations of public morality, or a set of principles and virtues which must be defended by the state as part of the state’s responsibility to preserve the rights and liberties of its citizens. The principal of mutual consent can be promoted by the state through sexuality education by framing consent as a citizenship right – the right to self-determination (Steutel and Spiecker 2004:56).

Positioning consent in this way makes it an appropriate and consistent part of a sexual citizenship approach.

Fortunately, *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* does not rely on morality completely, raising the legal implications of sexual assault and coercion in the lesson as well. While one would certainly hope that students would understand and agree with the immorality of sexual assault, the subjective quality of morality generally makes it a weak backbone for an argument. This is because of an “erosion of absolute moral standards” in modern society, especially on issues that are commonly considered of private or personal concern (Evans 1993:85). Wherever sexual choices are considered private in the United States – and judging by the prevalence of conservative attitudes towards sexuality and the resistance to sexuality education in public schools, this seems to be the case in many areas – any attempts to intervene on sexual choices using morality will be ill-equipped to make an impact. Changing these attitudes and the negative sexual behaviors associated with them can be done through a citizenship approach which positions sexuality as a public and political concern and which relies on legality over morality.

Rape and sexual assault are extremely serious because they can hurt someone physically and emotionally. They are not just wrong, they are crimes. So if you aren’t sure what another person’s boundaries are – or, like Max, push it a bit to see if the person will change their mind – you may end up committing a crime. (6-3:3)

A really challenging thing we need to figure out is the difference between having rights and doing what’s right. When we are in relationships, we need to think about what both of our rights are, and what our responsibilities are to each other as well as to ourselves. . .In the end, communication in relationships is so important so that both people’s needs and rights are recognized, considered and respected. (10-3:3)

Both excerpts succeed in grounding more strongly the right to have one’s boundaries respected. The first acknowledges the moral implications of sexual assault, then strengthens the message by ultimately labeling it a crime rather than a sin. This results in a more meaningful and concrete message that sexual assault is not just wrong, it is illegal. However, it may also highlight a conflict between autonomy and authority, resulting in resentment for the laws and the power and control they wield rather than respect for them. The second excerpt nuances this by reinforcing that the laws in question exist not to limit people’s freedom of choice, but to protect the rights of all individuals. It also clarifies how communication and consent in sexual relationships is part of public morality though its relationship to the right of self-determination.

*Skill Development Overview*

 The content of *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* does an insightful job of addressing the causes of sexual ambivalence and communicating the shared responsibility of each citizen to give and receive valid consent, challenge and work to change harmful sexual scripts, and offer support to victims of sexual coercion and assault. However, knowing which factors lead to sexual ambivalence is hardly useful information for students if they do not have the tools necessary to effectively navigate them. Practicing healthy sexual citizenship requires ‘sexual competence,’ or the ability and knowledge to be involved in sexual practices with successful processes and outcomes (Hirst 2008:402). Essentially, a curriculum needs to go beyond telling students what a good sexual citizen is and actually help them develop the skills necessary to become one. A useful model of which skills are relevant for healthy sexual decision-making is found in the concept of *weerbaarheid*, or ‘interactional competence’ as it is taught in sex education in the Netherlands. *Weerbaarheid* skills include personal insight, decision-making, communication, and resource access and evaluation (Ferguson, Vanwesenbeeck, and Knijn 2008:99). Each of these skills is necessary to translate the knowledge gained from sexuality education into real practices and behaviors.

*Skill Development: Personal Insight*

 Personal insight refers to the ability to know and understand oneself – to understand your personal values, relationship needs, and sexual desires. Developing personal insight must be encouraged as early as possible. The best way to get children to begin considering their personal values and needs is by asking about them.

