

Sexual Wellbeing

Why It Matters for Those Who Have Created Sexual Harm

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Florida ATSA Annual Conference

March 7, 2025

Dedication



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“The practice of love is the most powerful antidote to the politics of domination.”

bell hooks
1952-2021



My Plan for This Session

Why Sexual Wellness

Research Update

Conceptual Frames

Strategies for Success

Hope (for your clients and for you)

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Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Discuss the effectiveness of using a comprehensive sexuality education approach with persons who have sexually offended,
2. Describe one model for comprehensive sexuality education,
3. Analyze current methods of evaluation, risk assessment, and treatment of specialized populations of persons who have sexually offended;
4. Reflect on evidence-informed treatment of specialized populations of persons who have sexually offended;
5. Investigate the impact of sexually abusive behaviors on victims; and
6. Apply one aspect of this session to your work with persons with persons who have sexually offended.

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Who's in the room

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A lifespan approach



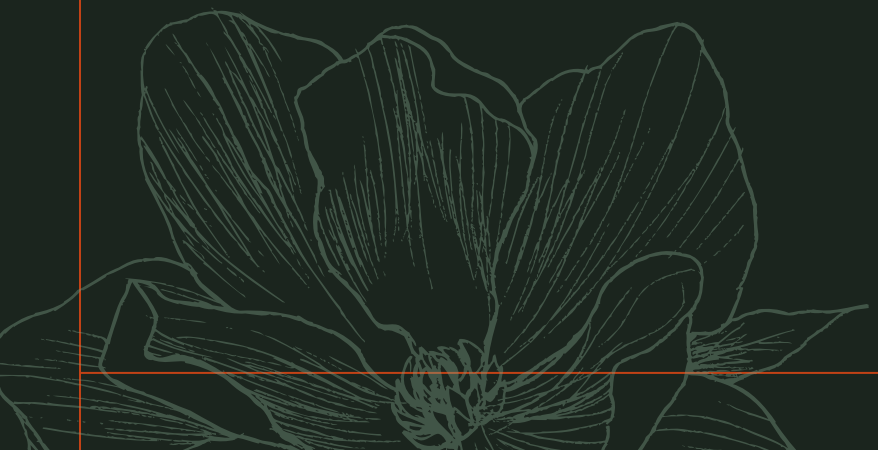








Words from a colleague



"People really don't talk with these folks about these things, and it's SO unusual for them when someone does, they're like a drowning person grabbing a life jacket. And then they just want more and more. And then word gets out that you are "askable." And then everybody approaches you. Even co-workers. I think many people working in this area are starving to have clients who are hungry for what they have to offer, rather than just clients who are resigned to attending a treatment program because they "have no choice." Maybe that's part of how you sell this. Tap into that desire to have motivated, inspired, excited clients who want to learn what you are offering. "Approach" goals rather than "avoidance goals". A better life rather than just staying out of prison.

"And I can say from experience that as I've switched over the years to the lens you are describing, my groups are so much more successful and satisfying. They get to the productive stages of the group process much faster, because they are engaged and curious and motivated. They connect with each other and relate to each other because they're all more willing to ask questions and share their stories. And, as incongruent as this might sound for this type of group, we have FUN together. They get to experience that they deserve to have pleasure and don't have to spend the rest of their lives feeling like a piece of s**t."

--Miranda Hughes, LPC, CSE, Former Sex Offender Program Coordinator
PA Department of Corrections, State Correctional Institution at Albion

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A thought experiment

A client in your care wants to have a healthy sexual relationship in the future.

You'd like to begin working with them *now* on mutual, consensual, pleasure-based sexual relationships to help them in the future.

But your employer is not too keen on *sex ed* for clients.

Questions

- Your own comfort level?
- Your team/administration's response?
- Obstacles? Allies? Tools?
- Long haul?

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Theory is at the root

What is social despair?

‘Down from hope’

The inability to imagine a brighter future



Shanahan et al., 2019

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What is erotic privilege?

Type of privilege afforded only to certain types of people

White
Cis het
Able-bodied
Thin
Tall
18-35



Fielding (2021)

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A Research Update


Time to talk about SEX my son
what you want to know?

Why teach about sexual wellness?

- Lack of emphasis or research on key issues
- Most sex ed -- concerned about prevention of pregnancy/STIs

Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021



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How is sex education part of prevention?

Comprehensive sexuality education integral to prevention with emphasis on:

- Health
- Wellness
- Pleasure
- Justice

Mitchell et al., 2021

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Why can’t we just leave it to caregivers?

- Sex ed -- woefully lacking
- Caregivers are unprepared, uncomfortable, wrong for the task
- Importance of clinicians and educators

Irvine, 2004



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What do clients ask for in sex ed?

Students want class more like Netflix series “Sex Education”

- Realistic and controversial topics
- Situations relevant to them
- Sexual pleasure and confidence
- Gender and sexual identity
- Falling in love

Allen, 2023

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And remember, changing social norms



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Conceptual Models

Why use a conceptual model to talk about sexual wellness?

Helps frame issues

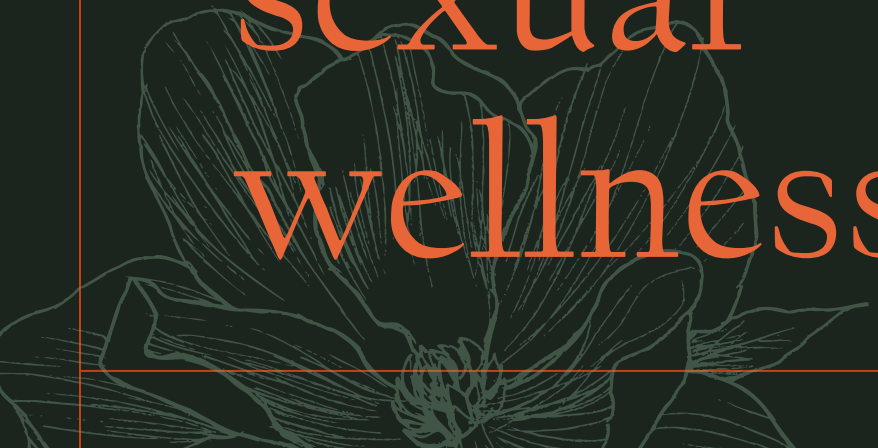
Assists in conveying complex information

Too often, stuck in “yes/no” binary

Describes issues multi-dimensionally

Includes issues of harm

Speaks to the ethical nature of sexuality



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Comprehensive Sexuality Education Models

- Circles of Sexuality (Dailey, 1981)
- Circles of Sexuality revised (Badger, 2012)
- Comprehensive Approach to Sexuality (Mitchell et al., 2021)



