

Everything You Need to Change Your Sex Life for the Better:
Hegemonic Narratives That Contribute to Understandings of Healthy Sex and Canadian
Adulthood

by
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Abstract

The production of a heteronormative society relies on the repetition and acceptance of ideologies that privilege certain expressions of gender and sexuality over others. One such expression of sexuality reproduced in Canadian society is the connection between sexual expressions and engagement as a marker of adulthood and an essential part of health and well-being. The dominance of ideologies in contemporary Canadian culture is perpetuated by ideological state apparatuses. The Canadian state can intervene when these ideologies are not upheld through medical systems and norms that regulate sexuality. This thesis undertakes a feminist discourse analysis and utilizes feminist auto-ethnography to identify the common narratives found in health and wellness magazines that replicate discourses of health and sexuality. The recent emphasis on sex as a healthy adult and maintaining relationships is indicative of a sexual hegemony that is prevalent in heteronormative and homonormative cultures that influences people's understanding of themselves and their relationships.

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I hope to continue to grow and learn. My sincerest thanks to all those who support me along the way.

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Introduction

My thesis aims to better understand the emphasis on sex and physical intimacy in Canada's hetero/homonormative sociopolitical life. I hypothesize that adults in Canada are bombarded with ideological and repressive state apparatuses that encourage the continued reliance and emphasis on centering sex in their lives (Althusser 1971). I believe the social importance of sex is linked closely to a Canadian citizen's understanding of adulthood and identity. I am inspired by queer theoretical frameworks that build "not an identity around which to organize oppositional politics but a refusal of coherent identities as defined under (neo)liberalism and practiced through identity politics" (Pramaggiore 2019).

With my understanding of sex-centered narratives and how they play into hetero/homonormativity in Canada, I engage with queer theory literature and concepts to expand the understanding of queer sexuality beyond the identity politics that a homonormative-embracing sex-centered narrative may have (Duggan 2002). Heteronormativity is a set of assumptions that relies on the belief that heterosexuality is the normal (and often only) expression of sexuality (Butler 1990; Duggan 2002; Warner 1991). Social norms and cultures are formed about the gender binary that upholds heteronormativity. Homonormativity is recognized to be "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 2002, 179). After investigating how sex-centered narratives influence queer bodies and thinkers,

it may become possible to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviours, erotic identities, constructions of gender [...] and practices of community-for restructuring, that is, the relations among power, truth, and desire. (Cited Blackmore 2011, 77).

Here, I take up my research questions: *how do ideological state apparatuses expose and emphasize sex and sexuality to Canadian adults, and how can rejecting or neglecting sex and sexuality in adult relationships challenge dominant sociopolitical structures that center on sex?* I direct these questions toward ideological state apparatuses in Canada (wellness magazines and popular discourse) that foster cultural norms regarding sex. My direction focuses my investigation on narratives of sex and sexuality that influence Canadian adults' well-being and role within hetero/homonormative societies. I explore health care and personal well-being as dominant power structures in citizen's lives. My research addresses the puzzle I observe with current widespread understandings of sex in hetero/homonormative Canadian societies. I engage and work with queer theory and social powers in a way that addresses the existence and importance of identity for sociopolitical contexts and calls for a reorganization of how we approach sex in a way that challenges dominant understandings.

In academic and popular settings, sex is often studied and framed around reproductive rights, citizen autonomy, and state intervention. Expressions of sexuality have been explored in public and private discourses around sex by queer scholars. Berlant and Warner argue that in heteronormative societies, "we are used to thinking about sexuality as a form of intimacy and subjectivity" (1998, 566). In their efforts to counteract this belief, they explore the nature of queer sex, identity, intelligibility, public, and cultures that unsettle the heterosexual couple's reverence and privilege in public Western societies (Berlant and Warner 1995, 1998).

Hegemonic heterosexuality and heteronormativity continue to maintain the privileged status of the heterosexual couple, but queer theory and sex attempt to unsettle the normalization of the couple's privileged status (Hopkin, Sorensen, and Taylor 2013). A sexual citizen is another concept explored by queer scholars. The role of the state in the formation of a citizen's identity

connects to sexual and gender orientation in the expression of being a “good” or “bad” citizen (Bell and Binnie 2000). The expansion of sexual citizenship to specific gay and lesbian relationships continues to be challenged, as the existence of a queer citizen upsets and sparks discontent from the state-granted privileges of sexual identity and citizenship and the expression of self-determined sexuality in public and private spheres (Bell and Binnie 2000; Plummer 1994; Warner 1991).

I am interested in uncovering the possibility of queer sex that unsettles heteronormativity and dominant social narratives by abandoning the “sex” part altogether—a hard and paradoxical undertaking. Nonetheless, exploring how Canadians can disregard the hegemonic hetero and homonormative emphasis on sex in adult relationships is an undertaking that will contribute to queer theory, queer cultures, and queer social movements. Focusing more on the promoted significance of sex rather than actual sex *acts* will help me navigate my research and align my work with previous queer scholars. Before I begin to explore the potential of resisting the importance of sex in heterosexual and non-heterosexual adult relationships, I develop an understanding of how sex is centralized or emphasized in Canadian adults’ lives. I believe this project will be valuable in its uncovering of such narratives in a specifically queer context that resists the supposed inherent importance of sex to adults and relationships.

Feminist Positionality

Asexual scholar Evelyn Elgie’s notes on positionality within the asexual community encourage me to reflect on my position as a white settler learning and researching from Treaty 6 land, the homeland of Dene Suliné, Cree, Nakota Sioux and Saulteaux peoples (2020, 4). I am privileged to attempt to carve out space for myself and communities in academic institutions and Western cultures. I am permitted to explore dominant discourses through a platform available to

me as a white settler who has access to academic resources and educational opportunities. Many marginalized queer and asexual perspectives and voices are not afforded the same platforms or opportunities as my position grants me.

My position within this thesis will inevitably influence my theoretical foundation, research reflections, and critical analysis. Reflecting on my position as a queer person in sexuality and gender on the asexual spectrum will allow me to engage with others' critically shared asexual narratives and my own experiences facing pity or misunderstanding. Sandra Harding's work on strong reflexivity, that "objectivity requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the object of knowledge" (1992, 458) requires me to examine my own identity and position in this research. I have an investment in discovering how (a)sexuality is shared in stories and ideological state apparatuses, experienced in Western cultures, and represented in dominant discourse because I hope to find ways to publicly reject the notions that sex, intimacy, and physical connection are what I should aspire for. I strongly relate to Elgie's desire to "understand my socialization and the (sexual) culture I find myself in" (2020, 10).

Sandra Harding's work on strong reflexivity, that "objectivity requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the object of knowledge" (1992, 458) requires me to examine my own identity and position in this research. I have an investment in discovering how Canadians reproduce and maintain dominant ideologies around sex and kinship because I aspire to find ways to publicly and objectively reject the notions that sex, intimacy, and physical connection are what Canadian adults should aspire for. I hope that my ability to unpack narratives in magazines surrounding sexuality will start me on the path of understanding and unpacking the discourses around sexuality and intimacy within the queer and heteronormative

culture I exist within. The paradoxical nature of asexual discourse and scholarship (Elgie 2020) requires that I first situate myself as a subject of sexual cultures and narratives before attempting to make sense of my relationship and others who commit and connect to individuals outside of the heteronormative narratives of relationships. My commitment to understanding my positionality through this project is essential when utilizing a feminist autoethnography as I do.

