

EDUCATING THE WHOLE, HOLY HUMAN
An Analysis of Intimacy and Sexuality Education in Jewish Spaces

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to analyze the current and potential landscape of formal and **informal “Jewish Intimacy and Sexuality Education”**, a term coined in this thesis grouping programming that seeks to bring together Jewish Education, Sexuality education, Comprehensive Sex Education, LGBTQ+ education, and Psychology/Trauma informed education. The core argument is that intimacy and sexuality are at the core of what it means to be human, and in relationship with ourselves and others. Jewish organizations should be intentionally addressing topics related to intimacy and sexuality in ways that authentically bring in Jewish values, practice, and texts in order to support the needs and experiences of Jewish humans throughout their life cycles in ongoing learning. In order for Jewish organizations and their educators to do this well, there needs to be a collection and expansion of resources.

The three core, research-based chapters take a different approach to research. Chapter 3 analyzes the survey data collected broadly surveying the landscape of formal and informal Jewish and Sexuality education. Chapter 4 reviews educational resources already in existence that could aid Jewish educators and organizations seeking to prioritize Jewish Intimacy and Sexuality Education. Chapter 5 analyzes the interviews with experts in some of the fields encompassed in Jewish Intimacy and Sexuality Education.

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Thank you to Cathy Stanley, who taught me that Comprehensive Sex Education belongs in Jewish spaces just as much as it belongs everywhere else. Thank you to Dr. Betsy Stone, Sarah Stone, Essie Shachar Hill, Barrett Harr, Rabbi Dr. Laura Novak Winer, Ira Miller, Rabbi Avi Orlow, Rabbi Jenn Queen, Stacy Shapiro, Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi, and Michaela Brown for taking time to share your wisdom, your experiences, and your resources with me during our interviews and chats. Thank you also to everyone who took my survey, encouraged others to take it, and sent me resource suggestions.

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Educating the Whole, Holy Human:

An Analysis of Intimacy and Sexuality Education in Jewish Spaces

Introduction

At the beginning of my rabbinical school career, when I mentioned that I studied **Women's Studies**¹ as an undergraduate student, I was often met with surprise. “Wow! **Women's Studies and the Rabbinate? Could you have picked two paths more different from one another?**” People would say... but to me the subjects did not feel far apart at all. A core part of my undergraduate studies was questioning, reflecting upon, and **learning about how societal norms and each individual's different identities affect their** person and their experiences of the world. Through my time in rabbinical school, my studies raised for me **both the questions of how one's experience as a whole, complex human affects one's Jewish experience as well as how Judaism can bring wisdom to the** experience of being a whole, complex human. In addition, both feminism and Judaism brought forth questions around the role of practice and action in relation to beliefs and values. The questions cited above are incredibly important in helping individuals build self-understanding as well as helping communities explore how to meet needs of the many humans who may be wrestling with their own experience as Jews, as complex humans, or both. In trying to bring together my background in Gender Studies and my passion for Judaism in a more intentional way, I became interested in the ways that Jewish communities provided implicit and explicit education that provided space to reflect on these questions and provide helpful and healthy information reflected on

¹ While the department was entitled Women's Studies, my learning more accurately would be defined as Gender studies or Feminist Studies

different elements of identity, intimacy, relationships, and sexuality - which are core to many of the human experiences which community members may encounter in their own lives. Through the research presented in this thesis, it has become apparent that Jewish Communities and organizations have significant room to grow in these areas.

One of the primary arenas where these questions are present is in Jewish **organizations' approaches to Intimacy and Sexuality education in authentically Jewish ways. Building upon what is known as "Sex Education,"** Intimacy and Sexuality education is the language this thesis uses to expand the definition of Sex Education beyond pregnancy, puberty, and STDs often taught in late middle school or high school. **"Jewish Intimacy and Sexuality Education", a term coined for this thesis,** groups programming that seeks to bring together Jewish Education, Sexuality education, Comprehensive Sex Education, LGBTQ+ education, and Psychology/Trauma informed education. While the Comprehensive Sex Education movement has also done significant work to expand the definition of Sex Education and to bring more accurate information, there is a distinction between what is at the central of the educational goals. Although many of the topics can and do relate to sex, the central focus of intimacy and sexuality education is the bringing foundational questions, knowledge, and skills about what it means to be human, to be in relationship - **with one's self and with others,** and to be in community.

Within the realm of Intimacy and Sexuality education, this thesis explores whether and how Jewish organizations address the following topics: Gender Identity or Gender Roles; Sexual Identity or Coming out of the Closet; Sexual Relations & Physical Intimacy; Readiness for Physical Intimacy, or lack thereof; Romantic Relationships & Emotional Intimacy; Desire; Peer Pressure; Ways to Say No to Unwanted Physical or

Emotional Intimacy; Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure; Healthy, Safe Relationships vs Unhealthy, Abusive Relationships; Sexual Assault, Unethical Sexual Contact, or "Good Touch vs Bad Touch"; Communication, Consent, and/or Implementing Boundaries; Body Diversity; Ability Diversity; Body Image or Self Esteem; Emotional and/or Mental Health; and Reflection on "Who I am" to myself, others, and my community.

Jewish Intimacy and Sexuality education is meant to provide sex-positive **opportunities to explore these different elements of one's human experience in developmentally appropriate ways at different parts of one's lifetime** and revisited as one develops. For example, when teaching kindergarteners, one isn't going to be talking about different kinds of sex acts, STDs, or the Mishneh Torah² on **"forbidden intercourse,"** but Jewish organizations could consider addressing through stories, songs, and short discussion sessions different types of families, building self esteem, being **created b'tzelem elohim, loving touch vs unloving touch, or ways to express joy through celebration.**³ Whether or not it is comfortable to admit, many of the different topics named above already apply to the lives of Jewish learners who are at different stages of development. While it is not possible to know everything that is going on in the lives of **each community member, there is value in creating spaces that affirm learners'** experiences and identities and that center around the joys and the challenges of being human in ways that meet their developmental needs. Similar to the ways Jewish

² The Mishneh Torah is a legal work by Maimonides compiled in the 12th century. - The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Mishne Torah." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1998, www.britannica.com/topic/Mishne-Torah.

³ 4 of the 5 of these topics are addressed in *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades K-1*, by Barbara Sprung.

educational organizations address Torah Stories, Jewish history, or Israel, through addressing these topics multiple times, Jewish communities, educators, and learners can spend their time together building upon their knowledge base to have more nuanced understandings and reflections about both being human, being Jewish, and how humanity and Judaism fit together. These conversations are all vital to so many in our Jewish communities and organizations at different parts of their lives, and they should be topics which Jewish communities and organizations feel responsible to address in authentic, meaningful, and holistic ways.

This is not the first time that the concern of addressing sexuality in liberal Jewish spaces has been raised. In response to a trend of young people becoming sexually active earlier and earlier, a group of Reform Educators and leaders of the Union for Reform Judaism came together in the early 2000's **to create** *Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics* curriculum.⁴ While individual congregations had attempted to fill the gap educators saw in the public school system around factual information around Sex, educator Rabbi Laura Novak-Winer and the rest of the *Sacred Choices* compilation team found that adolescents were not receiving guidance on healthy decision making and Jewish ethics. As Rabbi Eric Yoffie said in his 2005 **keynote speech at the URJ's General Assembly announcing the development of the** *Sacred Choices* curriculum,

That our kids need our guidance is indisputable, and they are puzzled by our failure to offer it. The following comes from a teenage girl, a member **of one of our congregations: "I have the opinion that [my Judaism] should have a lot to say about my relationship with a guy. It's not just whether**

⁴ Winer, Laura Novak. (2011). Ibid. 6. pg 22.

or not to have sex. What about honesty? What about communication? What about touching? What about respecting and being respected? No one helps you with this. The Torah has all these confusing teachings.

Which parts really apply to life today?” The issue here is not the cold and clinical biological facts, which are generally available. The issue is the ethics of relationships and sexuality, which are not.⁵

The thirst for a space to address in an honest, Jewishly rooted, **reflective way one’s** personal life presented itself even back then. In response to this thirst, the team created two curricula - one for middle school students and one for high school students. The URJ Press published these curricula toward the end of the 2000s - the Middle School module being published in 2007 and the High School module in 2008.⁶ This was quite revolutionary for its time; however, there are a number of gaps that have needed to be covered even in these intentional curricula, and there have been no updates or newer editions written since.

From the research which I will detail later in this thesis, one cannot address Intimacy and Sexuality education without noting access to current Intimacy and Sexuality education resources and development of new ones. At the beginning of distribution, the Sacred Choices curricula were used by a number of organizations - especially in the United States and Canada; however, today, organizations use it less and less as the content has become out of date⁷. In addition, some Jewish organizations have incorporated lessons and goals from Our Whole Lives, a series of holistic Sex Ed

⁵ Yoffie, E. (2005). Presidential sermon address to the Union for Reform Judaism’s sixty-eighth general assembly. Retrieved from <http://urj.org/learning/teacheducate/adolescents/sacredchoices>

⁶ Winer, Laura Novak. (2011). Ibid. 6. pg 22.

⁷ Novak Winer, Rabbi Laura. “Interview.” 5 Nov. 2020. Transcript pg 6.

curricula meant to be taught throughout one's lifetime developed by the Unitarian Universalist Church.^{8 9} As can be expected, others have created resources or program ideas to fit their educational needs. Jewish communities around the country have different needs and different priorities in addressing intimacy related topics. Thus, there needs to be a diversity of educational tools that will either fit or be easily adapted to local needs.

Through the research presented, this thesis will attempt to make a case not only that intimacy and sexuality education is a necessary project that Jewish organizations should take upon themselves, but also that in doing so there needs to be more development of resources that address the cultural and practical barriers to Jewish communities, their educators, and their learners which prevent such education from taking place.

Cultural Barriers to Jewish Organizations, Their Educators, and Their Learners

It is important to note that conversations around intimacy and sexuality are often considered to be inappropriate, uncomfortable, and taboo. We cannot have these conversations without acknowledging that discussing them is countercultural to the Christian-influenced, wider American society where sex and shame are inherently linked¹⁰. Due to the extreme discomfort that comes from addressing topics connected to sex, sexuality, or intimacy of any nature, it is understandable that some organizations choose to talk around these subjects or wait for the subject to come up rather than provide proactive, explicit education and reflection upon them. This discomfort can

⁸ "Our Whole Lives" *InSpirit: UUA Bookstore and Gift Shop: Our Whole Lives*, Unitarian Universalist Association, www.uuabookstore.org/Our-Whole-Lives-C1341.aspx.

⁹ This will be discussed further in chapters to come.

¹⁰ Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. "Interview." 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 24

prevent organizations from intentional thinking both about the explicit educational opportunities they provide and the implicit messages about these topics they send to their learners beyond the classroom.

There is no doubt that the baggage many carry with them around when **community members hear the words “Sex,” “intimacy,” and “sexuality”** impact the way in which Jewish organizations and educators go about designing educational experiences. Many Jewish communities are already concerned about having such little **time to educate about “basic Jewish knowledge,” such as the Torah, holidays, and shabbat prayers,** so Jewish intimacy and sexuality education may seem supplementary **to, or a distraction from, “core” Jewish teachings.** In addition, for those who choose to address intimacy and sexuality education, there is concern about who can teach these topics, what topics will be addressed, and how they will transform the learning environment so that students can feel safe and avoid embarrassment as much as possible.¹¹ Even for organizations who educate around intimacy and sexuality topics, there is concern about parents who may not want to expose their children to these subjects, which can influence the development of programs and courses.¹²

Practical Barriers to Jewish Organizations and Their Educators

While discomfort and taboo are major barriers in bringing intimacy and sexuality education to Jewish communities, through the research in this thesis it became apparent that these are not the only barriers. First of all, there is no central place to find a diversity of intimacy and sexuality educational resources. While there is certainly a need for new resources, there are a diversity of resources that exist already but are not

¹¹ Miller, Ira. “Interview.” 16 Oct. 2020. Transcript pg 11.

¹² Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. “Interview.” 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 6.

easily found unless one knows another person with access who is allowed to share. These resources primarily exist for adolescents, but not exclusively so. These resources include both widespread curricula (like that of Sacred Choices, Moving Traditions, or Our Whole Lives¹³) and curricula/lesson plans that individual educators have developed. They also include - but are not limited to - books, articles, theses/capstone projects, podcasts, and program write ups.

Additionally, those who are doing the work of Jewish intimacy education currently doing so in an isolated manor. There are no organizations or professional groups which allow people who are trying to bring these topics to their Jewish organization together, to help clergy, educators, or lay leaders invested in the project of Intimacy and Sexuality education as they search for curricular resources, professional development, problem solving, mentorship, or new ideas. Without easily found access to these resources or supports, Jewish individuals or organizations that want to take on the project of bringing intimacy and sexuality education to their communities may feel as though they have to choose between recreating the wheel, waiting until they can find the resources that meet their needs, or doing nothing.

Practical Barriers to Jewish Learners

While there are a number of organizations that are doing good work in addressing in some form adolescent sexuality, few Jewish organizations have created a culture of revisiting these types of learning and conversation topics **throughout one's lifetime. Without an opportunity to revisit at different parts in one's life, intimacy and**

¹³ Sacred Choices and Moving Traditions were both created with adolescents and teens in mind. Our Whole Lives, like the name connotes, was developed with resources starting in kindergarten going all the way through older adulthood.

sexuality education are scheduled once “when learners will likely need it” - during middle school and high school. Through addressing these types of conversations and educational attempts as a box to be checked off in 8th grade or high school - often being taught behind closed doors - there are a number of barriers for learners preventing them from acquiring information or support before it is offered. Because these topics are considered taboo or embarrassing, learners may not reach out for support because they **don’t know how or to whom they should be reaching out. If organizations wait until after b’nai mitzvah to begin Jewish intimacy and sexuality education**, this prevents a number of young people from receiving the information when they need it or at all - as a number **of students drop out of Jewish involvement after b’nai mitzvah**. Thus, learners who do end up dropping out may never know the kinds of support the community where they learned want to provide for them. Even for people who may have attended a singular program that took place during their adolescence, because these topics are societally taboo, without opportunities to ask questions or explore ongoing learning, people of all **ages who are going through different struggles may feel as though they don’t know** where they will be safe to pursue help or support.

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Many of the conversations around our personal lives, sex, and intimacy can feel awkward to talk about to many. That being said, our personal lives - including our human experiences of intimacy and sexuality - are just as much torah as our written **texts. They are the sources of conflict, passion, fear, love, and wisdom... and they often** inspire the search for connection that brings Jews to have Jewish friendships, relationships, community participation, and - believe it or not - learning. Like the Torah, we are not meant to read or learn about the parshiyot just once, but rather, we should

turn and turn throughout our lives readdressing and reaffirming the interconnection between our experiences as human beings and Jewish values, wisdom, and community.

-Chapter 1-

My Relationship to Jewish Intimacy & Sexuality Education

My passion for this Jewish Intimacy and Sexuality education is not new. Since my time as an eighth-grade religious school student, I have found myself drawn to and **inspired by the importance of addressing one's whole person in Jewish spaces** - including the more personal or vulnerable elements. In this chapter, I have included some snapshots of experiences that influenced me to pursue the research I will describe later in this thesis.

Jewish Personal Living: An 8th Grade Student's Perspective

“Yes, sex is pretty funny-looking, but one of the reasons we do it is because it feels **good. Don't you think that the older adults you love** - your parents, your grandparents - **deserve to feel good?**” This provocative question makes even adults feel squeamish, yet it was a question posed to me and my classmates at the Ivriah Religious School¹⁴ in our **8th grade religious school class, “Jewish Personal Living.”** This course, rooted in a comprehensive sexuality education philosophy, was created and taught by a member and leader of our community who was a certified sexuality educator, Cathy Stanley. While the school districts we attended did provide some form of sex education, due to Michigan law such education was rooted in abstinence. Seeing a need to address the gaps in our education around sex in public schools, Cathy brought her passion and skills **to Ivriah so that the Jewish students present could be well informed on “personal life”** issues that they would likely encounter.

¹⁴ Ivriah - a combination of Ivrit (Hebrew) and Sifriyah (Library) was the name of the religious school shared by the Reform and Conservative congregations of Flint, MI.

In this semester-long course, we talked plainly about body parts, practiced putting a condom on a banana¹⁵, distinguished between healthy and unhealthy signs in relationships, discussed the reality and repercussions of depression and suicidality, and created a culture where it was okay to bring up questions we had on related topics. In **this class, I learned that it is important to get accurate information and that I don't have** to leave my understanding of these topics to chance. As students, we were confronted with the fact that even though the subject matter we addressed in class was often awkward and sometimes challenging, we were better equipped to make decisions and speak about these topics in the future when we were willing to deal with the discomfort. Most importantly, for me it brought **together the ideas that Judaism and one's Personal Life didn't have to be addressed in separate spaces** - we could talk about it even in our religious school building. **While I wasn't aware of it at the time, this course started me** on a lifetime path of trying to bring education around sex, sexuality, relationships, and mental health into Jewish spaces.

Bringing Learning and Teaching Together:

Teaching Religious School as a Women's Studies Major

"Wait... but what if she says okay but her body is stiff, and she seems a bit **scared?" The room was** silent, and I paused to think of exactly the correct words to say to answer this question and to express internal gratitude that this question came up. **During a session about "How We Talk About Sex"** - addressing consent and slut shaming, I provided my 9th grade students with consent scenarios similar to this

¹⁵ A practice that was no longer allowed in public schools because it included "distributing contraception on school grounds." Public schools quickly stopped in order to prevent the state pulling funding. - https://www.moash.org/uploads/1/1/5/8/115876627/condom_availability_programs-2.pdf

question, hoping to prompt them to think about the ethical and healthy way to respond before they were making “in the heat of the moment” decisions. The room was silent as I began to speak, and I could tell from the students’ focused, concerned looks on their faces - especially from my male students - that they had not previously thought about this type of situation and that they wanted to know the answer. My students’ concern about the answer to whether it was okay to have sex with someone who said it was okay but the body language said otherwise gave me a sense of hope. Through asking this question and ones similar to it, they were trying to learn what to pay attention to as they became intimate with others so that they would not make the wrong decision. Despite the fact that statistics show that every 73 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted, I walked away from this lesson believing that beyond the fact that my students did not want to add to this statistic as victims, they also did not want to contribute to this statistic as perpetrators.¹⁶ Questions like those that arose during the “How We Talk About Sex” lesson were exactly the reason I wanted to address this topic with my 9th graders as I taught them in Spring 2014.

The year before, in Spring of 2013, I approached the education director of Temple Beth Emeth with a proposal. At that point there was no class on the subject of Judaism, Identities, and Sexuality. As a Women’s Studies major, I was passionate about what I was learning but also noticed that there were incredibly large lacunae when it came to issues around identity, sex, and relationships. As someone who was looking toward the rabbinate, I felt pulled to teaching young people about how Judaism applied to their everyday lives, and how they could use Jewish values and wisdom to help gauge healthy

¹⁶ *Statistics* | RAINN. (2018). RAINN. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics>

and ethical practices in their personal lives. Thus, it seemed important to find ways to educate my religious school students around these topics that would quickly be applying to the lives of these students - **if they hadn't already. I was lucky to work at a religious** school where I could name that I saw a need for such a class on Judaism and Intimacy to the Director of Education, be approved to create something to address the gap, and then go ahead to teach it despite it not being on the list of prioritized topics by the congregation or religious school board. This is not the landscape for all religious school communities. Thus, I began developing a 6-week course for 9th graders to be taught a **year later. I called "Jewish Personal Living" as a namesake to my own educational** experience as an 8th grader. This curriculum explored Gender, Sexuality, Healthy & Unhealthy Relationships, Body Image, How we Talk about Sex (Consent & Slut Shaming), and Mental Health and how all of these subjects intersected with Jewish values and Jewish thought.

Hippy Chug: Bringing Identity and Judaism together at Camp

Jewish camp is a place where personal life issues and intimacy are addressed implicitly on a daily basis. Counselors notice the mental health of their campers. Counselors and campers alike choose what Shabbat outfits they will choose and try to **make themselves look "Shabbat Ready" - perhaps as they prepare for a "Shabbat Walk" with their crush. As a camp counselor who hadn't gone to this specific Jewish camp, I** was touched by the efforts that female staff made to not make negative comments about

their bodies in front of campers, to celebrate first periods with “period parties,”¹⁷ and to encourage gratitude for our bodies with lights out games like “I Love My Body.”¹⁸

While I saw a lot of promising practices in place at OSRUI, the camp I worked at the summers of 2013-2015, there were still plenty of opportunities for more formal programming around personal identities and challenging societal norms around gender and bodies. When I learned that my unit - which worked with 7-9th graders - provided an opportunity for any counselor to create their own elective, I jumped at the opportunity to address more formally the messages that campers got around their gender and their bodies - **and to teach them how to challenge the messages they don’t identify with.** We candidly talked about dress codes and sports and sexual identity and slut shaming and unfair assumptions while sitting under shady trees around camp. We created collages from magazines to contrast images that felt harmful from images that felt empowering. We explored representation through creating a petition demanding that there be shabbat stories where the main character was a woman. Campers and counselors from many different units across camp later signed this petition, and the petition was later presented to the long-time director of camp, Jerry Kaye. Again and again, the campers contributed to the conversations in an impassioned manner, came up with their own ideas for conversations and programs, and brought their thoughts **outside of the allotted “Hippy Chug” time to cabin time and meals. They showed that**

¹⁷ These were cabin-wide parties where campers got decked out in red attire, and ate red snacks such as fruit punch and twizzlers

¹⁸ The rules of this game were that each person in the cabin had to go around the room and say a part of their body that they were grateful for and why. There was a range in depth from comments like “I like my hair because it is pretty” to “I like my legs because they allow me to get to the places I need to go”. At the end everybody would yell as loud as they could “I LOVE MY BODY!”

these were conversations they craved and they brought many of the takeaways to other areas of their lives at camp.

Faith to Faith: an Interfaith Forum on Sexual Assault and Relationship Abuse

As the #MeToo movement thrived on the internet, I couldn't help but think about the ways that gender-based violence impacted religious communities. I was especially struck by the fact that depending on the messages and the actions community members and clergy made regarding these subjects, religious communities could be either a source of support or a source of silencing, shame, and pain for survivors of gender-based violence. Statistics told us 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men experience contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime and reported some form of Intimate Partner Violence-related impact¹⁹. They also told us, as I previously mentioned, that every 73 seconds an American is sexually assaulted.²⁰ Yet, Jewish institutions I encountered were rarely up to date on resources, programs, training, policies, or conversations about how to best support the Sexual Assault or Partner violence survivors that were certainly in our communities - whether we knew who they were or not. While I did not believe that this was intentional, I saw a need to address this subject explicitly.

This certainly was not a challenge exclusively to Jewish communities, so as part of my work with the Brueggeman Center for Interfaith Dialogue²¹, in partnership with

¹⁹ "Preventing Intimate Partner Violence [Violence Prevention | Injury Center|CDC]." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 9 Oct. 2020, www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html.

²⁰ *Statistics | RAINN*. (2018). RAINN. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics>

²¹ "The Brueggeman Center for Dialogue." *Xavier University*, www.xavier.edu/dialogue/.

Women Helping Women²², we created a half day conference with clergy and community members from the interfaith community of the greater Cincinnati area. With a panel and workshops, we hoped that participants would both listen and interact with the information such that they would bring the information they learned to their home communities for ongoing learning. While much of the education I had done with teens remained close to my heart, it became ever apparent that there is incredible need to **continue addressing subjects that impact one's personal life in ongoing ways rather than** in courses that last for a short amount of time in adolescence.

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While each of these experiences fueled my passion for Jewish Intimacy and Sexuality education, they also were bittersweet experiences. In each of these snapshots, meaningful learning took place; however, these learning opportunities were not built to live beyond the educator who took on the project as their own responsibility. After Cathy Stanley retired from teaching religious school, Jewish Personal Living did not take place **as a course offered to post b'nai mitzvah students. My sister, just three years younger,** did not have the opportunity to benefit from this class. As I moved away from Ann Arbor to begin rabbinical school, I tried to find a replacement teacher who would be willing and able to teach Jewish Personal Living - but I had no guarantee that this course and the learning that took place within it would continue in the long term once I left. Hippy Chug also had no guarantee that it would live on when I left.

²² Women Helping Women is an organization in South-East Ohio that provides resources and education for how to support survivors of gender-based violence as well as providing resources for preventative education to keep people safe from these forms of violence. <https://www.womenhelpingwomen.org/>

As I write this thesis, I reflect on the fact that even in my own experience as both a student and an educator of Jewish Intimacy and Sexuality education, there were indicators that this field needs more structural and institutional support in order that **this learning can live on beyond the educators who initially create these programs...** and in order that we can intentionally create and support a new generation of Jewish Intimacy and Sexuality educators.

