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## Sexualities in Revolt: Teaching Activism, Manifesto Writing, and Anti-Assimilationist Politics to Upper-Division Undergraduates

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### ABSTRACT

We draw from critical pedagogy and work on radical democratic praxis when discussing ways to teach sexuality studies in a way that embodies revolt and resistance to inequitable social hierarchies. Together, we specifically look at three areas where we have worked to infuse the teaching of sexuality with themes of resistance and revolt: 1) Enhancing political engagement, including a closer look at how to create an advocacy group; 2) Manifesto writing, with students writing their own manifesto; 3) Teaching anti-assimilationist politics, as students imagine and design an anti-assimilationist gay pride parade. These examples of pedagogies, class materials, and assignments suggest that teaching sexuality from a critical and activist posture works to better incorporate voices on the margins (e.g., queer/trans, women, fat, disabled, older, people of color) while pushing back against the biocentric notion that sexuality studies merely teaches about sexual facts.

### KEYWORDS

Sex education; sexuality studies; scholar-activism; social movements; resistance; undergraduate education

Teaching sexuality courses to undergraduates can prove to be a daunting task. Professors often have to work to help students unlearn many of the ill-informed, misogynistic, racist, and heteronormative understandings of sexual practices students learn before they enter the classroom (Connell & Elliott, 2009; Fields, 2008). Not only do instructors face the overwhelming gaps of knowledge that many undergraduates inherit from their adolescence—particularly as many states require *no mandatory sex education* (Carr & Packham 2017)—but moreover they also must choose from a wide variety of potential topics that span sexual behavior and sexual identity alongside cultural, popular, medical, and educational framings of sexuality (Rust, 1994). Instructors should work to confront student anxieties

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(McDonagh et al., 2018) and challenge a slew of biases toward the sexual practices of women (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009), sexualized racial stereotypes (Han & Choi, 2018), and hostilities toward sexual minorities (Worthen, 2012). Sexuality studies instructors are essentially teaching simultaneously about facts of sexuality, complex theoretical models of sexual performance and gender identity, sexual scripts, sexual politics and sexual policy-making, and institutional bioethics (Fahs, Plante, & McClelland, 2016).

Student reactions to sexuality courses can be quite complex. Students take sexuality classes for reasons sometimes antithetical to an authentic education, such as “it seemed like an easy A grade,” “other classes were full,” and “I want to be better at having sex” (King et al., 2020). Added to all of this is the reality that talking openly about sexuality opens up various landmines in the classroom. Students often imagined that professors who challenged heterosexism were themselves gay or lesbian (Ripley et al., 2012) and that feminist and queer professors in sexuality classes were too political (Anderson & Kanner, 2011). The range of students that instructors encounter in a sexuality classroom—from giggling and embarrassed first-year students to students prone to personal disclosure of sexual histories to those with serious sexual trauma histories to those afraid to hear different viewpoints to those struggling with whether to “out” themselves as trans or non-binary—makes the careful and skilled treatment of sexuality all the more important and necessary (Davis, 2005; Fahs et al., 2016; Meyer, 2005).

In this manuscript, we draw from our decades of teaching sexuality studies to examine the question of how to teach sexuality studies in a way that embodies revolt and resistance to inequitable social hierarchies. We take the position—drawing from critical pedagogy and work on “radical democratic praxis” (Giroux, 2018)—that instructors can and should embody an explicitly feminist and antiracist posture, and that in doing so, they should prioritize teaching about sexuality from a critical studies framework that challenges heteropatriarchy (Connell & Elliott, 2009; Elia & Eliason, 2010; Galbreath, 2012), whether in sociology, psychology, women and gender studies, health classes, or ethnic studies. We define “radical democratic praxis” as that which “emphasize[s] the integrity, equality, and solidarity of women and men in opposition to patriarchy’s hierarchical dualism and dominance along race, gender, class, and other lines” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998). An emphasis on feminist activism and advocacy in sexuality classes can also inspire political engagement and greater sexual agency among women (Swank & Fahs, 2017; Warshowsky et al., 2020). A critical studies interpretation of sexuality studies posits that sexuality is a *justice-based* theme, that sexuality topics elicit emotions worthy of understanding