‘Let’s take a look at some behaviors that students tend to do with each other and talk about whether we like them, whether we don’t like them, or whether it depends’. . . There will be universal agreement on some and some responses of ‘sometimes’ to others. When they say ‘sometimes,’ ask ‘When do we like this? When do we NOT like this?’ (K-3:2)

Identifying and validating a range of interactional preferences helps children develop personal insight and builds a sense of agency by showing respect for their independence and autonomy. Exploring beliefs and values is crucial because of the immense influence they have in structuring personal development. According to Social Cognitive Theory, individuals’ actions are informed by their perceptions of social reality; thus, achieving positive behavioral changes first requires relevant changes to social cognitions, or the beliefs, attitudes, self-efficacy, and perception of social norms of an individual (Abel and Fitzgerald 2006:106). Altering perceptions of social reality is no simple feat, but the first step is prompting students to consciously identify their beliefs and consider how they originated.

Ask whether anyone has ever heard the word ‘dogma’ before. Say, ‘A dogma is a set of principles or values or beliefs we have. They may be informed by our families, our friends, our religious group if we have one, and just our own thoughts about what we do and don’t believe. When it comes to sexuality, we are making decisions based on what we know and what we believe. So when you think of making sexuality-related decisions, think about your own dogma.’ (9-6:2)

This message highlights the link between society, personal values, and sexual preferences and choices. It explains that sexuality-related decisions are influenced by personal beliefs and principles and that these beliefs and principles are influenced by society. Thus, in accordance with sexual citizenship theory, one’s sexual choices are very much a product of social influence.

A useful approach included in the *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* curriculum that seeks to encourage the development of personal insight is the use of a ‘forced choice’ exercise. The specific exercise included in the curriculum requires students to generate anonymous written responses to a series of value-based hypothetical statements. The teacher will collect the responses, redistribute them, and reread the statements out loud. Students will respond by moving to a designated part of the room to indicate if they agree or disagree with the statement on their paper. The teacher should prompt discussion following the exercise by asking students to reflect on the experience.

‘Thinking about both the experience of completing the worksheet individually, and then standing under the signs of someone else’s worksheet, what was it like to do that?’. . .’What did you notice about where people stood? Did you notice that there was a lot of agreement, or more variety and how people in this class feel about these boundaries?’ (11-2:2)

Such an exercise “invites introspection about [students’] personal sexuality-related beliefs and a comparison of these beliefs with those held by their peers” and serves to “foster individual and group exploration of feelings and attitudes and how these might affect decisions and behaviours” (Green, Hamarman, and McKee 2015:23). The anonymity built into the exercise planned in the curriculum is a smart addition, as it can encourage more honest responses.

 Students should be encouraged to explore their values and desires in all areas of their life from a young age; however, at the pre-adolescent and adolescent grade levels, it becomes especially important for sexuality education to ensure students feel supported in exploring values and desires related to sexuality in particular. This is not to say that a curriculum should depict students as “free to choose” in all situations or encourage them to go out and experiment with sex; legislation on the sexual rights of minors does limit their choices to an extent, and they should be aware of these restrictions (Albury and Crawford 2012:471). However, sexuality education does need to validate young people as sexual agents and give them the space and tools to understand their own desires and boundaries (Geary et al. 2013:438). If young people are not treated as autonomous sexual agents capable of making decisions for themselves, they will be limited in their ability to develop and practice the skills and self-awareness needed to make healthy choices.

 *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* does a very effective job of encouraging students to get in touch with their sexual needs regarding health and safety. One homework assignment in the curriculum instructs students to read an article about identifying and fulfilling personal needs.

Talking with the staff about my sexual health and getting birth control and safer sex methods to help myself and my partner prevent pregnancy and/or the transmission of STDs was extremely liberating for me. It gave me a sense that I was in control of my own sexuality. And it still makes me feel that way. (8-10:7)

Although consulting with healthcare providers and choosing appropriate contraception may not be the most thrilling topic for teenagers, the article’s framing of these actions makes it more palatable. By definition, citizenship entails the right to access and use resources and space within a given society (Hubbard 2001:54). Discussing how students can exercise this right and linking it explicitly to feelings of autonomy and independence appeals to a growing sense of agency within adolescents. Considering one’s needs and taking steps to address them is then seen less as an obligation or responsibility and more as a way to exercise individual power.