Outline

My research questions ask: *how do ideological state apparatuses expose and emphasize sex and sexuality to Canadian adults, and how can rejecting or neglecting sex and sexuality in adult relationships challenge dominant sociopolitical structures that center on sex?* In this introduction, I spent time introducing the topic of sexuality studies within the lens of queer theory and defining my positionality and commitment to feminist reflexivity. In chapter two, I explore existing literature on ideological state apparatuses, discourse and narratives, hegemonic heteronormativity and sexuality, asexuality, and medicalization. I introduce Althusser's ideological state apparatuses, a review of queer and asexual scholarship that addresses the role of sex in dominant cultures, feminist and Foucauldian critical discourse analysis, and an analysis of the current literature surrounding sex and sexuality in Canada to propose what is known and what I must discover. In chapter three, I frame my mixed-methodological approach by combining discourse analysis of magazines and feminist autoethnography. I introduce the 15 magazine articles I examined across four brands as a site for my discourse analysis and feminist autoethnography. I consider the audience of these magazines and outline the process of selecting articles. In chapter four, I present the major discourses (increasing sex for well-being and health, experts say, and decentering sex) and explain how magazines present these narratives. I apply my theoretical background and cultural understanding of Canadian society to identify dominant

themes and narratives. Finally, in chapter 5, I conclude by answering my research questions, outlining what gaps my research fills, reaffirming the potential impacts of my findings, and isolating areas for future research. An interpretation of my research formed through theoretical and personal approaches to the findings and overall themes.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Sexuality is in Canadian adults' everyday lives. We see "sex and sexuality" tabs on websites, we hear the phrase "sex sells" in advertising, we see couples holding hands on the streets and assume we understand their sexual connection, and we hardly double-take at stores and bulletin boards that promote healthy sex lives. Cultural norms that see sex as both a normal and crucial part of being an adult did not happen overnight. It was not as if citizens and adults decided to suddenly go public with their private and intimate relationships and sexual lives. Through the popular and dominant ideologies, discourse, and narratives of sex and sexuality, there has been a shift toward viewing sex as an important part of being a healthy adult within the last decade. The conflicts between same-sex and opposite-sex relations continue, but to a lesser extent, as sexual intimacy is prioritized by both camps and remains largely unchallenged by queer theorists, scholars, and two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (plus many more identities not listed) (2SLGBTQ+) people.

In this chapter, I define the concepts I used in the development of my research question and throughout my discourse analysis. I present queer critiques of systems of power such as state healthcare and narratives of sexuality that are possible through understanding why sex remains centered in popular and institutional discourse, the boundaries of a Canadian sexual hegemony, and an amplification of a fulfilling asexual perspective or existence. Multiple people have offered critiques of ideologies, discourse and narratives, and hegemonic systems of gender and sexuality that serve to oppress nonnormative bodies.

I begin with an overview of important concepts such as asexuality, heteronormativity, and culture. I mobilize these concepts in context with previous literature examining sex through ideological state apparatuses, narratives and discourse, sexual hegemony, and pathologization of

sexuality. I utilize critiques and scholarship from Marxist, Foucauldian, feminist, and queer scholars to connect systems of power, such as state and medical institutions, to public avenues of information, such as magazines. Through these magazines, I identified three recurring discourses as they relate to my research question and the relevant literature below.

Concepts and Definitions

Heteronormativity and Asexuality

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue that in heteronormative societies, “we are used to thinking about sexuality as a form of intimacy and subjectivity” (1998, 566). In their efforts to counteract this narrative, they explore the nature of queer sex, identity, intelligibility, public, and cultures that unsettle the heterosexual couple’s reverence and privilege in Western societies (Berlant and Warner 1995, 1998). Hegemonic heterosexuality and heteronormativity maintain the privileged status of the heterosexual couple, but an asexual identity can attempt to unsettle the normalization of the couple’s privileged status (Hopkin, Sorensen, and Taylor 2013).

A simple definition accepted by asexual communities is found on the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) as “a person who does not experience sexual attraction” (Asexual Visibility and Education Network n.d.). Considering the above definition of asexuality along with a definition of sexuality from the World Health Organization, which posits sexuality as “a central aspect of being human throughout life[,] encompass[ing] sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction” (Elgie 2020; World Health Organization 2006) To include “does not” in a definition of asexuality immediately orients the definition of being or doing asexuality in opposition to being heterosexual (normal) or homosexual (more normal in expressions of sexual attraction) and alludes to a narrative binary where asexuality is ultimately a lack of humanity (Plummer 2019).

Ela Przybylo and Danielle Cooper take the work of queer scholars and question the discourse of intimacy, sexuality, queerness, and relations to examine asexuality as an identity and resonance that can “enrich and expand queer possibilities” (Przybylo and Cooper 2013, 311). Asexuality beyond the identity label of not experiencing sexual attraction or desiring sexual intimacy with other people can be used to question what it is about queerness and relations that are so founded in sexual ideologies. Przybylo and Cooper ask what can happen when asexuality moves from an identity to a framework and perspective that can shape and influence queer theory? They propose that “only through reading asexually can we expand and newly trouble queer understandings of intimacy, polyamory, partnership, kinship, and singleness and also trace asexuality in unexpected, and perhaps even undesirable, locations” (Przybylo and Cooper 2013, 304). Reading into established queer literature and discourse with asexual perspectives troubles the dominant and counter-discourse that centers sex in political, social, and cultural connections.

Asexual scholar Evelyn Elgie outlines the perils of identity in a heteronormative culture and the language and power around who defines identity within the accepted definitions when claiming an asexual narrative that counters dominant discourses regarding sexuality requires “establish[ing] oneself and one’s body as nonnormative from a standard, “normal” baseline which is always assumed to be sexual” (2020, 17). The establishment of sexuality as a normative and natural aspect of humanity and the formation of an asexual identity that resists standard sexuality allows enforcement from dominant narratives to identify and other asexuality as an illness, deviation from norms, or improper response.

Canadian Culture

Within queer theory, scholars are often called to feminist and intersectional approaches to research and analysis. The desire to connect and complicate sexual orientation, gender, station,

and identity while providing ethical and representative academic research leads to an acknowledgement of how race, class, religion, sexuality, gender, and culture all contribute to people's identities. These intersections help form the classification of normal and non-normative sexualities and intimacy. However, often white queer scholars stop only at the acknowledgement of how race and culture impact 2SLGBTQ+ identities rather than exploring and amplifying experiences of racially marginalized.

Within this project, I seek to answer how ideological state apparatuses amplify health sexuality in Canadian adults. I must highlight that the dominant discourses I uncover focus on white, heterosexual, and largely non-religious. These narratives contribute to the erasure, fetishization, and taboo nature of racial, colonial, and oriental views of sexuality in Western popular culture and understanding. I look to black and Indigenous scholars to understand that “sexual discourses have to be considered as methods for colonization that require deconstruction” (Finley 2011, 41). I am a white settler participating in research that requires my perspective of sexuality to be paramount to my understanding of sexual discourse and how they are recognized and normalized by Canadians. I, therefore, must acknowledge that my results will lack in-depth knowledge of racialized (a) sexualities,otics, and intimacy. The Canadian culture I research through magazine articles and queer and feminist theories I use are not representative of all identities and forms of sexuality.

Black and Indigenous bodies disproportionately experience violence inflicted by heteronormative, patriarchal, and colonial systems of power and institutions, such as sexual norms, discourses, and medical institutions (Chude- Sokei et al. 2016; Finley 2011; Veenstra 2011). Census data in Canada confirms the relationships between intersectional violence and self-reported health. Gerry Veenstra concluded that a “variety of intersections between race,

gender, class, and sexual orientation were associated with especially high risks of fair/poor self-rated health” (2011, 1) when he applied intersectional frameworks of analysis to census data. I cannot hope to explore all the intersections that contribute to popular discourses of healthy sex within the scope of this project, but I attempt to maintain an awareness of the diversity of Canadian sexuality.

Literature Review

Ideological State Apparatuses

Ideology is more material in Western capitalist societies than the average Canadian may realize. Marxist scholar Louis Althusser addressed the continued production of a hierarchical society through his understanding of ideology, ideological state apparatuses and repressive state apparatuses (1971). Althusser believed that ideology was more pervasive and entrenched in class systems that separated people between the dominant ruling wealthy class and the subordinate providing class. Ideology is how humans can comprehend their place, role and relationships within the social hierarchy and practices. Elizabeth Wingrove explores Althusser’s two primary theses of ideology as

“(a) the logic or coherence of a system of ideas (beliefs) obtained in the relations between systemic elements, rather than in, say, one or more of its discrete parts, and (b) those element ideas (beliefs) shape through material practice...to develop an analytic frame that attends to corporeal and social systemic dimensions of sexual identity” (1999, 874).

The role of ideology in developing and understanding sexual identity and sexuality is in the social cohesions that bind citizens together as sexual citizens and in the actions and behaviours that reinforce dominant beliefs and understandings of subjects' roles in society. Ideological state apparatuses are sites where the dominant ideology is realized and enforced through social conditioning, cultural norm formulation, and hegemony (Althusser 1971; Bunch 2013; Wingrove 1999). Dominant ideologies of sexuality and gender are realized in subjects'

interactions with each other, media sources, the family unit and other social, cultural, and political rituals and norms.