and harnessing in academic work and writing, and that students should be pushed to imagine their own role in advocacy and activism (“scholar/activists”) rather than merely absorbing knowledge (Jones, 2011). Moreover, we hope that sexuality classes break from internalized pressures to be “information only classes” that avoid public and partisan debates in the name of “science” and “impartiality” (Burawoy, 2005).

Together, we specifically look at three areas where we have worked to infuse the teaching of sexuality with themes of resistance and revolt: 1) Teaching activism, including a closer look at an “activism, organizing skills, and social movements” project each of us has taught in the past; 2) Manifesto writing, as one of us has worked to teach students about the history of queer/sexuality-themed manifestos along with having students write their own manifesto; 3) Teaching radical anti-assimilationist politics, particularly with regard to anti-assimilationist queer and race politics, as in our assignment that asks students to imagine and design an anti-assimilationist and anti-capitalist gay pride parade. These examples of pedagogies, class materials, and assignments suggest that teaching sexuality from a critical and activist posture works to better incorporate voices on the margins (e.g., queer/trans, women, fat, disabled, older, people of color) while also pushing back against the biocentric notion that sexuality studies merely teaches *about* sexual facts (Jones, 2011). That is, we value the sharing of sexual facts while emphasizing materials and assignments that foster or enhance radical commitments and activist skills, and we do not see fact-based accounts of sex education as in contradiction with poststructuralist and Foucauldian perspectives on sex and power. We ideally work to integrate these together in our courses.

## **Key debates in sexuality studies pedagogy**

### ***Traditional sexology versus critical/feminist sexology***

The debates about how to imagine and understand sexuality studies have given sexuality studies a basis in strong ideological tensions. In particular, the ongoing tensions between sexuality studies as a biologically-based, science-based perspective (e.g., “sexual science” has emerged as a dominant theme at sexuality conferences, see Russett, 2009) and sexuality studies as connected to justice, social identities, and institutional practices (Tiefer et al., 2002) form a dominant tension within this field. —Becoming competent in political advocacy is a skill rarely mentioned on syllabi of most sexuality classes (Oswalt et al., 2015), and interviews with professors who teach sexuality classes rarely mention advocacy work (Wagner et al., 2017). Thus, people disagree, often emphatically, about how to approach the pedagogy of sexuality studies. Should sexuality studies emphasize the

science-based and biological essentialist claims that sex is “natural” and understood as a set of behaviors governed by evolution and biological “drives”? Or, as most critical and feminist scholars have argued, is sexuality *not* a natural act, but instead a set of ideological practices and sexual scripts passed down and circulated by families, individuals, governments, churches, institutions, and popular media? (Tiefer et al., 2002; Tiefer, 2004; Tolman & Diamond, 2014; Travis & White, 2000). We argue that scholars and teachers need to treat sexualities as invested in social structures in which “opportunities and constraints are based on sexuality categories” (Brown et al., 2015, 1).

The implications for how to view sexology, and how it impacts teaching, cannot be overstated for their importance. On the one hand, if sexuality studies is couched within a biological essentialism framework, assumptions about sexual norms change drastically. Within this tradition, heterosexuality becomes normative, drives toward reproductive sexuality become ubiquitous, and instructors focus their teaching on sexual facts and sexual science (thus teaching students to imagine sex as inevitable, universal, and a shared experience) (Giles, 2006; Hegarty, 2002). On the other hand, a critical/feminist view of sexology (something we more fully endorse) imagines sex in a more Foucauldian manner—as informed by discourse, linked to political and social institutions, and beholden to forms of power (both visible and invisible) that circulate within and around sexualities (Jones, 2011). Within this tradition, sexualities on the margins—including sexual minorities, alternative sexual practices, diverse “diets” of sexual media, and complex interpersonal power dynamics—are all relevant and important in the teaching of sexuality (Fahs, 2019; Ussher, 2002).