 The curriculum is successful in discussing how to identify and address sexual needs regarding health and safety, but it lacks sufficient emphasis on sexual needs related to desire and pleasure. *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* is not alone in lacking proper attention to sexual desire and pleasure; many sexuality education programs in the United States are plagued by what has come to be known as the “missing discourse of desire,” or a tendency of curricula to exclude desire and pleasure as a valid part of young people’s sexual subjectivity (Fine 1988). *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* does not lack this discourse completely, but instances where desire is discussed are always within a problematizing context.

Explain to the students that when they get older, they may have a boyfriend or girlfriend. Tell them that when they are in those kinds of relationships there may be different ways they will want to express their affection or love – which may be doing something sexual together. Explain that some of these behaviors may be more appropriate for younger people (e.g., kissing, holding hands, etc.), while others are more appropriate when they are older. Say, ‘One behavior that people your age should wait to do together until they are older is ‘sexual intercourse’. . .remember, there are lots of ways you can show other people you like or love them that don’t involve doing something sexual with those people.’ (6-6:2-3)

‘It’s important for each of you to figure out where you stand about decisions regarding sex so you can not only be clear for yourself but also find ways to be clear with any future partners.’ (9-7:3)

Both of these messages have some valuable content and some negative implications. The first normalizes desire, acknowledging it as a natural part of relationships, but it still positions desire as a potential threat that needs to be controlled. It urges students to think about the range of ways they can express desire and do so responsibly, but it only situates desire within the context of relationships. The message fails to communicate that a fulfilling sexuality “is something explored and embodied by one’s self and potentially in relationship with one’s partner(s)” (Cameron-Lewis and Allen 2013:129). Negotiating sexuality requires an understanding of one’s own desires; thus, desire should not only be presented in the context of relationships, but as something an individual can feel, explore, and benefit from on their own. The second excerpt communicates that understanding one’s own sexual desires is important because it can make boundaries more clear, but misses the opportunity to discuss how it can make sex more enjoyable. Both messages highlight important aspects of navigating desire, but they situate exploration of desire as a means for problem-avoidance rather than as a means for pleasure.

 Teaching about desire and pleasure in sexuality education is controversial due to a perceived social responsibility in Western societies to protect children’s innocence from the dangers of sexuality (Nielsen, Paasonen, and Spisak 2015:477). A sexual citizenship approach resists this socially-constructed vision of childhood, instead declaring that “sexual citizenship is helpful in re-thinking and re-affirming that the aim of sex education is to cultivate awareness and self-sufficiency in young people” (Illes 2012:620). A discourse of desire is both suited to and mandatory for any sexual citizenship approach to sexuality education because understanding desire is a crucial part of gaining personal insight. As discussed earlier, sexual scripts position heterosexual relationships at the center of the feminine identity, and as soon as young girls are exposed to these scripts, the process begins wherein “girls begin to look at themselves through the perspective of boys, and lose touch with their own feelings and desires” (Walker 1997:161). If a discourse of desire is not present in sexuality education from an early age, girls will begin to lose touch with their own desires before they are even given a chance to consider and explore them. If it is, the benefits are promising – for example, young women’s experiences of desire make them more capable of resisting coercive or unwanted sex (Tolman 2002). Boys’ experiences of desire are also shaped by sexual scripts from an early age and may lead them to associate violence and exploitation with desire and pleasure (Lamb, Lustig, and Graling 2013:315). Since individuals of all genders are confronted with sexual scripts that impact sexual desire, I believe a discourse of desire could ultimately benefit all students by helping them develop a complete and thoughtful sexual subjectivity.

*Skill Development: Decision-Making*

 The capacity to develop personal insight fashions students who know their values and what they do and do not want. This is a prerequisite for success in the next skill - decision-making. In *Rights, Respect, Responsibility*, students are provided with decision-making models to assist them in evaluating difficult situations. One example, the SMART model, outlines the best steps to take when faced with an important decision.

