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Content warning: explicit discussions of sex topics

ILLUSTRATION BY BIANCA RADEK

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Sex education needs to cover actual sex topics; Porn is good for learning one's sexual desires

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SJSU ASSOCIATED STUDENTS

# Sex.

## Let's talk about it

Sex: three letters and one syllable yet this small word encompasses a vast umbrella of topics and an ancient stigma.

In this special issue of the Spartan Daily, we aim to educate, inform and support the San Jose State community through an array of sexual themes with focuses including: porn, kinks, body image, pleasure and sexuality.

We also discuss the shockingly high rates of sexually transmitted diseases, Texas' recent harsh and restrictive abortion ban, sex education reform and sexual consent communication.

The editorial staff feels it's important to highlight conversations that aren't held enough as we navigate gray areas of adulthood and our sexual identities during our time at SJSU – an hour away from the nation's most sexually liberated city, San Francisco.

Questioning social expectations regarding sex shouldn't be stigmatized.

In fact, it should be celebrated.

Two thirds of college students in the U.S. have reported being sexually active, according to an April 15, 2017 Psychology Today article.

Nearly 17% of college students identified as LGBTQ+ or questioning, according to a 2018 study by the Association of American Universities.

For many students, college is the first time they're free to begin discovering who they are and what they like.

The Spartan Daily editorial staff encourages everyone at SJSU to take the time to reflect on their unique identities and we

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**The Spartan Daily editorial staff encourages everyone at SJSU to take the time to reflect on their unique identities and we hope this special issue is a form of support for those on that journey.**

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hope this special issue is a form of support for those on that journey.

Especially because, as we discuss later in our issue, the U.S. sex education system is below par with actually educating students.

And while California State University Title IX policies, which SJSU follows, determine sexual consent as affirmative communication, including an enthusiastic "yes," consent is predominantly communicated ambiguously between college students.

As integral as consent should be to sex, its intricacies aren't clear for many students.

We also don't shy away from discussing how kinks and porn can be inherently healthy for adults even though society paints it as distasteful.

About 22% of college students surveyed said they were into kinks and fetish roleplay and 40% said they were intrigued by the thought of kinks and fetishes,

according to a Nov. 9, 2018 article by Refinery 29.

We also point out how important it is for young adults to get tested for sexually transmitted diseases and infections to protect ours and our partners' health.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the largest demographic contracting STIs are young adults.

We must work to destigmatize the feelings of guilt and shame society has told us to have about sex.

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# Course Catalog:

## Course: 069 Comprehensive Sex Education

Teacher: Mrs. Diversity

**Course description:**  
An inclusive introduction to relationships and sex. Includes topics such as consent, pleasure, masturbation and how to be safe.

**Credits:** Lifelong, useful information as you enter the world of sex.

## Course: 070 Abstinence-only Sex Education

Teacher: Mr. Old, White Man

**Course description:** An introduction on how to resist any temptations. How to be a well-respected member of society by abstaining from sex.

**Credits:** No knowledge on how to maintain relationships.



INFOGRAPHIC BY SAUMYA MONGA; SOURCE: GUTTMACHER INSTITUTE

# Sex Ed should actually include sex



**Saumya Monga**  
STAFF WRITER

Didn't learn anything in sex education classes growing up? Get in line.

The only entertaining aspect of "sex ed" was the awkward, outdated videos where teenage actors discuss puberty as if they were thirty-year-old adults.

But it also wasn't informative about sex at all, at least not on topics including masturbation, pleasure and consent that are so important for young adults to learn about as they navigate their bodies.

Nina Randolph, a Spring 2020 Stanford University alumna, and Oakland resident Isa Bogart started an Instagram account called "i am EMPWR" in April 2020 to educate the youth on sex topics usually not covered in school.

"I definitely got abstinence education but also for me, it was more focused on sexual puberty than actual sex," Bogart said in a Zoom call.