### ***Critical sexuality studies and its priorities***

Recently, scholars have called for the development and implementation of critical sexuality studies (CSS) as a subfield within sexuality studies (Fahs et al., 2016; Fletcher et al., 2013; Gill, 2009). Critical sexuality studies argues the following core claims:

Critical sexuality studies takes its cues from several other critical moments in related fields, including critical psychology, critical race theory, critical public health, and critical youth studies. Across these varied critical stances is a shared investment in examining how power and privilege operate, understanding the role of historical and epistemological violence in research, and generating new models and paradigms to guide empirical and theoretical research. (Fahs et al., 2016, p. 392)

Its priorities include three key areas that are neglected in many sex education classes: 1) conceptual analysis, with particular attention paid to defining key terms and organizing research (e.g., attraction, sexually active,

consent, agency, embodiment, sexual subjectivity); 2) attention to the material qualities of abject bodies, particularly bodies that are ignored, overlooked, or pushed out of bounds (e.g., fat bodies, bodies in pain); and 3) heteronormativity and heterosexual privilege, particularly how assumptions about these circulate in sex research (Fahs et al., 2016).

In pedagogical terms, incorporating critical sexuality studies and its priorities leads to stronger critiques of privileged social groups and social classes, just as it means a shift toward moving marginalized sexualities to the center of the curriculum, particularly for queer/trans, fat, disabled, older, and people of color—all of which have historically been cast out of conventional forms of sexuality studies research and teaching (Cortina et al., 2012; Garg & Volerman, 2021; Epstein, 2004; Whitten & Sethna, 2014). This move should prioritize an intersectional discussion that reveals the gendered, racialized, and classed elements built into the heteropatriarchal practices of sex as an act, as a symbol, and within sexual citizenship (Connell & Elliott, 2009; Elia & Eliason, 2010; Jones, 2011). Building on this, we believe that sexuality educators should work to overcome language and terminology barriers that lead to students speaking of sex through sterile and disembodied medical terms or crude/violent/sexist/homophobic labels for genitals and sexual acts (Davis, 2005). Thus, the shift toward a more critical sexuality studies framework also calls for teaching students how to think critically about normative assumptions about sexuality, particularly surrounding heterosexuality and heteronormativity. Other professors have called for similar teaching goals of “interrogating the intersecting structures of power and privilege in sexual regimes and the policing of sex” (Davis, 2005, 18), or teaching sex as a social structure (Brown et al., 2015). Understanding that many of the concepts and terms connected to sexuality (e.g., virginity, “hooking up”) are socially and politically informed helps to allow students to better understand the social constructedness of sexuality and its accompanying sociological and political implications (Caputi, 2020; Murnen, 2000). Moreover, sex education classes that emphasize problems of sexism, racism, and heteronormativity also seem to help minority students deal with the discrimination they face in their everyday lives (Keiser et al., 2019; Proulx et al., 2019; Snapp et al., 2015).

### ***The hazards and challenges of teaching sexuality studies***

The pedagogies of sexuality studies are fraught with a variety of controversies and hazards—both personal and political—to instructors and students. The potential for complicated and volatile debates around sexuality-related themes abound. For example, we often encounter students who want to overly-disclose personal information in the classroom about their sexual

traumas, sexual histories, current sexual practices, or sexual desires (Oswalt et al., 2015). While a critical feminist classroom certainly should offer space for students to build their own theoretical positions by drawing from their personal experiences, this can become hazardous and difficult if the boundaries of the classroom are not explicitly drawn. Similarly, researchers have noted that teaching about sexuality can often result in students wondering about their instructors' sex lives, asking inappropriately personal questions of the instructor, and assuming that teaching about sexuality invites a pushing of pedagogical boundaries (Decena, 2010; Fahs et al., 2016).