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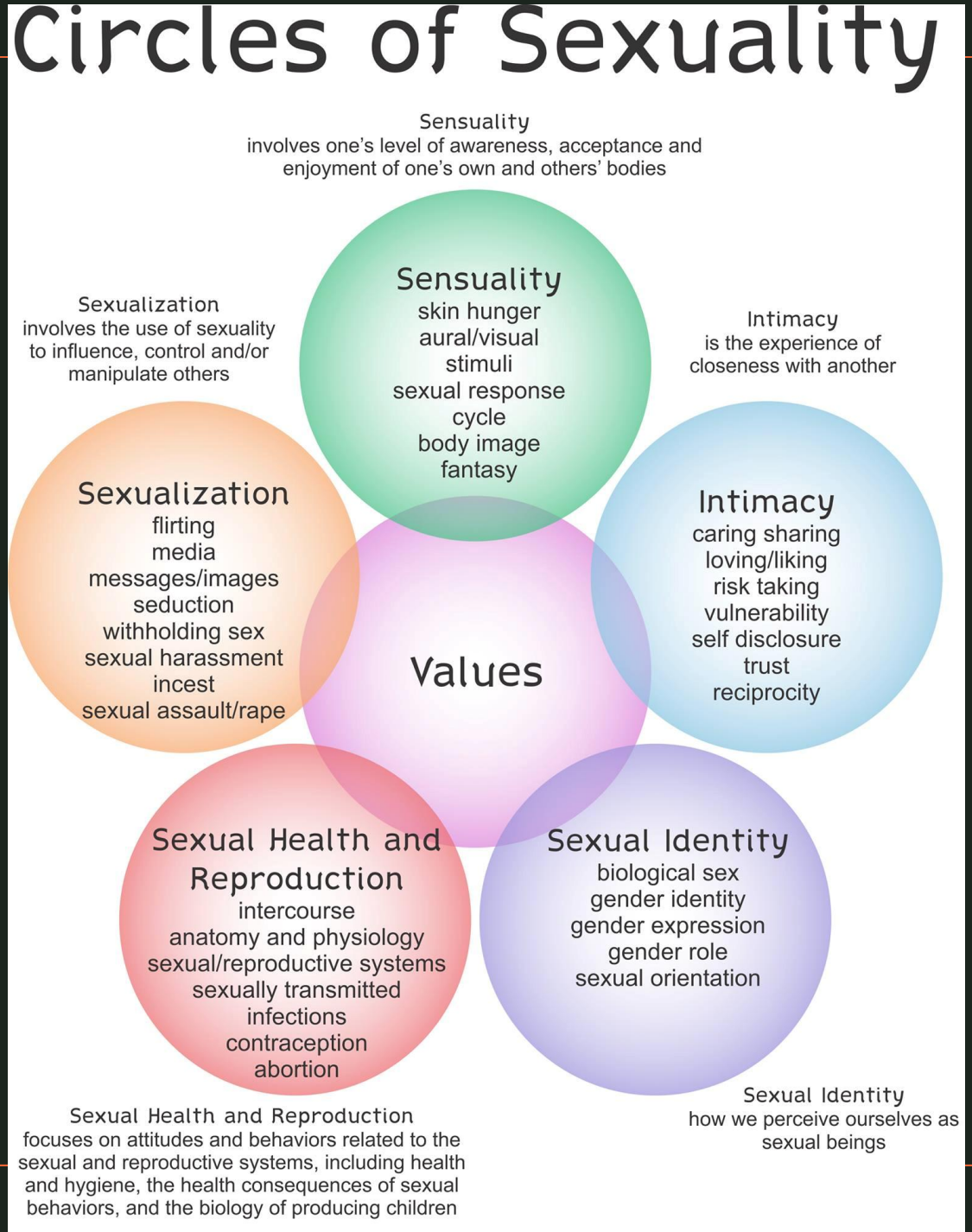
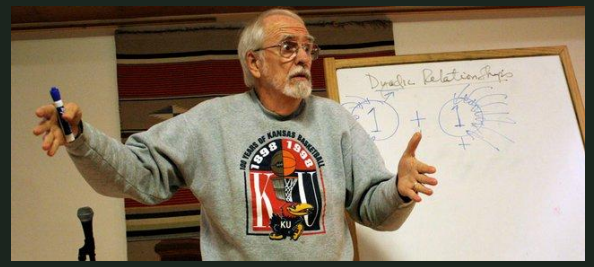
Circles of Sexuality (1981)





Dailey, 1981

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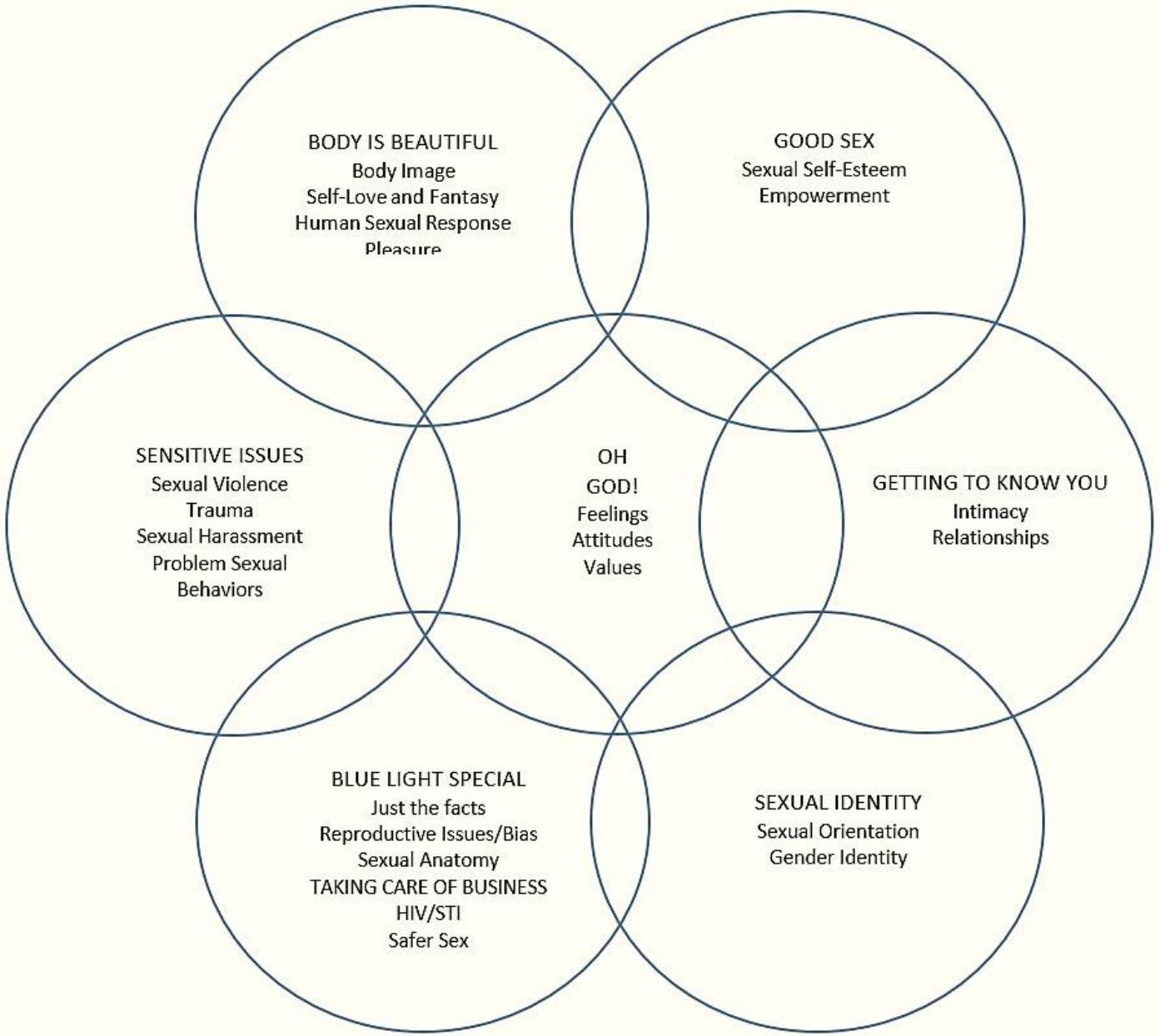
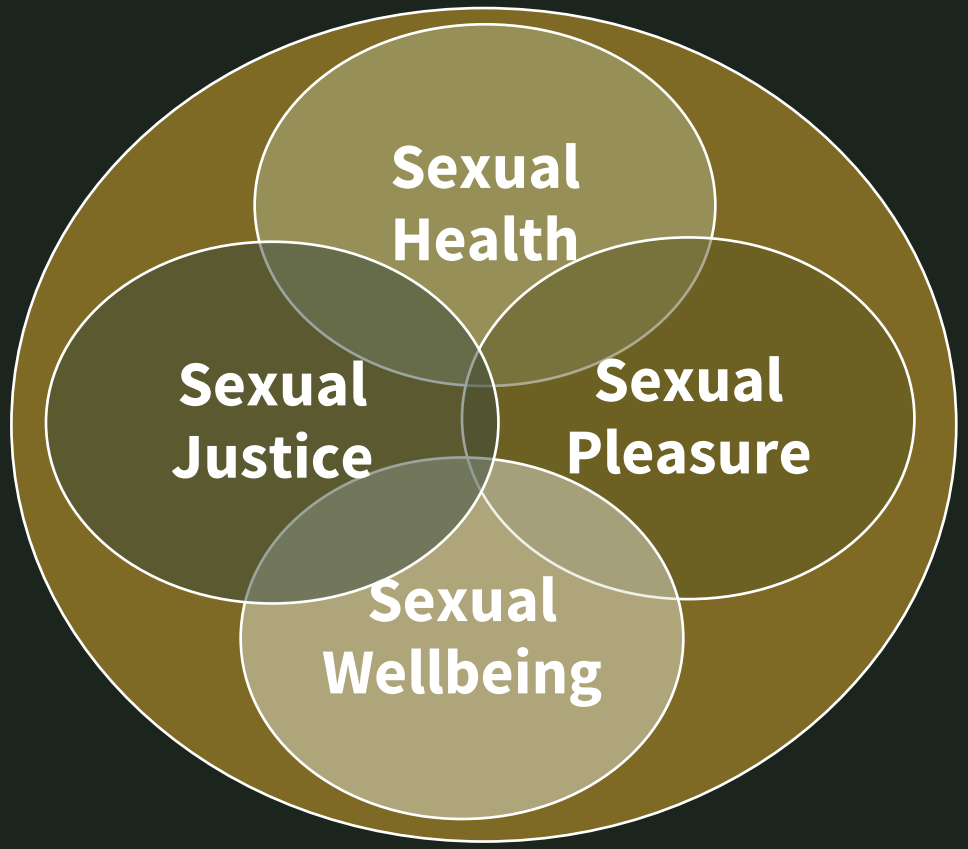
Circles of Sexuality Revised