S – SLOW DOWN

M – MAKE A LIST OF YOUR OPTIONS

A – ANALYZE YOUR CHOICES

R – REACH A DECISION

T – THINK AND EVALUATE (7-8:5)

Teachers are instructed to walk the students through each step, encouraging students to think through their options and potential outcomes as thoroughly as possible. They should emphasize that, ultimately, an individual should pick the option that is right for themself and not base their decision on what friends or partners want them to do. When it comes to teaching students about evaluating choices and outcomes, the most effective approach provides a flexible structure for ethical sexual decision-making that avoids labeling any sexual choices “forbidden” or “permissible” (Albury et al. 2011:341). The SMART model is straightforward enough to leave room for students to nuance the ethics of their decisions on their own and shows respect for their right to self-determination. Its step-by-step format encourages, above all, active engagement with the decision-making process. This is crucial considering that interviews examining sexual ambivalence among young girls revealed that “notions of desire and consent were not well articulated, with many girls themselves not understanding or being aware of whether they had actually made a decision to have sex or not” (Geary et. al. 2013:442). Young people will always make both good and bad decisions, but if they do not have any insight into how they arrived at these decisions, they cannot learn from their experience. Imparting the importance of a conscious and deliberate decision-making process can minimize the chance of students making choices out of coercion or impulse.

 A key part of teaching decision-making skills, especially when considering how to address sexual ambivalence, is illuminating the bevy of factors that consciously and subconsciously influence decisions. Doing so can help students to identify and resist the pressures that may interfere with choosing the option that is truly best for them.

Who or what do I consider before making decisions about sexuality or relationships? How might using alcohol affect how I make decisions about sexuality or relationships, and whether I stick to them? How can thinking about people and messages around me help me with my future decisions about sexuality and relationships? (8-2:3)

Questions like these trigger exploration of personal motivations, potential outcomes, and possible influences that interfere with decision-making. It helps students differentiate between autonomous sexual decision-making, which may stem from feelings of love, desire, and curiosity, and non-autonomous sexual decision-making, which may be the result of intoxication or peer pressure (Hirst 2008:404). Awareness of the range of factors that impact and regulate sexual decision-making is crucial to maximize self-determination.

*Skill Development: Communication*

Effective communication is the next key skill for students, as it prepares them to confidently and convincingly carry out their decisions, negotiate with partners, and protect their rights. *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* first highlights the importance of communicating early in the curriculum.

It is important to be able to tell a friend when we are happy or sad or annoyed or angry, especially if we feel bad because if we don’t tell them and we keep it all bottled up inside it will make us feel even worse and our friend may not know we are upset or angry. (1-1:2)

This message expresses at the first grade level that it is the responsibility of each individual to speak up for themself. Not only does being honest and assertive protect one’s rights, it helps to foster close and mutually respectful relationships with others. This assertiveness is key to effective communication and is discussed more explicitly further along in the curriculum.

Being AGGRESSIVE is when someone tries to get what they want by bullying the other person into it. Being PASSIVE is when a person is unclear in expressing their needs or afraid to. Sometimes this means they won’t speak up about what they want, but just go along with what the other person wants. Being ASSERTIVE is when a person says what they want or mean without being hurtful to the other person. (5-5:2).

Here, aggressive communication is framed as disrespecting the rights of others; passive communication is framed as disrespecting one’s own rights. Assertiveness is the ideal middle ground, where the rights of oneself and others are taken into equal consideration. Covering this range of communication styles is important due to the fact that anticipation of an aggressive response from a partner significantly lowers the likelihood that an individual will assert themself against unwanted sex (Morokoff et al. 1997:802). Thus, promoting assertive communication and condemning aggressive communication go hand in hand in addressing sexual ambivalence.