Building on this, because sexuality studies is already so inherently risky and challenging, and because instructors already negotiate so many tricky and delicate interpersonal dynamics in the classroom, we worry that there may be a temptation for instructors to reject material that is *especially* difficult, provocative, and emotional (Sinkinson, 2009). In this piece, we argue that teaching sexuality studies topics that link together power and resistance has rewards that outweigh the potential costs of this work. More specifically, we posit that sex educators would greatly benefit from including more material into their sexuality studies teaching that touches on activism and student roles as activists, the emotional impact of writing (particularly manifestos), and the importance and centrality of rebellious anti-assimilationist and counter-cultural politics. In doing so, students can better unpack the dynamics of power as related to sexuality and sex education, they can hone their own critical thinking skills toward these subjects, and they can integrate the more progressive, applied, and radical perspectives about sexuality into their college experience; all of these enhance students' overall understanding of their own, and others', sexuality as connected to broader pedagogical exercises.

### **Our inroads to sexuality studies**

As a brief note about our own inroads to this work, we teach at large public university in the U.S. Southwest and come from different academic traditions and trajectories when fusing together the teaching of sociology and sexuality. Breanne Fahs trained jointly as a critical feminist psychologist and a women and gender studies scholar, both as a graduate student and throughout her later career. She focused on issues of sexuality in her dissertation and has subsequently edited a book about sexuality and written two single-authored books about women's sexuality. Her orientation toward pedagogy is thus one that draws from a fusion of critical feminist social science and humanities traditions within women and gender studies. She has also developed several sexuality courses within women and gender studies that draw heavily from psychological and sociological frameworks.

Eric Swank trained as a sociologist and a social worker and has written extensively about inequalities for the past twenty years. His primary research focus in recent years has been on sexual inequalities, protest movements, and political activism. Throughout his teaching career, he has added sexuality readings to stratification and research methods courses but only in the last several years was he able to teach a full course on sexual identities and social justice movements. This course was taught within an interdisciplinary social and cultural analysis program which offered classes in women and gender studies, ethnic studies, queer and sexuality studies, and American studies. All of our assignments were taught in upper-division elective classes that attracted students who were interested in sexuality and LGBT studies, but we do think these assignments can work in general education classes in the humanities and social sciences. In terms of grading and evaluation, we present a clear grading rubric for each assignment so that students know what to expect; we also fully acknowledge the irony, discomfort, and contradictions of teaching about activism, manifestos, and anti-assimilation in the context of a university class in an institution dedicated to respectability narratives and frameworks of assimilation and upward mobility.

We mention this because we want to emphasize that teaching sexuality from critical traditions is best when taught from interdisciplinary perspectives and can occur regardless of one's own academic training and career trajectories. Whether one has been teaching about sexuality for decades, or is newly arriving at the teaching of sexuality after years of teaching other subjects, we want to urge readers to adopt a more activist and anti-assimilationist orientation to their teaching. While there are at times some problems or hazards that arise—most notably in students' lack of knowledge about what activism is (e.g., they sometimes think activism means asking people their opinion about something rather than making an intervention *per se*) or having difficulty adopting a manifesto voice (e.g., struggling to disregard citational practices)—students have been overwhelmingly eager to try these assignments with full gusto.

### **Part one: teaching activism**

Our courses focus on how governments, corporations, religions, families, and social relationships shape and regulate sexual behaviors and attitudes. Without including issues of resistance, agency, and social change, sexuality courses can lead to political apathy and paralysis if the main focus is only on the pervasiveness of social control (Davis, 2005). Conversely, classes that offer content of feminist, antiracist, and queer sensibilities and organizing tactics often lead to greater political and civic engagement among



students (Bowman, 2011; Case et al., 2014). Thus, our classes combine critical understandings of sexuality with important civic skills, activist commitments, and a sense of collective efficacy about political activism and public policy (Johnson, 2005; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013).