Badger, 2012

Comprehensive Approach to Sexual Wellness





Mitchell et al., 2021

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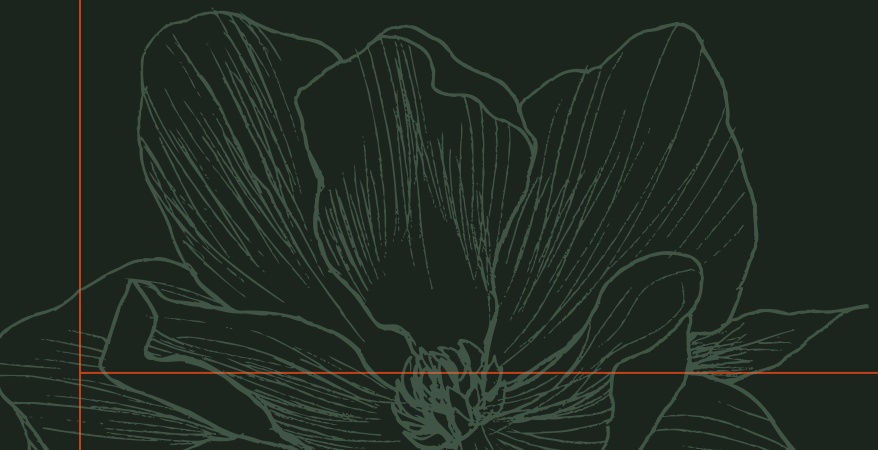
Sexual Health

Fertility and regulation

Prevention and management of STIs

Sexual violence prevention

Sexual functions (desire, arousal)





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Sexual Pleasure

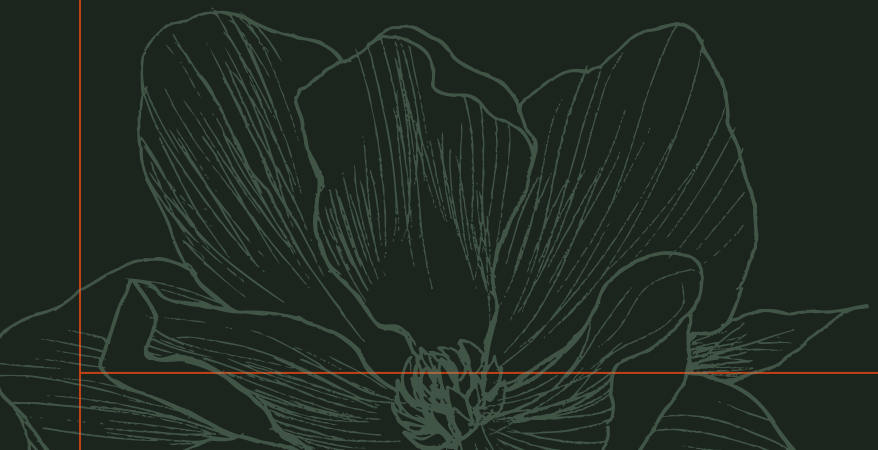
Self-Determination

Consent and Safety

Privacy and Confidence

Communications and Negotiations

Person-Related and Event-Related





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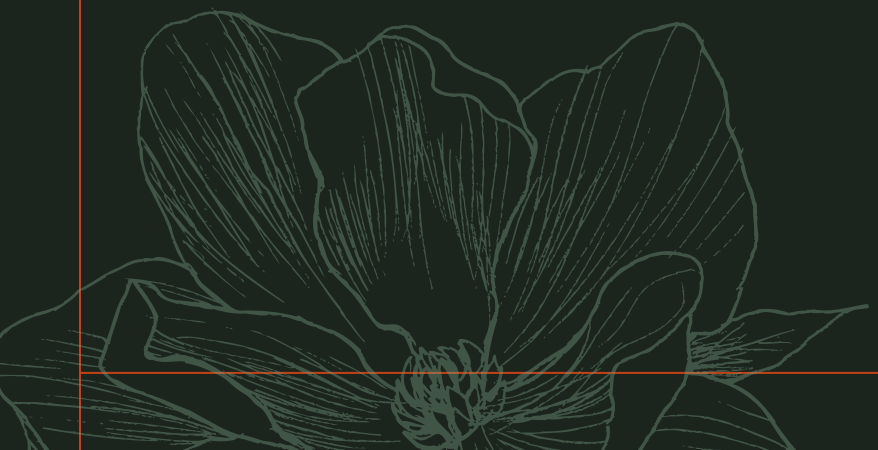
Sexual Justice