-Chapter 2-

Methodology

In order to get both quantitative and qualitative results for this study, the **research for this thesis took three main forms: Survey, “Interviews & Chats”, and Text Review.** The methodology of these forms of research will be described in further detail below. By utilizing an eclectic approach, I aimed to achieve several different, but complementary aims: 1. Take a snapshot of the current state of the Jewish intimacy and sexuality education field, 2. Learn directly from leading practitioners in the field, and 3. Build a case for making future recommendations.

Survey: “Sex & Intimacy Education in Jewish Communities”

The purpose of this survey was to get a broad picture of what topics related to Intimacy and Sexuality various Jewish communal organizations address in implicit and explicit ways. In addition, this survey sought data on the ages which these Jewish communal organizations chose to teach explicitly. This survey was designed for employees at any level of various Jewish organizations as well as lay leadership. While it could be argued that any person who interacts with a Jewish organization could speak to these subjects on some level, through requiring that one must serve in a leadership role, I was seeking a population with likelihood of deeper familiarity with the organization **and its culture without asking “how many times have you interacted with this institution.” Not all who answered the survey were personally involved with the educational efforts.**

There were two main outreach methods I used to distribute the survey to potential members of the survey population. The first of which was through posting the

survey with a short explanation²³ of the context in professional pages - namely JEDLAB²⁴, **Jewish Women's Clergy Group**²⁵, and HUC Students 2020²⁶ - as well as on my personal page. The second outreach method I used was sending the survey and a short explanation to an HUC School of Rhea Hirsch alumni email list²⁷. The goal was to reach 100 survey responses. These methods yielded 103 survey responses.

²³ The short message was as follows: "Hi All! My name is Zoe McCoon, and I am a 5th Year Rabbinical student on the Cincinnati campus of HUC-JIR. I am in the process of writing my thesis about the current landscape of formal and informal education around Sex, Intimacy, and related topics in Jewish organizations. I have created this survey to get a better picture of what is being addressed, and at what age(s), in a variety of Jewish spaces. I would appreciate survey responses from anyone who works for a Jewish organization at any level! This survey should take about 5-7 minutes.

I look forward to seeing what comes to light as results come in! If you are also interested in reading the results of the survey or my thesis at large, please feel free to email me at Zoe.McCoon@huc.edu - and I will get the final product to you by February 2021."

²⁴ According to the "About" section of the JEDLAB Facebook page, "JEDLAB is a network of Jewish education people passionate about redesigning the Jewish ed ecosystem... If you're a teacher, parent, funder, organizational leader, writer, academic, student, communal professional, whatever you may be, you belong HERE. This is your network." - "JEDLAB." *Facebook*, Facebook Groups, www.facebook.com/groups/jdsmedialab.

²⁵ According to the "About" section of the Jewish Women's Clergy Group Facebook page, "This group was formed to allow Jewish women clergy to connect with and support one another around the experiences of being Jewish women serving as clergy. It is our desire that, through this group, professional and personal relationships will be formed and fostered." - "Jewish Women's Clergy Group." *Facebook*, Facebook Groups, www.facebook.com/groups/1867037506950836/permalink/2731779260476652.

²⁶ HUC Students 2020 was formed to bring HUC students from all 4 campuses together to build relationships and support systems especially with the challenges of the global pandemic. - "HUC Students 2020." *Facebook*, Facebook Groups, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/637483450143879/permalink/773810599844496>.

²⁷ Similar to the short message posted to JEDLAB and Jewish Women's Clergy Group, the email sent to Rhea Hirsch Alumni read as follows: "Dear School of Education alumni, My name is Zoe McCoon and I am a fifth-year rabbinical student at HUC's Cincinnati campus. I am in the process of writing my thesis, advised by Rabbi Jan Katzew, about the current landscape of formal and informal education around sex, intimacy, and related topics in Jewish organizations. I created a survey to get a better picture of what is being addressed, and at what age(s), in a variety of Jewish spaces. I would appreciate survey responses from anyone who works for a Jewish organization at any level. This survey should take about five-seven minutes, and the deadline to respond is October 31, 2020."

While 103 responses to the survey paints a much broader landscape than what one could accomplish through interviews, there are limits to what one could conclude about the results of this research. The results of this research are meant to be formative and inferential, rather than summative and conclusive. Due to the process of obtaining survey results, this data likely is impacted by self-selection sampling bias for the Facebook posts as well as non-response sampling bias for the emails sent to HUC alumni. While I will be using the data from this survey to make certain arguments later in this thesis, it is important to note that the survey data is finite and must be understood within the context of its potential limits.

Interviews & Chats

To get a deeper understanding of what work Jewish professionals are seeing and providing on the ground around Intimacy and Sexuality Education, I scheduled one on one conversations over zoom and phone with people who have expertise and experience in the field. I named this **section “Interviews & Chats” to distinguish between more** formal conversations I scheduled with permission to record and transcribe, i.e., interviews, in contrast to less formal conversations I ended up having with people in the field without adhering to a formal interview guide, i.e., chats, where I did not have prior written approval to record. As I posted to the Facebook groups and began speaking with experts during the formal interviews, I was put in touch with a number of people who have done work and research around this subject. This is what led to what I am calling **“Chats.” Although the questions I asked were similar**, rather than record and transcribe our conversations, I took notes on our dialogues noting connections between what was said and points of interest during my previous research. I conducted seven - 45-minute interviews, (see transcriptions in appendix) and four - 20-minute chats.

Text Review

In addition to learning from educators' perspectives on sex and intimacy education, I looked to see what educational and literary sources already existed on the subject matter. While there were other books, podcasts, and textual sources I read for context in this thesis²⁸, I read for the purpose of model analysis the 2 curricula series, 2 books, and thesis. These sources are as follows: 1) *Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics*²⁹ (Curricula Series), 2) *Our Whole Lives*³⁰ (Curricula Series), 3) *Gay Like Me* by Richie Jackson³¹ (Book), 5) *We Will Listen and We Will Do: Exploring Biblical and Rabbinic Responses to the Voices of Sexual Violence Survivors to Develop Prevention-based Education and Survivor Support in Jewish Communities* by Jenn Queen³² (Submitted Rabbinic Thesis). While each of these written works contribute much in what we do to teach on Sex and Intimacy, I am more interested for the sake of this thesis to address how they convey the information they provide, and how we can use these models for our own benefit moving forward.

²⁸ To see the full reading list, you can reference my bibliography at the end of the thesis

²⁹ *Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics: Middle School Curriculum*, URJ Press, 2007

³⁰ "Our Whole Lives" *InSpirit: UUA Bookstore and Gift Shop: Our Whole Lives*, Unitarian Universalist Association, www.uuabookstore.org/Our-Whole-Lives-C1341.aspx.

³¹ Jackson, Richie. *Gay like Me: a Father Writes to His Son*. Harper, 2020.

³² Queen, Jennifer. "WE WILL DO AND WE WILL LISTEN: Exploring Biblical and Rabbinic Responses to the Voices of Sexual Violence Survivors to Develop Prevention-Based Education and Survivor Support in Jewish Communities." *Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion*, 2019.

-Chapter 3-

Survey Analysis

Overview

The purpose of this survey was to get a broader view of the landscape of sexuality and intimacy education offered currently in Jewish organizational spaces. As mentioned previously, I was interested not only in the topics of physical intimacy or sexual activity³³, **but of a wide range of topics that relate to one's relationship with oneself, with a partner (or partners), with God, and with community.** The topics included were as follows:

- Gender Identity or Gender Roles
- Sexual Identity or Coming out of the Closet
- Sexual Relations & Physical Intimacy
- Readiness for Physical Intimacy, or lack thereof
- Romantic Relationships & Emotional Intimacy
- Desire
- Peer Pressure
- Ways to Say No to Unwanted Physical or Emotional Intimacy
- Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure
- Healthy, Safe Relationships vs Unhealthy, Abusive Relationships
- Sexual Assault, Unethical Sexual Contact, or "Good Touch vs Bad Touch"
- Communication, Consent, and/or Implementing Boundaries

³³ Although this is not unimportant.

- Body Diversity
- Ability Diversity
- Body Image or Self Esteem
- Emotional and/or Mental Health
- Reflection on "Who I am" to myself, others, and my community.

At the minimum, these topics should be addressed within a holistic Jewish Intimacy and Sexuality education. Through the questions of the survey, I sought to find out which of these topics were inherently dealt with due to the nature of the work of the organization as well as what formal educational programming, courses, or conversations took place in the congregation.³⁴ In addition, if formal programming took place at a specific time in a **learner's experience with the organization, I was curious when this took place.** From my experience, I predicted that even for organizations that had formal programming were likely holding these conversations between 8th-10th grade. That being said, I wanted to confirm whether my intuitions were correct.

While the language around “formal” vs “informal” can mean a number of different things in different settings, in this case, the definition of “informal” in this setting has to do with whether the conversation had any prior intentional planning behind it. For example, at a youth group event, when going over the expectations for participant behavior at a lock-in or Kallah, mentioning “Don’t have sex” is just one of the many rules that likely have not had any prior planning by the person reading the list in front of the group.³⁵ Through highlighting informal conversations in an organization,

³⁴ To view the full survey questions, please visit Appendix A.

³⁵ Or for the board members who were miming the rules on the spot to keep them light and entertaining, as they did multiple times while I was in youth group.

this survey attempted to note what human or relational issues couldn't help but come up within the work of the organization. In contrast, the definition of "formal" in this survey is a program, course, conversation, or sermon that was pre-planned and intentionally crafted to address or educate others about these topics.

The intended survey population was anyone who considered themselves a leader of or employee - at any level - of a Jewish Organization. While asking executive leadership, clergy, or educators directly involved with these types of formal programs would have also yielded helpful information, this survey sought to ask anyone who identified as a leader or employee of the organization. This was done first and foremost due to access to the intended survey population, but it also gave an interesting look into how people with buy into the success of the organization see the landscape of their organization in this area of study. This survey was distributed through a few different means. First, **the survey was sent out to an email list of alumni of Hebrew Union College's Executive Master's Program.** Second, the survey was posted on Facebook to the following groups: **Jewish Women's Clergy Group, JEDLAB, and HUC Students 2020. I also posted the** survey to my personal Facebook page. The goal was to receive 100 survey results. The intention of keeping such a broad survey population was to glean insight from a number of different organization types as well as denominations if there was enough data. **Although we weren't able to use all of the surveys returned**³⁶, we were still able to use 103 of the 106 surveys returned. There are some who answered the survey for two different organizations, and some did not answer all of the survey questions - thus not

³⁶ These surveys were thrown out because they were the only data set in their organization type or denomination.

all of the numbers will add up to 103. The following charts break down the makeup of the survey population:

<i>Religious Affiliation</i>	<i>Total Number</i>
Reform / Renewal/Reconstructionist ³⁷ 38	66
Conservative	12
Pluralistic	15
Non-Denominational	10

<i>Type of Jewish Organization</i>	<i>Total Number</i>
Congregation	62
Religious School/Hebrew School	48
Youth Group	11
Camp	8

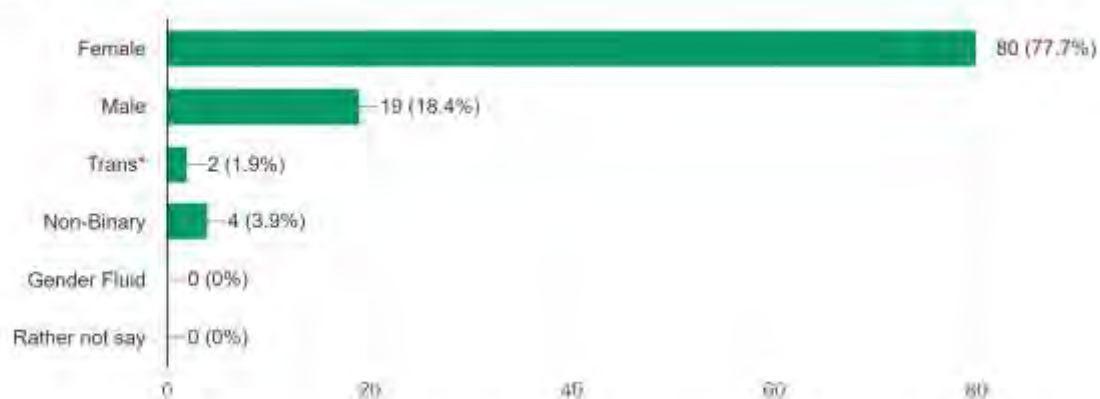
³⁷ Although the Reform and Reconstructionist movements are different from one another in history, liturgy, and in many cases theology, there were only two responses from reconstructionist organizations. Since there is precedence from other studies across Jewish denominations to have a category that combines Reform and Reconstructionist populations, I decided to do so in order to include the data from the reconstructionist organizations.

³⁸ There were two respondents who identified as Reconstructionist

Hillel	3
Day School	11
Federation	4
Other	3

My Gender Identity

103 responses



Of the total respondents, 77.7% identified their gender as female, while 18.4% identified themselves as Male and 3.9% identified themselves as Non-Binary. In the survey, I offered the option to select more than one option to allow respondents to arrive at an option as close as possible to how they identify. One of the results of this is that of those who identified as Trans*, both also responded with another gender identity as well³⁹.

³⁹ In this case, both respondents who identified as Trans* also identified as Non-binary.

The Jewish Organization I work at works with the following age groups

Infants/Toddlers	51	49.5%
Pre-K/Kindergarten	67	65%
Elementary (1st-5th Grade)	83	80.6%
Middle School (6th-8th Grade)	88	85.4%
High School (9th-12th Grade)	77	74.8%
Undergraduate Students/Emerging Adults (Ages 17-22)	49	47.6%
Early Adults (Ages 21-35)	58	56.3%
Intermediate Adults (Ages 35-65)	64	62.1%
Seniors (65+)	64	62.1%

Knowing that many organizations work with many different age groups, this question on the survey also allowed respondents to select more than one option in order to get their answer as close to a correct representation as possible. Of the age groups the Jewish Organizations worked with, only Infants/Toddlers and Undergraduate Students/Emerging Adults were below 50%. Part of the reason this question was crucial was to confirm that if data from the later questions suggested that the age groups where formal programming was taking place only happening with certain age groups or other groups were severely underrepresented - I wanted to confirm that this was not due to getting data from organizations that were not working with said age groups.

Interestingly enough, for respondents who responded that formal programming took place once during a learner’s experience in the organization, most of the sexuality and intimacy education topics tended to take place - in High School (more data on this below) - which was not the most common age group to be worked with. 74.8% of respondents reported that their organization worked with High School Students, in comparison to 85.4% of those saying their organization worked with Middle School Students or 80.6% of those saying their organization worked with Elementary School Students.

Overall Survey Results

In response to the question: “The Organization I work at teaches some form of (age appropriate) ‘Sex or Intimacy Education’”, 23.3% of respondents said that they agreed or strongly agreed whereas 58.3% of respondents replied saying they disagree or strongly disagree.

The Organization I work at teaches some form of (age appropriate) ‘Sex or Intimacy Education

Strongly Agree	14	13.6%
Agree	10	9.7%
Neutral	19	18.4%
Disagree	16	15.5%
Strongly Disagree	44	42.7%

The following data responds to groupings of topics in relation to the question:

“Members of the organization I work for will likely experience explicit, FORMAL programming, courses, or conversations provided by my organization on ...”. Some of the data results are present below with analysis. To look at the full data set, please look to Appendix B.

Data Group A - Identity

Gender Identity or Gender Roles
102 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Gender Identity or Gender Roles

A	12
B	7
C	6
D	25
E	16
F	17
G	19

Sexual Identity or Coming out of the Closet

A	12
B	5
C	3
D	13
E	17
F	28
G	24

Sexual Identity or Coming out of the Closet

102 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Reflection on "Who I am" to myself, others, and my community

98 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Reflection on "Who I am" to myself, others, and my community

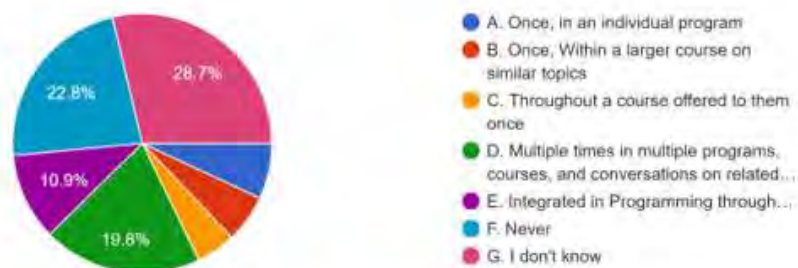
A	3
B	5
C	2
D	27
E	36
F	9
G	16

Gender Identity, Sexual Identity, and “Who I am to myself, to others, and to my community” are inherently tied to people’s experiences of intimacy with oneself and with others. Yet according to the respondents there were vastly different answers as to whether and how often formal programming took place. Unsurprisingly, a majority of the Jewish organizations represented in the survey results provided formal programming on “Who I am to myself, others, and my community” either multiple times in multiple programs courses and conversations on related topics (27.6%) or integrated in programming throughout one’s experience (36.7%). In contrast, when talking more specifically about gender or sexual identity - topics which call into question for many in the LGBTQ+ community the very question of “Who I am to myself, to others, and to my community”⁴⁰ - the frequency with which such formal programming took place significantly decreased or disappeared. In comparison to the 9.2% of respondents who answered that their organization never provided formal education on “Who I am to myself, others, and my community”, 16.7% of respondents said that their organization never provided formal programming on Gender Identity and Roles. The number increased to 27.5% of respondents who said their organization never provided formal programming on “Sexuality or Coming out of the Closet”.

Data Group B - Addressing Traumatic Realities

Healthy, Safe Relationships vs Unhealthy, Abusive Relationships

101 responses



nan. Seal

Healthy, Safe Relationships vs Unhealthy, Abusive Relationships

A	7
B	6
C	5
D	20
E	11
F	23
G	29

Sexual Assault, Unethical Sexual Contact, or "Good Touch vs Bad Touch"

A	7
B	3
C	5
D	15
E	8
F	31
G	32

Sexual Assault, Unethical Sexual Contact, or "Good Touch vs Bad Touch"

101 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Statistically it is unquestionable that within a community of multiple people that at least will personally experience either sexual assault or partner violence - or know someone closely who has. As I have mentioned previously in the thesis, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men experience contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime and reported some form of Intimate Partner Violence-related impact.⁴¹ Also, as I have previously mentioned multiple times in this thesis, every 73 seconds an American is sexually assaulted. While it might seem as

⁴¹ "Preventing Intimate Partner Violence [Violence Prevention | Injury Center|CDC]." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 9 Oct. 2020, www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/fastfact.html.

though I am harping on these statistics, I repeatedly bring them up for two reasons: 1) If these are the statistics we have, we can guarantee that the numbers are actually higher due to underreporting⁴², 2) Until we receive data suggesting otherwise, we have to assume that these statistics apply to our own community members too. Assuming that both of these statements are true, Jewish organizations have a lot of work to do in intentionally and explicitly addressing the issues of sexual assault, unethical sexual contact, and unhealthy relationships.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1: My Relationship to Sex & Intimacy Education in Jewish Spaces, I had noticed that the Jewish organizations I encountered rarely up to date on resources, programs, training, policies, or conversations about how to best support the Sexual Assault or Partner violence survivors that were certainly in their communities. The results of this survey confirmed my intuition that a majority of Jewish organizations have not been providing formal opportunities open to the public to address these issues that have affected, are affecting, and will affect a large number of their community members. Over 50% of respondents replied that their organization either never provided formal programming, courses, or conversations on the matter or that they were not aware of such learning both for **“Healthy vs Unhealthy Relationships”** (51.5% - **22.8%** saying “Never”, **28.7%** saying “I Don’t Know”) and for **“Sexual Assault, Unethical Sexual Contact, or “Good Touch/Bad Touch,”** (**62.4%** - 30.7 responding “Never” and **31.7%** responding “I Don’t Know”).

⁴² Kimble, Cameron. “Sexual Assault Remains Dramatically Underreported.” *Brennan Center for Justice*, 4 Oct. 2018, www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/sexual-assault-remains-dramatically-underreported.

Data Group C - The Good Feelings: Intimacy, Desire, and Pleasure

Sexual Relations & Physical Intimacy

102 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Sexual Relations & Physical Intimacy

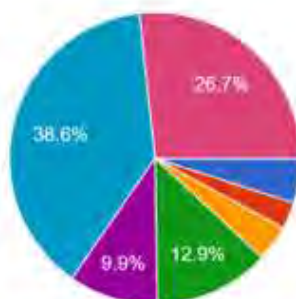
A	4
B	8
C	9
D	13
E	5
F	38
G	25

Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure

A	5
B	3
C	4
D	13
E	10
F	39
G	27

Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure

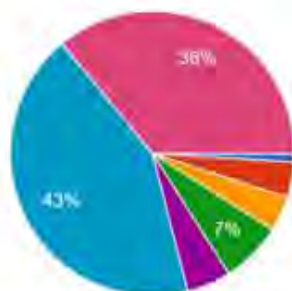
101 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Desire

100 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Desire

A	1
B	4
C	4
D	7
E	5
F	43
G	36

Romantic Relationships & Emotional Intimacy

A	4
B	6
C	7
D	16
E	7
F	32
G	29

Romantic Relationships & Emotional Intimacy

101 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

In a society heavily influenced by Christianity, like the United States, one could easily believe that all religions discourage - or even shame - desire, pleasure, and physical intimacy outside of procreation, for fear of attracting sin. There are elements of various Jewish traditions and Jewish texts that fall in line with this. That being said, there are a number of Jewish texts and traditions that speak highly of desire, pleasure and physical intimacy. At the very beginning of Song of Songs, in 1:2, we read **“Oh, give me the kisses of your mouth, for your love is more delightful than wine.”** It should not be ignored that these words of desire that speak about kissing and the pleasure it brings exist within the holy canon of the TaNaKh.⁴³ According to modern Mussar writer Ira Stone in his explanation of Creation and responsibility,

My theology about creation thus begins with the recognition that pleasure is at the core of what it means to be human...

...This notion of goodness is affirmed in the familiar biblical narrative of creation in which God is depicted as deriving satisfaction from creation declaring it ‘good’ and ‘very good’ (*tov* and *tov me’od*, in Genesis 1). Both the story and our real-life experience teach that the pursuit of pleasure and the experience of pleasure (i.e., enjoyment) are sources of good... This enjoyment of pleasure also creates in us a sense of gratitude, a debt we owe the other who is the source of our pleasure.⁴⁴

Beyond the facts that humans do naturally have desires and that they yearn to feel good, there are lessons - like those of gratitude - that tie together Jewish values and practices

⁴³ Even in rabbinic commentaries, like Shir HaShirim Rabbah or Targum of Canticles, that try to explain that Song of Songs is not about physical intimacy and desire between two humans, the desire to be intimate (in this case with God) in itself is not demonized, but rather painted as natural. Who wouldn't yearn after God after all?

⁴⁴ “Creation.” *A Responsible Life: The Spiritual Path of Mussar*, by Ira F. Stone, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013, pp. 7–14.

with human experiences. Some of the goals around Intimacy and Sexuality education are connected to providing spaces for community members to reflect during their **challenging or confounding journeys in trying to understand who they are... and some** are connected to providing helpful information or support to survivors of sexual assault or abusive relationships. These goals remain incredibly important. Unfortunately, because of the sense of responsibility and urgency to address challenges that arise, these elements of Intimacy and Sexuality education -whether Jewish or not - can sometimes **overshadow the “good,” joyous, fun, and meaningful parts of being human** - like feeling a sense of intimacy with another, feeling good, or even just yearning to feel good.

Through asking these questions about formal programming or conversations on Intimacy, Desire, and Pleasure, I wanted to get a sense of whether Jewish organizations were taking advantage of the wisdom Jewish traditions provide on the subject as well as to what extent Jewish organizations provided opportunities to explore and reflect on the pursuit of, experiencing, and being fulfilled by good feelings. Over 50% of respondents answered that these topics - Sexual Relations and Physical Intimacy; Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure; Desire; and Romantic Relationships and Emotional Intimacy - were either never addressed in formal programming or conversations or that they did not know of any such formal programming.