 An aspect of communication worth discussing in any sexuality education curriculum is the impact of technology on how young people interact. Mediated communication via social media, texting, and instant messaging is changing the way young people build and manage relationships. On one hand, modern technology offers new forms of mediated self-representation that can encourage personal growth and agency (Albury and Crawford 2012:464). However, digital communication lacks the nuancing effects of tone, inflection, and body language, making it more difficult to interpret the meaning and intent behind a message (Meenagh 2015:463). This can lead to poor communication and misunderstandings between partners.

Ask, “How many of you have ever messaged with someone, either using a phone for texting or some other app?” After a few hands have been raised ask, “Have you ever misunderstood what someone meant when they messaged you – or had someone misunderstood what you meant?”. . .”Sometimes we don’t know what a person means because there’s no feeling behind the text. Or, people use shorthand – they think they’re being super clear, but we’re not sure what they mean, and vice versa.” (8-6:2)

In addition to this lesson, *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* offers an exercise for students to attempt to nuance text messages and digital conversations. In fact, young people are already finding ways to do this, replacing the insights gained from non-verbal cues with that obtained from “second-order information,” or “the background knowledge of a situation and expectations of communication that allows one to interpret the words” (Gershon 2010:123). Knowing that young people will continue to develop relationships via mediated communication, allowing them to engage with the topic and discuss ways to clarify and interpret text communication is beneficial. However, it is best when paired with clear messages about the limits and dangers of digital communication in conveying and interpreting meaning.

*Skill Development: Resource Access and Evaluation*

 The final skill to consider in addressing sexual ambivalence is a student’s ability to seek and obtain information independently. This includes knowing where to go for help and how to evaluate sources in order to get valid, reliable advice. *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* cultivates these abilities in students throughout the curriculum.

Tell students that the best way to stop unwanted touching or bullying or teasing is to tell a trusted adult about it. This is not a problem that kids can solve by themselves. They need help from adults. (2-4:3)

This message communicates to children that they have the full and complete right to bodily autonomy, but that their position as kids may require them to seek support from an adult. As subjects denied the powers of full citizenship, children’s rights are limited in the aim of protecting them (Illes 2012:616). The resulting vulnerability makes it especially crucial to re-affirm their sexual rights and help them identify specific adults who can act in their interest to protect those rights.

 Students must also be aware of other sources of information and assistance, especially as they get older and gain access to more media and the Internet. The focus here must be on critical skills. *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* offers opportunities for teachers to analyze and evaluate sources with students.

So, when I read ‘it’s your sex life,’ it makes me feel like that organization wants me to take responsibility for and care of myself. I’d kind of like that as a teen, I think it’d make me feel really capable and mature. What also stands out even before I click on the link is that it refers to the CDC. The CDC is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and it’s the leading national public health organization in the U.S. It’s also a part of the U.S. government. I know this because the ending – the part that comes after ‘CDC’ is ‘.gov.’ So if I see the CDC mentioned, I know they’ve done their homework and that the information is accurate. (6-7:7)

This lesson helps students identify context clues that can yield insight into the legitimacy of a source. Further, it highlights the benefits of learning to evaluate information, pointing out the feelings of agency that result from taking responsibility for one’s health. The quality of adolescent-targeted sex information online is not consistent, but most young people will take an independent approach to learning about sexuality at some point (Simon and Daneback 2013). Thus, even for young people who received a thorough and progressive sexuality education, the ability to seek and obtain useful information on their own is a key skill to lifelong sexual health.

 In addition to evaluating sources of sexual health information, students should also be equipped to evaluate the legitimacy of messages they receive through the media. Elements of media such as language, images, targeting, and representations engage all actively with meaning production to influence young people’s perceptions of social reality (Bragg 2006:322) Students should be aware of this influence and how it affects their expectations regarding sexuality.