Sexual rights

Sexual citizenship

Sex positive practice

Larger efforts to ensure equity





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Sexual Wellbeing

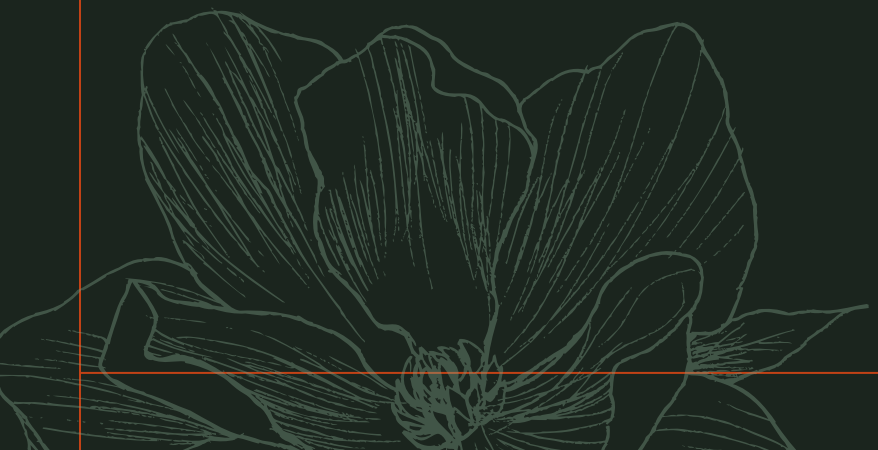
Sexual safety and security

Sexual respect and sexual self-esteem

Resilience and forgiveness in relation to past sexual experiences

Self-determination in one's sexual life

Comfort with sexuality



Sexual wellbeing

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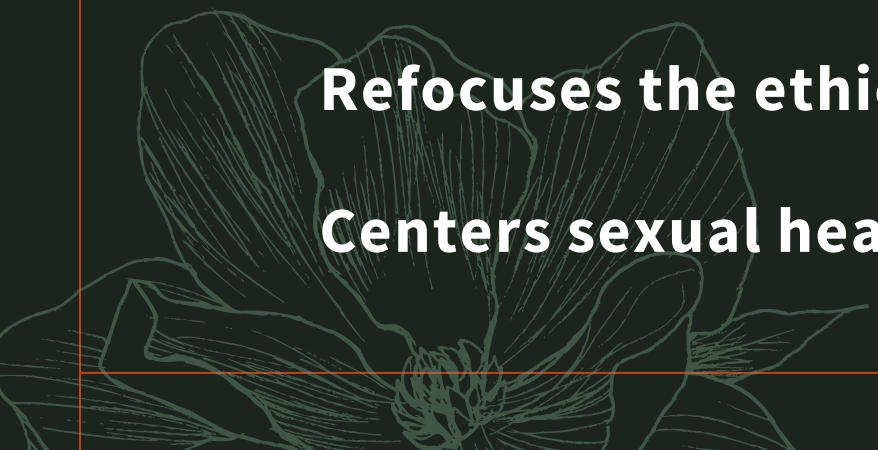
Sexual wellness is integral to your work

A marker of health equity for clients

A meaningful indicator of wellbeing overall

Refocuses the ethics, form, and practices of clinical work

Centers sexual health, pleasure, & justice in clinical work



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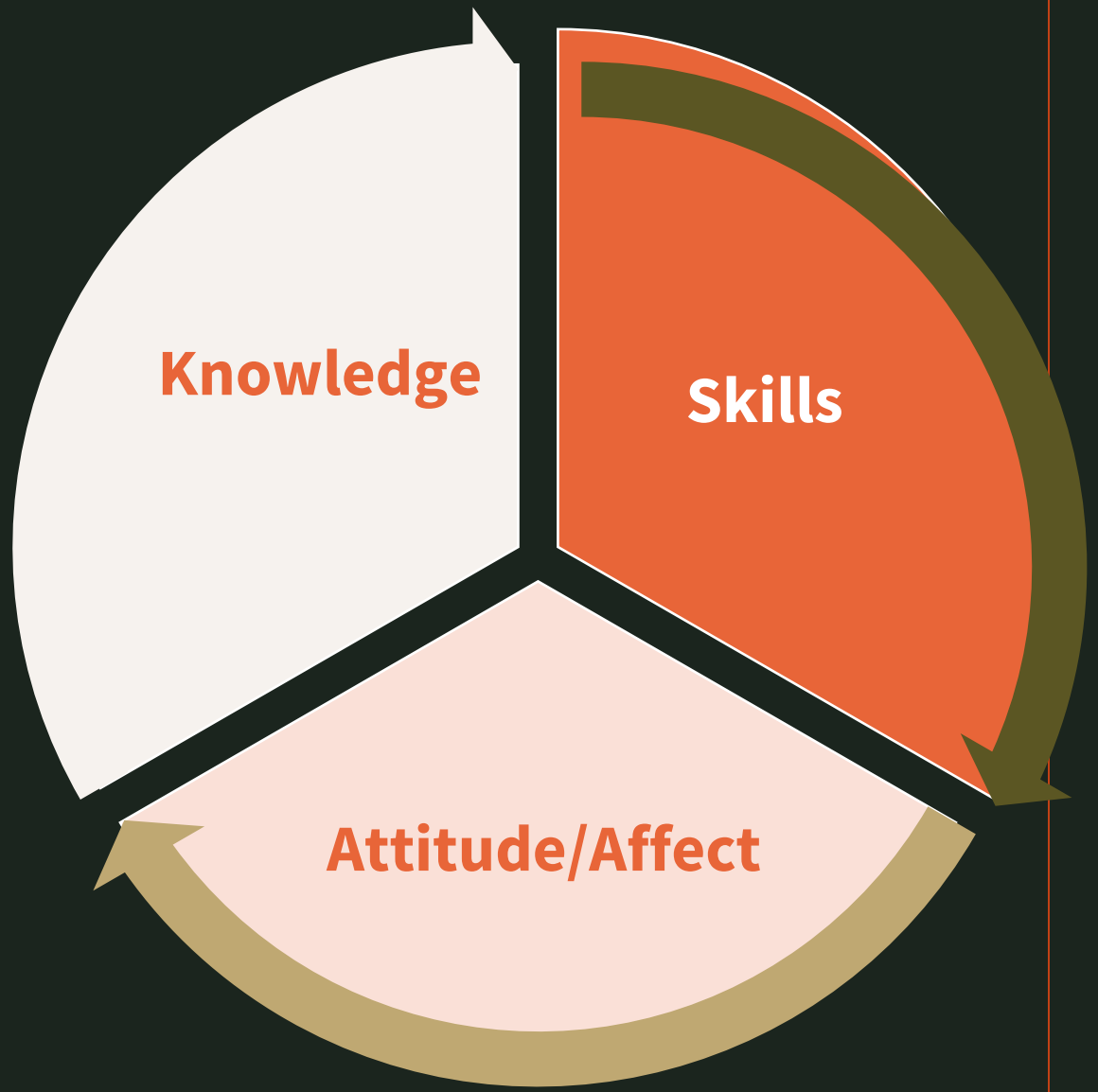
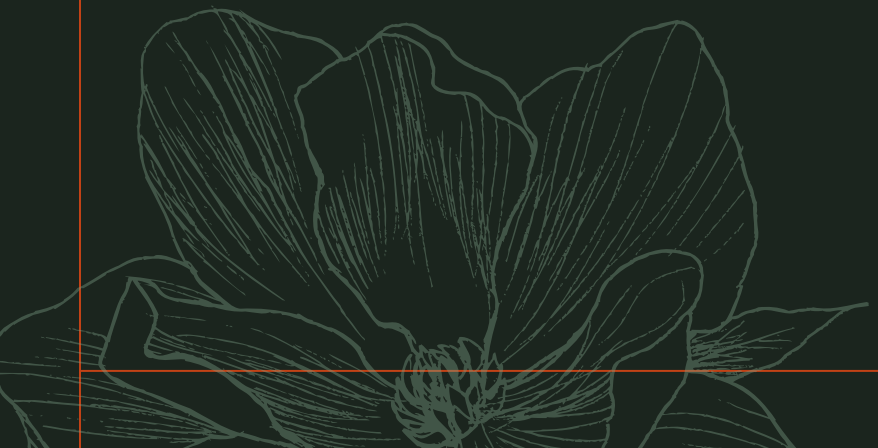
Strategies for Success