Data Group D - Comparing Informally Addressed Topics vs Formal Programming, Courses, Conversations⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Not all of the percentages of formal programming are out of 103, most are out of between 100-102, with 1 @ 99 and 1 @ 98

Key:

Green Font - Informally Addressed higher than Formal Programming, Courses, and Conversations

Red Font - Formal Programming, Courses, and Conversations higher than Informally Addressed

Black Font - Between 0-2% difference between Informally Addressed & Formal Programming, Courses, Sermons, and Conversations

Topic	Informal %	Informal #	Formal % (In any way)	Formal #
Gender Identity/Roles	83.2	84	64.7	66
Sexuality/Coming out of the Closet	58.4	59	49	50
Sexual Relations & Physical Intimacy	32.7	33	38.2	39
Readiness for Physical intimacy, or lack thereof	23.8	24	28.4	29
Romantic Relationships & Emotional Intimacy	39.6	40	39.6	40
Desire	13.9	14	21	21
Peer Pressure	59.4	60	64.3	65
Ways to Say No to Unwanted Physical or Emotional Intimacy	33.7	34	41	41

Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure	27.7	28	34.6	35
Healthy, Safe Relationships vs Unhealthy, Abusive Relationships	50.5	51	48.5	49
Sexual Assault, Unethical Sexual Contact, or "Good Touch vs Bad Touch"	33.7	34	37.6	38
Communication, Consent, or Implementing Boundaries	42.6	43	50.4	51
Body Diversity	39.6	40	37.6	38
Ability Diversity	54.5	55	54	54
Body Image or Self Esteem	54.5	55	56	56
Emotional or Mental Health	81.2	82	77	76
Reflection on "Who I am" to myself, others, and my community	72.3	73	74	73

Survey Findings and Analysis

There were a number of fruits harvested from this survey - some that I would have previously expected as well as a number that I had not. While the results of this study yielded a number of interesting findings, I want to focus on three of these findings - and name potential contributing factors to those results. The findings addressed below are as follows: 1) Likely underreporting on issues Jewish organizations are informally **addressing**, 2) **High numbers of respondents who replied “I Don’t Know”** regarding formal programming, courses, and conversations, 3) If it is taught once, it is likely taught between 8th-12th grade.

1. Likely underreporting on issues Jewish organizations are informally addressing

In the chart comparing the data on what respondents thought their organization was addressing informally in comparison to the types of formal programs, courses, sermons, and conversations there were significantly more red and black categories than there was green. (See Data Group D for Chart Key). The overall data from the respondents suggests that the only topics that seemed to be under-addressed in **comparison to what comes up in the organization organically were “Gender Identity or Gender Roles,” “Sexuality or Coming Out of the Closet,” and “Mental and/or Emotional Health.”** As far as my research has concluded, there is not specifically data on how these topic areas of the Jewish population in North America. That being said, if the statistics within Jewish communities in any way resembles the statistics of the wider population of the United States, this seems suspect. Through looking at the following data, one concludes that there are a number of examples touching upon other topic areas below that are going unnoticed:

- 1 in 5 U. S. adults, and 1 in 6 U.S. youths between 6-17, experience mental illness⁴⁶
- LGBTQ young adults had a 120 percent higher risk of reporting homelessness - almost 40% of the unaccompanied homeless youth population - compared to youth who identified as heterosexual and cisgender.⁴⁷
- By age 6, girls especially start to express concerns about their own weight or shape. 40-60% of elementary school girls (ages 6-12) are concerned about their weight or about becoming too fat. This concern endures through life.⁴⁸
- **Every 73 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted... and every 9 minutes, that victim is a child.**⁴⁹
- 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner contact sexual violence, and/or intimate partner stalking with impacts such as injury, fearfulness, post-traumatic stress disorder, use of victim services, contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, etc.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Mental Health By the Numbers* | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness. (2019, September). National Alliance on Mental Illness. <https://www.nami.org/mhstats>

⁴⁷ Dashow, J. (2017, November 17). *LGBTQ Youth Disproportionately Experience Homelessness*. Human Rights Campaign. <https://www.hrc.org/blog/new-report-on-youth-homeless-affirms-that-lgbtq-youth-disproportionately-ex>

⁴⁸ Smolak, L. (2011). *Body image development in childhood*. In T. Cash & L. Smolak (Eds.), *Body Image: A Handbook of Science, Practice, and Prevention* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford. <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/statistics-research-eating-disorders>

⁴⁹ *Statistics* | RAINN. (2018). RAINN. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics>

⁵⁰ Truman, Ph. D, J. L., & Morgan, Ph. D., R. E. (2014, April). *Nonfatal Domestic Violence, 2003–2012*. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ndv0312.pdf>

With these data points from the wider American population in mind, there are two main ways that the data comparing Informal to Formal conversations can be read. The first interpretation comes from the fact that many of the topics included under the **umbrella of “Sexuality and Intimacy Education”** are incredibly sensitive, making the person talking about it vulnerable. It is possible that the organizations discussed in the survey results are addressing these issues with specific trusted leaders or employees behind closed doors in a reactive way when issues come up. Due to the sensitive, private nature of these subjects, one would not want news of them dealing with these issues spread to the community - **so if other employees or leaders don’t know about this, the confidante is, in fact, doing their job.** This would certainly explain why someone who is not performing work in this area might not be aware of these kinds of issues coming up. In contrast, of the topics more likely to be addressed informally - these are topics that in many ways have been more normalized in liberal Jewish communities than in the past.⁵¹ Perhaps the reason why these numbers are higher on the chart speaks more to the fact that leaders and employees are more aware of the times that issues around gender, sexuality, or mental health come up.

The second interpretation comes from a more cynical standpoint. It is possible that the reason that many of the topics are not being reported as being addressed informally is because if issues around these topic areas come up, they are ignored, or worse, shoved under the rug. It is also possible that, due to the environment already created within the organization, when people connected to these organizations

⁵¹ One caveat to this is mental health in the case of certain conditions like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder where there remains a taboo of speaking about personal experience or how to support people with these conditions.

experience such issues, they do not feel comfortable speaking about it or reaching out for support. While to some this may not seem like such an issue for topic areas like **“Desire” or “Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure,”** this is a huge issue when it comes to issues like sexual assault, molestation, unhealthy relationships, consent, and implementing boundaries⁵².

Due to the fact that it seems **as though many of the topics don’t affect the Jewish** Organizations addressed in the survey data, it seems as though when formal programming takes place, organizations are going above and beyond the call of duty to address these issues. While it is good that the organizations who are educating those connected to them are doing so, we need to shift the framing toward addressing the ways in which other organizations can do better at creating culture change so that people can feel comfortable coming to leaders of the organizations to address personal life issues for support and training leaders and employees to keep an eye out for signs of these types of issues. At a certain point, to prevent lashon hara, although accountability remains important, I would not argue that we should encourage organizations to start reporting the types of issues addressed behind closed doors.

2. High numbers of respondents who replied “I Don’t Know” regarding formal programming, courses, and conversations

⁵² A third interpretation is that there was crossed communication regarding the language of “Informal” vs “Formal” in this context. Though I tried to clarify in the wording of the questions, I want to name this as a possibility, as there has been much discussion about informal and formal education styles within Jewish education recently.

While there were a large **number of respondents who answered “Never”** to whether any formal programming took place addressing a number of topics around Sexuality and Intimacy, in many cases there were even larger numbers of respondents **who responded that they didn’t know. I was not** expecting this to be so when sending out the surveys; however, after further consideration this does make sense. Especially in the case of organizations who offer these types of topics to students in religious school or for specific age or group cohorts, if one is not in those cohorts or specifically looking for what is being offered it is not surprising that they would not know whether they are being addressed. Nor would they know the format in which it was.

Regardless of whether this is something that the organization is addressing intentionally or otherwise, the fact that Jewish Humans interact with the organization as employees, volunteers, participants, congregants, etc. means that statistically they will be dealing with at least one of these issues. The fact that in many cases $\frac{1}{4}$ of **respondents didn’t know if there was any kind of formal programming to address this** issue speaks to a larger challenge of how well organizations are communicating about **what supports they do or don’t provide**. Each organization sets their own values and prioritizes in their own way. That being said, if there is a value of supporting the needs of the members or people connected to the organization, organizations likely need to rethink how they communicate and show transparency about the ways in which they are supporting human needs and human issues that could - and do - come up.

How many overall people organizations don't know about formal programming?

	How many answered, “I don’t know” re: Formal Programming?	Percentage of “I don’t know”
Gender Identity/Roles	19	18.6
Sexuality/Coming out of the Closet	24	23.5
Sexual Relations & Physical Intimacy	25	24.5
Readiness for Physical intimacy, or lack thereof	30	29.4
Romantic Relationships & Emotional Intimacy	29	28.7
Desire	36	36
Peer Pressure	17	16.8
Ways to Say No to Unwanted Physical or Emotional Intimacy	26	26
Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure	27	26.7
Healthy, Safe Relationships vs Unhealthy, Abusive Relationships	29	28.7

Sexual Assault, Unethical Sexual Contact, or "Good Touch vs Bad Touch"	32	31.7
Communication, Consent, or Implementing Boundaries	27	26.7
Body Diversity	29	28.7
Ability Diversity	25	25
Body Image or Self Esteem	22	22
Emotional or Mental Health	8	8.1
Reflection on "Who I am" to myself, others, and my community	16	16.3

3. *If it is taught once, it is likely taught between 8th-12th grade...*

For respondents who answered A, B, or C⁵³, to whether there was formal programming around the previously mentioned topics, the number of respondents who answered between 8th-12th grade ranged between 39.1% - 61.5%. This was not a surprising result - I previously predicted based on anecdotal evidence that when sexuality and intimacy related issues are addressed, they are often done between 8th

⁵³ A - Once, in an individual Program
 B - Once, within a larger course on similar topics
 C - Throughout a course offered to them once

grade and the end of high school. Depending on the topic, the second highest category of results were usually either in the Adult or Middle School age category.

One of the challenges with waiting until 8th grade or high school to address these issues is that often these topics are addressed too late. First of all, unfortunately, **Jewish involvement after b'nai mitzvah continues to be significantly lower than the involvement of young people while they are preparing for their b'nai mitzvah.** When waiting to teach these topics until 8th grade, Jewish organizations are waiting until they have less access to learners who would benefit from this type of information and reflection.

Eighth grade is too late in another sense as well. For example, if - like previously mentioned - by age 6, girls especially start to express concerns about their own weight or shape and 40-60% of elementary school girls (ages 6-12) are concerned about their weight or about becoming too fat. By the time 8th grade comes around (or potentially even later), girls and feminine-presenting people have had years of practicing damaging habits around their weight and food. Messages around body diversity and body image are then fighting an uphill battle. This is especially applicable and challenging regarding physical intimacy, healthy vs unhealthy relationships, consent, and unethical sexual contact. Rather than preemptively giving young people tools to use as they come in contact with a number of complicated human issues - or even providing parents with resources on how to address them at home - many of the organizations addressed in this survey and others wait until 8th grade, when these are already issues for the learners. **(Even if the organizations aren't aware that they are already issues).**

Jewish organizations are tasked with educating around a broad range of topics - each with its own argument for importance. To many, the main argument around why **these topics aren't being addressed earlier in an age-appropriate way** is because - in

addition to lacking the resources to accomplish this, there is simply not enough time. With increasing competition with other extracurriculars like soccer practice and **homework, and decreasing amounts of class time to teach Jewish literacy before b'nai mitzvah**, there is no way to squeeze one more set of topics - let alone these topics that could be messy, complicated, and require parent buy in.

While there are benefits to memory and creating patterns when topics are taught more than once - allowing for growth and deeper understanding each time they are addressed, it would be a good idea for Jewish organizations to consider shifting their timeline of when these topics need to be addressed so that they can be addressed at younger ages. This does not have to fall on the shoulders of religious schools - creative solutions are encouraged to get the information to learners and the families of learners. That being said, we are failing Jewish learners if we are teaching these subjects reactively and much later than they need them.

Caveats to the Survey Results

- *Small Sample Size* - As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, while 103 survey results surpass my goal of 100 survey results, the results should be treated as inferential. While I will be using the data from this survey to make certain arguments later in this thesis, it is important to note that the survey data is finite and must be understood within the context of its potential limits.
- *Potential Bias* - Due to the process of obtaining survey results, this data likely is impacted by self-selection sampling bias for the Facebook posts as well as non-response sampling bias for the emails sent to HUC alumni.

- *Timing* - Due to the fact that this survey was sent out in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, when organizational life has been primarily moved online and shifted to meet more immediate needs and interests, the results of this study may not exactly match if the survey had been sent out during a non-Pandemic time.

-Chapter 4-

Text Review

Overview

Although a good part of the introduction of this thesis discusses the ways in which sex and intimacy education are not addressed, there are some important resources that already exist. Through reading in preparation for this thesis, I realized that there is no centralized library for educational resources in addressing personal life issues throughout different parts of the life cycle. If individual organizations decide that they want to better address issues around any of the aforementioned topics, they may go to Sacred Choices or Our Whole Lives - or some other resource - and find that there are parts that are helpful and parts that are not. This may create the impression that they will have to create any other resources from scratch. This is simply not the case.

Curricula are important references, but they are not the only helpful tool. In addition to looking to the Sacred Choices curriculum and Our Whole Lives curriculum, this chapter explores memoir *Gay Like Me* by Richie Jackson and rabbinic thesis and **text exploration “We Will Listen, and We Will Do” by Rabbi Jenn Queen. Through** analyzing each of these resources, this chapter will seek to highlight what each adds to **the “library.”**

Of course, there is value in the creation of new resources, books, and curricula around educating Jewish whole and holy humans. There are still plenty of gaps that need to be filled with new materials and materials that need to be updated as new understandings of best practices or research arises. That being said, there is also value in gathering the resources and wisdom that already exist. There is a plethora of

information, lessons, books, etc. that are based in Jewish text or values, research in psychology or sociology or public health, educational best practices, or even personal stories. Individual organizations may find that these resources - both Jewish and non-Jewish - are more helpful to them than new materials based on the individual needs or readiness of their community. Also, they may use these materials to supplement new materials that are created. This text review is only the beginning of a compilation project.

Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics

About Sacred Choices

The Sacred Choices curricula are compilations of sessions addressing issues of relationships and Jewish Ethics designed for courses that would meet once in middle school and/or once in high school. While this resource is often thought of as an attempt toward sex education by the Reform Movement, there is little mention of sex acts specifically - rather focusing on other important issues tied to intimacy and relationships. The URJ Press published the Sacred Choices curricula at the end of the 2000s: The middle school module in 2007 and the high school module in 2008.⁵⁴ There is a session aimed at building buy in with parents and preparing them for speaking to their children about sex - although this is not the primary focus of this curricular resource.⁵⁵ These resources are designed for sessions shorter than full semester courses.

⁵⁴ Winer, Laura Novak. (2011). *Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics: The Reform Movement's Response to the Need for Faith-Based Sexuality Education*. American Journal of Sexuality Education. 6. pg 22.

⁵⁵ "Introductory Parent Meeting Outline." *Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics: Middle School Curriculum*, URJ Press, 2007, pp. 31–36.

The Middle School model features five lessons, and the High School model features seven lessons.

As mentioned in the introduction, *Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics* is the result of an educational attempt within the Union for Reform Judaism to address head on research that stated that young people were becoming sexually active at progressively earlier ages.⁵⁶ In speaking with Rabbi Laura Novak Winer, Ed. D. about the development stage of *Sacred Choices*, she highlighted that rather than starting from text about sex and sexuality from our tradition - which *Sex in the Texts*⁵⁷ had already accomplished, she took an approach rooted first in research and wisdom from experts in the field. She said in our interview,

What we did instead was, in the development phase, I talked to mental health professionals, I talked to medical professionals, people who work with children and adolescents and youth on issues of sexuality. I studied, I read loads of books about sexuality education and about how to talk to children about sexuality and sex. I did all sorts of research and I realized what we really needed to be doing **was coming from the approach of, “Okay, here are the issues around relationships and sexuality and the ethical ideas that we want the children and the youth to learn,” and then we** went, and we found the texts that related to it.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Winer, Laura Novak. (2011). *Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics: The Reform Movement's Response to the Need for Faith-Based Sexuality Education*. American Journal of Sexuality Education. 6. pg 22.

⁵⁷ According to the book description of *Sex in the Text* by Rabbi Paul Yedwab, The URJ Press published this curriculum in 2001. Rabbi Yedwab wrote this curriculum for High School students about topics related to sex including sexuality, marriage, love, deception, and rape as portrayed in Jewish texts ranging from *B'reishit* to other biblical, rabbinic, kabbalistic, and responsa texts.

⁵⁸ Novak Winer, Rabbi Laura. “Interview.” 5 Nov. 2020. Transcript pg 3.

While the content allocation leans conservative as to what types of conversations are planned for which age cohorts, the intention of both the middle school and high school modules of the Sacred Choice curricula was to be rooted in best practices and research in developmental psychology and in the field rather than just Jewish text. The Jewish text may not have been the starting place for development of the curriculum; however, the Jewish piece remains central to the enduring understandings of the curricula⁵⁹ and to each lesson. Unfortunately, the Sacred Choices Curricula were never given the opportunity to update, and in many ways have become outdated. Also, both the middle school and high school modules have fallen out of print. That being said, these resources still provide valuable content and models for those seeking a Jewish way to approach sexuality education for the future.

Topics Addressed in Sacred Choices:

Sacred Choices: Middle School Module		
	Lesson Title	Topics Covered
Topic 1	“Communication and Assertiveness”	Communication with an eye toward balance in assertiveness
Topic 2	“Self-Worth: I Am a Gift”	Addressing Self-esteem and humility, reinforcing that we must treat others with dignity and respect.

⁵⁹ Enduring Understandings: 1. My body and soul - including my sexuality - are gifts from God. 2. Jewish tradition provides guidance in coping with the consequences of my choices. (Sacred Choices Middle School Module, pg 9).

Topic 3	“Self-Control: Who Is a Hero?”	Idea of Balance, Control, and delayed gratification
Topic 4	“Friends and More than Friends”	Considering characteristics and behaviors of current and ideal friendships/relationships
Topic 5	“Everyone’s Doing It! Addressing Peer Pressure”	Peer Pressure and how to say no.

Sacred Choices: High School Module		
	Lesson Title	Topics Covered
Topic 1	“Be a Man (Who Reveres God) and Act Like a Lady (of Valor)”	Gender Roles, Masculinity and Femininity as portrayed in media and society
Topic 2	“I Think I Lust You”	I-Thou Relationships and distinguishing between Love and Lust
Topic 3	“Wrap an Eruv around My Heart”	Ethical Relationships, Sexual choices, modesty, what is private and what is public
Topic 4	“Who Am I? Sexual Identity and	Primarily looking at heterosexual and

	Sexual Orientation”	homosexual relationships
Topic 5	“R-E-S-P-E-C-T”	Respect and Healthy Relationships, Breaking Up 101
Topic 6	“Let’s Talk about Sex”	Continuum of ethical sexual expressions, Eugene Borowitz “Five Levels of Sexual Relationships”
Topic 7	“Oops I Did It Again”	Teshuva when we make mistakes in relationships

What this resource adds to the “Library”

Expanded Definition of Intimacy - An element of Sacred Choices that is both a strength and a weakness is its primary focus on the non-physical elements of intimacy. Through creating this focus, the curriculum clearly communicates that preparing students to make decisions about intimacy requires them to gain skills around communication, relationship building, self-reflection and understanding, and media literacy. As mentioned in the introduction, sex and intimacy are not just about the physical acts one participates in, but also about important emotional and mental engagement. Through teaching these skills even if they are just about platonic relationships, these skills translate into different types of relationships as teens mature.

Jewish Textual and Ethical Framing to Personal Life - It is incredibly important to communicate to people of all ages that intimacy, identity, and relationships are not

“Secular issues that we can make Jewish if we want” but rather part of a holistic view of Judaism and the self. As one of the enduring understandings outlines clearly, “Jewish tradition provides guidance in coping with the consequences of my choices”⁶⁰. While I find the language around “coping with consequences” harsh and focusing on the negative elements of intimacy, it is no small feat that one of the two enduring understandings outlines that “Judaism provides guidance” in making decisions around relationships and intimacy. Through teaching relationships and intimacy through the lens of Jewish texts, Jewish ethics, and Jewish values, students are meant to walk away knowing that Judaism has something to say about their personal lives, honoring who they are, and the decisions they make.

Some Key examples of the Jewish Framing:

- In “Friends and More than Friends,” I also love the connection with Rei-ah and referring to the 6th wedding blessing (of the sheva brachot) which calls partners “rei-im ahuvim” - which is translated as best friends or loving companions.
- In “Self-Worth: I Am a Gift,” Through the framework of Asher Yatzar and Elohai Neshama, we see directly the way our liturgy values both our bodies and our souls.

“Tools for the Toolbox”

One of the strengths of Sacred Choices was its use of easily remembered reflection questions or memory devices. One can notice the influence of both an education

⁶⁰ Sacred Choices, Middle School Model. Pg 9

background as well as developmental psychology in memory devices like “STAR” (Stop, Think, Act, Reflect), as described in the peer pressure lesson. These tools allow students to walk away with something concrete that they can practice or continue reflecting upon outside of the classroom.

Some Key examples of the Tools:

- STAR tool (Stop, Think, Act, Reflect)
- Impulse, Too much, Balanced, Too Little
- Communication Lesson:
 - How can I get in touch with my own feelings and communicate them?
 - How can I assert myself in a respectful way?
 - How can I listen to others in a respectful way?
 - What do I do when I need time to think about what I really want to do?
- Parent Session Reflection Questions:
 - If there was only one thing that you could tell your teenager about being sexual, what would it be?
 - Words and phrases to keep in mind when I discuss sexuality with my teenager

Our Whole Lives

About Our Whole Lives

Like the name suggests, the *Our Whole Lives* curricula are designed to address audiences throughout their lifetimes - starting from around age five through older adulthood. This contrasts greatly from many other sexuality education resources, which look to sexuality or intimacy education as an issue to be addressed exclusively with teens. There are seven curricula in the *Our Whole Lives* series: K-1, Grades 4-6, Grades 7-9, Grades 10-12, Young Adults (18-35), **Adults (intended for “adults of all ages”)**, and Older Adults. *Our Whole Lives* is part of a larger project by the Unitarian Universalist church to educate around human sexuality that has lasted over 40 years. Sparked by the **sexual revolution in the late 1960’s, UU leaders seemed to be forced to choose between** siding with Playboy Magazine and the also prevalent message that sex should not take place before marriage.⁶¹ Rather than choosing a side, the curricula team at Unitarian Universalist Association developed *About Your Sexuality* - the predecessor to Our Whole Lives - **to aid learners in making “well informed, emotionally sensitive, safer decisions about their sexual lives.”**⁶² In response to feedback that *About Your Sexuality* was no longer adequate for youths, the Unitarian Universalist Association partnered with the United Church of Christ - who had previously developed a sexuality education curriculum for adults - **to create a new project “Our Whole Lives”.**⁶³ The first editions of

⁶¹ Millspaugh, Sarah Gibb. “Forty Years of UU Sexuality Education.” *UU World Magazine*, Unitarian Universalist Association, 15 Apr. 2015, www.uuworld.org/articles/40-years-sexuality-education.

⁶² Millspaugh, Sarah Gibb. *ibid.*

⁶³ Millspaugh, Sarah Gibb. *ibid.*

the curricula came out between 1999-2008, and there have been newer editions to certain curricula as needed as recently as 2019⁶⁴.

Although *Our Whole Lives* comes from the Unitarian Universalist Association and The United Church of Christ, the curricula are specially designed to be secular and leave out specific religious content.⁶⁵ It is important to note that while specific religious content is not present in the curricula, there is a strong presence of the justice-oriented values of UUC and UCC. There are separate supplemental curricula dedicated to religious content of sexuality education, entitled *Sexuality and Our Faith*.

Built upon the assumptions that “All Persons are Sexual”⁶⁶ and “Sexuality is a natural and healthy part of living,”⁶⁷ *Our Whole Lives* begins talking directly about body parts and different types of physical intimacy as early as the K-1 curriculum. This is in **contrast to Sacred Choice’s approach of speaking about the parts of relationships mostly outside of physical intimacy.** These assumptions present themselves in the program topics and the content within each of the programs.

Through numerous conversations I’ve had about religion and intimacy education⁶⁸, *Our Whole Lives* is regarded by many as a gold standard for lifetime,

⁶⁴ According to the publishing data on inSpirit, the Unitarian Universalist Online Book and Giftshop, Newer editions include: Grades 4-6 (2017), Grades 7-9 (2014), Older Adults (2019). <https://www.uuabookstore.org/Our-Whole-Lives-C1404.aspx>

⁶⁵ Goldfarb, Eva S., and Elizabeth M. Casparian. *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 10-12*, Unitarian Universalist Association, 2000, p. ix.

⁶⁶ Goldfarb, Eva S., and Elizabeth M. Casparian. *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 10-12*, Unitarian Universalist Association, 2000, p. x.

⁶⁷ Sprung, Barbara, and Pat Hoertdoerfer. *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades K-1*, Unitarian Universalist Association, 1999, p. ix.