Each of us has moved from teaching *about* activism (that is, the history of activism, its impacts, and the various struggles against inequality that have occurred throughout the world and in the U.S.) to teaching about activism from a praxis and experiential orientation (that is, *doing* the work of activism). We do so in order to embody the 1970s feminist claim that women's studies is the scholarly wing of an activist movement (Fahs, 2018), thus allowing a centering of activism in the core curriculum and a shift toward nurturing "scholar/activism" in our students (Suzuki & Mayorga, 2014). Some scholars have offered examples of how to use class content, guest speakers, or classroom discussions to generate political activism in sexuality classes (e.g., Bowman, 2011; Case et al., 2014; Davis, 2005; Nunn Lisa & Bolt 2015). Given that Frances Fox Piven (2010) has argued that academic commitment to activism is crucial in order for the university to remain relevant to social justice causes, scholars should prioritize scholar/activism in their teaching practices.

### ***Vagina activism project***

Fahs has repeatedly designed "activism projects" in her 300-level undergraduate sexuality courses, specifically asking students to devise an activism project that takes direct action against negativity directed toward the vagina (she calls this the "vagina activism project"). The description of the assignment reads:

Negativity directed toward women and their bodies (and all things "feminine") affects not only individuals but the culture at large. A vast amount of hostility and negativity is directed toward "the vagina" within many spheres of American culture: the media (e.g., increasingly narrow constructions of "appropriate vaginas"), institutions (medical, educational, legal, and so on), the family, interpersonal dynamics, intrapsychic experiences of the body, and even within progressive and queer movements. Activism is one way that people can intervene about oppression, expose and challenge this sort of sexism, and elaborate a different view of the world. Your task has four parts for this project. 1) First, you will be divided into groups of 3–4 students to strategize and identify a priority for how you will intervene about contemporary attitudes toward the vagina, particularly sexist, homophobic, transphobic, classist, and racist notions of the vagina as "dirty" or "disgusting." This could include any number of specific topics: the tyranny of hairlessness; double standard about cis men's and cis women's genitals; medical vs. slang terminology for the vagina; media coverage and exposure about vaginas; language used about vaginas in high schools; women's attitudes about and comfort with their vaginas (and how this translates into topics like menstruation, childbirth, and cancer screenings); STDs and the notion of the "damaged" or "diseased" vagina; gay men's attitudes about the

vagina (allies vs. hostiles); visibility of vaginal health in local and global communities; sexual pleasure/orgasm and attitudes about the vagina (and so on ...). 2) Devise an activist intervention that will combat this negative norm. This should be something that is manageable in scope and that will be enacted on campus, within your families/friends/community, and (if applicable) in the broader culture. 3) Enact this intervention and record results. Push yourselves to be bold, courageous, and serious in your efforts. Be creative and energetic in these efforts, but also recognize that activism has a way of *provoking others* and as such can produce unexpected results in both positive and negative ways. Ideally, you should assign one group member to videotape or record some of your interventions. Take photos of any posters, signs, or pamphlets you make and where you put some of them. Interview people if you like. Try to document any/all activities you undertake and be sure that if you interview people or take photos that you secure their verbal or written permission to do so. 4) Write a paper on your activist project, including: recent research on vaginal attitudes that relate to your project (e.g., genital self-image studies, reactions to *The Vagina Monologues*, the history of medical intrusions into the vagina, and so on); the specific “priority area” you identified, the intervention you chose, the results of the intervention, and areas for future research and activism you think are relevant and important. You will present these findings briefly in class that day as a group. This should be designed as a 10 min presentation where you discuss your activist project and the results.