Comprehensive Sexuality Education





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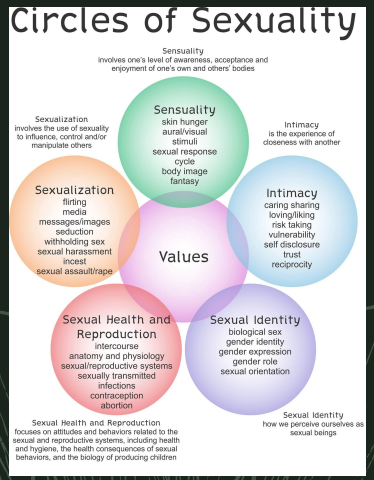
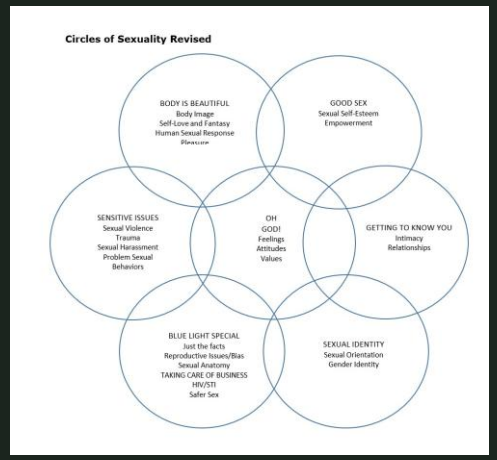
Quick Activity

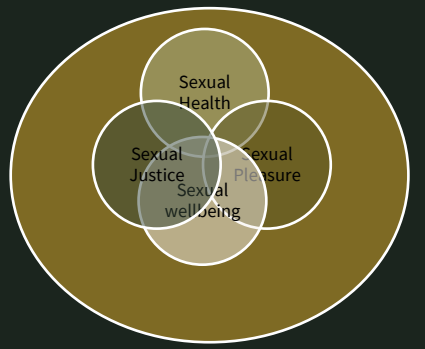
Consider three conceptual models

Note the evolution of these models





Comprehensive Approach to Sexual Wellness



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“Comprehensive sexuality education can be daunting.”

But you can do it!

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BREAK

ACTIVITIES
to promote sexual wellness

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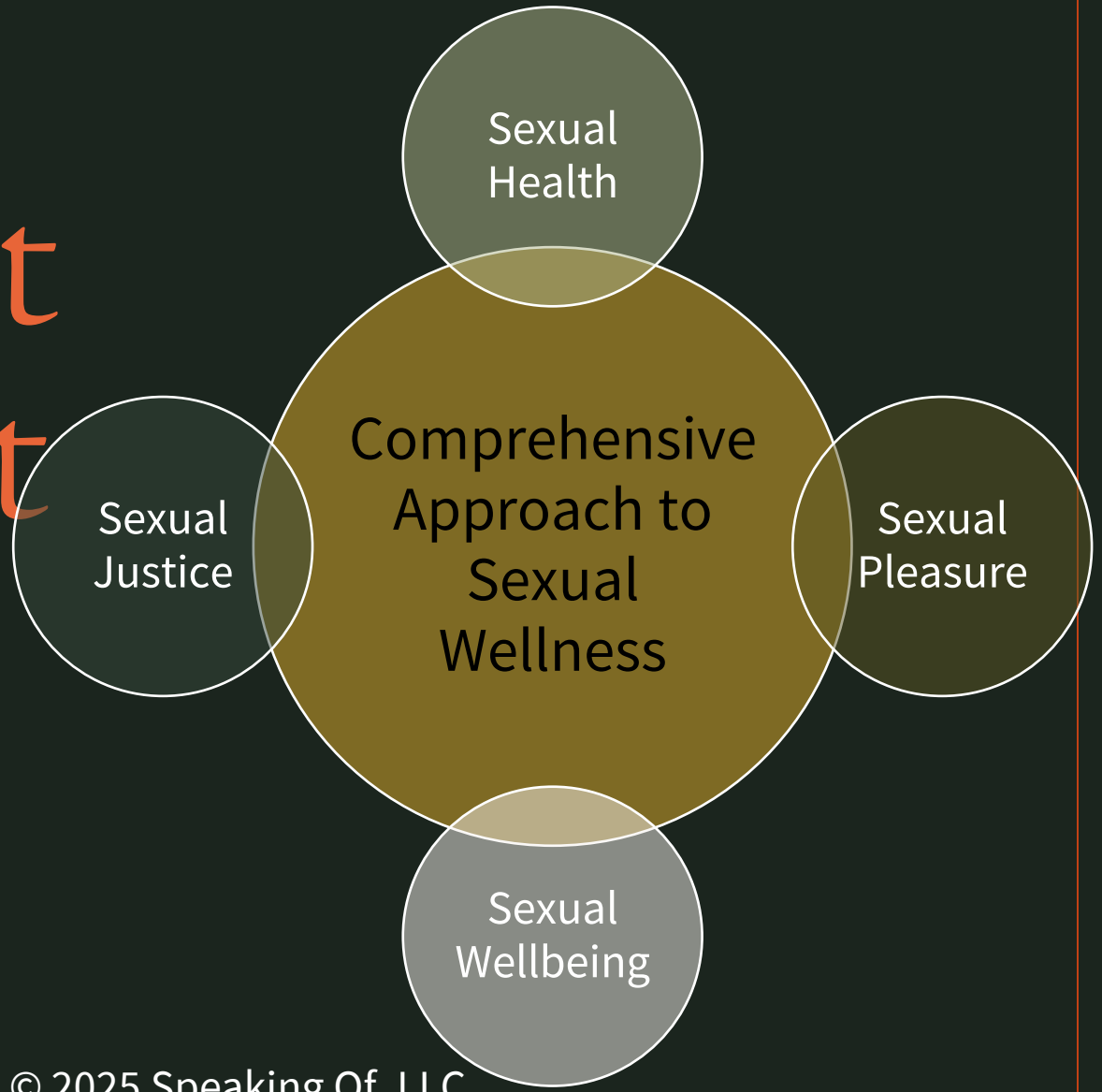
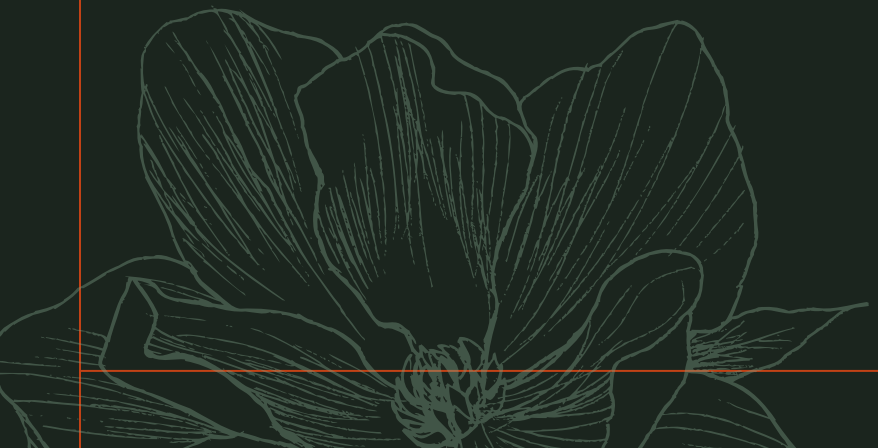
ACTIVITY 1: Assess Comfort and Discomfort