Sex education usually only covers topics relating directly to the body such as menstruation and erections, Bogart explained.

Currently, 28 states require that abstinence be stressed in sex education, according to the Guttmacher Institute's "Sex and HIV Education" webpage.

Guttmacher Institute is a research organization dedicated to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, according to its website.

Abstinence-only sex education focuses on stigmatizing sex instead of informing young people on how to practice safe sex, according to a Feb. 28, 2018

Guttmacher Institute article.

Ivy Chen, San Francisco State sociology and sexuality studies lecturer, said because the "main message" in sex education is abstinence, educators don't feel as if they can tell you about birth control or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Chen said educators also fear they'd be giving incorrect information regarding topics not included in the curriculum.

"A scare tactic is a really common way of teaching sex education in general but certainly abstinence-only sex ed," she said.

The goal of sex education should be to educate young people with the resources necessary for them to explore their sexualities safely.

However, Bogart said she was educated using the abstinence-only model and because the emphasis was predominantly on puberty, she never actually learned about sex.

"What happens with an abstinence-only program that extends through high school is that you graduate these young

adults that basically remain ignorant," Chen said.

There's no evidence on the efficacy of abstinence-only sex education, according to a Sept. 1, 2017 Journal of Adolescent Health study.

The U.S. curriculum needs to favor a more comprehensive model for sex education.

according to its website.

"A lot of abstinence-only puts the blame or responsibility on women to have that option. We then create this lack of conversation centering women's pleasure in sex and removing that agency from women then has a trickle-down effect to all this other sexual trauma, where

**Women are taught to carry that shame with them even today. They're burdened with "scarlet letters" for choosing to do what they want with their bodies.**

Chen delved deep into the history of why so many schools haven't adopted the comprehensive model, which is far more inclusive of different sexualities, according to the Guttmacher Institute.

"There had been funding for sex education that was matched from the state and federal and so the only thing was that the sex education had to be abstinence-only, which meant that if you accepted the federal money then the state would pony up the same amount [but] they would be handcuffed to teaching only abstinence-only," Chen said.

In 1996, the U.S. passed a welfare reform legislation that included the addition of the Title V Abstinence-Only Until Marriage program, according to the Journal of Adolescent Health study.

If a program accepted this federal funding, it could only teach abstinence and had to avoid topics including contraception. Between 1998 to 2019, Congress spent more than \$1 billion on Title V programs, according to an Oct. 2018 Siecus study.

Siecus is an organization that advances sex education,

women don't feel comfortable asking for what they want," Bogart said. "So then they stay silent."

She said abstinence basically removes women from sex.

"[Women or anyone who can get pregnant] being given whatever the man wants, are kind of being forced into complacency, coerced and manipulated into situations that they're not actually comfortable in and don't desire because they lose their voice as they're not a part of the [sex] conversation," Bogart said.

In many educational programs, boys and girls are separated when they're taught about sex: girls are taught about menstruation while boys learn about erections.

Bogart said that division allows educators to place any sex responsibility onto the girls because they're the ones who get pregnant.

Novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850, which is about a woman Hester Prynne who was exiled because she became pregnant without being married.

Hawthorne wrote, "she had wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness. . . . The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers – stern and wild ones – and they had made her strong, but taught

her much amiss."

Women are taught to carry that shame with them even today. They're burdened with "scarlet letters" for choosing to do what they want with their bodies.

Still, Ivy Chen said we're lucky because California never accepted the federal money that would require abstinence-only sex education.

"In California, what we do is we're inclusive about things like gender identity, sexual orientation, all different family structures as well as all different body types including acknowledging that some people have intersex bodies," Chen said.

Chen also referenced the California Healthy Youth Act, which requires school districts to provide comprehensive sex education and cover topics including HIV prevention.

Nina Randolph said she hopes to see consent being taught more in schools.