Finally, ask what they think the potential impact of these expectations are on romantic and sexual relationships. This discussion will vary from class to class, but you will want to probe for:

* People may expect sex to go a certain way and feel unprepared for or vulnerable when it does not go as expected. . .
* People may assume consent from their partner because they may think everyone of their partner’s gender “is like that”
* People may not realize how important it is to talk about sex as well as about feelings before and during, because this isn’t usually modeled in the media (12-5:3)

A critical lens on media messages about sexuality can help to combat the indoctrination of sexual scripts, especially their tendency to misrepresent and devalue the role of consent (Jozkowski et al. 2014:905). It also serves to challenge presumptions about sexuality that young people who are becoming sexually active may use as a guideline for their behavior. Instead of using information learned from the media as a basis for what sexuality should look like, students learn to challenge these expectations, find reliable sources, and depend more on communication to inform their sexual interactions.

*Chapter Conclusion*

 Exploring the three root causes of sexual ambivalence and how they can effectively be addressed has illuminated the strengths offered by a sexual citizenship approach. For each necessary feature of a successful curriculum, a sexual citizenship framework offers a unique relevance and advantage. Sexual citizenship theory is well equipped for the deconstruction of sexual scripts due to its rejection of the public/private or personal/political divides. Its core assertion that sexuality is a site of social and political interference automatically facilitates a critical analysis of how socialization impacts the formation of gender identity and sexual subjectivity. For the goal of combatting interpersonal coercion, sexual citizenship theory offers a rights-based perspective that situates consent as self-determination and lends credibility beyond moral implications to the condemnation of coercive behavior. Finally, the aim of cultivating key skills among young people benefits from a sexual citizenship approach through its focus on self-sufficiency. It is apt for the framing of skill development as a way to increase personal agency and work towards “leveling the playing field” in a society where not every individual has the same access to power and privilege.

**Chapter Four**

**Limitations and Conclusions**

 In this chapter, I will consider the limitations of a sexual citizenship approach in order to give a nuanced perspective of the extent of its applicability and advantages. Then I will conclude my main findings from this paper and offer suggestions for further research.

*Limitations of a Sexual Citizenship Approach*

 Although there are many clear benefits of a curriculum based on sexual citizenship for addressing sexual ambivalence, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of such an approach as well. The emphasis on collective responsibility for the wellbeing of the community at large is useful for building agency and accountability, but at times it can be a homogenizing approach. Encouraging students to see themselves as equal in power and responsibility to their peers can address feelings of inferiority and poor self esteem that lead to sexual ambivalence and harmful sexual behaviors (Aggleton and Campbell 2000:290). However, it fails to give due respect to the external factors that prevent certain students from actually being able to assume the same level of responsibility. Sexuality education should consider the unique obstacles some students face that may make it harder to implement program teachings in their own lives (Browes 2015:666). Although sexual citizenship theory heavily nuances the way marginalized groups are denied certain privileges and powers of citizenship, incorporating this discussion in an educational context is difficult, as it may make students who identify within these marginalized groups feel disempowered and cast as victims.

 Recognizing the limited power of certain groups can make those students uncomfortable, but failing to do so can alienate them as well. Young people who belong to marginalized groups are aware of and affected by the discrimination and systemic obstacles they face, so failing to acknowledge this could perpetuate their social exclusion. Feeling socially excluded can lead to a “them and us” dichotomy that prevents students from feeling connected to and responsible for their school or community (Limmer 2010:352). This connection and sense of belonging with the community is crucial for a sexual citizenship approach. Elaborating on the limited power of marginalized groups can threaten this connection by singling out certain students and causing them to feel set apart from the rest of the class, but failing to do so properly can also result in feelings of alienation and invisibility that prevent the formation of community attachment.

