

Honors Thesis Proposal

HOW PARENTAL SEXUAL PASSION STYLE RELATES TO COMMUNICATION ABOUT  
SEX WITH CHILDREN AND CHILD-PARENT DISCLOSURE ABOUT SEXUALITY

by  
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Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment  
of graduation requirements for University Honors

School of Family Life  
Brigham Young University  
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Advisor: Dean Busby

Honors Coordinator: Mark Butler

Faculty Reader: Chelom Leavitt

## **Working Title**

How parental sexual passion style relates to communication about sex with children and child-parent disclosure about sexuality.

## **Project Purpose**

In this paper, I will research the effects of parental sexual passion on parent-child communication about sex. Parents have differing ways of interacting with their sexuality: It can be in harmony or balance with the rest of their lives, it can be an obsession, or their sexuality can be inhibited/repressed. I want to see how parents with these different expressions of sexuality, called *sexual passion styles*, talk about sex with their children. I will look for associations between sexual passion and the frequency and quality of parent-child conversations about sex. I will also measure the reciprocal effect, where children take initiative to disclose sexual matters to their parents.

## **Research Questions**

How does parental sexual passion relate to frequency of sexual communication with children?

How does parental sexual passion relate to quality of the sexual communication with children?

How does parental sexual passion relate to child-parent disclosure about sexuality?

## **Project Importance**

This research fits into emerging literature on sexual passion (see Busby, Chiu, Leonhardt, & Iliff, 2019; Philippe et al., 2019). Sexual passion is a measure of the way one interacts with his or her sexuality. Ideally, one's sexuality is in harmony with the other aspects of his/her life; however, some individuals may be unhealthily obsessed with their sexuality, and others may repress or inhibit it. By including these three styles, studies of sexual passion include nuance that goes

beyond studies of sexual obsessiveness or sexual satisfaction. Preliminary research has found positive relationship outcomes for people with harmonious passion and negative outcomes for those with inhibited or obsessive passion. I hope to connect sexual passion to the frequency and quality of parent-child sexual communication as well as child-parent disclosure. In doing so, I hope to explain why some parents are more involved than others in the sexual education of their children.

## **Project Overview**

### **Introduction**

**Sexual passion.** Much of the existing research on sex has focused on the individual's sexual experience. Researchers have developed models of sexual inhibition and excitation (Bancroft, Graham, Janssen, & Sanders, 2009), arousal and orgasm (Masters & Johnson, 2010), homo- and heterosexual behaviors (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Although these models are helpful in understanding individual sexual functioning, they fail to include the context of relationships.

In her critique of prevailing theories of sexuality, Reynolds (1992, pp. 38–39) explained: “From the point of view of postmodernism, it is [...] intensely ironic that prevailing theories of sexuality reflect so little of what is most human about us [our relationships]. ... Prevailing views of human sexuality do not provide a vocabulary in which I can make a sensible account of my relational world.” Theories about sexuality that fail to account for the relational context in which sexual interactions occur are inherently limited.

Research by Schnarch (1991, 1997, 2009) attempted to redefine sexual functioning in relational terms. Schnarch posited that, in contrast to romantic love (see Sternberg, 1986), the sexual passion in a relationship can increase over time as couples come to know each other

better. Recently, scholars (Busby et al., 2019; Philippe et al., 2019) have worked to better define sexual passion by looking to literature on general passion and motivation (Vallerand, 2015; Vallerand et al., 2003). In the general passion literature, individuals are passionate about people, activities, and concepts that they strongly like, highly value, invest time and energy in, and consider a part of their identities (Vallerand, 2015). This has resulted in the current understanding of sexual passion as valuing, investing time in, and liking one's sexual identity. Like other passions, sexual passion can be in or out of balance with other aspects of one's life. Some researchers take an individualistic approach to sexual passion (e.g. Philippe et al., 2019), while others focus on passion within a relational context (Busby et al., 2019).