The assignment has produced an array of compelling interventions and direct actions, including projects where students distribute accurate information about sexually-transmitted infections, engage in menstrual literacy interventions, challenge the hairless norms, ask people to accurately draw vulvas and then hand out information about vulvas, work with nursing homes on their sexual policies, enlist the dual support of cis women and trans women to challenge the gendering of vaginas, and many more. Students often have expressed surprise at how much backlash simple activist efforts produced, from censorship to hate mail to direct confrontations. At the same time, students learn a great deal about working in groups, pushing themselves to be brave, and constructing activism as part of their undergraduate experiences in a sexuality course.

### ***Inventing a social movement organization assignment***

Swank has devised a race and sexualities class that focuses on the social forces that create, maintain, and challenge white and heterosexual privilege. With an emphasis on social movements and social change, the class concentrates on individual and collective attempts to resist and end racist and heterosexist practices. Readings highlight the dynamics of several different social movements, including the American Indian Movement (AIM), Brown Power (Chicanx Rights), Black Lives Matter, LGBT rights movement, AIDS activism, immigrant rights, and protests during the Trump presidency. With an intersectional emphasis, students read about how

LGBT protests move between the politics of difference and similarity (Ghaziani et al., 2016) and that race and sexuality intersections can create positive opportunities; they also consider the ways that social movements can create silences, tensions, and limitations within identity-based movements (DeFilippis & Anderson-Nathe, 2017; Gamson, 1995; Ward, 2008).

Swank's "inventing a social movement organization" assignment asks students to imagine and design a hypothetical social movement campaign. Papers are expected to address all the steps of making change, from choosing an issue to building an organization that has goals and preferred tactics. Readings about the crucial elements of social movement organizing come from a slew of sources but they are based on John Lofland's (1993) inventive typology of variable types in social movement research. Swank suggests to students that some of these activities include: (1) create a group name; (2) identify the problem the group is trying to end; (3) clarify the group's "statement of purpose"; (4) establish a decision-making process and division of labor within the group; (5) identify targets of social change; (6) discover and reach out to other groups that are working on this issue; (7) develop a strategies for making social change; (8) find ways to raise finances, (9) attract attention from the general public; (10) recruit new group members; (11) identify and connect with possible coalition members; and (12) develop ways to keep members committed to the group.

To keep the papers grounded in actual social conditions, Swank has suggested that the paper deals with racial or sexual identity conflicts in universities or within local or state-level politics. He also asks for a timeline that specifies when certain activities will be done. Finally, because most of the students in the classes are heterosexuals with little experience in political organizing, he asks them reread the articles on the common problems that ally activists make when trying to address the privileges that their race and sexual identity confer to them (Mathers et al., 2018). Students from diverse backgrounds can access this assignment and contribute to this assignment.

Students have proposed an exciting array of imagined social movement organizations, including several goals and tactics that embody the spirit of this assignment: removal of confederate statues from a state that was created 40 years after the Civil War; expel homophobic companies from college campuses; create gender neutral bathrooms; require fraternity students take a queer studies class; protest police harassment of trans people of color; expand child care services for lesbian mothers who attend college; and create a teach-in on racism in white LGBT communities.

### **Part two: manifesto writing**

As another example of a provocative and effective writing assignment for students in sexuality courses, Fahs has taught a manifesto writing

assignment that asked students to construct their own manifesto (i.e., a revolutionary document of emotional, urgent, sweeping social change). Students first learn about the genre of manifestos and their history, meaning, and impact, including several stylistic features: use of the universal “we” pronoun, radical and incendiary claims that are meant to spark revolution, little attention to citational practices or historicization of the content, frank and obvious use of emotion and personal investment in the text, and impassioned writing about a subject of choice (Caws, 2001; Fahs, 2020). We also address how manifestos are received by readers and the general public, as manifestos have a long and storied history both as documents of progressive change but also as documents of pro-violence discourse (including on the far Right). Understanding manifestos as a genre, limitations and possibilities included, is a key goal of the course. Rather than working on precision and form, citational style and practices of mastering bodies of literature that have come before them, and writing in empirical ways about careful research subjects, manifestos reject all of these common aspects of academic writing (North, 2005). Instead, the manifesto genre asks students to start from their own emotions of outrage and anger and then consider how to use a forceful voice to intervene. Students gain immediate access to authority (even if feigned, as the manifesto genre allows for) and voice when writing on personal experiences and in their own vernacular (things often denied to them through conventional modes of education that encourage distance and respectability). The result is often the emergence of raw, vital, pulsating, and energetic voices that helps them to better understand the links between sexuality and social justice.