It is important first to understand Althusser's notions of ideology and ideological state apparatuses to follow how Wingrove navigates ideologies between bodies and social systems, structured and chosen action, and materiality and discourse (1999). Wingrove's analytic framework highlights the necessity of construction between subjects of dominant ideologies and the existence of systems that produce and maintain ideologies of sexuality and gender in Western societies. The family as an ideological state apparatus is crucial for realizing and materializing dominant ideologies of gender and sex for children and adult subjects (Bunch 2013; Wingrove 1999). Wingrove focuses on how family structures and other ideological state apparatuses, such as sexed bodies, identify gendered performances that align with perceived feminine or masculine qualities. The connection between gender and biological sex is questioned when social ideologies and the natural body materialize and function as sites of cultural and political reproductions of the dominant ideology. Heteronormative dominant ideologies that classify sexed subjects into roles that are masculine or feminine attempt to preserve the connection between gender and sex through ideological state apparatuses. Although ideological state apparatus continues to find connections between gendered expressions and a natural sexed body, there is space to disrupt the dominant ideologies (Bunch 2013; Wingrove 1999). Thus, the possibility for a queer critique of the dominance of heteronormative ideologies over social and political subjects disrupts a society's hierarchical understanding of sexuality and sex (Bunch 2013).

The shift from "sex-as-object to sex-as-effect reverses the point of reference such that the objects of exploration and explanation become the political, social, and economic relations that

have sex means what it does" (Wingrove 1999, 887). The question of how ideological state apparatuses emphasize the meaning of sex in terms of gender and sexuality in sociopolitical spheres is where I start to unpack my research questions into the dominant ideologies and state apparatuses that highlight sex in Canadian adult life. Exploring the meaning and purpose of sex in ideologies will help focus on a queer critique that challenges the hegemonic heteronormative social structures.

Narrative and Discourse

Ken Plummer states that we, as citizens and humans, are “born into a pre-existing narrative world over which we have initially little control [;] we face narrative power” (Plummer 2019, 115). When confronted with this narrative power, we form distinct religious, gendered, political, and sexual identities. Ken Plummer and Michel Foucault both explore the networks of power of narratives and discourse on an individual’s formation and understanding of identity, and how those identities are acted upon by society in relation to sexuality (Foucault 1978; Plummer 1994). Narratives regarding (a)sexuality contribute to the formation of discourse, such as hegemonic sexuality that influences citizen’s understandings of the world and personal identities as well as policy decisions. Questioning dominant or hegemonic narratives that center being “human” around having or engaging in sex (for reproduction, pleasure, and relationship formation) can challenge how we view the right to have (or, in this case, not have) sex as constructed in modern Western culture (Elgie 2020; Mitchell and Hunnicutt 2020; Plummer 1994; Sundrud 2011).

Scholar’s center asexual individuals through oral interviews, qualitative interviews, and engagement with online communities to amplify the stories and narratives of asexual lived experiences (Mitchell and Hunnicutt 2020; Przybylo 2013; Sundrud 2011). When allowed to

share their asexual stories of fear, ridicule, pity, joy, diagnoses, trauma, faith, and pleasure, the power of sexually driven narratives ebbs and flows in different ways than what is seen as the universal or natural “truth” of a heteronormative society’s understanding of sex (Plummer 1994; Przybylo 2013). The historical and modern connections of asexuality to pathology require understanding the dominant narratives that contribute to the association and exposure to counter-narratives that resist calls for intervention and maintain the dignity and self-hood of an asexual identity and lived experience (Elgie 2020; Foucault 1978; Plummer 2019; Przybylo 2013).

I explore discursive themes regarding sex and sexuality in Canadian ideological state apparatuses. To develop a working definition of discourse, I focused on a Foucauldian understanding of discourse as linked to power/knowledge and politics, alongside Althusser's understanding of how dominant ideologies are reproduced and maintained through people's interaction with popular narratives. Michel Foucault connects the investment of power institutions to sex by acknowledging how central talking about, controlling, and detailing citizens' sex lives is within modern Western societies.

But more important was the multiplication of discourses concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail (Foucault 1978, 18).

This understanding of discourse can be mobilized into a feminist discourse analysis that recognizes “the interrelations between gender, power, ideology, and discourse [as] necessarily complex and multi-faceted” (Lazar 2007, 150). I explore how “ideology and gendered relations of power get (re)produced, negotiated, and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and people’s social and personal identities in texts and talk”

(Lazar 2007, 150) in the context of sexual hegemony in Canadian ideological state apparatuses and thus adult citizen's lives.

Ideological state apparatuses and repressive state apparatuses are responsible for maintaining hegemonic narratives of sexuality in Western cultures. Foucault argues that messages of sexuality are managed and produced by powerful networks such as the family, pedagogical institutions, and medical institutions (Foucault 1978). Doctors and medical practitioners, in particular, have the power to create "true" discourses concerning sexuality. Through medical interventions, such as physical and psychiatric evaluations and treatments, doctors ascertain normative sexualities. Foucault (1978) argues the medical community "questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light" sexual practices that do not reinforce procreative ideologies (45). Doctors and medical institutions are primary enforcers of heteronormativity and responsible for the maintenance of dominant discourses of healthy sex.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Sexuality

Dominant assumptions about how gender or sexuality should be expressed and experienced in Western societies influence citizens' understandings and expressions of their gender and sexuality and the gender and sexuality of others. Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity identifies beliefs and actions that perpetuate gender inequality by power hierarchies that situate men over women and other men, often from marginalized minority groups (Connell 1987; Jewkes et al. 2015; Specie 2020). Hegemonic masculinity is a useful analytical concept to better understand how sociopolitical structures such as workplaces, health care systems, and cultural norms uphold patriarchal order and provide people with specific versions of masculine social power that translates to power over women and other men.

Heteronormativity plays a key role in hegemonic masculinity. The people who can most easily access the powerful role of the dominant masculine figure perform their gender and sexuality as white heterosexual men (Butler 1990; Connell 1987; Jewkes et al. 2015; Speice 2020).

Hegemonic masculinity tends to understand sexuality in a feminine/masculine and gay/straight binary. Travis Speice attempts to better understand the relations of power of the “dominant and subordinated” (2020, 1864) by grappling with Connell’s hegemonic masculinity and introducing the notion of hegemonic sexuality. Speice argues that although “hegemonic masculinity is useful for understanding how performances of gender result in a hierarchy that rewards or punishes certain individuals, this concept fails to fully account for the ways that performances of sexuality similarly result in a kind of sexualized hierarchy.” (Speice 2020, 1866). Speice examines the power structures that exist within communities of gay men to “provide insights into the social pressures that are placed on these co-constitutive identities” (2020, 1896) through defining hegemonic sexuality as the “various performances of sexuality [that] are differentially valued by a particular society” (2020,1868). Speice seamlessly incorporates his definition of hegemonic sexuality into an analysis of hegemonic masculinity and power relations among gay men that occur within workplaces; he remains focused on the relationship between dominance and subordination in terms of a feminine/masculine and gay/straight binary.

Speice’s hegemonic sexuality considers factors of all aspects of a person’s identity and performance, including “their gender, race, social class, HIV serostatus, etc.” (2020, 1878) when establishes how a sexuality hierarchy can occur in social and cultural settings. This understanding of hegemonic sexuality makes it possible to explain the sexual hierarchy between gay men and masculine identities. However, by applying notions of hegemonic sexuality to

sexual expressions other than gender and sexuality performances of gay men, I explore how sexuality and sexual identity and behaviours are expressed, performed, and responded to within Canadian social settings and cultural understandings.

Pathologizing Sexuality

Canadian healthcare institutions, systems, and structures are maintained and provided by the state. Healthcare access and availability differ for citizens for many varied reasons. The analysis of healthcare in Canada has been approached from multiple perspectives and across a wide field of study. I am interested in exploring the literature and theories involved in understanding the medicalization of sexuality for two reasons in this project. First, I connect state structures of healthcare institutions and narratives to Canadian adults' sexuality by understanding the medicalization of sexuality. The connections guide my research in understanding the emphasis on sex and sexuality. Understanding the role of the state and medical authority assists my awareness of sexual hegemony that diagnoses a lack of sexual desire, intimacies, and activities. Lindsay Greiner's work in connecting sexual norms, citizens' well-being, and the medicalization of sexuality are foundational for my understanding of how sexuality is connected to culture, the media, and healthcare institutions.