"Consent needs to be taught very early on and that doesn't need to be in a sexual context but [by] teaching very young children, asking to hug them, telling them they're allowed to say no to a meal," Randolph said in a Zoom call. "Teaching them general respect for yes and no and showing them that you respect [the no]."

She said consent is much more than a simple yes or no question, it's an entire communicative process.

Randolph and Bogart said sexual empowerment is also crucial, where individuals feel confident to explore their sexualities.

Teaching sexual empowerment means teaching the "taboo" topics including masturbation and orgasms.

"When you give people the information and you allow them to make competent, informed decisions, that's the start of how you can then be more empowered," Randolph said.

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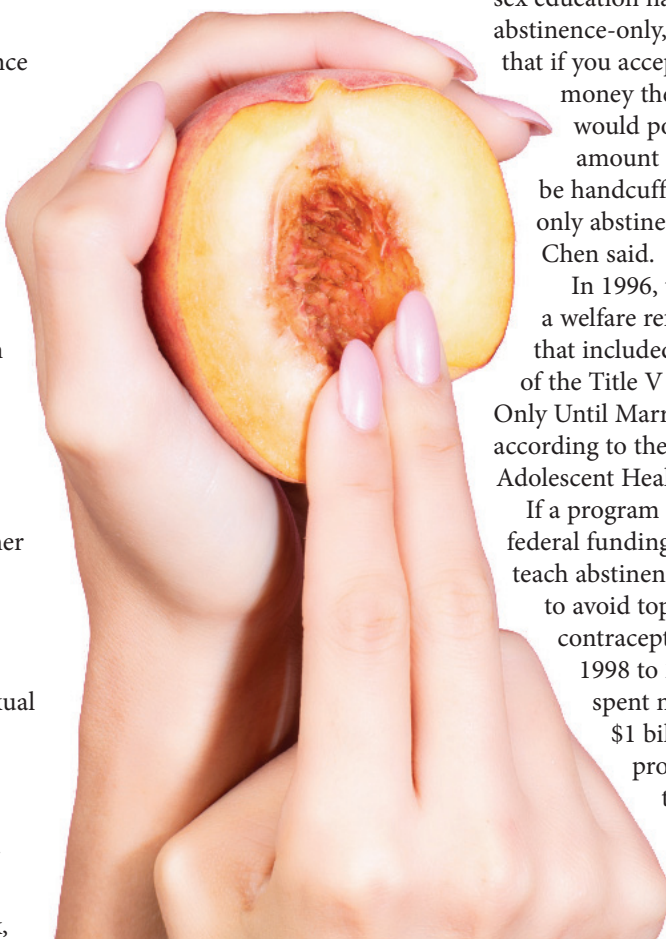


IMAGE FROM CANVA

# Sexually explicit content can promote self understanding



**Christopher Nguyen**  
STAFF WRITER

Porn has moved from being a taboo secret you keep to yourself to becoming popular in mainstream media.

There's no denying porn has both positive and negative aspects when it comes to its effects on our society. I think it's okay for people to legally indulge in porn to learn how to be intimate with their bodies and what sexual interests they'd like to pursue.

Adults who consume porn reported to be less sexually repressed and more tolerant toward other people's sexualities, according to a 2007 Australian Journal of Communication article.

For so long, people were told to repress their sexual feelings and view them as something wrong and shameful but in reality, we should be teaching our society about tolerance and acceptance.

Matthew Capriotti, San Jose State associate psychology professor, said while porn is ubiquitous, his research indicated it's not causing societal problems.

"The vast majority of people using pornography do so without having much of a negative effect," Capriotti said in a Zoom call.

He said he believes if porn was causing problems in society, there would be more documentation of it.

"There were some studies I read that showed . . . 98% of men and 75% of women have accessed some form of pornography in the last six months," Capriotti said. "There's not much clear evidence to say that porn

is causing problems."

Capriotti said he also thinks the positive effects of porn consumption are under-reported.