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ACTIVITY 2: Sexual Consent





Vernacchio, 2014

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ACTIVITY 3: Intimacy



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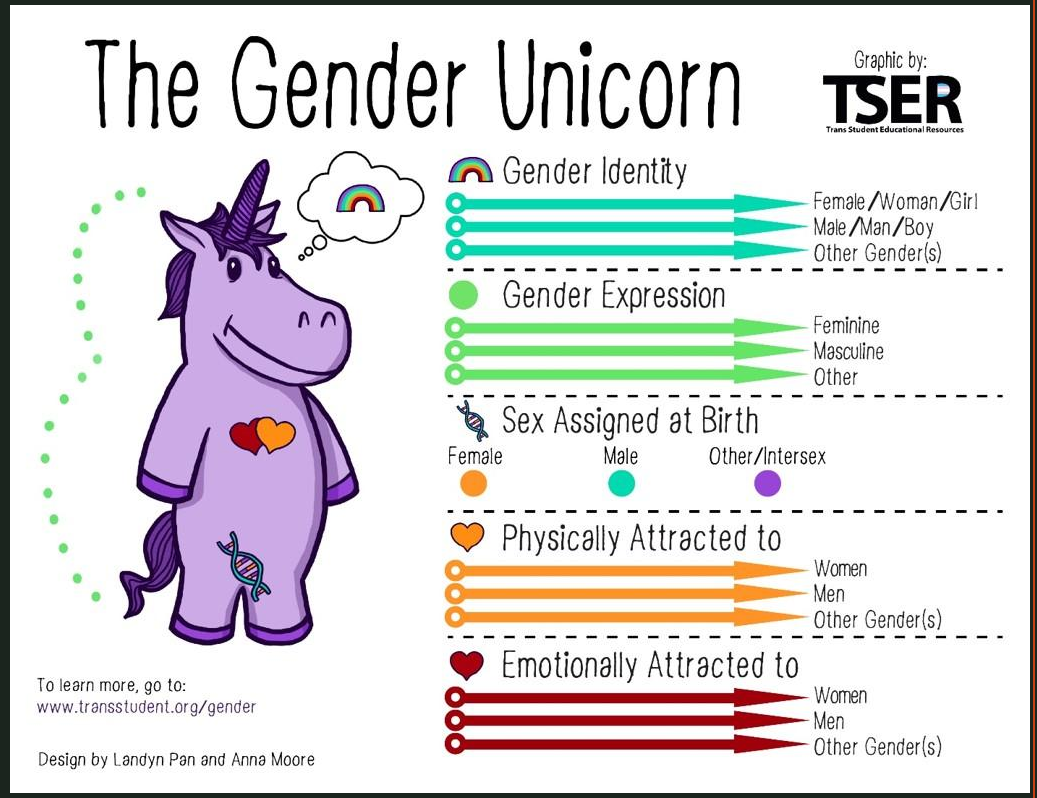
ACTIVITY 4: Gender and Orientation



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ACTIVITY 5: What the Closet Looks Like



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ACTIVITY 6: A Sensual Feast



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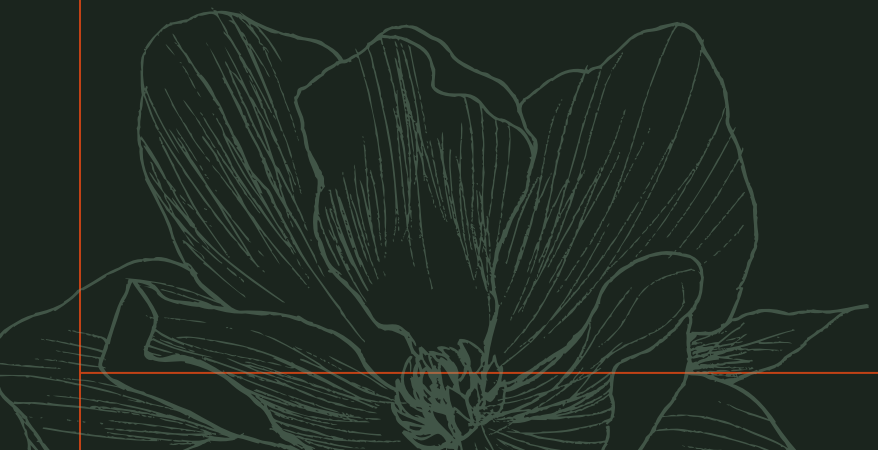
ACTIVITY 7: Etymology

Erotic

Sexuality

Sensuality

Intimacy



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ACTIVITY 8: Childhood Memories

What messages did you get about sexuality as a child?

- From whom?
- What did they say?
- Silences
- Secrets



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ACTIVITY 9: The Hourglass

Consider the hourglass as a symbol:

- What felt good on your body as a child?
- At the narrowing, what traumas occurred?
- In recovery, what pleasures are possible?



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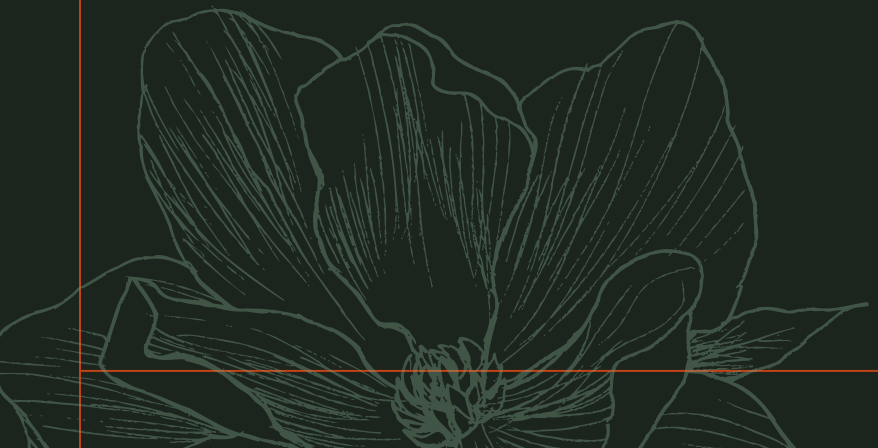
ACTIVITY 10: Finding Someone Who

Learning how to talk about sex



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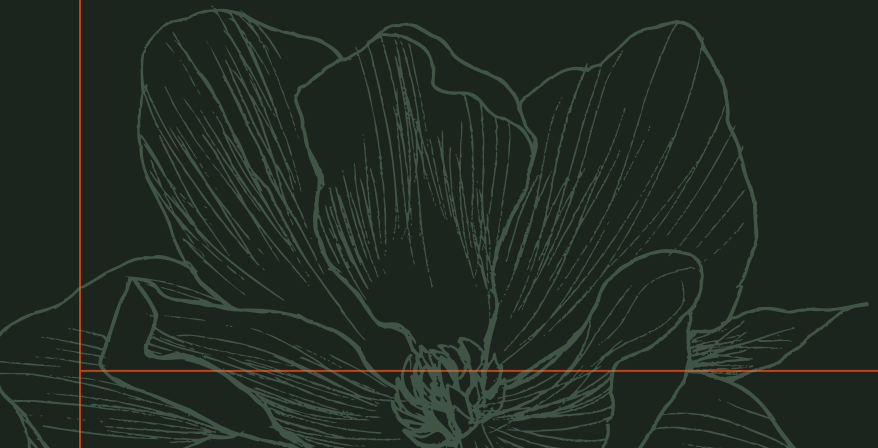
ACTIVITY 11: Sexual Pleasure

Consider an array of sexual behaviors

Note which ones you might want to offer/receive



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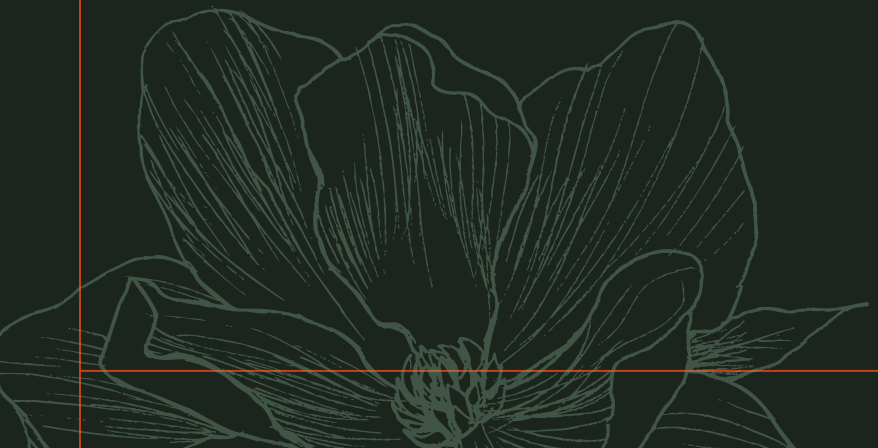
ACTIVITY 12: Let's Talk