⁶⁸ In addition to mentions in multiple interviews and chats, people have been suggesting to me to read OWL over the past three years. I haven’t kept note of exactly when and how many people, but *Our Whole Lives* has come up both with people who work in Secular Sexuality education - as well as others who work in (liberal) religious settings.

comprehensive sexuality education model from religious organizations. Like Sacred Choices, the creators of these curricula rooted programming in incredible amounts of research and input from experts in the field. That being said, there is an unapologetic nature about addressing sex, different types of physical intimacy, body parts, and bodies as a whole that one would not expect coming from religious institutions.

Topics Addressed in OWL

Our Whole Lives Grades K-1

	Lesson Title	Topics Covered
Topic 1	“Being a Body”	Self Esteem, Our Bodies help us do the things we love, “Outside Self & Inside Self”
Topic 2	“Our Wonderful Bodies Pt 1”	Learning Body parts, including genitalia
Topic 3	“Our Wonderful Bodies Pt 2”	Learn less familiar parts of body and their functions, Difference between Gender Identity and Gender Roles
Topic 4	“Healthy Bodies, Safe Bodies”	Keeping bodies safe and healthy, Bodily privacy, Loving Touch vs Harmful Touch, “No! Go! Tell” Rule re: Sexual abuse,
Topic 5	“Families”	Learning about All sorts of Family Configurations

Topic 6	“Families and Feelings”	Emotions related to Family life, Big changes in Family life
Topic 7	“Babies and Families”	Importance of Physical and Emotional nurturing beginning at birth, Sexual Reproduction and Childbirth, Adoption
Topic 8	“Birth of a Baby”	Birth, Conception, Role of Love in Human Sexuality
Topic 9	“Celebrations!”	How Humans express Joy, Examples of celebrations through lifespan

Our Whole Lives Grades 4-6

	Lesson Title	Topics Covered
Topic 1	Orientation	Birth Order Differences
Topic 2	“Values and Sexuality”	Self Esteem; Defending and Reassessing positions on dating, gender roles, friendship, and peer pressure; Prejudice and Stereotypes
Topic 3	“Family Relationships” -	Roles & Functions within family, Compare and Contrast Intimacy with friends vs Family members

Topic 4	“Puberty: Physical and Emotional Changes”	Body diversity and changes, Physical and emotional part of puberty
Topic 5	“Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation”	Gender Identity vs Gender Roles & Expectations, Sexual orientation & misconceptions, Homophobia
Topic 6	“Lovemaking and Reproduction”	Important factors to consider before deciding to make love, Events leading up to conception
Topic 7	“Health and Safety”	STIs and Sexual Abuse - facts and who to go to
Topic 8	“Communication”	Discussing Complicated feelings and issues
Topic 9	“Decision Making”	Identifying messages around sexuality from peers, family, religion, and media; how messages impact our actions

Our Whole Lives Grades 7-9

Unit 1 - Introduction	
Topic 1	What is Sexuality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circles of Sexuality • Sexuality is Everywhere

Topic 2	<p>Examining Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values Auctioning OR Values Voting • Identifying Personal Values
Topic 3	<p>Language of Sexuality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking the Language Barrier • Sexual Language in Music
Unit 2 - You, as a Sexual Being	
Topic 4	<p>Anatomy and Physiology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naming Anatomy and Physiology • Constructing Sex Systems
Topic 5	<p>Personal Concerns about Puberty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Am I Normal” • Personal Concerns
Topic 6	<p>Body Image</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body Image Overview • Exploring Media Messages • Connecting Body Image and Sexual Health
Topic 7	<p>Gender Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to Gender Identity • Social Challenges Scenarios
Topic 8	<p>Gender Expression, Roles, and Stereotypes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpacking Gender Roles and Stereotypes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Roles Values Voting • Understanding Gender Boxes • Breaking Down Gender Boxes
Topic 9	<p>Sexual Orientation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual Orientation, Homophobia, Biphobia, and Heterosexism • Understanding Myths • Being an Ally • Coming Out Stories
Topic 10	Guest Panel
Topic 11	<p>Sexuality and Disability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability and Sexuality • What Would You Do • Sexuality Challenge Match • Rethinking What's Possible
Unit 3: Relationships	
Topic 12	<p>Healthy Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deal Makers and Deal Breakers • What's Important in a Relationship • Is It Healthy or Unhealthy • Power and Equality in Relationships
Topic 13	<p>Relationship Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active Listening

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking Up for Yourself • Developing Refusal Skills
Unit 4: Contemporary Issues	
Topic 14	Sexuality, Social Media, and the Internet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing Technology Use • What Would You Do? • Bigger Issues
Topic 15	Bullying and Bystander Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Bullying? • Bystander Intervention
Unit 5: Responsible Sexual Behavior	
Topic 16	Redefining Abstinence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining/Redefining Abstinence • Masturbation • Outercourse • Sex Needs a New Metaphor
Topic 17	Lovemaking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positives and Negatives • Lovemaking: Myth vs. Fact • Is This a Healthy Sexual Relationship?
Topic 18	Consent Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensual Sex or Sexual Assault

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent Activities • Bystander Responsibilities
Unit 6: Sexually Transmitted Infections, Pregnancy, and Parenting	
Topic 19	Sexually Transmitted Infections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why STIs Matter • STIs: A Quick Review • STI Myth or Fact • Condoms and Dams
Topic 20	Pregnancy, Parenting, and Teenage Parenthood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conception, Pregnancy, and Birth • Finding Good Parents • Goals and Personal Timeline • Healthy Pregnancy • Prenatal Development Myths • Teen Parenthood Role-Plays • Exploring Media Messages
Topic 21	Unintended Pregnancy Options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facts about Adoption and Abortion • Case Studies
Topic 22	Contraception and Safer Sex <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birth Control Options • Evaluating Pregnancy and STI Risks • Contraception Myths and Facts

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choosing a Contraceptive
Unit 7: Communicating about Sexuality	
Topic 23	Sexual Decision Making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How Do I Decide about Sexual Experience • Bottom-Line Messages for Sexual Decision Making • “Freeze-Frame” Role Playing
Topic 24	Communicating with a Sexual Partner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication Skills Review • Initiating Conversations about Sexual Behavior • Responding to Objections
Topic 25	Self-Care, Celebration, and Closure

Our Whole Lives 10-12

Session 1	Sexual Health - Learning About our Bodies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 1: Language • Workshop 2: Body Image & Feelings • Workshop 3: Anatomy & Physiology
Session 2	Sexual Health - Taking Care of our Sexual Selves <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 4: Sexual Response Cycle • Workshop 5: Reproductive & Sexual Health Care • Workshop 6: AIDS and Other STDs

Session 3	<p>Sexual Health - Making Safer Choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 7: Contraception • Workshop 8: Condoms and Negotiating for Safer Sex • Workshop 9: Sexy Safe Fantasy • Workshop 10: Sexual Health Closure
Session 4	<p>Lifespan Sexuality - Exploring Our Sexual Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 11: Gender Roles • Workshop 12: Identity, Roles, and Orientation • Workshop 13: Sexual Orientation
Session 5	<p>Lifespan Sexuality - Becoming a Parent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 14: Conception, Pregnancy, and Birth • Workshop 15: Parenting License • Workshop 16: Parenting Alternatives
Session 6	<p>Lifespan Sexuality - Expressions of Sexuality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 17: Sexuality Timeline • Workshop 18: Sexuality and People with Disabilities • Workshop 19: Sexual Expressions and Relationships • Workshop 20: Lifespan Sexuality: Closure
Session 7	<p>Building Healthy Sexual Relationships - Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 21 - Verbal and Nonverbal Communication • Workshop 22 - What Makes a Good Relationship • Workshop 23 - Questions of the Other Gender
Session 8	<p>Building Healthy Sexual Relationships - Intimacy, Masturbation, and</p>

	<p>Lovemaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 24 - Defining Intimacy • Workshop 25 - Masturbation Myths and Facts • Workshop 26 - Sexual Behavior • Workshop 27 - Images of Love and Sex in Music and Video
Session 9	<p>Building Healthy Sexual Relationships - Recognizing Unhealthy Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 28 - Power and Responsibility • Workshop 29 - Power in Relationships • Workshop 30 - Breaking Up and Moving On • Workshop 31 - Building Healthy Sexual Relationships: Closure
Session 10	<p>Sexuality and Social Issues - Reproductive Rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 32 - Abortion • Workshop 33 - New Reproductive Choices
Session 11	<p>Sexuality and Social Issues - Power and Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 34 - Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Harassment, and Erotica • Workshop 35 - Date Rape • Workshop 36 - Between Consenting Adults
Session 12	<p>Sexuality and Social Issues - Equality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop 37 - Gay Pride Parade • Workshop 38 - Gender Equality • Workshop 39 - Sexuality and Social Issues Closure

Our Whole Lives Young Adults (18-35)

Workshop 1	<p>Young Adults and Sexuality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circles of Sexuality: Sensuality, Intimacy, Sexual Identity, Sexual Health and Reproduction, and Sexualization
Workshop 2	<p>Mind and Body</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body Vocabulary • Body Image & Feelings • Personal Values & Sexuality
Workshop 3	<p>Sexual Pleasure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Messages about Pleasure • Anatomy of Pleasure • Understanding Sexual Response • Masturbation • What is Orgasm Like
Workshop 4	<p>Keeping Your Body Healthy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuum of Risk • Barrier Methods for STI Protection • Contraception Showcase • Breast and Testicular Self-Examinations • “STI Quiz Game” • Healthy Approaches to the Risks of Sex
Workshop 5	<p>Exploring Gender</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Roles and Stereotypes

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a Forced Choice • Presentation on Sex and Gender • Values, Culture, and Gender Pinwheel • Stories from People who are Transgender
Workshop 6	<p>Sexual Orientation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding Sexual Orientation • Our Sexual Orientations • Bisexuality and Biphobia • Being a Supportive Ally • About Coming Out • Terminology Matchup
Workshop 7	<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naming the Challenges • Identity and Communication Styles • Substances, Sex, and Communication • Communication about Sex
Workshop 8 & 9	<p>Relationships, Love and Commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship Options • Hooking Up: What's It All About? • Dating and New Relationships • Asking Out and Being Asked Out • Long-Distance Relationships • Monogamy, Polyamory and Values • Breaking Up

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Introduction to Commitment ● Commitment to and Love for Yourself ● What is Love? ● Commitment Continuum ● Sexual Activity and Commitment
Workshop 10	<p>Boundaries and Boundary Violations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is It Abuse If...? ● Power and Sexual Aggression ● Resources on Recovery and Prevention ● Know Your Own Boundaries ● Dealing with Power Differences ● Messages in Music
Workshop 11	<p>Family Matters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parenting Perspectives ● Becoming a Parent ● Abortion and Values ● Facts about Pregnancy Options ● Feelings about Pregnancy Options
Workshop 12	<p>Sexual Fantasy and Variation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Reality of Fantasy ● Fantasy for Sale: Sexually Explicit Media ● Sexual Variations ● Sexy Safe Fantasy ● Online Sexual Compulsivity

Workshop 13	Advocacy and Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Background on Abstinence-Only Education ● Introduction to Advocacy ● Becoming Effective Advocates⁶⁹
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What this resource adds to the “Library”

Conversations around intimacy and sexuality throughout the lifespan

While most resources specifically aimed around intimacy and sexuality education are aimed at middle school or high school, *Our Whole Lives* provides material and a model **for teaching about sexuality throughout one’s life based on what information is age appropriate and what questions are likely to come up.** Through trying to address sexuality education in a holistic, proactive way, learners **don’t have to wait until they are teenagers and then be taught that they “may have already encountered this.”** There are multiple opportunities for a learner to encounter information so that by the time they are making their own decisions about their bodies, they have the tools to do so.

Programming about gender and sexuality that normalizes LGBTQ+

Experience

While providing in each curriculum opportunities to understand messaging and societal portrayals of different genders or sexuality, *Our Whole Lives* also provides programming and language for all ages to communicate that it is normal and okay for people to have different relationships with their gender and sexuality. In the lesson for

⁶⁹ Unfortunately, I couldn’t get access to the Adult or Older Adult Curricula, thus those topics are not included in this chapter.

Grades 4-6 on Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation, one of the goals expressly mentioned is **“To help participants recognize the cultural expectations that are placed on females and males to behave according to specific roles.”**⁷⁰ Through normalizing reflection on who we are in comparison to what we are told to be based on our identities, this allows learners no matter their identity to explore who they are and to challenge the messages they get in media and other sources around what they are **“supposed to be”** or **who they are “supposed to like.”**

Direct Language about Bodily Autonomy and Assault

Whether it is framed as **“Loving Touch”** for Grades K-1, or sexual abuse and sexual harassment for all of the other age cohorts, *Our Whole Lives* intentionally provides language and models for direct conversation about something none of us likes to talk about: Sexual Assault. Unfortunately, this issue exists whether students are taught about it or not. Through providing lessons about assault, there are opportunities to introduce **mnemonic devices like “No! Go! Tell”**⁷¹ (for Grades K-1) or to have learners think ahead to people they trust who they would tell or ask for help if something that made them feel uncomfortable took place. The language is rooted in bodily autonomy and a value that a person should be able to choose who touches their bodies in what ways - rather than focusing on what a person could do to avoid being assaulted. Also, if educators or

⁷⁰ “Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation.” *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 4-6*, by Elizabeth M. Casparian, Unitarian Universalist Association, 2000, pp. 49–55.

⁷¹ “No! Go! Tell!” - NO: “No! Remember that no one has the right to touch you on or near your genitals if you are uncomfortable about it or if there is not a good reason, like a doctor’s examination... What do you say? (No!). GO: “GO! Listen to your feelings... A touch that makes you feel angry or afraid is bad, and that kind of touching is harmful to you... What should you do? (Go! Get Away! Leave!). TELL: “Always tell an adult. Don’t be afraid to tell. Don’t wait.” - Sprung, Barbara, and Pat Hoertdoerfer. *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades K-1*, Unitarian Universalist Association, 1999, p. 55

parents are looking for language to address a situation that has already happened, there is already scripted language to help prepare for the conversation.

Direct Language about Pleasure and Types of Intimacy

Whether talking about masturbation or acts one may participate in with others, *Our Whole Lives* provides lessons and language for talking about pleasure without shaming it. There are programs about risks one may encounter in participating in certain acts - which the program write ups and handouts describe in detail; however, there is clear **communication that pleasure is not shameful. Rather than teaching on a scale of “good” to “bad”** *Our Whole Lives* **teaches on a scale of “high risk” to “low risk” while providing options on ways to achieve pleasure while lowering risk.**⁷²

We Will Listen and We Will Do

About We Will Listen and We Will Do

Rabbi Jennifer Queen wrote her rabbinic thesis, **“We Will Listen and We Will Do”** the same year that the #MeToo movement exploded on social media. Having previously done work in comprehensive sexuality education and in Abortion fund allocation as she **earned her Master’s in Public Health from George Washington University**, she saw a gap in the content and resources Jewish communities were providing to support survivors of sexual violence and to raise awareness about the presence of sexual assault in Jewish

⁷² “Redefining Abstinence.” *Our Whole Lives: Sexuality Education for Grades 7-9*, by Pamela Wilson et al., Unitarian Universalist Association, 2014, pp. 249–258.

sources.^{73 74} Inspired by the Our Whole Lives curricula, Rabbi Queen sought to develop **a curriculum that could become part of a series addressing this issue throughout one's** life time - but with an expressly Jewish framing. While addressing the issue was an important first step, she also wrote her curriculum to inspire conversations about tools, action, and practice⁷⁵. **To negate the myth that sexual assault doesn't happen in Jewish** communities, and certainly not within Jewish families, Rabbi Queen explored Jewish texts including II Samuel 13, to open the conversation of what our Jewish tradition has provided for wisdom and practice as well as what modern Jews today should be doing to address this issue.

Topics Addressed in We Will Listen and We Will Do

Part A: Exploration- Text and Classic Commentary	
Ch 1	Biblical Texts on Sexual Violence
Ch 2	Talmudic/Rabbinic Text on Sexual Violence in the Bible
Ch 3	II Samuel Text Work
Ch 4	Rabbinic Commentary on II Samuel 13
Part B: Interpretive and Practical Applications	
Ch 5	Halakha
Ch 6	Midrash

⁷³ Queen, Jennifer. "Interview". Oct 20, 2020. Chat Notes pg 1.

⁷⁴ Queen, Jennifer. "Jennifer Queen." *Jennifer Queen, Rabbi-in-Training*, 2019, rabbijenniferqueen.com/.

⁷⁵ Queen, Jennifer. "Interview". Oct 20, 2020. Chat Notes pg 1.

Ch 7	Contemporary Resources
Part C: Extrapolation - Developing New Resources	
Ch 8	Constructing a New Ethic
Ch 9	Curriculum Introduction and Sample of Materials

What this resource adds to the “Library”

Jewish Educational Resources for Sexual Assault

While there are informational resources about Domestic Violence from organizations like Faith Trust Institute or Jewish Family Services, there are significantly fewer informational resources around Sexual Assault in Jewish spaces. From my research, before the #MeToo movement took off, the number of educational resources widely available that combine Jewish traditional learning with accurate, helpful information about sexual violence was even smaller. Jewish Organizations to this day are ill-equipped to support survivors of sexual violence despite the fact that, as previously mentioned in this thesis, according to a statistic cited by the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), every 73 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted.⁷⁶ To this day there is not a widely published Jewish educational resource for individual organizations to reference as they try to support survivors in their midst or create awareness. While this curriculum is not fully developed, once it is, it can give individual organizations seeking to educate adults about sexual violence an opportunity to use a Jewish resource rather than bringing in a secular resource. In the meantime, the textual

⁷⁶ *Statistics* | RAINN. (2018). RAINN. <https://www.rainn.org/statistics>

exploration and application provide a foundation to communicate that - unfortunately - Sexual **assault happens in Jewish communities too... so it is our responsibility to address it.**⁷⁷

Element of Jewish Sexuality Education for Adults

While there have been efforts to develop Jewish educational resources around sexuality education for teens, there is far less effort dedicated to addressing sexuality education beyond college unless it is for the sake of educating teens. (For example, there was an informational session with the parents in *Sacred Choices*, but this was far more focused on preparing the parent to teach their child rather than dedicating time or energy to understanding their own relationship to sexuality.⁷⁸) This resource is intended to be a part of a much larger life-span sexuality program that includes intentional education around sexual violence - similar to *Our Whole Lives*.⁷⁹ That being said, it remains no small detail that this resource is dedicated to adult comprehensive sexuality education head on, let alone one rooted in Jewish text and values.

Gay Like Me

About Gay Like Me

Gay Like Me started off as a letter that writer Richie Jackson, a gay man, was writing to his son, who had recently also come out as gay, as he prepared to leave for

⁷⁷ Queen, Jennifer. "Interview". Oct 20, 2020. Chat Notes pg 1.

⁷⁸ "Introductory Parent Meeting Outline." *Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics: Middle School Curriculum*, URJ Press, 2007, pp. 31–36.

⁷⁹ Queen, Jennifer. "Interview". Oct 20, 2020. Chat Notes pg 2.

university.⁸⁰ Rather than writing in an academic or textbook style, Jackson wrote in a memoir style, using his own experience as a gay man and LGBTQ+ history in his lifetime as a vehicle to instill certain values as well as to convey advice. While this was not expressly written to function as sexuality education, in many ways the lessons and values communicated modeled how parents can talk to their children about sexuality. There is discussion about self-esteem, discovering oneself, love, lust, condoms, physical intimacy, risky sexual behavior, AIDS, and gay-male **“cultural” practices to be aware of** - all of which are important elements of sexuality education. Also, while this book was not expressly written as a Jewish resource, not only are Richie Jackson and his son Jewish, but Judaism made its way into many of the lessons - incorporating his experience of Jewish rituals and life cycle events into a few of the stories he told. Published in 2020, Jackson writes of his experience twice becoming a father as a gay man, of the AIDS crisis in New York City, of gay marriage being legalized in the United States, of the Trump election, of increases in attacks on gay rights over the past four years. His advice is not given in a vacuum, nor is his portrayal of himself as a gay man. Jackson portrays himself as a father, a partner, a husband, a gay man, a Jew, a friend, a sexual being, a producer, and a human. These are all parts of who he is - and his stories and advice encouraged his son to explore the many parts of himself that make him whole.

⁸⁰ Jackson, Richie. “Gay Like Me: A Father’s Advice for His Son.” *Town & Country*, Town & Country, 3 Feb. 2020, www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/arts-and-culture/a30720195/gay-like-me-richie-jackson-book/.

Topics Addressed in Gay Like Me

Chapter 1	My Son
Chapter 2	Being Gay Requires Double Vision
Chapter 3	Visibility Is Not a Cure-All
Chapter 4	Find and Ignite Your Anger
Chapter 5	Coming Out and Joining In
Chapter 6	Parenting Is a Marathon, Not a Sprint
Chapter 7	Complicated/Worth It
Chapter 8	Otherness Is a Leg Up to Extraordinary
Chapter 9	Never Diminish Your Essence
Chapter 10	Buttress Yourself with Gay History
Chapter 11	Have Sex in the Light
Chapter 12	AIDS Is Not Over
Chapter 13	Character Counts, Not Profile Stats
Chapter 14	Grief Is a Manageable Disease
Chapter 15	Dive Heart First
Chapter 16	Coming Out Is Every Day

Chapter 17	Words Matter
Chapter 18	It's Still a Straight Man's World
Chapter 19	Being a Good Gay Citizen
Chapter 20	Stonewall50
Chapter 21	This Parent's Prayer

What this resource adds to the “Library”

Modeled Communication for Parents

Parents often find it challenging to figure out how to speak about conversations as uncomfortable or awkward as sex. While each parent will have to find their own way to talk about these types of issues, there is something important about finding the balance **between sharing “words of wisdom” and sharing personal challenges and celebrations** from personal experiences. The author treats sex not just as this separate part of life that **needs to be discussed like “the birds and the bees” but rather talks about it** as part of his whole being. He wants his son to be respectful, responsible, and safe. Conversations **about safety, condoms, trauma, history, confidence, love for one's self, and pride are all** entangled in conversations both about sex and about the identity of being gay. While **there were parts that came off a bit “lecture-y”, it is important that the wisdom held by** the parents is honored as well as the personal stories. There are plenty of instances of warning, but the warning comes from a place of love and wanting what is best rather

than a place of control. While not every parent is going to be speaking from a place of experience as another member of the LGBT community, it is important that parents celebrate their whole child, not just the parts they can relate to. This part of their soul and heart are a core part of who they are. That part is beautiful too.

Direct Communication about how LGBTQ+ Identities impact human experience

Jackson did not boil down gay-ness into to whom one is attracted or the kind of sex that people prefer. Rather, he provided a look into what it can mean not only sexually or romantically, but personally and culturally to be a gay man in the stories he shared and in the advice he imparted on his son. This is also expressly modeled communication for talking to LGBT young adults. In contrast to curricula or resources aimed at whole groups or at learners assumed to be heterosexual, the information and the stories in *Gay Like Me* are unapologetic in the way they address issues that are more exclusively applicable to gay men. He advises his son in one of the last chapters of the book, “Be a Good Gay Citizen” - and teaches him what that means.⁸¹ While some of the lessons are universal, Richie Jackson normalizes the experiences that his son will likely experience as a gay man and shares a vision of what his life will be not “despite” who he is, but rather because of who he is.

Story, Spirituality, and Blessing

⁸¹ “Being a Good Gay Citizen.” *Gay Like Me: a Father Writes to His Son*, by Richie Jackson, Harper, 2020, pp. 137–144.

Throughout this book, Richie Jackson ties his own story within a communal history.

This feels very Jewish - almost like his own version of a telling of the Passover story.

“One must look upon themselves as though they, themselves, have come out of Egypt”.⁸²

In addition to citing Jewish and spiritually meaningful experiences throughout the book, Richie Jackson ends his book with a blessing to his son.⁸³ Throughout the book there are pieces of advice and celebrations and warnings, but he ends the book with a blessing that he writes for his son. In Jewish life cycle events, it is traditional to take the **opportunity during b’nai mitzvah and sometimes weddings to give parents the** opportunity to share blessings with their children, but there are so many more times that deserve this opportunity. Jackson models in his blessing not only a parent who happens to be Jewish teaching his son about sexuality, he models celebrating his son and creating ritual to share hopes and dreams. One does not have to be a rabbi to create ritual or liturgy. This book is a prime example of some of the most beautiful spiritual moments coming from one person sharing their love and hope for another.

⁸² Mishnah Pesachim 10:5

⁸³ “This Parent’s Prayer” *Gay Like Me: a Father Writes to His Son*, by Richie Jackson. Ibid. pp. 155-156

-Chapter 5-

Interviews

Introduction

From the beginning of the thesis process, there was an intention to speak to people in the field of Jewish Education, Comprehensive Sex Education, and/or the intersection of these areas. This was to gain more perspectives than my own on what direction Jewish organizations need to take regarding Sexuality and Intimacy education and on what are best practices around this type of education. Little did I know that in fact as I reached out to some people to interview, they would suggest I reach out to others who suggested I reach out to others. In addition, when I posted my survey to the different groups on Facebook, even more people suggested I reach out to other people they knew who had done work or study in this field. Individuals in the field also reached out suggesting books and articles I should read, podcasts I should listen to, other materials they were familiar with, and offering to talk about their experiences. Before I knew it there were more people than I had originally planned to interview. There was such individual enthusiasm for a topic around which there has been little organizational development.