Grenier examines "how medicalization is enacted by classifying behaviours, or lack thereof, as 'dysfunction' or 'disease' which creates a new standard of 'normal,' thereby exerting control over the sexuality of individuals" (2014, 75). Medicalization refers to the process where healthcare officials (the state, doctors, scientists, medical communities, etc.) are granted authority over the body-minds of citizens (Elgie 2020; Grenier 2014; Jutel 2010). When medical authority and scientific "truths" are infused into a citizen's social and political experiences of everyday life, citizens become the subjects of medical authority beyond their direct experiences

with healthcare institutions and structures (Elgie 2020; Foucault 1978; Grenier 2014; Jutel 2010). An example Grenier uses to explain how the medicalization of a citizen's sexuality has occurred is by following the process of diagnoses, problematizing, and treatment of erectile dysfunction (2014, 76). The creation of the *Viagra* drug allowed the medical community to infuse citizens' everyday lives with the knowledge that sexual intimacy and gratification are something that can be controlled and encouraged through medical intervention. Labelling erectile dysfunction as "dysfunction" and offering drug treatments to ensure the completion and engagement in sexual gratification normalizes is an act of medicalization that emphasizes the importance of sex in citizens' lives.

Medical intervention into the sex and intimate lives of citizens "puts satisfying sex lives at the center of achieving a healthy, balanced lifestyle" and encourages the widespread belief that any "deviation from a 'normal' sexual experience in which gratification is reached is seen as needing medical treatment" (Grenier 2014, 76). Medicalization produces a dominant set of ideologies around what healthy citizens should be. It controls the ways citizens are encouraged to act, behave, and look to remain "normal" and "healthy." The reproduction of these ideologies "relies on a consumer system in which the mass media, societal norms, and the medical community perpetuate the perception that people are defective in some way" (Grenier 2014, 77). Diverting from a heteronormative existence can lead to people being labelled as "defective" or "deviant." The medicalization of non-heterosexual sexual intimacy and sexualities has presented problems in the pursuit of sexual gratification and fulfillment in the past. However, "Non-reproductive sexual urges are no longer contained in the DSM" (Jutel 2010; 1085), representing a normative and cultural shift toward a medicalized hetero/homonormative society that values

the presence of sexual intimacy in relationships over the sexual orientation of those in pursuit of sexual gratification.

Deviation from desiring sexual connections and experiences continues to be pathologized through the diagnoses, treatment, and othering of people with low-sex drives, little or no desire for sexual gratification, and lack of sexual experiences (Elgie 2020; Grenier 2014; Jutel 2010). The social meanings of sex in Canadian culture and the medicalization of sexuality have produced a dominant hegemony where sexual experiences and ideologies centered on sex are normalized. Those who do not experience or engage in sexual intimacy and gratification are deemed “unhealthy” by others. The shift towards prioritizing sexual gratification and sexuality over sexual orientation or identity indicates a hierarchy of sexual-focused ideologies and norms in Canadian cultures. The use of mass media to infuse the medical authority and state presence in the sexuality and sex lives of citizens reflects the connection between ideological state apparatuses like the media, repressive state apparatuses like the healthcare institutions, and societal control of cultural norms in influencing and upholding dominant sexual hegemonies (Elgie 2020; Jhally et. al. 1997; Rudman and Hagiwara 1992).

Conclusion

This chapter served as an introduction to my intensive literature review and theoretical background that allowed me to engage with my research questions regarding ideological state apparatuses' exposure to sexuality to Canadian adults and how potentially rejecting these narratives in adult relationships challenge dominant sociopolitical structures that center on sex. In chapter three, I delve into my methodology and introduce the magazine articles I analyzed and the preliminary narratives and discourses of sexuality. Here, I begin to combine the theoretical

background and key concepts to approach magazines as a site for reproducing an emphasis on sex and well-being.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Magazines

This chapter connects the literature review and theoretical frameworks in Chapter Two to my qualitative methodology and research design. I begin this chapter by introducing feminist auto-ethnography and feminist discourse analysis and describe how I selected magazine articles to reflect upon with my key concepts, methodology, and feminist research approach. Within this chapter, I look to the four magazine brands that serve as source material to isolate three discursive narratives that contribute to upholding sexual hegemony and cultural norms.

Methodology

I draw on a mixed-method approach by performing a feminist auto-ethnography and a feminist discourse analysis to answer my research questions. A mixed-method approach strengthens my project and further reinforced my connection as a queer researcher to my critiques and reflections. I am attempting to discover how ideological state apparatuses such as the media "expose and emphasize sex and sexuality to Canadian adults" (Wingrove 1999). I refer to my literature review when determining how sex and sexuality are defined. The cultural understanding of what is sexual is subjective and relies on ideologies that believe sexual gratification is ideal and sought after. I define the demographic of Canadian adults as people ages 17-65+ who would access the Canadian healthcare system. Although this definition would be hard to measure as a variable of Canadian adults engaged in sexual relationships, I find it useful to consider this age group and the aspect of accessing healthcare in this study that relies on an autoethnography and discourse analysis. Cultural and political exposure to sexuality and sexual desires are not only pornographic or explicit but focused on family formation, physical and emotional well-being, and adulthood. As addressed in my previous section on race and culture, there are bound to be diverse experiences that I do not analyze in this project. Within this

chapter, I outline the process of selecting magazine articles and provide insights into my reflection process.

I refer to the medicalization of sexual wellness and the dominance of a sexual culture to identify sources that emphasize the importance of sex and sexuality to Canadians. Canadian culture is often influenced and infiltrated by American mass media and discourse (Elgie 2020). The rejection of sex-centered narratives challenges the dominance of a sexual hegemony at the potential expense of individual pathologization (Elgie 2020; Grenier 2014). Community building and meaningful connections that are not built on sexual intimacy can be an act of resistance to dominant sociopolitical structures, such as state-offered medical care and healthcare institutions, and ideologies that encourage sex-centered relationship building.

Feminist Autoethnography

Feminist autoethnography is critical and individually focused with an emphasis on cultural understanding. Feminist autoethnography provides “a method of being, knowing and doing that combines two concerns: telling the stories of those who are marginalized and making good use of our experience” (seen in Ettore 2016). Sarah Wall speaks of autoethnography and highlights how “women [or gender diverse people] are constantly aware that they function under (what is often considered to be) male-centered conceptions of writing (orderly, self-assured, progressive, unified, finalized) (2008, 42), and how that process can lead to second-guessing and striving towards an impossible standard of authorship. Wall states that “there continue to be significant issues in the legitimacy granted to autoethnography and the credibility of this genre as scholarly work (see Holt, 2003; Muncey, 2005; Sparkes, 2000)” (2008, 46).

Using this methodological tool alongside my feminist discourse analysis and positionality, I “aim to uncover, if not upset, the normative, hegemonic and prevailing ways we

analyze human relationships” (Ettore 2016, 11) when using autoethnography in my honours project. I am a person who is in a committed adult relationship without forms of sexual intimacy. I have been marginalized by family, friends, peers, and strangers (regardless of their sexual or gender orientation) for a lack of physical intimacy with my partner. I make use of my experiences with amanormativity and sexual hegemony to better explore the boundaries of these systems of power. I share my vulnerable self in the research to better amplify the voices of other vulnerable people who are not engaging in sexual “normalcy” and address cultural, popular, and political interpretations in ways that “are equivocal, uncertain and paradoxical” (Ettore 2016, 4).

Feminist Discourse Analysis

Using feminist discourse analysis, I examine health and wellness magazines available to Canadians to understand the role of hegemonic heterosexuality and the emphasis on sex-centered narratives (Lazar 2007; Rudman and Hagiwara 1992; Trimble and Treiberg 2015). I utilize a feminist critical discourse analysis of Canadian health and wellness magazines to uncover underlying discursive themes and ideologies within the magazines that reflect a cultural understanding of sex and sexuality. As the only researcher on this project, I paid attention to my initial responses and sought references, representations, and emphasis on sex and sexuality in my sources (Bazzini et al. 2015; Rudman and Hagiwara 1992).