 Another limitation to consider, particularly in reference to *Rights, Respect, Responsibility*, is access. A major benefit of this curriculum is its availability online and free of cost. However, the curriculum’s dependence on input from students, discussions, group activities, and an overall sense of community makes the curriculum far less effective for a student who may be using the content on their own to take an individual approach to sexuality education. Skills like communication and refusal methods can prepare students to navigate sexual ambivalence, but are best cultivated through exercises that allow students the opportunity to practice and develop these skills. Being unable to conduct the role play assignments and other exercises for practical application may severely limit the curriculum’s effectiveness outside of a classroom setting[[11]](#endnote-11). Thus, while it is a valuable goal to increase the online accessibility of sexuality education resources, the long-term goal at hand is to implement progressive sexuality education nationwide in schools so that all students can benefit from in-person instruction and class interaction.

*Conclusion*

 Evaluating the Advocates for Youth curriculum revealed some valuable insights into my research question: What implications does a sexuality education approach theoretically based in sexual citizenship have for addressing sexual ambivalence among young people? Based on my analysis of *Rights, Respect, Responsibility*, I believe such an approach is rife with positive implications. Sexual scripts are the root cause of sexual ambivalence, and these scripts begin shaping gendered identity formation from a very young age. A curriculum promoting sexual citizenship validates the sexual citizen status of children and thus allows for sexuality education to begin as soon as children enter school. This can help to combat sexual scripts as early as possible and makes room for ample time for skill development throughout the educational process. Additionally, teaching children how to embody the positive elements of citizenship in discussing bullying, family and peer relationships, and other relational contexts can prepare them for discussing and applying these elements in sexual contexts at a later age.

 A sexual citizenship approach also offers an innovative framing of consent as self-determination. This centers consent on the self and associates giving or withholding consent with satisfying one’s own wants or needs. This can combat the tendency for individuals experiencing sexual ambivalence to consent to sexual activity out of obligation to others or in the interest of anything but their own desire to do so. It also allows for the incorporation of the principle of mutual consent as a right demanding legal protection, resulting in a stronger message against sexual assault than one based on ethics or morality alone. Additionally, a discourse of desire fits into this framework as a path to personal insight, which allows for self-determination that achieves a healthy and pleasurable sexuality.

 The focus on universal rights and responsibilities taken by a sexual citizenship approach also shows promise for addressing the gendered aspects of sexual ambivalence and its causes in a way that avoids alienating men or victimizing women. It communicates that everyone is responsible for rewriting sexual scripts and respecting others’ rights to self-determination, while also using the concept of citizenship to nuance this and illustrate the particular role men play in preventing sexual assault. Its validation of various family structures, gender identities, sexual orientations, and cultural customs expands traditional notions of citizenship by encouraging younger generations to be more accepting and challenging the stigmatization of these differences that limits the citizenship privileges of minorities.

 A sexual citizenship approach to sexuality education shows promise for aiding the development of a healthy and agentic sexual subjectivity and addressing sexual ambivalence and its causes. Future work could nuance this further by investigating the effects of sexual ambivalence on young men and individuals of non-binary genders. Additionally, more work is needed to determine the implications of a sexual citizenship approach to sexuality education overall. Addressing sexual ambivalence is just one aspect of sexuality education. In order to contribute to a more holistic understanding of its potential, future research should consider the application of sexual citizenship theory to other topics and objectives, such as contraceptive use, sexual and domestic violence, and reproductive health. Finally, the key issues and concerns regarding sexuality that are faced by young people are not static, so continuous research is necessary to stay informed of students’ needs and where lapses currently exist in sexuality education.

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**Notes**

1. This statistic was obtained from an Evaluation and Performance Measurement report by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Adolescent Health ([www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/evaluation/](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/evaluation/)). Abstinence-only programs promote the avoidance of sexual activity outside of marriage. They focus on the dangers of being sexually active, such as sexually transmitted disease and unplanned pregnancy, and fail to present any knowledge or skills useful for alternatives to abstinence. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This statistic was obtained from a report by Lindberg et al. (2016) entitled “Changes in Adolescent’s Receipt of Sex Education 2006-2013,” published in *Journal of Adolescent Health*. The decline in availability of sex education for young women in rural America since 2006 is based on a comparison of figures from 2006 to 2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. RNW Media’s online sexuality education curriculum is entitled *Love Matters* and seeks to offer sex-positive information on sexual health and intimate relationships. The curriculum targets young people aged 18 to 30 in India, Latin America, Africa, China, and the Arab World. More information on the project and links to country-specific curricula can be found at <https://www.rnw.org/activities/love-matters>.