I began by “official” interviews, which were scheduled as interviews, and I had prior permission to record and transcribe for the purposes of referencing for this thesis. **Later in the research process, as I began following people’s recommendations for further people to talk to, I began having what I called “Chats.” These chats were slightly less** formal and were not entered with the intention of being an interview. I had not previously asked to record and transcribe, so analysis from these conversations comes

primarily from notes I wrote down as we spoke. These chats were often shorter, and more focused on exchange of resources. I interviewed Dr. Betsy Stone and Sarah Stone, Essie Shachar-Hill, Barrett Harr, Ira Miller, Dr. Laura Novak Winer, and Avi Orlow. I additionally had chats with Stacy Shapiro, Rabbi Jenn Queen, and Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi. **In total I had 10 Interviews and “Chats.” There could have been** significantly more – and I believe there should be moving forward.

It has become apparent throughout the process of speaking with each of these individuals that there is a need for more spaces where these voices are uplifted, the difficult conversations they raise can be visited, the resources they are aware of can be compiled, and these individuals can interact with one another. Most of these individuals have done work based on their own passions and the projects they have taken on – but they have in many ways been islands unto themselves. These individuals may have had a few other individuals with whom they have worked, or perhaps other individuals or their individual workplaces who have supported them in their research and initiatives. That being said they have largely been working in isolation from others doing similar work. There is an opportunity to move away from the current model of isolation through the creation of a field that would provide scaffolding, networking, organizational structure, human resources, new ideas, power, and support such that these individuals. Creating such a community or initiative would not only benefit those who are already doing this work, it would also benefit others who would like to enter this field or organizations who could benefit from the compiled wisdom and resources.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ In the survey, there was a space at the end where people could share thoughts brought up by this survey or other things that they wanted to add that did not have space in the survey. There were multiple responses individuals wrote about wanting their organization to do more or even that they were interested in resources to better address this.

This chapter will discuss each individual with whom I conversed – highlighting their vision of an ideal Jewish sexuality and intimacy education, their individual experiences in the field, and what they add to the conversation of what Jewish organizations need to do to improve sexuality and intimacy education. Afterwards, it will uplift patterns I saw across multiple conversations.

Conversations with Some Experts

Betsy Stone, Ph. D

About Dr. Betsy Stone

Dr. Betsy Stone started her career as a clinical psychologist but has since focused her energy on bringing understanding about human psychology and development to Jewish communities. While she can speak to a number of topics, she often educates on topics surrounding adolescence, anxiety and depression, impacts of trauma on the brain and body, and intimacy. She is currently a lecturer at Hebrew Union College for classes related to these subjects, as well as a highly sought-after speaker at Jewish organizations and congregations.

Dr. Betsy Stone's vision of an Ideal Jewish Sexuality Education

(Immediately before, Sarah Stone: I think the umbrella you need to use here is Intimacy. It's the Intimacy umbrella. All of it falls under that.)

I agree with that, and I also think that one of the things that we, as a society and as a sub-society, need to do is we need to empower families to have not just emotionally intimate, but intellectually intimate conversations. What the two of us have done with you in the last hour has been an intellectually intimate conversation. These don't happen in most of our families.

I have an article that's in HAP⁸⁵, that came out maybe three or four years ago, about a program that I've been teaching for a long time, for sixth and seventh graders and their parents that builds intellectual intimacy. I actually think is one of the most important things for our families. If there is intellectual intimacy about X, it's easily transferable to Y. But if what we do is say, "This is the thing I'm going to tell you," and then I'm going to tell.

Look. We talk about the sex talk as though there is a single conversation, which once it's over, is complete and we never have to talk about it again. I think if we can build intellectual intimacy, it actually provides emotional intimacy. I don't think it always works in the other direction. What I think we have the ability to do within the rubric of Jewish education is about building intellectual intimacy, which I think our kids are starving for. I frankly think our parents are starving for.

What This Conversation and Dr. Stone bring to the table

Dr. Stone brings to this conversation both an intimate knowledge of human development, knowledge of Jewish organizations from the perspective of someone who is often consulted as an expert, and her own personal experience as a Jewish person who participates in membership in her own community. From the beginning, she wanted to make clear that there is a difference to her between sex education and what is needed - a much larger conversation around intimacy. She mentioned toward the beginning that she sees sex education as explanation of the mechanics, rather than addressing the expansive definition of the different facets of life that connect to sex. Through our conversation, Dr. Stone's remarks pushed me toward searching for different language to use rather than reclaiming the term sex education while explaining the caveat of "using an expansive understanding" toward using language that encompasses more of these subjects. There is a lot of social baggage surrounding sex education, or lack thereof, and

⁸⁵ Handbook of Applied Psychology

the ways current models are failing learners throughout their development. Beyond saying explicitly that she does not see Jewish organizations taking on sex education, the following are quotes she said during different parts of the interview that support her concerns around the baggage around sex education - both the term and the education:

- **“I think that a lot of what we call sex education has historically been sex mis-education. It has not been about sexual pleasure. It has not been about ... other forms of intimacy that might go hand in hand with sex and might NOT go hand in hand with sex. So, I think the first thing that’s really demanded of you in this topic is to think about the relationship between sexuality and sex education, and gender bias and gender orientation and sex education because they have not historically had much to do with each other at all.”**⁸⁶
- **“I think that the place that lots of liberal kids have gotten the greatest amount of sex education - and I wouldn’t call it education - has been at camp or NFTY events, which has basically been ‘Don’t get pregnant.’”**⁸⁷
- **“I think it’s also talked about when there are implicit rules that have not been articulated but somebody violates them...and that is the way that very often we learn what the rules are - not just about gender but writ large. It’s that when I break the rules, then I know what the rules are.”**⁸⁸

Aware of the social dynamics that often take place in child and adolescent development, Dr. Stone was concerned that many of the ways that young people learn about sexuality and intimacy is not through thoughtful, intentional, open conversations within their families or in their trusted communities rooted in a sense of emotional and intellectual intimacy. Rather they

⁸⁶ Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. “Interview.” 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 1.

⁸⁷ Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. “Interview.” 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 1.

⁸⁸ Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. “Interview.” 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 2.

are learning about it from other young people, from the media, from implicit rules and cultural norms (often surrounded by secrecy, silence, or fear), or from shame when young people break these implicit rules. Shrouding intimacy - both with oneself and with others - in secrecy and in shame leads young learners to understand that intimacy and sexuality itself are inherently shameful, over which she expressed great concern. As a parent, Dr. Stone attempted to have open, sex-positive conversations with her children so that they would know they could come to her and her husband with questions⁸⁹. As she discussed in her vision for an Ideal Jewish Sexuality education, she wants to empower families to have emotional and intellectual intimacy in the ways they discuss what can often be uncomfortable conversations between parents and children. Through creating a family culture of speaking about curiosities and concerns, this opens the door to future conversations that may have been prevented if the young people **assume that these types of subjects are simply not discussed, or if they detected any sort of “rule breaking” from previous experience asking questions.**

One of the solutions she offered regarding the appropriate, and to her - more honest - language was to change the language from Sex Education - or even sexuality education - toward **language that includes the term “Intimacy”, stating, “I think that it is really important for us to understand that sexuality and intimacy often don't have much to do with each other. Surely in adolescence, they are parallel paths.”**⁹⁰ Rather than exclusively speaking about an idea or an activity that young people may not be actively engaging in currently - as can happen in approaches to sex education, Jewish organizations should understand that there are skills to be developed that benefit them both right now and also in the future. After reflection upon this conversation, I felt inclined to move toward language **that used both the terms “sexuality” and “intimacy.”**

⁸⁹ Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. “Interview.” 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 26.

⁹⁰ Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. “Interview.” 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 17.

Sarah Stone, MSW, LCSW-C

About Sarah Stone

I was lucky to have had Sarah Stone join in the conversation with Dr. Betsy Stone. Sarah **Stone, Dr. Stone's Daughter, in many** ways followed in the footsteps of Dr. Stone by pursuing a career as a social worker working primarily with teens and young adults. Earlier in adulthood, she worked at URJ Camp Eisner for a number of years which strongly impacts her understanding of what improvements need to be made in the world of Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy education. Sarah Stone, who identifies herself as Queer, has a background in LGBTQ issues and sexual identity.

Sarah's vision of an Ideal Jewish Sexuality & Intimacy Education?

(Immediately Before: Dr. Betsy Stone's response quoted above)

So, I would agree with all of that and I would add to it, for me, part of what would be this ideal educational experience would be stepping away from norms, so that the conversation is kept... First, we have to destigmatize. We have to destigmatize all intimacy, which is a monumental task and not realistic at all. But you asked me about ideals. Then you'd also have to step away from norms, and it shouldn't be hetero normative, and it shouldn't be cis normative. That if we stop saying, "This is the base," and then things shoot off from there, and we start saying, "You're a person and you experience your life the way you experience your life. Mine might be similar, and it might be very different."

It creates a safety base. If we stop saying, "Sex is penetrative," which is nonsense. There is so many steps... Even in heterosexual relationships, there's so much of sex that happens before penetration. If we stop saying, "Sex is penetrative," which excludes all sorts of intimacy and

excludes all sorts of people from intimacy. Because if you know you're a lesbian from the time you're 10, do you ever lose your virginity?

... If you're a Gold Star Lesbian, have you ever lost your virginity? That's a dumb question because virginity shouldn't be a concept that we're discussing at all. If we stop treating it like it's precious and we step away from the norms and we step away from the stigma, then we can actually have an educational experience with meaning, with values and with safety.

... Essentially, my argument is to do this ideally, we have to burn it to the ground. We need a new foundation. Our foundation is cracked.

What This Conversation and Sarah Stone bring to the table

Throughout our conversation, Sarah Stone was particularly concerned with the importance of representation and genuine inclusion - especially as it relates to LGBTQ+ identities - when it comes to the norms both of Jewish communal life and of sexuality and intimacy education. This is in direct contrast to what she saw as the current reality of many individuals who experience shame and othering for being who they are and loving who they love. In many ways her comments on the way to best address issues around genuine inclusion in Jewish spaces and surrounding sexuality and intimacy education included both open conversation that did not signal any shame around being these identities and demonstrating through actions the ways people who are different identities are just as much part of the community as everyone else - and if they want to share these pieces of themselves, they should be welcome to do so.

She cited as a model that a member of her mother's congregation, who had been the president of the Sisterhood at one point, was a trans-woman.⁹¹ According to Sarah,

⁹¹ Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. "Interview." 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 8.

while this woman is quite introverted, she was given the opportunity to test the waters and become comfortable sharing little bits of her experience to individuals before speaking more openly with her community and taking visible positions of power within the community. Now, apparently, the fact that this woman is a trans-woman is a non-issue within the community. Not only is it a non-issue, but it serves as an informal communication to others in the community that if their own gender identity is something they struggle with, they are still safe and welcome in this community.⁹² To Sarah, for many reasons, this is an ideal to be inspired by.

As a queer woman, Sarah has felt in Jewish spaces as though no part of her identity was represented - or intentionally uplifted⁹³. While she acknowledges that she was not always as clear in understanding her own identities, this did not mean that she **did not notice that something felt different... she feared being accepted by those around her.**⁹⁴ She argues that through going beyond focusing on formal education to understanding the ways communities informally educate learners allows for them to be more thoughtful as they attempt to align their values with the ways they treat members of congregations and other Jews who have different identities than what are traditionally represented in the congregation⁹⁵. As she states in her vision for ideal Jewish Sexuality education, a core element of thoughtfully addressing both formal and informal Jewish education must be rooted in challenging societal norms and actively destigmatizing intimacy. Without these two key pieces, any education remains harmful to the learner and to the community.

⁹² Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. "Interview." 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 9.

⁹³ Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. "Interview." 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 11.

⁹⁴ Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. "Interview." 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 27

⁹⁵ Stone, Dr. Betsy, and Sarah Stone. "Interview." 4 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 34

Essie Shachar-Hill, MSW

About Essie Shachar-Hill

Essie Shachar-Hill is the Chicago Education and Training manager of Keshet. Keshet is **a Jewish organization that seeks to “equip Jewish organizations with the skills and knowledge to build LGBTQ-affirming communities, create spaces in which all queer Jewish youth feel seen and valued, and advance LGBTQ rights nationwide.”**⁹⁶ Essie primarily leads training sessions and consultations for Jewish communities on an institutional level in the Chicago-land area, as well as provides resources and education to leaders of these organizations. They received their MSW through the Jewish Communal Leadership Program, a program within the University of Michigan School of Social Work.

Essie’s Vision of an Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education

I want everyone to feel not alone. I want people to see their experiences represented. I want people to see different experiences represented. I want sex to be talked about expansively and not just “P and V” as being Sex. I want there to be talk around all the things that surround sex ie. **Communication and boundaries and abuse and what dating... you know, what intimate partner** violence can look like both physically and emotionally and verbally. That is something that feels really important. I want people to be thinking critically around their own gender and messages they get around their own gender. I want people to know that non-binary and trans people exist **and are all around you and you’re probably one of them or sitting next to one of them.** I want people to know that there are more than two options for gender AND sexuality.

⁹⁶ “About Us.” *Keshet*, www.keshetonline.org/about-us/.

I want people to have resources for other places to look because it's also true that even the most expansive curriculum is not going to cover everything. So, I want people to have access to factual information. I want...

I want people to talk about porn and the messages that young people and all people about porn and what is realistic and what is really fucked up and not realistic. I want people to talk about trafficking and what that is and what that looks like. I want people to know about what happens **when trauma happens and how it impacts people's relationship to their bodies. I want people to have safety plans around, like, what happens if you're in an unsafe situation. I want people... I** want people to know that sexual assault is never their fault and what to do if that happens. I want **people to know, like, sexual assault doesn't just happen from like scary strangers in bushes.**

I want people to know that they are worthy of love and pleasure... and how to have a critical eye towards media and messaging and even messaging they get in religion that is harmful for them. And how to look at messages we get in Judaism and pick the ones that feel really good for us and the ones that are really challenging - like how to grapple with that and also know that we can let **some of those things go, in my opinion. That's not going to work in all religious** communities but being able to look at all the kind of cards that we were dealt and all the scripts we were given and **figure out which ones are awesome and which ones are like "maybe not for me... might be good for someone else, but that's not good for me."** and to have autonomy over that experience.

What This Conversation and Essie Shachar-Hill bring to the table

Essie Shachar-Hill brings not only their background in educating Jewish organizations on becoming welcoming and safe for LGBTQ+ folks, but also their own experience as a non-binary person who is deeply involved in Jewish life. The need for education around inclusion and equity within Jewish spaces is not a theoretical conversation for them - but one that affects them every day. They notice that Jewish spaces use binaries as an assumption - and educate as though there are two main ways of being - male and female. When describing an experience, they had with training with

a partner organization, they mentioned that being forced to choose between a false dichotomy of choices was a painful experience for them. Even in Jewish organizations that try to create space for LGBTQ+ individuals, there is little understanding of the experience of people who are non-binary or who are exploring their relationship with their gender identity. There is an assumption that non-binary individuals are best able to meet their needs by choosing between norms and programming made specifically for male and female individuals that in many ways reinforce the gender norms and stereotypes - rather than challenging the assumptions made about extremely gendered spaces that could leave even people who do identify as such feeling out of place.

One of the comments they made that hadn't been previously brought up was that even in inclusive spaces there is a need to acknowledge the reality that part of the human experience of moving through life is fluidity. We do not always have the same relationships with different parts of ourselves in different parts of our lives, rather we explore and change and come to understand different parts of who we are differently as **time goes on. In discussing this, they said, "... It's kind of like people are frozen in time. It's like 'Okay well if you're attracted to boys now, you're always going to be attracted to boys. So, let's talk about liking boys.'** And like, that is not how it works! People become **aware of themselves and their identities and their sexualities..."**⁹⁷. Through educating people about people who experience life like them and like other people, it gives individuals tools to add to their toolbox not only for understanding others but potentially for understanding parts of themselves in the future.

⁹⁷ Shachar Hill, Essie. "Interview." 8 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 9.

Also, when asked about the relationship between Judaism and intimacy education, Essie framed beautifully an important piece of what Judaism has to offer to this conversation.

Judaism is so comforting... because it gives us structure. It gives us rules. It gives us something to follow. It gives us meaning. And when relationships - both romantic, sexual, platonic, whatever all kinds of relationships - **are also core, key to people's lives and social and emotional wellbeing**, we **are going to look to our tradition on how to relate to those people...This should be a core part of what we are teaching and it's not even... it's not even engrounding in Jewish values. It's not like you have to pull for those threads of connection - I mean, they're pretty much one in the same.**⁹⁸

Essie was the first person I spoke to who explicitly explained the inherent interconnection between Judaism, relationships, and education. This perspective uplifted both what is beautiful in Judaism and noting the ways it can help us talk about what we have already noted that we want to address. The content does not have to be pulled out of thin air - Jewish practice, traditions, community, and text can all contribute to the structure and meaning that can give individuals new insights into **understanding oneself and also one's relationships.**

Barrett Harr

About Barrett Harr

Barrett Harr currently serves as the Director of Mental Health and Addiction at Feinberg Consulting. Previously, she worked as a Jewish Educator serving in roles as a Director of High School and Youth Programs at Temple Shalom in Dallas, Texas, Regional Director for NFTY-MI, Director of Youth Education and Family Engagement at

⁹⁸ Shachar Hill, Essie. "Interview." 8 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 7.

Congregation B'nai Moshe in West Bloomfield, Michigan, and as the Mental Health

Resource Senior Coordinator at Jewish Family Service of Metropolitan Detroit.⁹⁹

Throughout her career, she has been an active voice for sex positive education, which seeks to remove shame from seeking information one needs regarding issues around emotional and physical intimacy.

Excerpt from Barrett Harr's Vision for Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy

*Education*¹⁰⁰

... The social emotional piece has to come into it. I think we have to talk to our learners about where and why sexual behavior, and talk about pleasure, talk about consent, talk about all of that. We have to help families talk about their values, because many times that conversation is not happening.

Families may have rules, but they don't talk about their values. Helping parents to identify that or to ask kids to identify their values, what may be important to a kid may not be important to their parents, and vice versa. Really having these conversations, where we honor where every person is, we honor whatever gender and sexual identity they present with, and normalize it, and it's okay. In an age-appropriate scaffolded way, talk about it their entire lives. So, it's not just a one day, "Oh, by the way, it's time for the puberty talk."

It isn't, and there are lots of ways we can explore, there are great Jewish source texts, there's great midrash. There's all kinds of ways in which it is clearly woven through our tradition, but we often hide those texts. You only get the true story of Hanukkah when you're a grown up. "We want you to come to Bible and beer," which by the way, let's talk about the alcohol use to sell Judaism. That's a whole other issue at my current job.

But we have, our kids need to know the good, bad, and ugly. Figuring out ways to do that throughout, I think it's important to know what's going on in their lives outside of the building.

⁹⁹ "Barrett Harr." *LinkedIn*, www.linkedin.com/in/barrett-harr-725a8019a/.

¹⁰⁰ To Find Barrett's full vision for Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education, look to Appendix C part A

What's being taught in their schools? What are their families telling them? So that you can avoid conflict. Because if their faith is teaching them one thing and their family ... you've got to find that balance to use inclusive language so that it's not creating dilemma and saying, "Oh, do I listen to my parents or my school or do I listen to my community? Or dismiss my religion, because you told me X, Y, or Z is bad, and therefore [inaudible 01:02:21]. I don't agree with you, so Judaism is dead to me."

We've got to find ways to balance it, and I think it's got to be done in a way that is loving and supportive, and helps people to understand, for sure, that one decision does not make you anything. That you always have the right to make a different decision. That was one of the most powerful things I think I taught my kids, is just because you may have a partner that you think it's appropriate to engage in sexual behavior with today. If for some reason tomorrow you say, "This doesn't feel right to me anymore," you have every right and you have the obligation to yourself to say to your partner, "Doesn't feel right."

What This Conversation and Barrett Harr bring to the table

Although Barrett Harr has shifted from working in various Jewish organizations to working at a secular, mental health organization, she remains a Jewish educator at heart. Her vision for Jewish education and for intimacy education are interlinked - and in many ways are one in the same. Influenced by her own study of Mussar, or study of Jewish ethics, she believes that Judaism is full of values and lessons that remain relevant to the lives of learners today. If that is not coming across to learners, it is the responsibility of educators to change the priorities and teaching models to reflect this.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹"My view of Jewish education has pretty much always been the reason for Jewish education and for Jewish engagement is for the values and the lessons that we can learn from it. My personal philosophy has always sort of spun around Middot, and what we can take from it, and so how you can apply that to your life.

Normally, as a Jewish educator, instead of teaching the story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the sea, I would say, "Tell me about bravery. What does that look like in your life? Who do you know that's brave? How do we determine? Oh, and by the way, do you know that we have brave people in our

While she spoke about this in regard to Jewish education - this remains true about intimacy education as well. There are ways to teach learners of all different ages about intimacy and identity and relationships that feel relevant to their lives and to the world around them today - rather than speaking in theory or in a vacuum about different subjects, and rather than speaking about practices that they may experience in the future. If these expectations are true for Jewish education and for intimacy education, all the more so that we should have this expectation for Jewish Intimacy education.

Similarly, through her experience as an educator in a number of Jewish settings, she has come to understand that the best education must be viewed holistically, and it cannot come from only one setting. Rather than depending on Sunday school or a retreat experienced once, we have to find ways to introduce the lessons we value in multiple arenas of life. She described:

Families can talk about their family values, congregations can talk about the relational values, the Jewish values that are behind respect for one another, respect for oneself, modesty. All of those kinds of things that our tradition has something to say about. When they all are overlaid on each other, you get a much richer picture, and much better idea and education. We talk about good education scaffolds things, and it spirals up.¹⁰²

In order to truly address what Jewish sexuality and intimacy education should look like, there needs to be intentional thought about how Jewish communities can support these different types of learnings - and how they can build upon one another in a meaningful way. Thus, there is an incredible need to develop resources for many different places of learning - including within the home.

tradition? Let's look at this story and see if it fits your definition." I flip the script on them, so I always start with the value about making it relevant to their lives. Because if it's not relevant, does it really matter if our kids can quote verse? It doesn't really matter."

¹⁰² Harr, Barrett. "Interview." 10 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 4.

One other discussion that Barrett uplifted is the importance of understanding this topic as it relates to shame, individual and generational trauma, and family systems issues. In her work with addiction and mental health, she is constantly confronted by the reality that many topics that need to be discussed in sexuality and intimacy education¹⁰³ do not exist in a vacuum. While people should not be pushed to reveal their **own traumas, there is value in being open about the reality that people's experiences of** these areas of life are impacted by outside forces that we may not fully understand or be aware of. When discussing the way this impacts the lessons parents may be teaching to their children about sexuality, Barrett Harr said,

Look, realistically, statistically, how many of our parents have, are survivors of sexual assault in some way, shape or form? How few of them talk about it with their kids? It's the taboo topic. If you can't talk about it with your kids, you're not communicating your values about what's appropriate, and what's not appropriate. Or if you do talk about it, oftentimes, it's from a place of **fear of, 'Don't wear a short skirt, don't... Whatever'. As opposed to a really healthy ... there's so** much generational trauma that we're constantly passing on, because people just don't know.¹⁰⁴

Rather than thinking about sexuality and intimacy education as a tool that teens¹⁰⁵ need as they navigate puberty, it is important to provide the resources for people of all ages to understand who they are, to understand their own experiences, and to put their best foot forward in the ways they act in relationship to their friends, family, and loved ones.

¹⁰³ Beyond addiction and mental health, topics like body image, self-esteem, assault, unhealthy relationships, etc.

¹⁰⁴ Harr, Barrett. "Interview." 10 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 15

¹⁰⁵ Which actually is too late for many young people as the average age of puberty continues to decrease, according to Harr.

Ira Miller

About Ira Miller

Ira Miller is the Director of Informal Education at Washington Hebrew Congregation in the DC area. He has been working at WHC for over 18 years, many of which he has spent his time working in **“informal education”** – or as he defines it, experiential education.

While he works with the post-**b’nai mitzvah population in a number of different** programs, one of the meaningful parts of his portfolio is running a retreat series for seventh and eighth grade students around identity development, self-esteem, and **healthy relationships. The last retreat of the series is called, “A Jewish Review of Love, Relationships and Sexuality,”** but the students lovingly call it **“the Sex Retreat”** as its content is almost entirely rooted in comprehensive sex education.