"Pornography can provide a place for people to explore what they're interested sexually in ways that are private and reasonably safe," Capriotti said.

There's an obsessive narrative that porn ruins relationships, that it kills love, changes people's view of what sex actually is and is the root cause of society's detriment.

Instead, those same people pushing that narrative are hiding what's actually killing love, relationships and society. It's not porn, it's the hyperfocus and continuous, thankless need to produce value for society.



**Pornography can provide a place for people to explore what they're interested sexually in ways that are private and reasonably safe.**

Let's turn our attention and look at Japan's porn industry for example: It's estimated worth is around \$20 billion, according to a March 2, 2015 GQ article.

GQ is a part of Condé Nast, an organization that covers various topics including news and entertainment, according to its webpage.

While Japan is producing and selling a lot of porn, they understand porn isn't the reason relationships are not being formed and love is being killed.

Adults in Japan are suffering from overwork. Japanese workers are not taking time off that they're entitled to because of the



INFOGRAPHIC BY BRYANNA BARTLETT; SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNICATION;

workaholic culture that has been instilled in their society, according to a Jan. 17, 2020 BBC article.

People can't find love and build relationships if their "free" time is used excessively for work.

The same thing is happening in China,

working culture known as "996" which means working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. for six days a week while not being able to afford a home, according to an Oct. 24 SCMP article.

As we see again, this time in a different country that doesn't allow porn in society, people are being overworked and have no free time on their hands to even try to build a relationship.

Young Chinese workers responded to 996 with "lie flat" or "tang ping" in Mandarin. "Lying flat" means to do the bare minimum and do what is absolutely essential for one's survival including no relationships. The lifestyle is causing the Chinese government to worry about economic growth and lowering birth rates, according to the same SCMP article.

So, if the problem of forming relationships is happening simultaneously in one country that is a porn hotspot and another that bans it, why can't Americans see that porn is not a detriment to society? The constant stress from overworking is the problem.

People should not feel alone or ashamed by consuming porn.

I freely admit to using porn in order to be intimate with myself and find out what interests me. People should have the choice to use porn as a means to explore themselves sexually.

a country where porn has little influence on society.

The Chinese government continuously censors pornographic material, whether it's visual or literary, according to a July 9, 2020 South China Morning Post article.

South China Morning Post (SCMP) is a Hong Kong-based news organization that reports about China and anything related to it, according to its webpage.

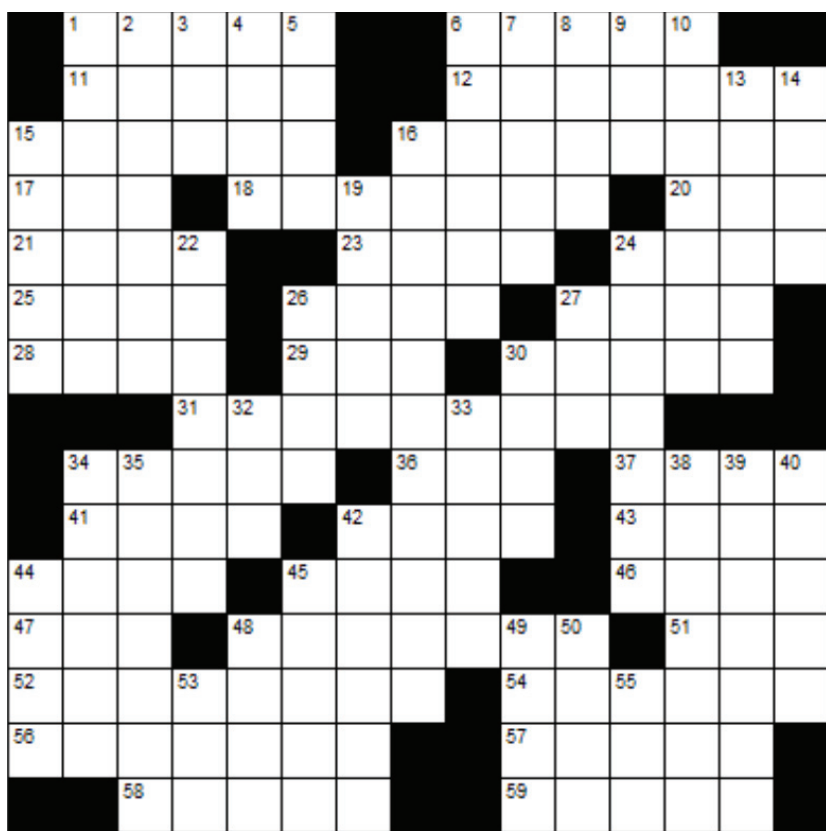
Even with the Chinese government continuously censoring porn, adults are still making the choice to move away from work and relationships.