Having those difficult conversations with someone who may have caused sexual harm

Learning how to receive feedback



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Link to lesson plans:

Link to handouts:



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Now it’s your turn

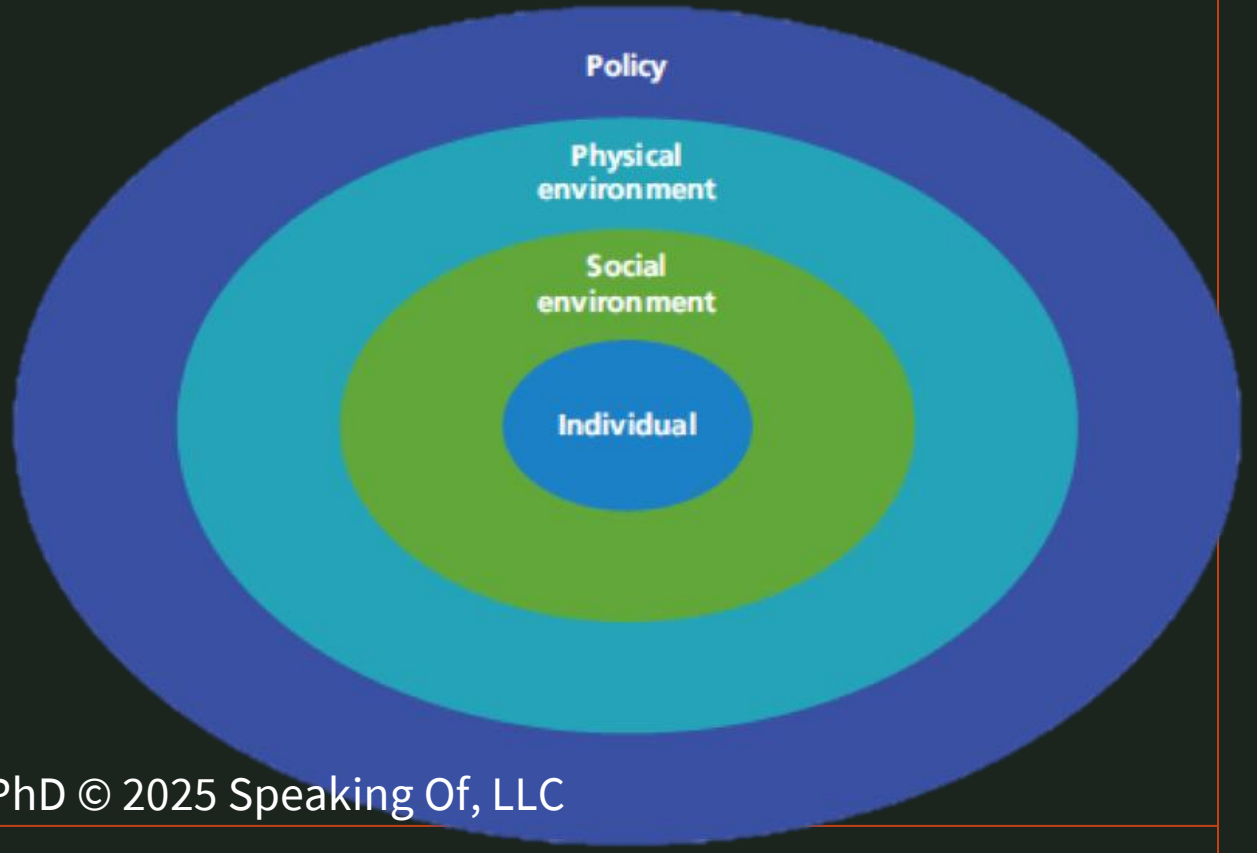


Policy Lens

Remember that thought experiment we did earlier?

Consider the barriers:

- Your own confidence or knowledge?
- Your role?
- Your employer?
- Something else?



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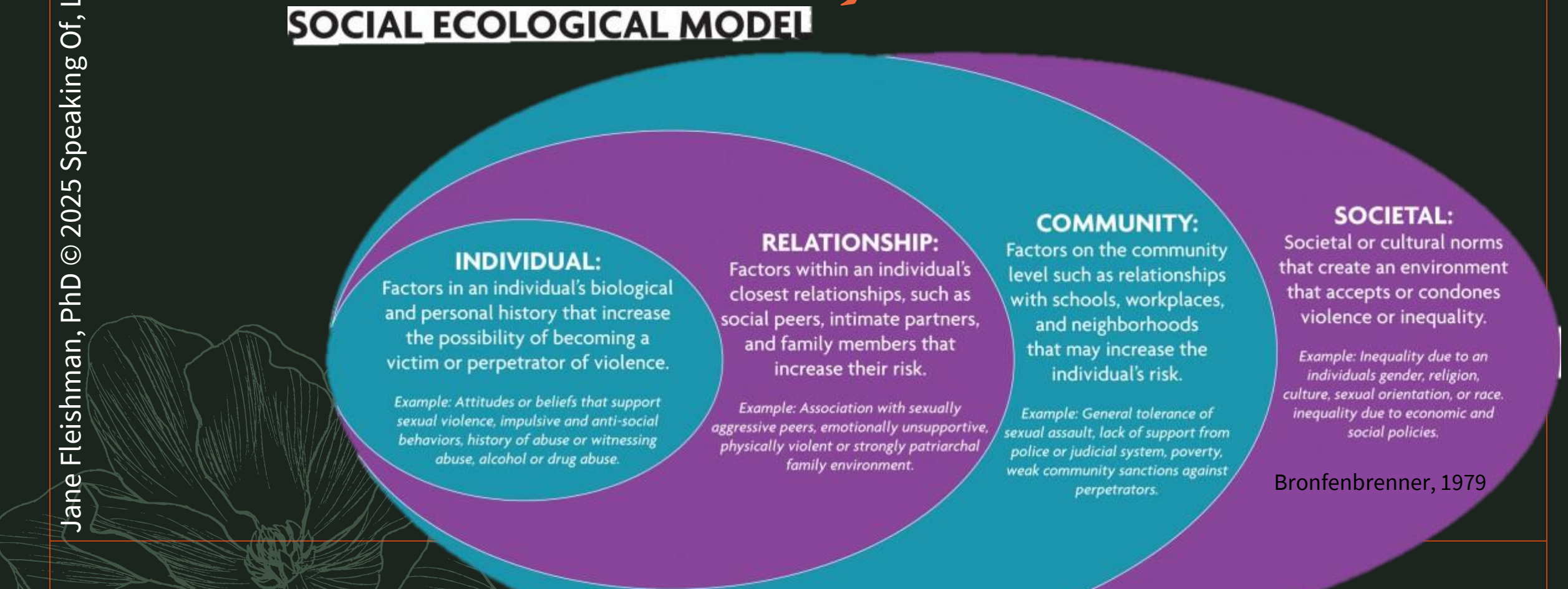
Looking at Changes in Practice at Many Levels



Bronfenbrenner, 1979

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Teaching Sexual Wellness

More words of hope

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“Over my 25-year career both as an academic and a frontline professional I have found through my research and anecdotal experiences in educational settings that young people are eager to learn about relationships and sex. I have found that a key aspect that is often missed by professionals, to the detriment of young people, is that they have agency, and that they want information that can help them make informed decisions about their lives. This includes decisions about relationships and sex. In my research, many young people consistently assert that they are being taught aspects of relationships and sexual behaviour that they already know and that education in this area is unrealistic and severely lacking.