Manifestos have rarely been taught in academia, despite the significance of the genre throughout history (particularly in the art world) (Fahs, 2020). In this assignment, students are asked to write a manifesto about any subject of their choosing and to perform that manifesto (in part) for their classmates later on. Students are given total freedom about page length, subject, and style of the manifesto, though Fahs has found it essential that they read a number of other manifestos before writing their own so that they can understand what manifestos sound and feel like. In this assignment, many students have written compelling manifestos about sexuality and gender, choosing subjects as diverse as eradicating gender altogether, embracing fat sex, working against ageism in sex and health education, and raging out against sexual assault and rape culture. The manifesto genre allows students to strip away the necessity for academic “socialization” and instead focus on their actual emotional experiences of the course content. The question of what infuriates them about the world of sexuality/gender today is an important and fruitful one, and it leads them in the direction of planting seeds for their later more academic work (e.g., honors projects,

master's thesis work). More importantly, it allows students to demonstrate deep investment in their writing, something that often gets stripped away when students worry about postures of objectivity and detachment at the expense of personal investment and "voice."

### Part three: teaching anti-assimilationist politics

As a final example of a pedagogical intervention based in the politics of rebellion and revolt, we have also each taught an assignment that asked students to think in anti-assimilationist ways. By anti-assimilationist, we mean the embrace of politics that do not seek the approval from dominant groups in order to gain the resources and benefits monopolized by the privileged, but instead framing lower status groups as *purposefully and intentionally* on the margin and more free from institutionalized constraints that exploit, injure, and oppress most people. Anti-assimilationist work often espouses the importance of marginality and opposition, of being on the edge, of *not* adopting the gestures, practices, and mannerisms of the more dominant groups (Ghaziani et al., 2016). Queer, lesbian separatist, and Afro-centric movements have long histories of challenging assimilationist goals and tactics (Chi, 2019; Loadenthal, 2012), particularly among those working against the trappings of same-sex marriage (Rodgers, 2010) and those separate black spaces that exclude white people (Dillard, 2016; Hill, 2013). These histories of anti-assimilationist activism have often gone understudied within academia, even in critical fields like queer studies and women and gender studies (Geer & Pool, 2019).

In this assignment, students are asked to imagine an anti-assimilationist gay pride parade that challenges a corporatized version of celebrating queerness. The assignment reads:

Gay pride parades have been a source of contention both between conservatives and liberals (as conservatives often deem them unsavory while liberals support them as important measures of diversity). Similarly, *within* queer communities, there are disagreements about how to go about showing and having gay pride. Using readings and lectures, as well as your own critical analyses, describe the ways that increasingly flamboyant and in-your-face gay pride parades resist assimilation just as they might serve as tools of assimilation. Next, envision a kind of gay pride parade that would be as far as possible away from assimilationist gay perspectives. What kinds of images, floats, booths, food, slogans, clothing, and demonstrations would such a parade have, and why would these meaningfully advance anti-assimilationist queer agendas? How can the absurd be used as a weapon for radical social change? What strategies would a gay pride parade have if its primary purpose was to resist assimilation into heteronormativity? Write out a clear sense of your vision *in detail* for this gay pride parade.

In this assignment students are provoked to think and imagine in anti-assimilationist ways, particularly focusing attention on gay pride parades as a site of possible co-optation or liberation. Given that gay pride parades

have in recent years been accused of moving toward a more corporate mindset and away from flamboyant and overtly sexual displays (Greenwald, 2013; Johnston, 2007; Markwell & Waitt, 2009), this question also fits into contemporary political discussions about how tools of resistance often become tools of exploitation.