The framing of the magazine content provides narratives to analyze in the context of ideology, medicalization, and dominance of sex in Canadian adult lives (Bazzini et al. 2015) and conclude how sexuality and hegemonic heterosexuality are framed to Canadian adults. The frames I find will be crucial in understanding how media acts as an ideological state apparatus in Canadian adult lives. I apply these frames to existing queer literature and research to approach my question of how rejecting these frames or narratives can contribute to resisting dominant

sociopolitical narratives and structures. Qualitative discourse analysis can look beyond identifying sex in ideological state apparatus, cultural norms, and Canadian adult lives to examine the political, societal, and cultural context in which sex-centered hetero/homonormative narratives emanate (Trimble and Treiberg 2015). Questions I used to guide my discourse analysis include.

- In what ways are sex and sexuality portrayed in magazines? Are there noticeable patterns in representations of sex through photos, language use, and the intention of articles?
- Is there a connection between health, the strength of relationships, mental well-being, self-worth, and other indications of individual wellness and representations and languages of sex and sexuality in magazines? How may these connections indicate to consumers and citizens the importance or role of sex?
- How does my position as the researcher impact my understanding of how sex and sexuality are portrayed and represented in magazines in relation to sexual connections, physical intimacy, and relationships?
- How do I respond to these articles, given my perspective as an asexual queer adult? How may that differ from the intended audience? In what ways may experiences expose different discourses and narratives?

Magazines and Collection

I selected magazines as sources that are accessible and consumed by a wide range of Canadian adults and used in academic projects that examine gender and sexuality. The content, articles, and advertisements within print and digital magazines are well-researched sites for the study of cultural politics – relations of power and ideology as they appertain to cultural processes and practices in the public sphere" (Lazar 2007, 156). I place magazines and three discourses reflected within the theoretical framework of ideological state apparatuses, hegemonic narratives, and pathologization to provide findings and reflections that indicate an emphasis on sexual activities to a person's health and well-being.

I was inspired through my literature review and preliminary research to critically examine magazines in terms of advertising and representation. However, there is a difference between selling to consumers and maintaining heteronormative structures and beliefs. A content analysis of *Men's Health* and *Women's Health* (two magazines' brands I also examined) in 2015 found that both magazines objectified and represented women and men to frame a specific way of being "healthy" and aspirational for the general public (Bazzini et. al. 2015). This study demonstrates how magazines can serve to reinforce existing power relations by framing people in particular ways and shaping people's perceptions of the world and their beliefs. In pursuit of answering how ideological state apparatuses expose and emphasize sex and sexuality, I identified four magazine brands that Canadian adults would be familiar with.

Men's Health, *Women's Health*, *Chatelaine*, and *Reader's Digest* were the ideological state apparatuses I examined to identify narratives of sexuality and wellness that contribute to and uphold cultural understandings of sex and health. I accessed the magazine articles through the "Health and Fitness Magazine Archive" and websites operated by the magazine companies. I selected fifteen initial articles that included references to sex and health in the title or subtitle of articles. The articles span from the years 2015-2023 and represent a contemporary cultural understanding of the importance of sex to people who engaged with the content. I was able to access all articles online via the magazine website, no magazines were behind a paywall, and I was not required to create an account or pay for a subscription. However, I did reach the limit of "free access" articles from *Women's Health* Online and *Men's Health* Online. I found articles under the primary headers of "Sex and Love," "Sex and Relationships," "Health," and "Living." I will provide a more in-depth analysis of the primary headers and tags of the articles in later chapters. Since I viewed online articles, I could access the author's names, publication date

(original in-print and updates on the website), tags that related to keywords and concepts in the articles, and photos and advertisements attached to the article. I focused my attention on the titles, keywords/tags, photos, and article contents to isolate narratives regarding sexuality and health. Magazine articles are intended to quickly draw in readers, and some of the articles I examined included the estimated time it would take to read the article. I noted that often the titles would follow a pattern that would quickly catch a reader's attention and was often linked to advice or concerns that a person might have about their sexual health, sexuality, or relationships.

From the fifteen articles I investigated from four sources, I isolated three common discursive themes from the online content that I examined in-depth. I identified these themes as “increasing sex for well-being and health discourse” and “experts say discourse.” The discourses relate the emphasis on sex and sexuality to Canadian adults through ideological state apparatuses and contribute to a counterdiscourse that relies on my feminist autoethnographic reactions and lived experiences to “decentering sex discourse.” I recognize the paradox of looking to articles focused on sexuality and sex as a method for maintaining health in adulthood to find a counterdiscourse. However, I believe that within the gaps, there is a concern addressed by these magazines in contemporary Canada to continue to maintain the importance of sex and continued medical authority over sexuality.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced my methodological approach and outlined my process of research reflections. I focused on the acquisition of articles and outlined the practices I used for others to follow in future studies. I introduced the three discourses from my magazine samples and personal responses to the article's contents, photos, and narratives. I will expand upon the

discourse themes and articles in-depth in the next chapter, where I present my research reflections.

Chapter Four: Discourse Themes and Narratives

I identified two primary discourse themes that contributed to the upkeep of sexual hegemony that produced dominant ideologies of what healthy expressions of sexuality are and how they create narratives of adulthood and well-being. These themes are increasing sex for well-being and health and experts say. I also identified a counter-discourse from my careful examination that arose from my reactions and resistance to the narratives that put "sex first" titled decentering sex. I begin this chapter with a section dedicated to one of my experiences I reflected upon throughout the research process. Here I provide some insight into my internal monologues and behind-the-scenes identification of these discursive themes.

In this chapter, I explain the significance of each theme and how it contributes to my analysis of ideological state apparatuses, sexual hegemony, and the power of narratives. My reflections yielded three discourses across the 15 articles that contributed to the exposure of sexuality and emphasized sex as important for an adult's well-being and health. Often, there would be multiple discourses in play in an article. The discourses I identified are neither positive nor negative, they are dominant discourses that relate to the creation and maintenance of a culture that focuses on sexual experiences as a meaningful part of living within a sexual hegemony.

Sex(y) Research and Me

I am sitting in one of my favourite cafes in the city. The table is quiet like my cohort friends, and I type on our laptops working after the usual catching up and commiserating. This cafe tends to have a lot of people coming and going, and I realize as I am working on this project that people can probably see the images of sex toys, vibrators, and semi-clothed people covering my laptop screen (see Figure four to share my experiences) as I read through article after article

on sexuality. I cannot say that this realization does not bother me, but I am in a unique position to reflect on what it means to be looking at “private content” in a public space when I am writing an academic thesis on how public institutions intervene and influence private expressions of sexuality. The realization that I am researching and reflecting on sex (something most people consider incredibly private and personal) in ideological state apparatuses that are advertised and marketed towards the masses and easily accessible by the public comes to a major tipping point as I begin to critically examine one of the articles in my collection of health and wellness magazines.

26 Best Sex Toys On Amazon That You Need To Buy ASAP
In 2023



Figure 4: The image reads.
 “26 Best Sex Toys on Amazon That You Need to Buy ASAP in 2023”.
 A person is holding a purple wand vibrator.
 In an article on mindful sex in *Chatelaine*. (Blumberg 2021)

The opening lines of the article read, “I love orgies and group sex, but I’m always the last person to cum. There is nothing that turns me on more than seeing guys fucking, sucking, and cumming. I especially get turned on watching my husband cum on some guy” (Zane 2023), and I pause. I interrupt the quiet flow of my friends working on their research projects to say, “I just experienced psychic damage listening to this quote” I read off the above quote, and I finish by saying, “I am really researching this. This is my life. I am reading about gay orgies and writing an academic paper. I will force professors to read about fucking, sucking, and cumming”. I

reflect on this moment as part of my research process to try and stay true to my chosen methods. I have visceral responses to the content in these articles, and I am certain that the people seeking out advice or coming across the clickbait attention-grabbing headlines feel the same way. There are emotional reactions throughout this project. I note my shame and initial disgust and recognize how I am not prepared to navigate systems that might shun me for trying to make sense of the overarching ideologies responsible for talking about cumming at gay orgies and how sexual power exists between the lines of talking about being turned out and asking for professional advice. The disgust is quickly followed by more emotions and questions form as I start to self-reflect on why it is that I am even concerned about how people seek sexual pleasure and start to remove my emotional reactions to better situate the article within my research project. Of course, my project demands I include my perspective and experiences as a researcher and person to perform a feminist discourse analysis and autoethnography that feels truthful and real. So, I settle with sharing the psychic damage and my understanding that I am fully embedded within systems that maintain a sexual hegemony and reproduce discourses of sex as a part of healthy adulthood by blurring the lines of public and private spaces and ideologies. I hope that knowing I am as invested in existing in a world that promotes cultural norms and shared approaches to “normalcy” informs readers that the narratives I identify and explore push their way into my life and this project the same way that advertisements and articles push their ways into your phone, laptop, and private lives that must enter public spaces.