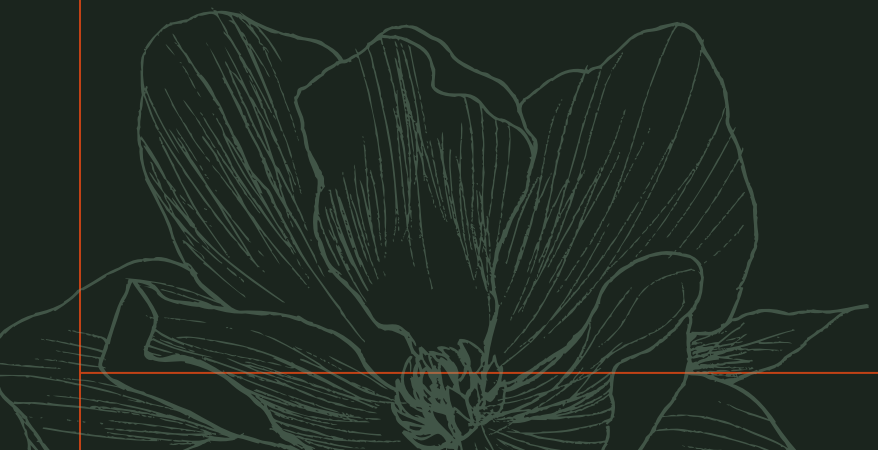
They need safe spaces where they can unpick aspects of the sexual world around them without feelings of shame as shame shuts down vital communication. This must be underpinned by robust research and led by young people and their knowledge. They are the experts in the seamless online and offline world that they live in today – and educators should always be led by this premise. Additionally, for those who have displayed problematic sexual behaviour, the main focus is on prevention of sexually harmful behaviour being repeated and/or escalated. Whilst this is a vitally important aspect of interventions, it should also run alongside the promotion of healthy sexual relationships and the right of the young person to go on and have these if they so choose.”

-- Dr. Sophia King-Hill, Associate Professor, University of Birmingham

Creating Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Your Program

To make this happen:

- What KSA's do you need as an individual?
- What do you need to discuss with your team?
- What does the facility need?
- What needs to change on a policy level?
- Other concerns?



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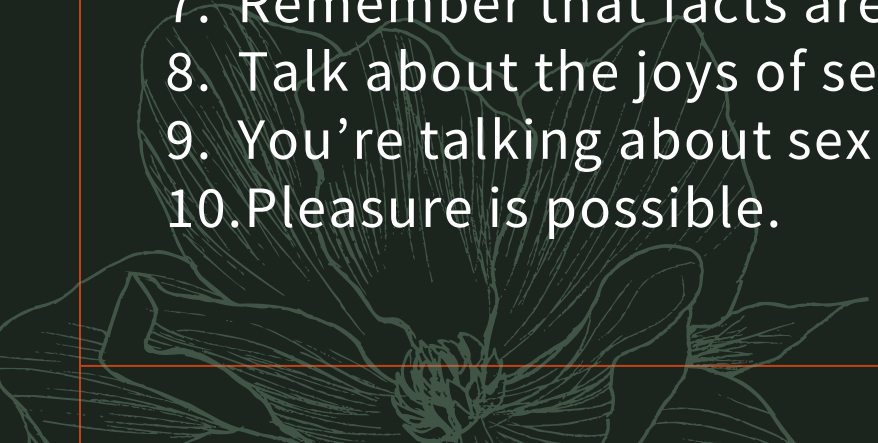
Helpful Tips to Teaching Comprehensive Sexuality

1. Remind yourself that it's OK to feel uncomfortable.
2. Seek "teachable moments" to share your values.
3. Don't wait until your clients ask questions.
4. Be "askable."
5. Consider the question behind the question.
6. Listen and be present.
7. Remember that facts are not enough.
8. Talk about the joys of sexuality.
9. You're talking about sex because you care about their happiness and well-being.
10. Pleasure is possible.



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AASECT

Advocates for Youth

Help Wanted, Prevention

I Wanna Know

Let's Talk

Our Whole Lives

PFLAG

Planned Parenthood

Scarleteen

SIECUS

StopInNow!

Sylvia Rivera Law Project

Trans Student Ed Resources

Young Adult Institute

What's OK?

Helpful Web Resources

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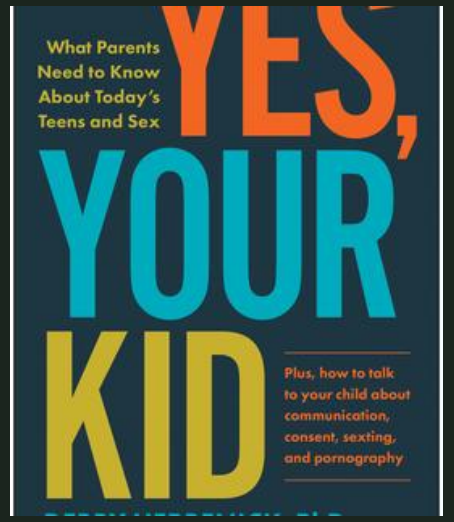

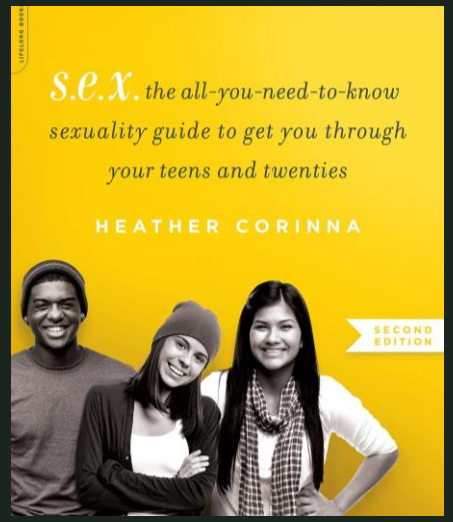

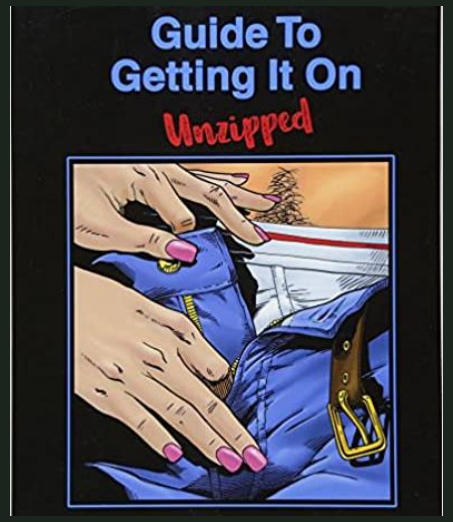

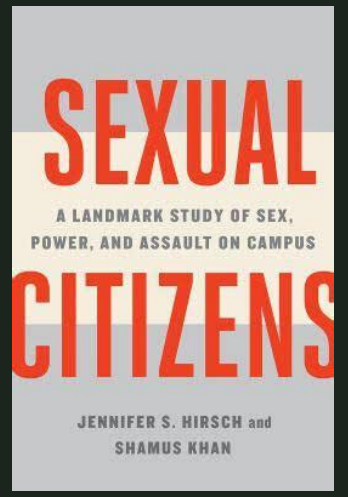

Resources for Clients

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Best Practices



What ideas do you have?

What KSA's do you need?

Who can support you?

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One last thought

What I am suggesting is daunting.

To live as fully healthy sexual beings, your clients deserve to learn about sexual wellness.

It’s quite possible that no one has ever talked with them in this way.

Why not be the person who begins to change all of that?

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Gratitude and Curiosity



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