After reading eight readings about anti-assimilationist queer perspectives from Mattilda Sycamore's (2008) *That's Revolting*, students grapple with this question in many ways. Some have imagined intensifying diversity at the parades, with far more recognition of different subsets of attendees (e.g., gay parents with children need different kinds of areas/events/food than do single gay people, and so on). The question has also helped students to direct their attention toward a creative reimagining of gay pride as something that *could* continue to resist the (violent) processes of assimilation. Students effectively grapple with questions about why it matters to have anti-assimilative space, how that could be enacted rather than just cerebrally considered, and what a pride parade—designed to mark queer space in public and “out loud”—could evolve toward in future years. In terms of grading and evaluation, Fahs typically looks for the incorporation of both the tools of the course (e.g., critical queer readings and anti-assimilationist readings) along with creative critical thinking (e.g., imagining the gay pride parade as a space to be reinvented and reimagined).

## Conclusions and recommendations

Sex educators need to use pedagogical strategies that operate from a position of resistance and revolt. Critical sexuality education studies (McClelland & Fine, 2017) highlight how school-based sex education is not a neutral vehicle of knowledge transmission. It critiques sex education logic, highlighting the individualistic, neoliberal approach to sexuality that disadvantages oppressed people (Bay-Cheng, 2017) and exacerbates power differences at the expense of sexual agency and pleasure (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Holland et al., 1998). Highlighting the ways that sexuality intersects with issues of gender, class, education, ethnicity and race, studies have uncovered values and norms that might implicitly be communicated in sexuality education. These studies deconstruct gender structures (Sanjakdar et al., 2015) and racialized knowledges (Bredström, 2005; Quinlivan, 2017) that shape sex education curricula, uncover “hidden lessons” of the curriculum (Fields, 2008) or make visible how heterosexual structures influence classroom interaction (Ryan, 2016).

Sex education classes benefit from exploring the ways that sexual practices are connected to social hierarchies and address the ways that feminist, queer, and reproductive rights movements contest social inequalities.

Moreover, sexuality classes need to purposefully incorporate more on the political struggles against sexual violence, “slut-shaming,” hegemonic masculinity, access to abortion, heterosexism, and racialized sexism, alongside the continued inclusion of marginalized voices. We need to nurture and develop a cadre of students who not only have a sophisticated understanding of sexual norms and sexual health, but also a sense of responsibility for taking action in a social justice sense.

We believe that sexuality classes should draw upon the insights of critical fields like women and gender studies, ethnic studies, and queer studies. These collaborations make space for new alliances, new pedagogical ideas, and new ways of relating to the subject of sexuality. We need to make space for those on the margins to “enter the classroom”—both literally (as in students who are marginalized) and abstractly (as in subjects that are marginalized). Designing creative and compelling assignments that embody scholar/activist principles, emphasize the principles of direct action, and help students to grapple with their own voice and creative possibilities will make education more transformative and help to pull the margins more into the center. Further, these types of sexuality classes will make space for “edges”—unpopular claims, emphatic writing, creative and imaginative artistic work, and group activism that will linger in student’s minds long after they leave the class. All of these assignments fit within the tradition of college classes that enhance student activism (Bowman, 2011), and students from our classes worked with groups that provided resources and protection for LGBTQ homeless youth, protested our former Sheriff Joe Arpaio, protested the Trump administration’s xenophobic practices, participated in voting drives for Latinx communities locally, worked with groups that served undocumented immigrant women, and challenged the presence of restaurant chains with homophobic practices on campus, among many other things. Further, students describe these assignments in their student evaluations as (to date) positive, rewarding, and memorable, noting that these assignments pushed them to think about applying the knowledge they have learned in class to the broader social world they live in. We have an obligation to broaden the teaching of sexuality so that students care for and support voices on the margins, however hard to hear, however difficult to access.

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