Discourse Theme One: *Increasing Sex for Well-being and Health Discourse*

One of the discourses that emerged from my magazine reading emphasized narratives that contribute to contemporary sexual hegemony were increasing and improving the sexual experiences people were involved in. Although this discourse may have been less explicit in

connecting sexual experiences to health and well-being, there were still narratives that readers would connect to their own sex lives and experiences. However, one unexpected revelation connects to a sexual hegemony prevalent in heteronormative and homonormative cultures. The importance of “prioritizing satisfaction under the sheets” (Harris 2023) was not tied to one demographic. Women and men, old and young people, people from different races and cultures, and diverse sexual orientations were represented through words, pictures, and open-ended phrasing. The ideological state apparatuses focus on “making your life the best it can be or maximizing your pleasure” (Berry 2016) or with casual reminders that “the premise that people who have more sex are happier seems obvious enough” (Duong 2017). The timeframe I am looking at in this project likely contributes to the dominant narratives that the quality and quantity of sex are something that can be addressed in the public sphere. The advice that a “sex therapist can help you improve your sexual well-being” (Harris 2023) can only be given in a culture that already believes that “we’ll never object to hav[ing] *more* sex—in any and all of its many iterations” (Hrustic 2017). The uptake in talking about sexuality and sexual experiences has led to many positive changes in political and cultural taboos and conversations around sex. However, the dominant narratives that focus on increasing sexual encounters that promote pleasure and sexual satisfaction contribute to sexual hegemony that will continue to shape how people engage with sexuality.

Although health and wellness magazines often consult experts in sex (sex-therapists, sexologists, medical doctors, etc.), there is a narrative style unique to the magazine medium. Advice columns and article authors would chime in on consumers' sexuality and sexual experiences with attitudes that ranged from coy to genuinely concerned. The tabloid tone of some articles would contribute to their likeliness to be shared widely in digital spheres, thus is

important to consider when using feminist discourse analysis and my own experiences in contacting dominant discourses that emphasize a sexual hegemony.

In this project, only one article was pulled from the “advice columns” of the magazines. A *Men’s Health Magazine* section entitled “Sexplain It” responds directly to write-in comments and concerns from readers. The author’s advice did not come from medical experts or other common narratives on sexuality but rather from his own sexual experiences as an “ethical Boyslut (a fancy way of saying [he] sleeps with a lot of people, and [is] very, very open about it)” (Zane 2023). The format of a “Sexplain It” section of a magazine takes private concerns and sexual experiences and shares them with the public (given anonymously) in a way that further reinforces sexuality as something that belongs to all adults. Sexual narratives are presented for people to develop shared opinions on. The author Zachary Zane asks to “share a brief personal anecdote’ and remarks that “personally, when [he is] struggling to cum” (2023) to assure the readers and person asking for sex advice that he has the sexual experiences and thus power to provide advice and encourage sexual behaviours even without the expert medical status or an intimate connection. The advice format is usually geared towards individuals, but there are plenty of articles and authors that draw attention to the importance of sexual experiences for people in relationships.

Many articles recognized that relationships and intimacy are not built on sex alone. Authors were quick to assure that “no one’s expecting you to perform like an adult film star for your partner every night” (Kashyap n.d.), yet there continued to be “silent signs your relationship is ending” (Kashyap n.d.) and solutions that “can help improve your relationship with yourself and others” (Harris 2023) centered entirely on physical intimacy and sexual experiences with a significant other. A couple’s emotional well-being and fulfillment were attributed to a robust and

'healthy' sex life since physical affection and intimacy could "reassure us that we are safe and valued by our partners" (Kashyap n.d.). However, physical well-being took priority when speaking about sex in relationships as articles reported statistics that people "slept better when they had sex with their partners before falling asleep" (Kashyap n.d.) and reports of hormones for men and women - such as oxytocin, dopamine, prolactin, melatonin, and endorphins- that "makes you feel relaxed, happy, and closer to your partner afterwards" (Hrustic 2017).

Discourse Theme Two: *Experts say discourse.*

These magazines all proclaim to collaborate with experts in the fields of medicine, fitness, health, and general wellness. For topics centered around sex, sexuality, and relationships, "experts" are consulted to provide legitimacy for the article's claims. These experts could be from a variety of different fields, yet the most common were sex therapists, psychologists, and medical practitioners. Often PhDs, MDs, and PsyD were questioned for their recommendations and opinions regarding sexuality ranging from ways to increase pleasure to the amount of time engaging in sexual acts. There was an emphasis on providing legitimate evidence for the claim of the articles beyond the author or magazine's scope; "but don't just take our word for it. Researchers, scientists, and medical professionals have made it their mission to study exactly how sex improves nearly every facet of your life" (Hrustic 2017). The mission of the people with medical and scientific authority is important to provide legitimacy to the cultural claims from an ideological state apparatus. The magazines can speak directly to the consumer/reader/adult citizen, but they require the approval of dominant systems to continue to reproduce norms of what improvements sex can bring to a person's life.

Eleven out of the fifteen articles referenced (oftentimes multiple references) were expert sources who conducted studies or research into sex, psychologists or therapists who were trained

in discussing sexuality and intimacy, and medical doctors. To demonstrate this evidence, articles often included citations or hyperlinks to published studies and research articles or referenced institutions and professors by name. Sections would start or comment on "meet the experts" (Harris 2023) and "sexologist and relationship expert Dr. Carlen Costa" (Costa and Mandich 2015), "I had a father who is a physician and an expert in sexual health, so I felt comfortable enough bringing it up to him." (Leasca 2017) and evidence was pulled from "a study from the University of Guelph" (Walker 2020), "Frequent ejaculation lowers your prostate cancer risk, according to a study from the Boston University of Public Health." (Hrustic 2017; Rider et. al. 2016). The magazine articles defaulted to the expertise and dominance of healthcare professionals and research studies to promote an understanding of what sexuality is and should be.

The evidence provided by the magazine from experts and research institutions defaulted to a common narrative that health systems and practitioners are the ones responsible for deeming activities and behaviours as "normal" and "essential for well-being". The use of hyperlinks to scientific journals and published studies constitutes reliable citations that lend the article and their messages regarding sexuality to the same authority medical systems are given. A Men's Health article puts it best when discussing healthier lifestyles and how to boost erections with supplements. Authors say "as you've heard a million times" improving your health through lifestyle changes recommended by a medical expert (Millard and Zane 2021). When focusing on supplements that "may help enhance your sex life and potentially increase your overall wellness, too" it is always preferable and safer to follow medical advice over "some shady supplement that makes promises about boosting your libido or increasing your girth", even when doctors admit "no one is regulating this stuff" (Millard and Zane 2021).

Discourse Theme Three: *Decentering sex counterdiscourse*

The revealed counter-discourse in health and wellness magazines reflects a narrative that influences my own experiences with sexuality and is a common theme within this thesis. These articles were written primarily to speak of sexuality and reproduce the above discourses on sexual experiences' role and importance to health, adulthood, and relationships. However, asexuality and not engaging or desiring sexual intimacy were explicitly mentioned in some of the articles. When discussing why a sex therapist is important for all people, an article in *Women's Health* provides "situations where you're not actively engaging in sex" (Harris 2023) and highlights that marginalized identities and people who are not having sex are more at risk for "[receiving] pushback from friends, family, and potential partners trying to insist there's something wrong with them, rather than accepting asexuality as a perfectly valid identity. (Which, spoiler: It is.)" (Harris 2023). I found a recent rise in mainstream media and health and wellness magazines speaking to asexuality as an identity. Articles addressed that people may be in spaces and conversations that revolve around sex without engaging in sexual activities. It seems to be a recent trend, with the first mention of asexual in a *Reader Digest* article from 2020 aimed towards exploring safer sex saying, "many healthcare providers see older adults as asexual and are embarrassed by the idea of seniors being sexually active" (Walker 2020). However, only these two articles reference asexuality by name, and in *Reader Digest*, it was to condemn assumptions that people are not having sex to emphasize the importance for everyone- even seniors- to be engaging in sexual activities.