 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. I conducted a summative content analysis as defined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) in their paper “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis.” Summative content analysis requires the identification of content within a text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of this content. Its defining feature is the incorporation of latent content analysis, or the interpretation of content to discover its underlying meanings (1283-1284). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The National Sexuality Education Standards were developed by an advisory committee consisting of academics and professionals working in the fields of physical education, sexuality studies, and public health. These research-based standards aim to outline minimum, essential content for sexuality education programs. The seven topics comprising this content are anatomy and physiology, puberty and adolescent development, identity, pregnancy and reproduction, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, healthy relationships, and personal safety. The standards recommend that students can fully comprehend the core concepts, analyze key environmental influences, access necessary information, demonstrate effective interpersonal communication, make decisions, set goals, self-manage, and advocate for their own health and the health of others. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. The CDC is part of the Department of Health and Human Services and seeks to promote health security in the United States through conducting research and publishing health information for the public. Its recommended sexual health education components include healthy relationships, environmental influences, benefits of sexual abstinence, condom use and safe sex, communication and negotiation skills, goal-setting and decision-making skills, health consequences of HIV, STDS, and pregnancy, reducing sexual risk behaviours among oneself and others, limiting the number of sexual partners, finding and accessing reliable information, and preventive care for reproductive and sexual health. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Advocates for Youth supports a non-binary approach to gender. Each lesson plan includes the following note about gendered language use:

Language is really important and we’ve intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar – using the pronoun “they” instead of “her” or “him”, using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to “someone with a vulva” vs. a girl or woman. This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom, and should make adjustments accordingly.

The curriculum is not perfect in avoiding heteronormativity or gender essentialism, but the measures it does take are commendable. This is significant and contributes to the categorization of *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* as a progressive curriculum because of the traditional exclusion of sexual and gender minorities (i.e. non-heterosexual orientations, taboo but consensual sexualities, trans and non-binary identities) from the ‘public sphere’ as a way of limiting the power and privileges of citizenship available for these groups (Evans 1993:6). Including and validating these identities re-situates them within a citizenship role with the potential for full and influential agency. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. *Rights, Respect, Responsibility* can be downloaded in full at <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/3rs-curriculum>. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. The Sexual Assertiveness Scale (Morokoff et al. 1997) measures sexual assertiveness in women through the contributing factors of sexual initiation, refusal, and prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The model also raises sexual experience, anticipated partner response, and self-efficacy as predictive of sexual assertiveness. A woman’s capacity for each of these factors is related to the satisfaction, power dynamics, and longevity of a relationship. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. This summary of sexual scripts and gender roles is informative and to the point for the context of this paper, but certainly oversimplifying of the depth of this topic. The scripting of gender and sexuality is a topic of broad relevance and explored at length by numerous scholars, one of the most notable being Judith Butler in her theory of gender performativity (1990). Such an understanding of gender as a social construction has paved the way for further examination into the function and formation of gender roles, revealing their significance for a wide and interdisciplinary array of inquiries. Perhaps relevant to some themes of this paper is the relationship of gender roles to the reproduction of capitalist hegemony. For insight into gendered divisions of labor and other links between gender and capitalism, Evans (1990) points to Oakley (1982), Engels (1968), and McIntosh (1984). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Green, Hamarman, and McKee (2015) recently theorized approaches for adapting in-person teaching methods to be effective online. In determining how to translate activities from a classroom to online context, they encourage the identification of the specific elements of the activity that make it successful in person, the consideration of how these elements can be replicated online with minimal modification, and/or the incorporation of the core goals and objectives of the original activity into the online approach (21). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)