*Excerpt of Ira’s Vision of an Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education*¹⁰⁶

...So, part of my ideal is even a stronger connection with the parents and the families to say, "This is what we need to be doing. Nothing is more important this weekend for our kid than this" I actually think that doing this type of program in a retreat context is the ideal. I mean you could maybe say it would be a camp, though I think there's some interesting challenges with camp and the overall dynamics of camp that make it more challenging. I think having it a couple days where there's parent influence before and after, it just really works. So ... What about the Jewish community? So, I'd love to see more Jewish organizations running this program or a program like it, but I also think that more Jewish organizations just need to be comfortable starting doing something. And whether that's bringing in someone who can do a basic talk on some stuff, or doing some study, or ... I think our, and this is kind of my platform of my soap box for everything that we do, when I started doing the work that I do, which again is a long time ago, I was quickly noticing how few adults in kid's lives have time for them. And I would go down the list, Teachers

¹⁰⁶ To Find Ira’s full vision for Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education, look to Appendix C part B

have so many kids in their classes and so many classes that unless you're really an out-there person that is going to go visit them in office hours, you don't really get to know them.

...And so, we have to have the chutzpah to say, "We want to be that place." And so, we will talk about suicide, and we will talk about drug abuse. And we will talk about cutting, and we will talk about eating disorders. And listen, we don't want to have a program that's like, "Come this week so you can be depressed about the existence of teens." We want to do it in an environment that is positive and fun, and moving you forward. But there are ways to do that and to create a healthy place for self-exploration and growth, and this fits into that. I don't think we could run ... And listen, there are groups that run a sexuality retreat and don't do a lot of the other things that we do, I think ours works particularly well because historically it comes within a month or two of us running a self-esteem retreat where on a Saturday evening in gendered groups, we do an activity where we talk about in-depth teen suicide, and about self-esteem, and about how each person is important and valuable, and loved, and worthy of love.

And they're crying, we're crying, whatever might be. But we're creating this community that really matters. And that, even though it's weeks later, or a month or two later, those kids who have been through that and then go on the sexuality retreat, they start off in that much better of a place. So, we've got to do something.

What This Conversation and Ira Miller bring to the table

Ira Miller is incredibly inspired by the work his congregation has been doing in this area over the past 30 years. One of the initiatives that makes Washington Hebrew Congregation unique is its use of weekend retreats as an educational setting to teach eighth and ninth graders about identity, self-esteem, and **"Love, Relationships and Sexuality."** Although there are plenty of challenges in trying to fit all of the information into 36-40 hours, the retreat setting allows the educators to be intentional both about the messages they send both inside of programming sessions and in the times between.

They are able to set different norms around language, behavior, and around public displays of curiosity regarding sexuality in a different way than one-hour sessions spread over a semester is sometimes able to allow. To illustrate one of the ways they set this tone with the learners, Ira described some of the ways they try to implement this in the Love, Relationships and Sexuality retreat.

We run an amazing activity on **Friday evening as they're getting comfortable with each other** where we put all these terms up around the wall, like 'Sexually active male', I'm trying to think ... some of them are body parts, some of them are things people might do, or whatever it is, and we ask them to put every slang term they've ever heard on them. And there's another point to the exercise in terms of how we look at men and how we look at women, and all those types of things, but really, it's important that that part of the retreat, when one of them says sexual intercourse or vaginal intercourse, or whatever, that if they're not doing it, one of the staff goes up and writes, 'Fucking' big on it, because ... And they're like, "What did you just do?" "Well, if you're not going to say it, we are. Because you need to be able to say it, especially this weekend."

So, we try to get that boundary stuff out of the way. We're very clear that staff will answer almost any question, except for questions about us. And we actually have an anonymous question box that people can use throughout the weekend, and at meals, or at group times the Miron¹⁰⁷ will take the questions out and they'll just go through them. And sometimes people try to be silly or ridiculous and whatever, and they have a great way of addressing that as well.

As Ira Miller described the goals of the retreats, one of the reasons it is valuable to create drastically different space than what learners may experience within the congregational

¹⁰⁷ Amy and Charles Miron are certified Sexuality and Relationship Educators and Sex Therapists who Washington Hebrew Congregation bring in every year to educate the learners based in best practices.

space is that he as an educator can communicate openly that the learners can come to them with any number of topics that are affecting their lives and he will listen to them and be there for them. While many educators try to communicate this, this can sometimes come off as inauthentic if the learners have not previously encountered situations where they might see how the educators deal with talking about subjects that could be uncomfortable. Through allowing the learners to talk about relationships and sexuality using any number of terms that could be deemed in other spaces as **“inappropriate” or through different modalities** - both public and more private - the intention is to communicate that what is important is that the learners get the answers they need to the questions they have and that they know they can get many of the answers to their questions from their Jewish community and Jewish communal leaders.

As he described in his vision for an ideal Jewish sexuality and intimacy education, he sees young people have smaller and smaller amounts of access to adults who are willing and able to give them time, energy, and full attention. Ira Miller wants learning about sexuality, intimacy, and relationships to both show and tell teens that they have adults who care about them and are able to give them the time, energy, and full attention they need. While Ira Miller focuses most on communicating this to teens, there is incredible value and need for people of all ages to know that there are people within their community who care about them who they can come talk to and ask questions - no matter how seemingly uncomfortable the topic might be.

Rabbi Laura Novak Winer, Ph. D

About Rabbi Dr Novak Winer

Rabbi Dr. Novak Winer is the Director of Clinical Education at the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at the Hebrew Union College campus in Los Angeles. Early in her career as a rabbinic student and later as a new rabbi, Rabbi Dr. Novak Winer invested her time in AIDS education and domestic violence work. Between 2000-2012, she worked at the Union for Reform Judaism serving various roles regarding Youth and Teen

Programming. During this time, in response to the development of “hook up culture” and its presence in the lives of Jewish teens, she was asked by then president of the URJ Rabbi Eric Yoffie, to lead an initiative to develop a curriculum for adolescents that provided guidance on issues of sexuality and Jewish ethics and values. She led a team of **Jewish educators in developing and distributing “Sacred Choices: Adolescent Relationships and Sexual Ethics”,** which had both High School and Middle School modules.¹⁰⁸

Dr Novak Winer’s Vision for an Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education

I mean, I think that I love your idea of “Hafoch bah, v’hafoch bah”, like turn it over and over, and would that we were able to create something for the Jewish world that is like our whole lives, right, really, that’s aspirational. I mean, I just think we want our people, our community, the members of our communities, to feel like they are whole people and that the Jewish world and the Jewish learning that they do supports their growth into whole people. And whether it’s about their sexuality, or their physicality, or their ideology, right, that our synagogues and our community structures should be places where we’re supporting the development of whole human beings, and sexuality is part of that.

¹⁰⁸ “Laura Novak Winer, RJE.” *LinkedIn*, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lauranovakwiner/>.

So if we can somehow let go of this notion that Jews have to know X, Y and Z, and instead think about what we do with our learning and say, "How can we create learning where our learners find wholeness and are able to thrive?" which is sort of a buzzword these days, "And also find themselves and how they fit into the universe, into the world, and what their purpose is in the world?" That's where I think our Jewish education needs to be, and sexuality education is part of that.

What This Conversation and Rabbi Dr. Novak Winer bring to the table

Rabbi Dr. Laura Novak Winer is the only person I spoke to who attempted to create a resource that was intended for cross-country, movement-wide usage. While there had **previously been texts like the "Sex in the Text" curriculum developed by Rabbi Paul Yedwab**, Rabbi Dr. Laura Novak Winer sought to create curricula that worked from a process that started with research from the field of developmental psychology and relationship education and then from the themes that came forward found texts that authentically addressed those topics.¹⁰⁹ Although she did a lot of work researching the content that would be in the Sacred Choices curricula, she also spent a lot of time and energy during the curricular development stage finding the balance between what she could put explicitly into the curriculum booklets with what she wished could be addressed but was not convinced congregations would widely accept¹¹⁰. If she wanted the resource to be used widely, Dr. Novak Winer had to make sure that it left room for different communities to be in different comfort levels regarding certain issues around relationships and sexuality. In addition, because conversations around relationships are

¹⁰⁹ This is similar to the Jewish educational approach that Barrett Harr spoke about during her interview.

¹¹⁰ Novak Winer, Rabbi Laura. "Interview." 5 Nov. 2020. Transcript pg 4.

often complicated, the Sacred Choices curriculum development team created the educational lessons and resources to be as user friendly as possible - where congregation educators - including lay educators - could almost verbatim use the language in the lessons if they found it fitting. Laura Novak Winer used her expertise as someone who worked in congregational educational settings, as a rabbi, and as someone well versed in curriculum development to find a balance between getting to represent the information accurately, with Jewish framing, in a relatable way, and with porosity such that it could be adapted to fit the needs of individual communities, classrooms, and learners. As she suggested in the interview, one of the challenges since its publication has been that while certain parts of the curricula remain helpful and accurate, it cannot be avoided that the ways in which she and her team sought to make the lessons relatable have become outdated. In addition, there have been societal developments that would allow **certain topics, like gender and sexuality, to be addressed more explicitly that wouldn't** have been accepted when Sacred Choices was published.

One of the important underlying messages that comes across from the conversation with Rabbi Dr Laura Novak Winer is that the work of developing resources for Jewish sexuality and intimacy education cannot be a one and done deal. Educators and leaders in the field do incredible work to develop what they are able to in their time, and then it is the responsibility of Jewish organizations to continue to prioritize and to fund the development of updated resources and the development of new and upcoming leaders. Sacred Choices would not have **existed if Rabbi Eric Yoffee hadn't reached out** and said that this was something that the Reform Movement was prioritizing at the time and then bringing on this experienced member of the field of Jewish education to bring it to reality. While this is something that does not have to be the responsibility of the

Union of Reform Judaism, the responsibility and the potential for resources and funding and development has to come from somewhere if there are going to be new developments like what Sacred Choices was when it was published.

Rabbi Avi Orlow

About Rabbi Avi Orlow

Rabbi Avi Orlow is the Vice President of Innovation and Education at the Foundation for Jewish Camp, where he has been working for 12 years. Before working at FJC, Rabbi Orlow worked as a Hillel Rabbi and as the Assistant Director of the St. Louis Hillel at Washington University. He received rabbinic ordination from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the open Orthodox rabbinical school. Both his studies at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and his work as a Hillel strongly influence the way he understands the work he does in guiding year-round leadership of Jewish camps of many denominations as well as secular Jewish camps across the country toward the types of Jewish education and **culture they seek to create, or as he puts it as they create “galaxies in which other worlds come into existence”^{111 112}.**

Excerpt from Rabbi Avi Orlow’s Vision for an Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy

Education¹¹³

... I don't think there's an ideal. I think there is many ideals. And I think people need to bring their authentic selves to those ideals. I could talk about my own personal ideals but that's not my professional ideal. My professional ideals is you have conservative camps, orthodox camps, reform camps, [inaudible 00:46:08] camps, JCC camps, independent camps, Zionist camps.

¹¹¹ Orlow, Rabbi Avi. “Interview.” 25 Sept. 2020.

¹¹² “Our Team.” *Foundation for Jewish Camp*, 11 Jan. 2021, jewishcamp.org/about/team/.

¹¹³ To View Rabbi Avi Orlow’s full quote, see Appendix C part C

There's all these different flavors of camp and they need to wear their own skin. And that means they need their own skin in all these elements.

... One last story. I studied a lot of a lot of things at rabbinical school that I didn't think I would ever need to know. Meaning I knew that I wasn't going to go the traditional shul route. So, it was like, "Why am I learning this? I spent a whole summer learning Mamlisha." It's impossible to get a piece of schechted meat that has not been salted in this country. You cannot get it. Right? But I had to learn schita. I had to learn [foreign language 00:58:43] ... I think it was this old discourse of things. You're like, "Why do I need to know this?" I remember very clearly, Rabbi Love came. He was doing... He was the rabbi who was teaching us practical halacha. And we were learning maroz of the cloth that women check to see where their menstrual cycle is. And it's bedikas [inaudible 00:59:09] ... And to this day, I have no idea who, but someone snickered. And this is a very gentle human being, Rabbi Love. Obviously, by his name, Rabbi Love. But he... I've never seen him like this, beyond furious. He just said, "If you're not up for this, leave. And I'm not telling you to leave my class. I'm telling you to leave yeshiva. If a woman has the yira shamiyim, the fear of heaven to bring you something that intimate from her life, and you don't have the wherewithal to treat this with the utmost respect that you're being led into the most private of her existence, you have no place here." And it wasn't about the bedikah cloth.

The question is, do... And I'm not limiting it to rabbis either, I'm saying... And this is my right-wing critique of liberal American life, which is I don't think the rabbi has a role in the bedroom. I like to think the Torah does. And if the rabbi gets schlepped along for it, that's great. But if we don't have that openness to that experience, openness to the honesty of what's working and not working in those experiences, you have no right in the rabbinate. So, I'm just saying, I don't think... I haven't got that many bedikah... ta'ar mishpacha sh'eilas in my life. But that class prepared me to teach these young women because it was an openness to the fragility and vulnerability of what happens in those private spaces and what does it mean to be invited into them, in the most tzniut of ways. Meaning like, there's nothing public about this but the fact that they're bringing you in... And if Judaism doesn't have anything to say then we have no role in... We don't have any chelek in this at all.

So, whatever. His voice has resinated loudly through the years of realizing that skirting these issues is skirting the rabbinate. And that equally applies to... And that has nothing to do with ta'ar mishpachah, that has nothing uniquely to do with... I'll say this very clearly. And this has nothing to do with orthodoxy. We, the Jewish community, have no right to claim to be allies to the gay community before we are able to talk about gay sex. We are unable to talk about it because we're unable to talk about sex and then gay sex makes us squeamish. But that's the squeamish that Rabbi Love was yelling about. To not take it seriously, that human experience, is a travesty. Because there's a deep, deep problem. So how do we say, "Oh, we decided on high, gays and straights are the same," but the reality is we haven't talked about any of this. So, the many orthodox environments would be like, "How do we ignore..." I'm like, "Get up in front of you and talk about gay sex as if it's not weird or disgusting. Don't talk about halakha. Just talk about it as if this is normative and then we'll have a conversation about... Or can we deal with our homophobia?"

Because until you do normalize it, you're just propagating the homophobia. It's absurd. Right? But then they're like "But Avi what about tzniut?". I'm like, "Fine. So, let's talk about it in respectful ways." But the fact is, the fact that we're uncomfortable in society... It's not even Judaism. We're uncomfortable in society to talk about gay sex in ways that we put heterosexual sex on billboards, everywhere. It's astounding. And then we're like, "But why haven't we made progress?"

What This Conversation and Rabbi Avi Orlow bring to the table

Rabbi Avi Orlow was the only orthodox voice explicitly present in my research - both from interviews, which contributed some important perspectives to the table. In addition to being unapologetic in his use of mashal and nimshal¹¹⁴, he was also much more willing to speak of the ways in which halacha and the necessarily explicit language

¹¹⁴ Mashal and Nimshal is a traditional rabbinic text literary structure that uses stories to illustrate a point that is more explicitly stated at the end of the story.

surrounding it can actually aid in creating meaningful sexuality and intimacy education. While people in less traditional Jewish communities might assume that Orthodox camps are less able to handle explicitly talking about sex, gender, sexuality, or other similar **elements of sexuality and intimacy education in comparison to more “liberal” branches** of Judaism - Rabbi Avi Orlow provided examples where this was not actually the case. After describing a story of two colleagues - an orthodox and a conservative camp leader - as they met different challenges in beginning to welcome openly gay staff members, he **noted that in some ways more liberal camps don’t have the tools to talk about** sexuality at all because talking about sex -whether heterosexual sex or homosexual sex - is taboo and avoided to prevent discomfort. He said,

What's interesting is that the... In some ways that orthodox, I'm not saying all, that individual orthodox camp, in the fact that they've already socialized a language about talking about normative sexuality, the normative relationship between two human beings, when they opened up that category beyond their own ease... Meaning like they knew they were going down that road, but they already had a language for it. And I just think that that conservative camp is actually endemic of most of our community, which is, "We're not going to talk about it. We don't want to talk about it." It's awkward. And there's no doubt it's awkward for the people who want to have a claim in this Jewish traditional stuff. It gets double down awkward, but I think it's bullshit. The reality is that all of them have... It's awkward. And they don't have a particular language around this. I think it's just another really interesting spread there, which is do we talk about these things at all? Before we think about how do we open up how we talk about them, is do we have any mechanism of talking about these things?¹¹⁵

Through framing language and halacha as “mechanisms” and “technologies” to operate in the world we live in today, Avi Orlow made a case that Judaism doesn’t have to be seen as an

¹¹⁵ Orlow, Rabbi Avi. “Interview.” 25 Sept. 2020. Transcript pg 6.

afterthought in the crafting of Jewish sexuality and intimacy education. Judaism isn't just a set of values but is unique in the way it can bring our actions - and our language around our actions - to the forefront. Different Jewish communities use Jewish practice differently, but in the crafting of Jewish sexuality and intimacy education, even secular Jewish camps who say kiddush over grape juice on Friday night before dinner can talk about the connections between others **saying "Amen" to the blessing and the practice of consent.**¹¹⁶

Through his role at the Foundation for Jewish Camp, Avi Orlow supports camps that range in level of Jewish practice - trying to support the vision and culture they are already attempting to create. One of the advantages that come naturally to the world of camping is the way education takes place both through showing and telling both during program time and in less formal time spent together.¹¹⁷ In many other educational settings, this has to be intentionally created in order for showing to take place outside of programmatic settings; however in camp the **focus doesn't have to be on creatively** bringing such spaces or cultures to life - rather the focus can just be on how to harness

¹¹⁶ "...I remember I was taking a visiting educator around to visit different rooms. And then we're going to visit Camp Chi, Chicago, and we're visiting with them and I said to the fellas, said, "What are you working on?" He was like, "Well, we were doing this thing about consent because we got to do this. It's an issue on campus." It's funny because I just said these things without thinking about them and then I realized, I was like, "Wait a minute. Got to go here." I said to her, I said... Do you know what Camp Chi is?

I said, "It's not a particularly ritualistic camp," like in a traditional sense, right? I said, "I have a question for you. When... Do you make kiddish at Camp Chi..." "Yeah, every Friday night, we make some [inaudible 00:42:06]." "Does everyone say Kiddish? Or does one person say kiddish?" "Well, so yeah. One person gets up and says kiddish." "Does everyone else's drink?" "No, no, no. They say 'Amen'. And then we all drink." I said, "So you're telling me, someone gets up in front of another body of people, or another person and says, 'I want to enjoy this kos, this thing. And I'm going to make a blessing on it' and you're going to say 'Amen' to it, and thereby consent the fact that we will have made kiddish together and then we can enjoy the grape juice together?" I said, "You have a technology that you revisit every Friday night but what does it mean for multiple people to actually give consent that they're going to enjoy something together? Why is that so easy but everything else is so hard?" Right?

So the question's not, what is the Jewish perspective on this or that, the other thing, as opposed to, do we have technologies that enable us to talk about things that maybe people are having trouble talking about?"

¹¹⁷ "This is me pushing back, I think Moving Tradition, I love the work they do but there's a lot of, "Let me tell you," right? And I think what's interesting about camp is, "Let me show you." And I just want to recognize that there's room for both and it's really interesting when camps can explore that."

the culture, language, and space that is already present. While other people I spoke with alluded to the fact that different organizations have different needs, Rabbi Orlow was the only person to explicitly say that he cannot speak to what an ideal Jewish sexuality and intimacy education looks like across the board. Rather, he used examples throughout our conversation that the ideal is actually for each and every camp (and organization) to find the authentic voice and expression of Judaism for them and to use that language to intentionally create cultures that support whole beings as they exist, learn, and grow together.

Stacy Shapiro

About Stacy Shapiro, LCSW^{118 119}

Stacy Shapiro is the Northeast Program Specialist with Moving Traditions, a non-denominational Jewish organization that seeks to provide pre-teens and teens with educational settings to address many of the intimacy education topics addressed in this thesis. In addition to her certification as a social worker, she received her **master's** in Jewish Education from Hebrew Union College in 2018 and had served as faculty at a **number of URJ camps before her time at Moving Traditions. Stacy's role at Moving Traditions** is primarily around teen engagement for students from grades 6-12 - trying to place them in the groups that would be most fitting for them. There are a number of different initiatives, but the baseline is that there are 3 different groups divided by gender - Rosh Chodesh for female identifying teens, Shevet for male identifying teens, and tzelem for Questioning and Gender-Queer teens. The intention is for young people

¹¹⁸ "Stacy Shapiro." *LinkedIn*, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/stacy-shapiro-99b84438/>

¹¹⁹ "Staff." *Moving Traditions*, 14 Dec. 2020, www.movingtraditions.org/aboutus/staff/.

to join a Moving Traditions group around 8th grade, be paired with a mentor, and stay with their group and their mentors through 12th grade where the group will go through a developmentally appropriate programming rotation - and support one another as they grow together. While Moving Traditions groups are not necessarily in all parts of the United States, Stacy takes pride in having mentioned to a number of people that, “If you have a student, we’ll find you a group.”

Stacy’s Vision of an Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education (Notes from Chat)

- Sex education couched in creative curricula that is engaging (just going over charts and body parts is not what students are looking for)
- Ideally safe, sacred space that they will stay in and grow in
 - Developing friendships and gaining trust through relational growth
- **“It’s not just about the lessons it’s about the relationships built so that they can explore together”**
- Sometimes the ideal ignores the audience
 - **The real question is how will the audience (the people you’re trying to reach) receive it**

What This Conversation and Stacy Shapiro bring to the table

In many ways, Moving Traditions is at the forefront of explicit Jewish intimacy education programming today. They provide one model for what it can look like to prioritize intimacy education, find funding, and provide ongoing development for both curricular resources and professional development of group facilitators. Through the conversation with Stacy, she argued that this model meets a lot of teen educational

needs around intimacy that had previously been unmet in Jewish spaces. Beyond that, she argued that while the content remains important - it is even more important that the space is created for these young people to be able to grow and develop and build relationships with one another and with trusted adults over a multi-year period. As has **been argued earlier in the thesis, it is not enough to address all topics deemed “the sexuality and intimacy education” topics in the span of a semester, never to be** addressed again. Rather over the span of years, young people are able to develop in their understanding of themselves and deepen their relationships with those they learn with which can enable deeper and more meaningful learning.

Rabbi Jenn Queen

About Rabbi Jenn Queen^{120 121}

Rabbi Jenn Queen is currently serving as the Director of Engagement and as Campus Reform Rabbi for Harvard Hillel. She was ordained from Hebrew Union College in May 2019. As described in the Text Review chapter, Rabbi Jenn Queen wrote her her rabbinic thesis, *WE WILL LISTEN AND WE WILL DO: Exploring Biblical and Rabbinic Responses to the Voices of Sexual Violence Survivors* in the wake of the **#MeToo movement’s rise in prominence online. For more on Rabbi Jenn Queen, see the “About We Will Do and We Will Listen” in the Text Review chapter.**

Rabbi Jenn Queen’s Vision for an Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education

(Notes from Chat)

¹²⁰ Queen, Rabbi Jennifer. *Jennifer Queen, Rabbi-in-Training*, rabbijenniferqueen.com/.

¹²¹ “Jenn Queen.” *Harvard Hillel*, hillel.harvard.edu/people/jenn-queen.

- Ongoing work - **proving to people that “this is something Judaism has talked about” and that we need to as well**
- Envisions a curriculum with a training for trainers that is part of a comprehensive education model about topics beyond assault to reach broad topics (similar to Our Whole Lives, perhaps even in relationship to OWL) that **addresses age appropriately throughout one’s lifetime**

What This Conversation and Rabbi Jenn Queen bring to the table

In addition to the incredibly thorough text and curricular work Rabbi Jenn Queen did during her development of *We Will Do And We Will Listen*, she brings to the table a clear and strong vision of what Jewish Sexuality education throughout one’s life must look like moving forward. Rather than creating educational materials for teens as most of the organizations I looked to were doing, Rabbi Queen created educational materials specifically for adult learners for whom this content is still incredibly important. Her work and our conversation uplifted the fact that statistically, Sexual Violence has taken place in Jewish Communities and - unfortunately - will continue to take place in Jewish communities. While it is important that we do what we can to introduce proactive, consent-centered sexuality education as well, we also need to create space to acknowledge that sexual assault happens to Jews too. Jewish communities should be a place of comfort for survivors, but this cannot entirely happen if survivors feel as though sharing their experiences could lead to othering and the feeling of being casted out.