Attempts to address not having sexual experiences in the articles aligned with the paradoxical nature of trying to decenter sex or reduce the inherent importance of a sexual hegemony while still having conversations that are primarily about having sex. An example of

this paradox is how people were told to “cheer up, one of the [things that happen when you stop having sex] is actually a good thing” (Walker 2020). Articles focused on health and well-being often mentioned that sex alone was not the only way to improve health. *Men’s Health* still encourages going to the gym but reassures that “the longer you do it [sex], the more calories you burn” (Hrustic 2017). The same article claims that your immune system could be boosted by sexual activities that cause “higher levels of salivary immunoglobulin A (IgA)” and “the more of it you produce, the better able you’ll be to fight off an infection” (Hrustic 2017). It seems as though finding ways to try and decenter sex as an important part of adulthood and well-being is the responsibility of consumers and people exposed to the ideologies and dominant narratives that exist within the articles I examined and other media sources and ideological state apparatuses. The counter-discourse that can seek to unsettle the sexual hegemony in Canadian ideological state apparatuses is brought in by my readings as an asexual queer adult rather than common narratives across the health and wellness magazines.

Adulthood and Above Discourses

As an asexual queer adult, I anticipated that the health and wellness magazines would cater to a specific demographic. I believed that *Chatelaine*, *Reader’s Digest*, and *Women’s Health*’s online articles would appeal to white, allosexual, heterosexual, women aged 29-49, who were likely working class. I thought that this would be the most likely group that would engage with the content and possibly share it to sites such as Facebook or Twitter or amongst networking platforms such as WhatsApp or Messenger. I included *Men’s Health* in this project specifically to widen the assumed demographic to men within the same age and class range and likely allosexual and heterosexual. However, I found that the “Canadian adults” included in these narratives and entrapped in dominant discourses that contribute to a sexual hegemony varied

across sexual identities, were aged much older, and were spoken to as if they were experienced in sexual activities.

It was not the language and content of the articles that first clued me into a different perspective of adults who have sex but the pictures that accompanied the articles I reviewed. *Reader's Digest* and *Women's Health* articles both featured photos of queer couples in their respective articles discussing “What You Should Know About Safer Sex” and “What It Really Means to Be Sex Positive, And Why It Matters.” With a focus on safe and positive sex, it makes sense to provide examples of a variety of different couples. In Figure one and Figure Two below, my belief about the audience and demographics that access the health and wellness magazine articles online was challenged. The *Reader Digest* article showed elderly couples, gay and lesbian couples, and different racial groups.



Figure 1: Image of two feminine presenting people cuddling in bed smiling found in *Women's Health* (Inks 2023).

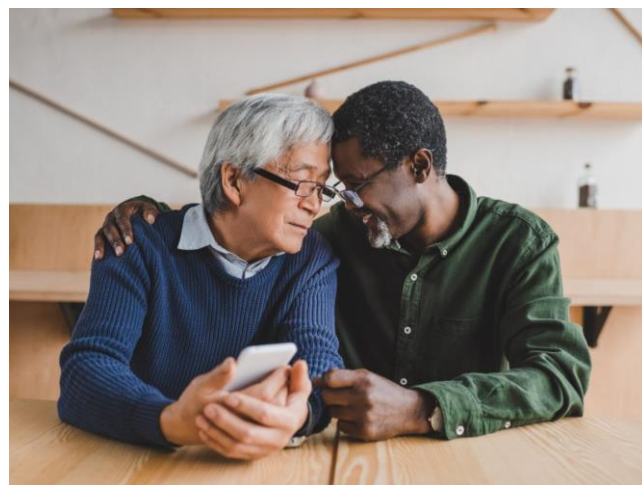


Figure 2: Image of two elderly masculine presenting people sharing an embrace at a table in *Reader's Digest* (Walker 2020).

Although these pictures clearly depict different sexual orientations and racialized people, there were still plenty of pictures that showed intimacy in my assumed demographic (see Figure 3).

The different depictions of people in intimate settings further reinforce that a sexual hegemony

that relies on adults having sex is influencing ideological state apparatuses that represent and inform Canadians.



Figure 3: Image of a heteronormative presenting couple kissing semi-nude in a bed in *Chatelaine* (Costa and Mandich 2015).

Health and Above Discourses

As magazines address the general public and are targeted toward consumers, it could be assumed that the language and content used would appeal to a general audience. However, with the emphasis on experts providing health and wellness advice and information, there was a formal aspect of medical language and scientific processes that may impact the way an average citizen engaged with the ideologies surrounding sex. Quotes included such as "nitric oxide (NO), which is produced both in cavernosal nerves and endothelium, has recently been recognized to play a key role in the physiology of penile erection" (Millard and Zane 2021) are difficult for readers to understand. Sometimes magazines would provide "translations" of language that was deemed too medically intimidating, but that practice was not consistent "(FYI, penile erection is a vascular phenomenon that directly results from smooth muscle relaxation along with arterial dilation and venous restriction)" (Millard and Zane 2021). When articles did combine medical

terms with common phrases and recognizable language, they primarily focused on hormones and assumed normal physiology “compounds found in semen—including melatonin, serotonin, and oxytocin—may have mood-boosting benefits for women who have unprotected intercourse” (Fowler 2015), “the combination of those three hormones conks you out in no time” (Hrusic 2017), “going without sex in a relationship can impact your self-esteem and decrease levels of oxytocin or other bonding hormones” (in Fowler 2015). The emphasis on physiology and physical health is promoted through engaging in sexual activities.

Providing medical authority to the narratives of increasing and engaging in sexual intimacy is a way to promote ideologies that prioritize sexual hegemony. I draw on my own experience with the media to assume that most readers will not follow up or consider that their experiences and individual health and well-being are different from the baseline presented in the articles. With this assumption, readers who do not engage in sexual activities regularly or do not feel closer to their partner and more comfortable and happier in their bodies after sex may begin to feel like an outsider or that something is “wrong” with their difference. The magazines promote healthy lifestyles and physical and mental well-being and reinforce that not abiding by narratives of healthy sex results in being abnormal, unhealthy, or in need of ideological and medical adjustment.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I identified the two common discourses and one counterdiscourse in the 15 health and wellness magazine articles. I referred to my theoretical concepts of sexual hegemony, ideological state apparatuses, heteronormativity and asexuality, and the power of narratives to explore the medicalization of sex in these articles and how they reproduce cultural norms regarding sexual expressions. I expanded on the emphasis on increasing and/or improving

sex discourse, advice and relationships for individual and relationship well-being discourse, experts say discourse, and decentering sex discourse to provide working definitions and examples of content such as language, photos, and underlining messages that produced these discourses. I provide an insight into some of my reflections in the process of this thesis research to connect myself and my reaction to the identified discourses.

I connected the discourses to adulthood and health to begin to answer my research questions; how do ideological state apparatuses expose and emphasize sex and sexuality to Canadian adults, and how can rejecting or neglecting sex and sexuality in adult relationships challenge dominant sociopolitical structures that center on sex? In the concluding chapter, I explore how my research questions and approach to sexual hegemony matter in Canadian culture and how this research project is of personal and political importance.

Chapter Five: We Have Brought Sexy Back

This thesis was a project motivated by my personal need to see people acknowledge and reflect on their own experiences in a sexual hegemony that pressures and persuades people of all sexual and gender orientations in contemporary Canada to engage in sexual activities to be healthy adults. With this motivation, I undertook the paradoxical approach of attempting to dismiss sex as a crucial part of being a healthy adult while also speaking directly to sexual experiences and the cultural importance given to sex and sexuality in popular ideologies. In this final chapter, I will summarize the key findings from my thesis, respond to my research question and aims, present my study's main contributions to the discipline of Canadian political science, and outline some areas for future research. I share reflections on my research process and motivations to stay true to feminist autoethnography. I thread together my extensive literature on queer theory and asexuality, ideological state apparatuses and power, and the identified discourses and counterdiscourse to fully answer my research questions. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of why researching sexuality and sex in Canada is significant to sexualities studies, Canadian politics, queer theory fields, and myself and people who resonate with my experiences.

I started my journey into reflecting on and studying sexuality with my introduction to queer theory. I remember learning the difference between “queer” and “2SLGBTQ+” in politics and academic roles and being entranced by the possibility of studying sexuality and sexual expressions as something different. I learned queer theory did not limit itself to orientations and labels that are specific to individuals and locations and instead gathered everyone who failed at heteronormativity and asked us to consider our politics, motivations, and cultures in a different light. I speak at the beginning of this thesis on the enrichment of queerness and queer theory to expand beyond assumptions of sexual expressions in adulthood.