Busby (2019) suggested a *triadic* model of sexual passion, expanding from the two-dimensional model (harmonious and obsessed) in the existing passion literature. In this triadic model, an individual's passion for sexuality can have varying amounts of harmonious, obsessive, and inhibited elements. Additional studies are needed to verify his results and to connect sexual passion to other individual, couple, and familial outcomes.

Measuring sexual passion is uniquely useful, because existing measures of sexuality may misdiagnose passionate individuals as being obsessed with sex. It is also distinct from general measures about the quality of a person's life or relationship, which do not ask about sexuality specifically. Busby's model is also useful because it looks at passion within a relationship, which adds meaning to the traditionally physiological model of sexuality.

As sexual passion plays this unique role, it could potentially be a predictor of parent-child communication and education about sex. Parents who have a high degree of harmonious passion, for example, may be more likely to broach the topic with their children. Conversely, parents with

inhibited passion styles may convey less information about sex, or they may be seen by their children as less approachable.

Parents play a vital role in the sexual education of their children. Various programs have been implemented to increase awareness and involve parents in this process, with varying degrees of success (Davis, Evans, & Kamyab, 2013; Walker, 2004). The goal of this study is to connect parent sexual passion styles to parent-child conversations about sex.

**The Present Study.** I intend to use data from the Healthy Sexuality Project (HSP), which contains data on parents and children. HSP data was collected by researchers from Brigham Young University from 2000 children and 2000 non-related parents. Participants were asked questions about demographic information, parenting, and sexuality. They were compensated \$3US for participating. I intend to use only the parental data. The data has been archived and de-identified, so there are no human subject implications for this particular study.

A preliminary STATA analysis shows all three types of passion are significantly related to child-parent sexual disclosure, so I believe further analyses will prove worthwhile. I will use multiple regression analysis to look for associations between the variables, controlling for income, race, age, and gender. These controls are needed because income and race affect family values, because parental sex education is known to vary by gender, and because sexual passion may vary by age over the life course.

### **Thesis Committee**

#### **Faculty Advisor: Dean Busby**

Dr. Busby has authored books, book chapters, and research articles about marriage relationships and sexuality. He has been a professor for more than twenty years and teaches classes on healthy sexuality at undergraduate and graduate levels. He is also a primary

investigator on the Healthy Sexuality Project. I have worked with Dr. Busby since May 2018, doing qualitative research about the transition to marriage and how sexuality influences that transition. I am currently taking his MFHD 695R Sexuality Research Seminar class.

**Faculty Reader: Chelom Leavitt**

Dr. Leavitt has a PhD in Human and Family Studies from Penn State. She researches issues surrounding healthy sexuality within committed relationships, mindfulness, and sexual satisfaction. Dr. Leavitt is a primary investigator on the Healthy Sexuality Project. She has an intricate knowledge of the data I will be analyzing, as well as relevant research experience that allows her to understand and critique my work.

**Honors Coordinator: Mark Butler**

**Project Timeline**

27 September – Nathan submits proposal

3 October – Nathan completes first draft of introductory section

22 October – Nathan submits revised draft of introductory section to Dean

7 November – Nathan completes draft of paper

17 December – Nathan submits revised draft of paper to Dean

13 January – Dean provides Nathan with feedback

27 January – Nathan provides completed thesis to committee for feedback

10 February – Feedback from Dr. Leavitt and Dr. Butler

21 February – Nathan submits thesis defense information form to Honors department

11 March – Last day for thesis defense

13 March – Last day for Nathan to submit thesis submission form to Honors department

20 March – Nathan submits thesis poster and final thesis PDF to Honors department

25 March – Nathan submits poster for Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Student Research Conference

11 April – Mentored Student Research Conference

### **IRB Approval**

The original project received IRB approval for data collection. I will be receiving the data in a de-identified format, so there are no issues with human subjects. I am currently working to determine if any additional approval is necessary and obtain it.

### **Funding**

I will not need funding from the Honors Program.

### **Culminating Experience**

I intend to publish a version of this paper in a book or special edition of a journal, alongside the work of my classmates in Dr. Busby's sexuality seminar. I also plan to present a poster of this research at the Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Student Research Conference or at the Utah Council on Family Relations conference in March.

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