Inspired by the curricular work, *Our Whole Lives*, Rabbi Jenn Queen brings to the table a dream of a Jewish iteration of lifelong learning around sexuality and

intimacy that also trains Jewish intimacy educators to best practices as well as to be able to bring this learning to communities adapting the learnings to the varying needs and communal cultural norms. Surprisingly to some, this Reform Rabbi responded quite similarly to Rabbi Avi Orlow about the function of Judaism in Sexuality and Intimacy education. Rather than focusing on values, Rabbi Queen highlighted the ways in which Jewish practice can serve as models that enhance how we educate and learn to live as whole human beings.

Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi

About Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi

Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi is a freelance rabbi who spent years in the Hillel World - especially at the Bronfman Center for Jewish Life at NYU. Among the projects she worked on at the Bronfman Center, she helped to develop and pilot a Jewish Learning Fellowship curriculum **“Sex, Love, and Romance,”** which ended up being taken on as a Hillel International Initiative and is now taught in Hillels across the country. According to her website, **as a freelance rabbi she speaks and teaches about “issues of emerging adulthood, feminism, sexuality, gender identity and expression, conversion, inclusion...”**¹²²

Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi’s Vision for an Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education

(Notes from Chat)

- **“There are lots of different answers to ‘what is normal’.**

¹²² *Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi, PHD*, www.rabbinikki.com/#.

- No one should say “Judaism says X” about almost anything unless it is a lot of options
- BUT ALSO - There is incredible importance to training the teachers to be non-judgemental and also knowledgeable
- Different types of relationships - wants to start a conversation and learning about Polyamory in Jewish spaces

What This Conversation and Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi bring to the table

During my conversation with Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi, I became aware of a number of written articles and resources on subjects around Judaism and intimacy of which I had not previously been aware. She brought with her a large wealth of resources not only that she had written but also that she had compiled due to her own areas of passion.¹²³ She was the only person I spoke to who had worked in the Hillel world addressing these issues and spoke in ways that were conducive to Hillel’s pluralistic nature. Hillel serves the college population of Jews as they go through emerging adulthood, allowing them to explore who they are as individuals when they are no longer living with their parents.¹²⁴ She was dedicated to the idea that education around sexuality and intimacy must be intellectually honest. Especially when educating young people who have differing levels of Jewish education preceding their time in college, she argued that it is incredibly **important that educators don’t make statements like**

¹²³ This made me excited about the development of a potential library or collection of resources around these subjects.

¹²⁴ Under normal circumstances. Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi recently made a podcast speaking about the precarious position that a number of young people in the stage of emerging adulthood (which she defined as between the ages of 18-25) as record numbers are returning home during the coronavirus pandemic.

“Judaism says X” unless that answer is actually multiple answers. This goes both for Jewish learning in general and as it relates to Jewish intimacy education.

Patterns I’ve noticed across conversations

Not Seeing enough (or in some cases any) intimacy education

Although the people I spoke to were aware of programs here and there, the overall consensus across those to whom I spoke was that widespread sexuality and intimacy education is not happening - especially in congregational settings. According to Barrett Harr, **“conversations regarding sex education, gender identity, relationships, if they happen in congregational schools, they're fleeting and unintentional.”**¹²⁵ While Rabbi Dr. Laura Novak Winer didn’t go as far as to say that programming that exists today around these areas are often fleeting or unintentional, she was saddened by the fact that Jewish organizations are in many ways in the same place they were before the development of Sacred Choices - they were on their own for resources and had to search for materials on their own.¹²⁶ There are programs like Moving Traditions that are doing significant work in certain areas, youth group events where a program may be about a topic related to intimacy, or camps that address these issues. That being said, even for individuals who are heavily involved in Jewish life in multiple communities, the people I

¹²⁵ Full Quote: Barrett Harr - I think that it does not, conversations regarding sex education, gender identity, relationships, if they happen in congregational schools, they're fleeting and unintentional. I don't think... there are some places that are exceptions to the rules, of course, and that are doing it. But I think part of it is, a lot of places are still, it's the taboo topic. They don't want to fight the battle with parents, so they don't know what the parents are going to say, and if they're going to be okay with it.

¹²⁶ Full Quote: Rabbi Dr. Laura Novak Winer - I think that people are just, again, back in this place that we were before Sacred Choices existed, that they're all just sort of "making shabbos" for themselves. Because, sadly now it's almost 15 years old, right, and it's outdated.

spoke with were under the impression that it is likely these individuals would not come in contact with enough - or potentially any - Jewish intimacy education.

Not enough adequate resources for families

While this was not a topic as widely covered, it did come up in the conversations with Barrett Harr, Rabbi Dr. Laura Novak Winer, and Rabbi Avi Orlow. In these conversations, it was important to highlight that for education of young people, parental involvement was not only helpful regarding buy-in¹²⁷, it also was key to having holistic education where learners would not receive conflicting messages when they were at home and when they were away. **Parents don't want to do this poorly¹²⁸**, but as Barrett Harr mentioned during our conversation, **"There's no parenting book, which is also a really sucky part of all of this."**¹²⁹ Not only was the providing of resources to families helpful for the young people, in many ways, these resources - whether curricular or

¹²⁷ Barrett Harr - I think it's an important boundary to have very open conversations with the parents, and to engage them in the conversations early on. Potentially even knowing that each year, it may look a little different by getting the buy-in of those parents. Because each group of kids is slightly different, each group of parents is slightly different. If there's a way to say, "Here's the menu of things we could offer, help us prioritize which ones are the most priority, and most important for you. Which conversations do you want us to help you have? Which resources do you need?"

¹²⁸ Rabbi Avi Orlow - We want to actually partner with the parents that actually have really meaningful talks with their kids about this without us. But we want to support the parents because we know that they suck at this." How do we help them do this?

¹²⁹ Full Quote: Barrett Harr - Also, what message is their parents sending their kids? How do you deal with that? Do you tell your kid, "No, you don't do that, that's not good." Or do you tell them that, "Feels great if you do it in your room?" What are the messages? There's no parenting book, which is also a really sucky part of all this...

Look, realistically, statistically, how many of our parents have, are survivors of sexual assault in some way, shape or form? How few of them talk about it with their kids. It's the taboo topic. If you can't talk about it with your kids, you're not communicating your values about what's appropriate, and what's not appropriate. Or if you do talk about it, oftentimes, it's from a place of fear of, "Don't wear a short skirt, don't... Whatever.. As opposed to a really healthy ... there's so much generational trauma that we're constantly passing on, because people just don't know.

communal - serve parents through meeting their own needs. These resources should ideally help parents on their journey of growth and deeper understanding of their relationships to identity, sexuality, intimacy, and relationships.¹³⁰

Mentioned Specific ideas for new programs/initiatives they've been thinking about

While this was not necessarily the focus of each person I spoke to, there were a number of people who were already thinking about different initiatives and programs that they dreamed of bringing to fruition around Jewish intimacy and sexuality education. Barrett Harr described her vision of creating a “cotillion” program where pre-teens learn how to act at b’nai mitzvah. Rabbi Jenn Queen described her vision of a Jewish version of Our Whole Lives, with curricular resources of how to address sexuality and intimacy at different ages and stages of life. Rabbi Nikki DeBlosi was looking to create a Jewish text study group to explore what Judaism has to say about polyamory. While each of these initiatives were very different from one another, each had its own value that I could see thriving in different settings. More importantly, I could see that in order for these initiatives - and ones just like them - to thrive, they will need support from organizations or funders who will prioritize and encourage their growth and development.

¹³⁰ Laura Novak Winer - I still so much stand by what we did in just envisioning Sacred Choices, that our Jewish institutions are safe places for our young people and they should feel safe to have opportunities to learn and talk about all of these issues in their synagogues with people who are of like minds to them. And by like minds I mean sort of grounded in Jewish tradition, grounded in Jewish value

Parents need it. Parents need that space to have those conversations with their peers, because they're not getting it anywhere else. They're not getting it in their schools, their public schools, or maybe they're getting it in their private schools, but I doubt it. But the openness that we have in the Reform Jewish community is not mirrored out there in the secular world, and the acceptance and the inclusivity. If we can't create spaces in our synagogues for the parents and for their children to do that learning, they have nowhere to go. So I think it's vital.

Concern about gender divided spaces and the message it sends

Anytime gender divided spaces came up, there were strong feelings about them - and more of those strong feelings were against the division of learners by gender. For those who were critiquing the use of gender divided spaces there were a few main points uplifted as to why they are problematic. First, According to Dr. Betsy Stone and Essie Shachar-Hill, **people should know about how all types of bodies work even if they don't have that type of body.**¹³¹ ¹³² Second, Dr. Betsy Stone, Sarah Stone, and Barrett Harr mentioned the fact that by creating an experience that gives off an impression of **“hiding” content from another group, this division communicates that this content is inherently shameful not only to talk about, but to experience.**¹³³ ¹³⁴ Third, Sarah Stone,

¹³¹ Dr. Betsy Stone - “I continue to be confused about why boys don't need to learn about female bodies... And why girls actually do learn about male bodies, but boys don't learn about female bodies... I, in a perfect world, I would put that I would have that period discussion. First of all, parents need to have it, as well as kids. As well as schools. And I would have that be a non-segregated discussion because, in fact, there is nothing about female sexuality that boys don't need to know. And there's nothing about male sexuality that females don't need to know. ”

¹³² Essie Shachar-Hill - “I think it fuels ignorance, because I think it's important for young people to know what's going on with all different kinds of bodies. The reason things can feel so awkward around puberty and bodies is often because it's like “Oh, I don't have a penis. So I don't know anything about penises.” And it's really awkward now to even say the word penis. It's like, what if we all learned together what's happening to different kinds of bodies because you are going to be in relationship and in community with people of all different kinds of bodies, so it's important to know what is going on with them.”

¹³³ Sarah Stone and Dr. Betsy Stone -
Sarah: And separating kids by gender (a) invalidates kids who are not separated by those gender lines; and (b) starts shame.

Betsy Stone: Right. And there are lots of ways to present this that are not all horrible, which is what that period talk is. “We're going to take all the girls in the other room, and the boys are going to go have fun.”

¹³⁴ Barrett Harr - “One of the conversations was a young person asked me if vaginal discharge was sort of your period, that if you laugh or you sneeze, that you might have an extra amount than you normally would. The males in my life had no answer to that question. If you're a father of a young girl, you can't answer simple, basic questions if you've not been exposed to those conversations, as wonderful and caring as you may be. If you're a woman who's grown up not being able to have those conversations, you may just say, “Shhh...You can't talk about it.” Then your kid feels like they can't come and ask you that question. They're left feeling shameful about their body or their experience, or Googling for it, as opposed to actually having a trusted resource...”

Essie Shachar Hill, and Barrett Harr highlighted the fact that these gendered spaces are incredibly problematic for people who are not cis-gender or who are figuring out their own relationships to their gender identity.¹³⁵ ¹³⁶ In addition, one of the points that Essie Shachar Hill pointed out that was not previously mentioned, these gender divided spaces often end up sending messages that uphold gender norms that can be harmful and even for people who identify as cis-gender and for the wider Jewish community as they come to terms with what it means to challenge gender norms.¹³⁷

Truthfully, it makes it shameful. God made us this way. So to some extent, it could be spun that we aren't proud of the way God made us if we can't talk about these things, and if we can't be open about them. There's a reason God made us this way. The spectrum of sexuality, the spectrum of gender, all of those things are beautiful and wonderful. If we're made in God's image, it's all right there. It's holy, and it's special, and it's fine."

¹³⁵ Essie Shachar Hill - "While I think there is sometimes power in separate spaces, it also sends a really strong message that these two groups of people are super-duper different and have super-duper different concerns... and we can't talk about it together because it's so private. I find that really troubling because I think it's important for... first of all it puts young people in boxes really, really early. So there are some folks in "a girls space" who maybe aren't girls, and there are going to be people in the "boys space" who maybe aren't boys. So, one that's a problem because it makes people choose and also it forces people into boxes really early."

¹³⁶ Barrett Harr - "There's that problem with it. I think it's also limiting, because we don't know who is in our class who may not be cisgender, who may be thinking about these things, who need to learn more about their gender identity, even though their bodies may present in a different way, or their partners. If we only teach boys about penises, well, it just misses the mark. Really, if we teach everyone about cardiac disease, why don't we teach everyone... These are just humans."

¹³⁷ Essie Shachar Hill - "I think, the ways that those gendered spaces are constructed... they're also not teaching... Not only are they not teaching the same information, but the media through which those messages are being transmitted are really different. So, I went to a training for adults for an organization... the women and the men were separated... and I was kind of left to bounce in between, which was not validating as a non-binary person. It was kind of like "Oh you can just pick and choose between Men's and Women's..." So it was personally really painful, but it was really enlightening because I could see the ways in which the modalities were just taught differently. It was like, "Boys are really...", So I got to bounce in between the boys and the girls groups and it was like "Boys are really physical. So we have to always start with a big physical activity so they can get out all of their energy. And girls are really emotional. So we're going to start all sitting down on our white table cloth and drawing our hopes and dreams. The Girls [group] was very, like even the closing session, it was a two day thing, we were all at a hotel. It was a long, extensive training thing. And the closing session for the women who were leading the girls group was this emotional ritual with water and people stepped forward and washed their hands and share a something, something# And people were crying. And it was all, whatever, emotional and intimate. And the men's closing activity was to go to the hotel bar together. So just... I think that's a specific example that feels really indicative that even in these spaces that are trying to be really aware of boys and girls groups and the different dynamics, they reinforce those gender roles."

Although there were strong critiques of the use of gender divided space, there were some comments from Ira Miller and Stacy Shapiro that suggested that embarrassment and shame precede any gender divided programming. Because there are so many barriers in the way of a number of young people feeling comfortable sharing personal questions or details and **trusting the others in the group, it shouldn't be** discounted that sometimes these smaller gendered groups can help in the development of the trust and building up comfort.¹³⁸

Acknowledging the reality of what is already limiting programs/initiatives.

From the expertise each of these people brought to the table, they were each fully aware of the challenges that can limit the work of Jewish sexuality and intimacy education. They did not hide from these realities - rather they acknowledged them to better describe what people working in this field will have to deal with moving forward in the work of bettering the field of Jewish sexuality and intimacy education. Some of these challenges included the following areas. Sarah Stone and Dr. Betsy Stone discussed the challenge of parental discomfort and even fear around issues of sexuality

¹³⁸ (Zoe: So then what is the purpose of having the separate boy and girl spaces?)

Ira Miller- "Sometimes it's ... Some of the programming is done to be able to kind of compare and contrast, because understanding ... and we don't use opposite gender, we use other gender because we're not against each other. So one activity that I mentioned earlier is on intimacy, and we have a program called 'intimacy continuum' where each group gets a list of 15 or so things that two people might engage in, from hand holding to ... I don't even want to say what ... It depends on how you look at that spectrum, but from hand holding to intercourse, let's just say. And about everything you can think of in between. And the goal of each group is to put them in order from least intimate to most intimate.

And they have amazing conversations in their gendered groups, and then we bring them back together and one by one they lay out from least intimate to most intimate, what their group felt. And it's a great place to start a conversation, and to continue a conversation because there are often groups ..."

and intimacy.¹³⁹ Barrett Harr mentioned that it is difficult to find lay leaders to teach **this content in communities that either don't have professionals who are already** familiar with this material or who can afford to bring people in to provide this education¹⁴⁰. Ira Miller uplifted the fact that one of the challenges Jewish educational institutions continue to run up against is the competition with other extracurricular activities that have also been prioritized by families (sometimes over Jewish education).¹⁴¹ Rabbi Avi Orlow also named that within the content, there are some **questions that just don't have a** clear cut, tidy answer, which can be terrifying to deal with when discussing something as traumatic and emotionally hard hitting as assault or healthy vs unhealthy behaviors within relationships.¹⁴² There were many more named

¹³⁹ Dr. Stone and Sarah Stone -

Sarah: "You know, the same reason that Sex Ed in public education is so bad, is because everyone is afraid of overstepping, and saying something that the parents would be offended that you said to their child. In the same vein, that we hear these panic responses about trans people. "What will I tell my child?" Children understand it better than adults do. When you see two men walking down the street holding hands, yeah, 4 and 5-year-olds are going to say something. And you say to them, "Oh, because they're in love." And they say, "Oh, okay." The problem we deal with is so much more parental adult fear- (Dr. Betsy Stone: Discomfort) ... and discomfort. It's both."

¹⁴⁰ Barrett Harr - Also with having a lot of lay people teach, they feel uncomfortable in asking Joe Schmoe dad to talk about sex, when who is he to tell anyone about it? How do you know that if they're going to have the conversation, that they're going to have a healthy and safe conversation? It's hard to find the right people who can do that, and since there isn't a modern scripted curriculum that really addresses all of those things for the Jewish community, I think a lot of people are just, they're just shying away from it.

¹⁴¹ Ira Miller - Well, so we actually still run four retreats, two in eighth grade, two in ninth grade. Or some version of that. Part of it is economics, and part of it is kid's schedules. It's been getting harder and harder over the years for kids to commit to being away for a weekend, and with the exception of this retreat, we are very flexible. We try to go to a camp that's within about an hour drive, so if a kid needs to get picked up Saturday afternoon for a family event or a sports game, if the parents are willing to schlep then we'll do that. This retreat historically has been the exception, that we're really trying to create a safe, consistent community. We have gotten more lenient with that over the years because ... We used to talk about this being like driver's ed. And we don't want you to learn how to use the gas without learning how to use the break. And that's important. But we also realize that it's better to be able to use the breaks and not to turn the car on at all. So we have started allowing kids to miss pieces of the retreat and we try to catch them up. It depends on what those pieces are and how much.

¹⁴² Rabbi Avi Orlow - So the camp director, who's 41 years old, right? And she says, "We had a problem last summer. There was a kid who's a male counselor, who had inappropriate... And I don't know what the

challenges during these conversations, and yet I'm sure that there were even more that went unnamed but will be dealt with by those who continue to do this work or who will enter the field in the years to come.

touching was, but it was inappropriate sexual experience with a co-counselor, with a [inaudible 00:47:16] counselor. And it was a classic Me Too moment and we kicked him out of camp, right? He openly admitted what he did was wrong. He has done everything he can think of to do teshuva. And he wants to come back." Right. So this is not a question of he didn't admit his wrong. It's not a question of... And it wasn't... [inaudible 00:47:45] not a rape case. I'm saying it was not a case to go to the authorities on, per say. It wasn't [inaudible 00:47:52]. But everyone admitted there was no disagreement about the case of in fact, there is no disagreement of him being the wrong party in this. There's no disagreement about him owning it, having charata, going the whole teshuva process. And they're saying is, "We don't know, in our cancer [sic] culture, how we can bring him back. And we actually feel at odds with our Judaism because our Judaism is saying there should be a modality of him finding a way to return but we don't know how to socialize that yet. And the last thing we want to do is hurt the injured party, or hurt the people who are perceived injured parties in this. So we've been talking with the [inaudible 00:48:34] like, where is Judaism in that moment?"

Conclusion: A Vision

There are a number of areas of growth that need to take place in the field of Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy education. In conclusion of this thesis, I am making the following recommendations:

- 1) *Create a Field* - The first and most important area of growth that needs to take place is the creation of a field of **“Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education.”**

There **has been mention of “Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education”** - this was an umbrella term of a lot of different types of work that I grouped together for the purposes of this thesis that came from a number of conversations with experts in areas surrounding Jewish Education, Sexuality Education, Comprehensive Sex Education, Psychology, Social Work, LGBTQ+ Identities, etc. That being said, there is benefit in bringing together this work in a more official, intentional way. Through the creation of fields like **that of “Israel Education” the development of** educational resources, study programs like the iCenter, and communities of leaders has flourished - guaranteeing a future for these valuable programs that encourage people to explore their relationships with the topics. Similarly, with **the agreed creation of a field like “Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education,” this** could prevent future situations like what happened where Rabbi Dr. Laura Novak Winer spent years developing two sexual ethics curriculum modules for the Reform Movement - and just 15 years after their publication there is almost no proof that this work was done. We need to create structural guarantors in order **to ensure the passing on of this incredibly important education l’dor vador** -from generation to generation.

2) *Compile a library of written resources that already exist for reference* - A

number of people have named both in the survey comments and in conversation that there currently exist powerful and meaningful resources - both Jewish and secular. There are traditional Jewish texts, books of ethics, books with modern interpretations of traditional Jewish texts in ways that shed light on intimacy, identity, and sexuality, theses, and curricula - just to name a few. While each community and organization will need to figure out the resources that will best meet their needs, there is no reason that each community should have to go out and scour the internet and their local libraries when there can be a centralized location for people as they look for what they need.

3) *Create a Community of Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy educators* - While

programs like Moving traditions have programming that allows for the creation of facilitator communities and professional development this is not something accessible to people who are looking to create different models of Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy education. Rather than focusing energy on convincing a number of individuals to buy into a single model that may not actually meet the needs of all involved, there should be energy put into bringing the people who care about this expression of Jewish education together to have challenging conversations with one another, to allow those with new ideas to find allies and partners who want to work with them, and to create a sense of support. In creating these communities, this not only battles the burnout one could feel from feeling as though one is doing this incredibly important work alone - but it allows educators to practice modes of communication and modeling values of ongoing learning and respect of whole, but eternally unfolding humans in the process of

finding what they need from the community and contributing back to it. In addition, for those who want to enter into this type of work, it can be helpful to have a community where newcomers can find mentors and participate in the conversations.

Appendices

Appendix A

Sex & Intimacy Education in Jewish Communities

--About Me--

Check as many as apply

I work at a Jewish...

- ☐ Congregation
- ☐ Religious School and/or Hebrew School
- ☐ Youth Group
- ☐ Non-Profit
- ☐ Camp
- ☐ Hillel
- ☐ Day School
- ☐ Federation
- ☐ Early Childhood Center
- ☐ Senior Center
- ☐ Other: _____

I work in the following geographic area:

- ☐ US - East Coast
- ☐ US - Mid-west

☐ US- South

☐ US - West Coast

☐ Canada

☐ Other:

My Gender Identity

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Trans*

☐ Non-Binary

☐ Gender Fluid

☐ Rather not say

☐ Other: _____

Do You Identify as Jewish?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ I have Jewish Heritage but am not personally Jewish

☐ Not yet, but I am in the process of conversion

☐ Other: _____

--About the Jewish Organization I work at--

Check as many apply

The Jewish organization I work at affiliates:

- ☐ Reform
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Reconstructionist
- ☐ Jewish Renewal
- ☐ Modern Orthodox
- ☐ Orthodox or Chabad
- ☐ Pluralistic
- ☐ Non-Denominational
- ☐ Other: _____

The Jewish Organization I work at works with the following age groups:

- ☐ Infants-Toddlers
- ☐ Pre-K - Kindergarten
- ☐ Elementary (1st-5th Grade)
- ☐ Middle School (6th-8th Grade)
- ☐ High School (9th-12th Grade)
- ☐ Undergraduate Students/Emerging Adults (Ages 17-22)
- ☐ Early Adults (21-35)
- ☐ Intermediate Adults (35-65)
- ☐ Seniors (65+)

The Organization I work at teaches some form of (age appropriate) "Sex or Intimacy Education"

Strongly Agree

__ 1

__ 2

__ 3

__ 4

__ 5

Strongly Disagree

Due to the nature of our work, The Organization I work for INFORMALLY addresses or communicates regarding the following subjects:

__ Gender Identity or Gender Roles

__ Sexual Identity or Coming out of the Closet

__ Sexual Relations & Physical Intimacy

__ Readiness for Physical Intimacy, or lack thereof

__ Romantic Relationships & Emotional Intimacy

__ Desire

__ Peer Pressure

__ Ways to Say No to Unwanted Physical or Emotional Intimacy

__ Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure

__ Racial Discrimination or Stereotypes

__ Healthy, Safe Relationships vs Unhealthy, Abusive Relationships

__ Sexual Assault, Unethical Sexual Contact, or "Good Touch vs Bad Touch"

__ Communication, Consent, or Implementing Boundaries

__ Body Diversity

__ Ability Diversity

☐ Body Image or Self Esteem

☐ Emotional or Mental Health

☐ Reflection on "Who I am" to myself, others, and my community

Members of The Organization I work for will likely experience explicit, FORMAL Programming, courses, or conversations provided by my Organization on the following subjects:

Please click the options that most closely answer the above question.

Gender Identity or Gender Roles

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Sexual Identity or Coming out of the Closet

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects

- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Sexual Relations & Physical Intimacy

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Readiness for Physical Intimacy, or lack thereof

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics

- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Romantic Relationships & Emotional Intimacy

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Desire

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Peer Pressure

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never

G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Ways to Say No to Unwanted Physical or Emotional Intimacy

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Healthy, Safe Relationships vs Unhealthy, Abusive Relationships

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Sexual Assault, Unethical Sexual Contact, or "Good Touch vs Bad Touch"

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Communication, Consent, and/or Implementing Boundaries

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics

- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Body Diversity

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Ability Diversity

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Body Image or Self Esteem

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once

D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects

E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement

F. Never

G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Emotional and/or Mental Health

A. Once, in an individual program

B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics

C. Throughout a course offered to them once

D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects

E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement

F. Never

G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Reflection on "Who I am" to myself, others, and my community

- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related subjects
- E. Integrated in Programming throughout their involvement
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

If you answered A, B, or C to the question above, at what age is this program/course offered?