My research looking at sexy societies brought out the sex(y) research and experiences in my work and returned to the 'natural and base instincts' of being a human. Although my findings point to a sexual hegemony reproduced and maintained within Canadian discourses, I argue that the importance given to sexual expressions is indicative of cultural assumptions regarding sexuality. To truly bring sexy back, we must look to the cultural and political importance of exploring intimacy and the role of discourse and cultural norms in the private lives of public citizens. Moreover, the feminist adage "the personal is political" is a cornerstone of this project, and my feminist research approach focused on developing a research project that addresses contemporary Canadian media and the role of the ideologies and discourses that are shared in that media in power structures such as state health care, politics, and cultural norms. Within this thesis, I have shared my experiences in an attempt to generate new knowledge that highlights how power and sex are connected in nuanced and complicated ways. Ideologies that reproduce and uphold a sexual hegemony that prioritizes certain sexual expressions and sexualities over others must be acknowledged before the knowledge and theories of this field are connected to action and mobilized toward a widespread disruption of dominant narratives.

Research Questions

My research asked two interrelated questions: *how do ideological state apparatuses expose and emphasize sex and sexuality to Canadian adults, and how can rejecting or neglecting sex and sexuality in adult relationships challenge dominant sociopolitical structures that center on sex?* I answered these questions using my identification and reflections on the health and wellness magazines in ways that stayed true to my research motivations and commitment to feminist and queer approaches. I hope that readers join me in reflecting on their own experiences of being exposed to sex and sexuality and recognize that there are opportunities and spaces to

challenge the assumed importance of sexual activities for health and well-being as a modern adult.

I determined that health and wellness magazines function as an ideological state apparatus as a public (and in the case of online articles free) media platform to expose and emphasize sexual expressions through pictures, language, and popular narratives. I isolated three common narratives through the 15 articles. These narratives identified an emphasis on having sexual relations, engaging in consensual sexual activities, and expressing self-love and love for another through sexual expressions are part of being a healthy adult in contemporary Canada. By focusing on sexuality and sexual expressions as an important part of adulthood and being a healthy person, these four magazines contribute to upholding a sexual hegemony that focuses on the dominant and powerful assumptions about individuals' sexuality and sexual expressions. These discoveries are consistent with my own experiences in online and physical public spaces that address sexuality. They are also consistent with previous research that explores how ideologies are reproduced through media sources to contribute, reproduce, and uphold discourses surrounding citizens' healthy sexuality.

The second question in this research resulted from the urging of people who supported this thesis from its beginning conceptual stages. When I considered addressing incredibly personal questions relating to homonormativity and my notice of a rapidly increasing "sex-first" culture, I was uncertain of how to approach these topics within political science. I was challenged to find spaces where people challenge and push back these dominant discourses that relate to ideologies around sexual adulthood and health as I became more confident in my abilities. Although I found mentions of asexuality and threads of resistance in my own experiences and reflections on the articles in this thesis, I am unsure of the possibility of

rejecting these narratives in mainstream cultures or how to resist popular ideologies that contribute to policies, industries, and cultural norms that are built on assumptions of healthy sexualities.

In contrast to the four magazines within this thesis, there are online spaces such as the Asexual Visibility and Education Network and physical zines (Kliegman 2019) that date back to the 1970s that expose people to different realities and possibilities of expressing intimacies that are healthy and valid ways of expressing adult affection, love, and care. The existence of these sorts of media publications and online spaces indicates a possibility for a physically collaborative group of people that do not fit the mould for the normative sexual expressions expressed through the health and wellness magazines and discourses of healthy adulthood and sex. Within the introduction of this chapter and this thesis, I addressed how homonormative cultures formed to embrace LGBT expressions of sexuality into heteronormative practices and norms (such as marriage, raising children, monogamy, etc..). I remain curious about the possibility of enfolding asexuality (or other non-normative expressions of sexuality) into a sexual hegemony that I outlined, as I do not foresee the same connections within sexual expressions that were made homonormative cultures possible within the contemporary Canadian landscape. I believe that the dominant narratives that uphold and reproduce a sexual hegemony that I noted within this thesis point to a sexual culture that is founded on people either having sexual experiences or not, with little space for those who are not or experience sexual expressions and encounters on a spectrum- it may be possible people who only have sexual experiences once every three years are considered lacking as both an insider and outsider of hegemonic practices.

Conclusion

In chapter one, I introduced my research topic and defined important terms that relate to sexual hegemony and cultures, such as heteronormativity and homonormativity. I explored how Western culture and queer theorists have created and critiqued forms of sexuality citizenship and norms around sexual expressions. I also outlined my feminist research approach by outlining my position in this project and commitment to reflexivity as part of my research by reflexive research. In chapter two, I defined the concepts I used in the development of my research question and throughout the thesis. I introduced important concepts and outlined my literature review to provide people with the necessary background information to follow my discourse analysis. I used Ela Przybylo and Evelyn Elgie's previous research on asexuality, along with Travis Specie's development of hegemonic sexuality, to develop the language of a sexual hegemony. With Louis Althusser and Elizabeth Wingrove's work on ideological state apparatuses, I developed a foundation where ideologies develop cultural meanings of sex. Ken Plummer and Michelle Lazar's writings on discourse analysis and the power of discourse in politics, along with Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse and maintaining normative sexualities, informed my research. Lindsay Greiner's work on pathologizing sexualities established normative sexualities and the way that states can and do intervene through healthcare to promote and punish specific expressions of sexuality. In chapter three, I provided an overview of my methodology and approach to selecting magazine articles to reflect upon. I defined my feminist autoethnography and feminist discourse analysis and explained the process of selecting magazines to reflect upon. Using the previous chapters as a foundation, I presented my research reflections and three discourses found within my thesis in chapter four, entitled *Increasing sex for well-being and health, experts say, and decentering sex*. I began the chapter with an autoethnographic reflection on the research process so far and attempted to connect my

experiences to promote readers to consider their reactions prior to learning the identified themes more in-depth. Afterward, I explained the significance of each theme and how it contributes to my analysis of ideological state apparatuses, sexual hegemony, and the power of narratives. To do this I connected each discourse of ideologies regarding sexual adulthood and sexual expressions as a measurement and components of health. In this chapter, I returned to my research questions and argued the importance of this thesis. I concluded with potential limitations and avenues for further research within this area of study.

Limitations

The work in this thesis was limited by the explicit focus on my experiences as a queer adult and researcher and the perspectives I utilized to address a truly massive topic. Sexual expressions and ideologies are widespread in a variety of media and are influenced by state policies, cultural norms, family and social expectations, and a mixture of ideological state apparatuses and repressive state apparatuses that vary across societies. Although I could not adequately address all the factors that contribute to my topic, I hope that the outlined scope and intentions of this thesis ring true to those listening and looking for areas to explore and identify some ways that sexuality is produced and maintained in Canadian landscapes. I built this thesis around Althusser and Wingrove's concepts of ideological state apparatuses and a Foucauldian approach to understanding discourse. The creation of hegemonic power, such as the sexual hegemony I developed, maybe inapplicable on a widespread scale. The existence of hegemony is maintained by so many different factors and the development of such cannot be pinned to only dominant ideologies and cultural norms. Engaging politically and actively (and against) sexual hegemony would require approaches and solutions I have not spent time developing or deeply considering within this research.

Further and Future Research

I intend for this thesis to open the door to further avenues of research. Through my exposure and identification of sex-centered narratives that contribute to amanormativity and allosexual cultures, I have begun to explore sexual hegemony through a specific lens of adult health and well-being. There are more perspectives from different cultures and individuals that can provide a deeper understanding of how ideologies that promote certain sexualities and sexual expression function. I am interested in continuing my reflections academically and personally. I believe it would be incredibly valuable for others to do the same. People interested in understanding how power, politics, sex, and cultures relate and function could utilize the theories and literature, methodological approach, or draw inspiration from this thesis. At the time of writing, studies of Canadian sexual hegemony are limited. There is power in how cultures create, embrace, and normalize dominant discourses and manage people's behaviours through reproducing certain ideologies. I contribute my experiences and research into sex and sexuality to advance others' approaches to studying politics, power, and the interactions of cultures and states. This project is an important and timely intervention in Canadian politics that bridges political science, sexuality studies, and gender studies.

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