Your answer

Any Additional Comments or Notes You're Thinking Regarding these questions?

Your answer

Appendix B

Members of The Organization I work for will likely experience explicit, FORMAL Programming, courses, or conversations provided by my Organization on the following subjects:

Gender Identity or Gender Roles
102 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Gender Identity or Gender Roles

A	12
B	7
C	6
D	25
E	16
F	17
G	19

Sexual Identity or Coming out of the Closet

A	12
B	5
C	3
D	13
E	17
F	28
G	24

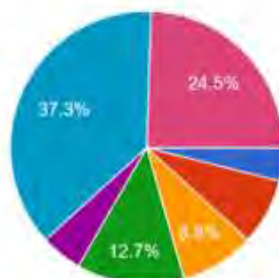
Sexual Identity or Coming out of the Closet
102 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Sexual Relations & Physical Intimacy

102 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Sexual Relations & Physical Intimacy

A	4
B	8
C	9
D	13
E	5
F	38
G	25

Readiness for Physical Intimacy, or lack thereof

A	3
B	5
C	7
D	7
E	7
F	43
G	30

Readiness for Physical Intimacy, or lack thereof

102 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Romantic Relationships & Emotional Intimacy

101 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

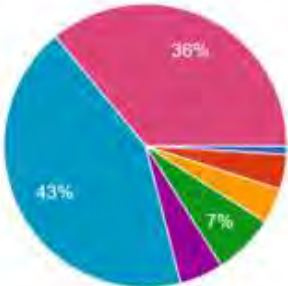
Romantic Relationships & Emotional Intimacy

A	4
B	6
C	7
D	16
E	7
F	32
G	29

Desire

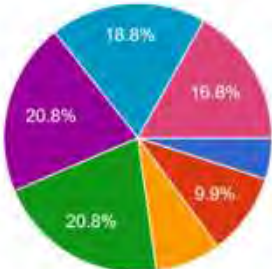
A	1
B	4
C	4
D	7
E	5
F	43
G	36

Desire
100 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Peer Pressure
101 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Peer Pressure

A	5
B	10
C	5
D	21
E	21
F	19
G	17

Ways to Say No to Unwanted Physical or Emotional Intimacy

A	4
B	4
C	7
D	12
E	14
F	33
G	26

Ways to Say No to Unwanted Physical or Emotional Intimacy
100 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure

101 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Physical, Emotional, or Spiritual Pleasure

A	5
B	3
C	4
D	13
E	10
F	39
G	27

Healthy, Safe Relationships vs Unhealthy, Abusive Relationships

A	7
B	6
C	5
D	20
E	11
F	23
G	29

Healthy, Safe Relationships vs Unhealthy, Abusive Relationships

101 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Sexual Assault, Unethical Sexual Contact, or "Good Touch vs Bad Touch"

101 responses



Sexual Assault, Unethical Sexual Contact, or
"Good Touch vs Bad Touch"

A	7
B	3
C	5
D	15
E	8
F	31
G	32

Communication, Consent, or Implementing
Boundaries

A	5
B	4
C	6
D	25
E	11
F	23
G	27

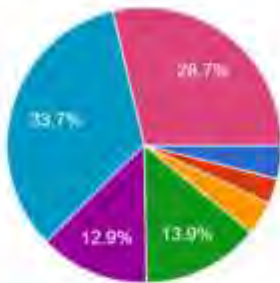
Communication, Consent, and/or Implementing Boundaries

101 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Body Diversity
101 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Body Diversity	
A	4
B	3
C	4
D	14
E	13
F	34
G	29

Ability Diversity	
A	5
B	10
C	1
D	15
E	23
F	21
G	25

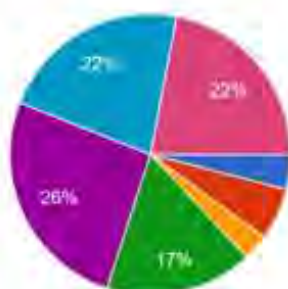
Ability Diversity
100 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Body Image or Self Esteem

100 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Body Image or Self Esteem

A	4
B	6
C	3
D	17
E	26
F	22
G	22

Emotional and/or Mental Health

A	6
B	7
C	4
D	22
E	37
F	15
G	8

Emotional and/or Mental Health

99 responses



- A. Once, in an individual program
- B. Once, Within a larger course on similar topics
- C. Throughout a course offered to them once
- D. Multiple times in multiple programs, courses, and conversations on related...
- E. Integrated in Programming through...
- F. Never
- G. I don't know

Reflection on "Who I am" to myself, others, and my community

98 responses



Reflection on "Who I am" to myself, others, and my community

A	3
B	5
C	2
D	27
E	36
F	9
G	16

Appendix C

Part A - *Full Quote: Barrett Harr's Vision for Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education*

First, it has to happen in multiple arenas. Because not every kid goes to URJ camp, not every kid goes to youth group, and not every kid goes to congregational religious school. There have to be ways that we can interweave this through all aspects of Jewish life, and support families, no matter what they may be choosing as their Jewish engagement opportunities.

I think, like we talked about, it starts early, and it starts with very simple things. In terms of safe touch, we're all having those conversations about stranger danger when our kids are little. Why not phrase it in a way that's positive, proactive, in a way that can also be built upon later on. As opposed to the scary man in the white van down by the river, that's not always the bad guy.

The bad guy could be your best friend's dad, who you're having a sleepover with, who is doing something that makes you feel funny. I think we have to think holistically, and talk about instinct, and intuition.

Because that's not a conversation that really anyone's having about it. But... It's just someone, I don't remember who it was, now, I want to credit them. Maybe it's Debbie Mascherano, said to me that, "Every time you deny your instinct, intuition, you're harming yourself." That it's a step further away from your true authenticity, and it's only harder to come back the other way. Your body, one of those other miraculous things, just like when vessels open and close, that God endowed us with his intuition. When the hair on the back of your neck goes up, there's a reason it does that, and we need to teach our kids to listen to it.

Look, it's as simple as saying, it can be protecting us from attackers, whether those are Egyptians or whatever. We can spin it whatever way we need, but it's got to be a part of the conversation and trusting that. Because I think when it comes to relationships and sexual behavior, that's a really big part about this. "Do I feel good about the choice I'm making right now? Am I nervous-excited or am I scared?"

The social emotional piece has to come into it. I think we have to talk to our learners about where and why sexual behavior, and talk about pleasure, talk about consent, talk about all of that. We have to help families talk about their values, because many times that conversation is not happening.

Families may have rules, but they don't talk about their values. Helping parents to identify that or to ask kids to identify their values, what may be important to a kid may not be important to their parents, and vice versa. Really having these conversations, where we honor where every person is, we honor whatever gender and sexual identity they present with, and normalize it, and it's okay. In an age-appropriate scaffolded way, talk about it their entire lives. So, it's not just a one day, "Oh, by the way, it's time for the puberty talk."

It isn't, and there are lots of ways we can explore, there are great Jewish source texts, there's great midrash. There's all kinds of ways in which it is clearly woven through our tradition, but we often hide

those texts. You only get the true story of Hanukkah when you're a grown up. "We want you to come to Bible and beer," which by the way, let's talk about the alcohol use to sell Judaism. That's a whole other issue at my current job.

But we have, our kids need to know the good, bad, and ugly. Figuring out ways to do that throughout, I think it's important to know what's going on in their lives outside of the building. What's being taught in their schools? What are their families telling them? So that you can avoid conflict. Because if their faith is teaching them one thing and their family ... you've got to find that balance to use inclusive language so that it's not creating dilemma and saying, "Oh, do I listen to my parents or my school or do I listen to my community? Or dismiss my religion, because you told me X, Y, or Z is bad, and therefore [inaudible 01:02:21]. I don't agree with you, so Judaism is dead to me."

We've got to find ways to balance it, and I think it's got to be done in a way that is loving and supportive, and helps people to understand, for sure, that one decision does not make you anything. That you always have the right to make a different decision.

That was one of the most powerful things I think I taught my kids, is just because you may have a partner that you think it's appropriate to engage in sexual behavior with today. If for some reason tomorrow you say, "This doesn't feel right to me anymore," you have every right and you have the obligation to yourself to say to your partner, "Doesn't feel right."

Not shy away from it, and use an excuse or distraction tactic, you got to be able to have those conversations. A lot of it comes down to social emotional learning, but also the realities of how relationships work, and what are the values behind them that our tradition clearly has embedded in it? That will only make Judaism seem more relevant, and appealing, and important to our kids. There's my two cents.

Part B - Full Quote: Ira Miller's Vision for Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education

I think part of the problem is not only do I think what we're doing is great, I wish it was more of it, right? Where 10-12 years ago kids came out of the woodwork for this retreat, and even in the recent years they do. This is a retreat where you don't have to be in religious school to do this retreat. We prefer you are. You can buy this retreat a la carte, which we don't do for anything else. But over the years there are more and more families who, "Oh, well my kid has a game that weekend." And I'm like, "Really?? That's more important than your kid's sexual health? What are they going to remember in 10 years, the one random game, or this?" And we've talked about, "Can we go later?" Because there's so much programming to do. Can we go Sunday until three or four o'clock in the afternoon and give them some more down time but have some more programming time.

So, part of my ideal is even a stronger connection with the parents and the families to say, "This is what we need to be doing. Nothing is more important this weekend for our kid than this" I actually think that doing this type of program in a retreat context is the ideal. I mean you could maybe say it would be a camp, though I think there's some interesting challenges with camp and the overall dynamics of camp that make it more challenging. I think having it a couple days where there's parent influence before and after, it just really works. So ... What about the Jewish community? So, I'd love to see more Jewish organizations running this program or a program like it, but I also think that more Jewish organizations just need to be comfortable starting doing something. And whether that's bringing in someone who can do a basic talk on some stuff, or doing some study, or ... I think our, and this is kind of my platform of my soap box for everything that we do, when I started doing the work that I do, which again is a long time ago, I was quickly noticing how few adults in kid's lives have time for them. And I would go down the list, Teachers have so many kids in their classes and so many classes that unless you're really an out-there person that is going to go visit them in office hours, you don't really get to know them.

Coaches have this pressure at low levels to win that's ugly actually, so how many coaches are really getting to know their kids and developing relationships that are healthy and appropriate with them? Music teachers, drama teachers, newspaper advisors, you go down on the list, and I'm not criticizing them, I'm acknowledging the challenge of their role. And there's a really amazing place for Jewish organizations to say, "Hey, we see our kids and we care about our kids, and we're going to invest in them." Not just by saying, "Oh, here's money for programming." But "Here's money for people who are there to listen to you,

and to engage you in conversation, and to give you a safe space to talk about this or the myriad of other issues that are out there that you're ... Not your fault at all, you've got the internet at your access all the time, and you've got friends that you can text all the time, and so that's how you're dealing with this stuff." And some of that is fine, but there needs to be something else.

And so, we have to have the chutzpah to say, "We want to be that place." And so, we will talk about suicide, and we will talk about drug abuse. And we will talk about cutting, and we will talk about eating disorders. And listen, we don't want to have a program that's like, "Come this week so you can be depressed about the existence of teens." We want to do it in an environment that is positive and fun, and moving you forward. But there are ways to do that and to create a healthy place for self-exploration and growth, and this fits into that. I don't think we could run ... And listen, there are groups that run a sexuality retreat and don't do a lot of the other things that we do, I think ours works particularly well because historically it comes within a month or two of us running a self-esteem retreat where on a Saturday evening in gendered groups, we do an activity where we talk about in-depth teen suicide, and about self-esteem, and about how each person is important and valuable, and loved, and worthy of love. And they're crying, we're crying, whatever might be. But we're creating this community that really matters. And that, even though it's weeks later, or a month or two later, those kids who have been through that and then go on the sexuality retreat, they start off in that much better of a place. So, we've got to do something.

Part C - Full Quote: Rabbi Avi Orlow's Vision for Ideal Jewish Sexuality and Intimacy Education

... **I don't think there's an ideal. I think there is** many ideals. And I think people need to bring their authentic selves to those ideals. I could talk about my own personal ideals but that's not my professional ideal. My professional ideals is you have conservative camps, orthodox camps, reform camps, [inaudible 00:46:08] camps, JCC camps, independent camps, Zionist camps. There's all these different flavors of camp and they need to wear their own skin. And that means they need their own skin in all these

elements. I do want to bring up one [inaudible 00:46:24] and then I'll try to answer your question. I was visiting a Habonim camp, which is fascinating because it is truly youth empowerment camp. And it is decidedly liberal. And it's just so fascinating to me to, out of the mouths of babes you were hearing... I was hearing the most profound question that I hadn't heard in public discourse. And I just wanted to bring this up in this context. So, they... This was two summers ago. It was after the peak of #MeToo, but it was still in the world of it.

So, the camp director, who's 41 years old, right? And she says, "We had a problem last summer. There was a kid who's a male counselor, who had inappropriate... And I don't know what the touching was, but it was inappropriate sexual experience with a co-counselor, with a [inaudible 00:47:16] counselor. And it was a classic #MeToo moment, and we kicked him out of camp, right? He openly admitted what he did was wrong. He has done everything he can think of to do teshuva. And he wants to come back." Right?

So, this is not a question of he didn't admit his wrong. It's not a question of... And it wasn't... [inaudible 00:47:45] not a rape case. I'm saying it was not a case to go to the authorities on, per say. It wasn't [inaudible 00:47:52]. But everyone admitted there was no disagreement about the case of in fact, there is no disagreement of him being the wrong party in this. There's no disagreement about him owning it, having charata, going the whole teshuva process. And they're saying is, "We don't know, in our cancer [sic] culture, how we can bring him back. And we actually feel at odds with our Judaism because our Judaism is saying there should be a modality of him finding a way to return but we don't know how to socialize that yet. And the last thing we want to do is hurt the injured party or hurt the people who are perceived injured parties in this. So, we've been talking with the [inaudible 00:48:34] like, where is Judaism in that moment?" Obviously in getting closer to Yom Kippur here, I'm just thinking where is that moment?

And this is a fascinating moment again where maybe we need to stop following and start leading again. In the larger discourse of teshuva because it's not there. Right? So, the answer to your question is whatever people... Whatever their Judaism is, they need to bring it to bear. And sexuality is often under-spoken about but a huge part of people's private and public identity. And if that does not find a way that their Judaism speaks to their humanity, it speaks of a bigger hole in the boat. So, I also feel like camps have a opportunity/mandate/space to step into that role of loco parentis, beyond the insurance issues, to actually

say, "Actually, we want to actually make sure that we're leading this conversation. We want to actually partner with the parents that actually have really meaningful talks with their kids about this without us. But we want to support the parents because we know that they suck at this." How do we help them do this?

Without... And how do we help our kids on the other side of that, be respectful of their parents? And the fact that it's really hard for the parents to have this conversation. How do we enable... How do we, the camp, understand their own role as not replacing the parent but actually complementing that relationship and reinforcing that relationship? And intrinsically I think Judaism plays a huge role in that, but people have to own their own Judaism to have it have a role. Which is to say if I were a cultural Jew and I didn't have a sense of power and authority of halachic literature, or aggadic literature, or medieval literature, I still need to dig in deep and actually discover... you know... Ruth Bader Ginsberg as a huge Jewish icon who actually protected... Who entered a role of protecting same-sex marriage. That's stuff like... I don't need to resort to the books behind me (points to traditional Jewish texts on shelf behind him) to actually say, "Judaism as Judaism, has a voice." But recognizing there's so many different voices of Judaism.

In rabbinical school there was a teacher they brought in to teach us how to homiletics. And she [inaudible 00:51:34] says, "Here's the shtender. Here's the lectern." "What are you using it for?" Right? And I'm like, "Are you using it to give yourself authority? That you're above the audience. Or you're using it to divide you from the audience? Or are you using it to just hold your paper? And if that's the case then, step out in front of it. It can hold your paper and be next you as well." Just recognize where the Judaism is being used as the shtender. And is it the thing that's dividing you from the people you want to have influence over? Or is it something that just enables you to make the connection? And I think for too many people, Judaism is just the tool for authority, or is the mechanism of distinction. Not the means of connection. It's a weird analogy but I'll go with it.

... I'll tell you about one more good story. So as a Hillel rabbi at Wash U, it's a private university. So, there was a moment when a guy, Wolfson, whatever, fabulously wealthy orthodox man, gave money to a Lakewood Kolel system to send... yeshiva bucharim out to campus to learn with people on campus. And you give them a stipend, the whole thing. And the university was like, "I don't know if we trust this guy,

but we trust you. Can you meet with him and find out if that's going to... Can you meet with him? Tell me he's kosher or not." Right?

So, this guy comes over. For whatever reason my wife was out that night and I was alone with one of my kids. I only had one kid at the time. And I said, "Can we meet at my house?" He came over to my house. After 20 minutes of figuring out if he could have a cup of tea at my house, right? Which is interestingly insulting. But clearly a "smell each other's butts" moment.

I'm a chutzpan. So, I didn't go in the defensive, but I also didn't... From the offensive, I said, "I have a question for you." "Tell me what's your question?" It's like, "I'm just curious... I have this problem. So, I have these seven young women, undergrads, who come to learn with me once a week. We pick a topic, I get the ma'amar hatalmud for the topic and then the next week we learn the ma'amar hatalmud and then we come up with a new topic. And then... it's wonderful. Right? None of these girls are orthodox, orthopraxis or anything. These are reform, unaffiliated Jewish women who are Jewish, who want to learn Torah. And who believe that Judaism has what to tell them in their lives. And - Baruch Hashem - they brought me into their circle, and they want me to inspire them."

He's like, "What's the problem?" I said, "The problem is, they came to me and they want to talk about premarital sex. So, of course, the first shiur I give them is Shulchan Aruch and how it's asur, it's prohibited. And what do I do for the second class?" Right? Because I'm on the seventh class. Right? So, here's a guy who says, "Look, it's all about Torah. And I want to bring people to Torah." And I said to him, "That's wonderful. But here are these seven women who are saying, 'You don't have to convince me. Torah has a place in my life. And I totally appreciate you had to play by the rules, and you had to tell me it's asur. But don't pretend that that's the end of the story.'" And how much more faith did they have than this other guy had? Because they actually that's not the end of the story. And they weren't saying, "Okay, rabbi. Wink, wink, nudge, nudge. We know that's the end." They're like, "We understand that's asur. But that's not the limit of Jewish wisdom."

So, I said, "Look, if you want to come to campus, come to campus. If you want them to come to you, have them come to you. But let's not pretend that they're the same thing." Right? So here they are on campus. They're saying, "We're having premarital sex with our boyfriends! And our boyfriends know we're going to learn with the rabbi. And we're asking you if what we're doing is prohibited and you've done your work."

You've told us prohibited. That is not the end of the story." So, I think it's this fascinating which is, how many rabbis, and this has nothing to do with him being from Lakewood, that is the end of the story. Meaning they... Either they lack their own literacy, or their own comfort, or their own humanity to actually say, "I can hold this space for you," to have six more classes. It's funny, my 16-year-old is bigger than me now. He's six foot, 200 ... [inaudible 00:56:57] ... The night that I worked for these young women to come over for the class, was the night that my wife was teaching choir or something. So, I had to do it from my home. So here I am with these young women... It's the counter side of... This is a horror film of pastoral shit storm, right? But I have my little bitty son on my lap, right? So, I am protected. I have my superhero cloak on because here I am, a man with all these young women in my house but we can talk about anything. Why? Because my son is there and I'm like, never touch anything, right? But I'm just noting the fact that if I was willing to meet them, they would go anywhere. Not because we were changing their behavior, not because it was... Because they were open to how Judaism could impact their lives, the meaning of their intimate lives.

So, I don't think that's a critique of, a more right-wing orthodoxy. That's not my point. That's not the point. I'm saying, how many rabbis get real? Can say, "Actually, I'm open to how do I read the Torah to impact this moment? And vice versa." I just don't know.

... One last story. I studied a lot of a lot of things at rabbinical school that I didn't think I would ever need to know. Meaning I knew that I wasn't going to go the traditional shul route. So, it was like, "Why am I learning this? I spent a whole summer learning Mamlichia." It's impossible to get a piece of schechted meat that has not been salted in this country. You cannot get it. Right? But I had to learn schita. I had to learn [foreign language 00:58:43] ... I think it was this old concourse of things. You're like, "Why do I need to know this?" I remember very clearly, Rabbi Love came. He was doing... He was the rabbi who was teaching us practical halacha. And we were learning maroz of the cloth that women check to see where their menstrual cycle. And it's bedikas [inaudible 00:59:09] ... And to this day, I have no idea who, but someone snickered. And this is a very gentle human being, Rabbi Love. Obviously, by his name, Rabbi Love. But he... I've never seen him like this, beyond furious. He just said, "If you're not up for this, leave. And I'm not telling you to leave my class. I'm telling you to leave yeshiva. If a woman has the yira shamiyim, the fear of heaven to bring you something that intimate from her life, and you don't have the

wherewith awe to treat this with the utmost respect that you're being led into the most private of her existence, you have no place here." And it wasn't about the bedikah cloth.

The question is, do... And I'm not limiting it to rabbis either, I'm saying... And this is my right-wing critique of liberal American life, which is I don't think the rabbi has a role in the bedroom. I like to think the Torah does. And if the rabbi gets schlepped along for it, that's great. But if we don't have that openness to that experience, openness to the honesty of what's working and not working in those experiences, you have no right in the rabbinate. So, I'm just saying, I don't think... I haven't got that many bedikah... ta'ar mishpacha sh'eilas in my life. But that class prepared me to teach these young women because it was an openness to the fragility and vulnerability of what happens in those private spaces and what does it mean to be invited into them, in the most tzniut of ways. Meaning like, there's nothing public about this but the fact that they're bringing you in... And if Judaism doesn't have anything to say then we have no role in... We don't have any chelek in this at all.

So, whatever. His voice has resinated loudly through the years of realizing that skirting these issues is skirting the rabbinate. And that equally applies to... And that has nothing to do with ta'ar mishpachah, that has nothing uniquely to do with... I'll say this very clearly. And this has nothing to do with orthodoxy. We, the Jewish community, have no right to claim to be allies to the gay community before we are able to talk about gay sex. We are unable to talk about it because we're unable to talk about sex and then gay sex makes us squeamish. But that's the squeamish that Rabbi Love was yelling about. To not take it seriously, that human experience, is a travesty. Because there's a deep, deep problem. So how do we say, "Oh, we decided on high, gays and straights are the same," but the reality is we haven't talked about any of this. So, the many orthodox environments would be like, "How do we ignore..." I'm like, "Get up in front of you and talk about gay sex as if it's not weird or disgusting. Don't talk about halakha. Just talk about it as if this is normative and then we'll have a conversation about... Or can we deal with our homophobia?"

Because until you do normalize it, you're just propagating the homophobia. It's absurd. Right? But then they're like "But Avi what about tzniut?". I'm like, "Fine. So, let's talk about it in respectful ways." But the fact is, the fact that we're uncomfortable in society... It's not even Judaism. We're uncomfortable in society to talk about gay sex in ways that we put heterosexual sex on billboards, everywhere. It's astounding. And then we're like, "But why haven't we made progress?" You don't see that? There's an old joke. The joke

goes, Moshe and Schprinze - haredim, chasidishe couple. They get married. And [foreign language 01:03:30], they go back to their place that they're going to have... Consummate their marriage. And Moshe says, "Schprinze what do we do? I don't know. What do we do?" And Schprinze's like, "I think we're supposed to get naked. Turn off the lights and get naked." He comes back. He's wearing his tzitzis and yarmulke. "no, no, no. Really naked, naked." Fine. and Moshe says. "Okay, now what do we do now?" He says, "I think we're supposed to go to bed." And Moshe says, "Okay, what do we do now?"

He says, "I think you're supposed to get on top of me." "And then what do we do?" "I think you're supposed to put your schmekele in my makom" "What do I do now?" "Moshe daven". So that joke... The humor in that joke is actually the kernel of such a fascinating issue. You have a Western civilization that talks about sexuality everywhere but has no inner conception of prayer. You have a haredi culture that has a total inner world around prayer but has no language to talk about sexuality. When in reality those are actually mirror images of intimacy. And it is profound to realize that there's a sameness, the similarity between a real prayer experience and a real sexuality. And the juxtaposition of those cultures. And now, anyone who's not living in the haredi world, or living in a totally removed world from Jewish culture, we get to talk about both. Do we bring the depth of spirituality to sexuality? Do we elevate it to that? And vice versa. Do we actually talk about prayer's hard to access right now, can you access sexuality to evoke that in you?

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