Young Chinese workers faced a severe

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## CLASSIFIEDS

### CROSSWORD PUZZLE



**ACROSS**

- 1. Lacquer ingredient
- 6. Beauties
- 11. Washbowl
- 12. Shad
- 15. Strong
- 16. An eating disorder
- 17. In song, the loneliest number
- 18. Drenching
- 20. Explosive
- 21. Knights
- 23. Male deer
- 24. Dregs
- 25. French for "State"
- 26. Alert
- 27. One who accomplishes
- 28. Depend
- 29. In the past
- 30. Black-footed albatross
- 31. Response times
- 34. Change gears
- 36. Buffoon
- 37. Female sheep (plural)
- 41. Command (archaic)
- 42. Send forth
- 43. Gave temporarily
- 44. A young male horse
- 45. Affirm
- 46. Abominable Snowman
- 47. A wise bird

- 48. Continuing forever
- 51. Liveliness
- 52. 10-sided polygons
- 54. Relating to the sea
- 56. Hard
- 57. Cattail
- 58. High, low and neap
- 59. Row of shrubs

**DOWN**

- 1. Hard rubber
- 2. Sidelong
- 3. East southeast
- 4. Subconscious
- 5. Moving within
- 6. A loose fitting jacket
- 7. Beside
- 8. Large mass of ice
- 9. Female sheep
- 10. One more than fifteen
- 13. Showy attire
- 14. Dines
- 15. Show-off
- 16. Star gazers
- 19. Habitual practice
- 22. Hairdresser
- 24. Broadly speaking
- 26. Light bulb unit
- 27. Female deer
- 30. Present
- 32. Aback

- 33. A marker of stones
- 34. Exhibited
- 35. Vixen
- 38. Crying
- 39. Accord
- 40. Anagram of "Spite"
- 42. Happenings
- 44. Musical finale
- 45. Redress
- 48. Quaint outburst
- 49. Nursemaid
- 50. Disabled
- 53. French for "Friend"
- 55. Scarlet

### SUDOKU PUZZLE

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains every digit from 1 to 9 inclusively.

8	4				3	6	7	
		6					4	9
		9	1	6				
2	5			7				
	9			2			3	
				9			6	2
				4	7	1		
1	6					4		
	7	4	8				5	6

### SOLUTIONS Nov. 18

C	L	A	W	A	R	R	A	S	E	V	I	L	
L	A	S	H	B	A	I	L	S	G	E	N	E	
I	M	P	O	S	S	I	B	L	E	O	R	C	A
F	I	E	P	O	S	S	E	T	I	T	A	N	
F	A	N	F	A	R	E	G	O	R	S	E		
			O	R	B	P	E	N	U	M	B	R	A
Z	O	W	I	E	S	I	D	L	E	R	A	W	
I	R	O	N	D	O	L	L	Y	H	A	I	R	
N	E	O	D	I	M	L	Y	W	E	E	N	Y	
C	O	L	L	U	D	E	S	A	R	R			
		S	E	R	O	W	I	C	E	B	E	R	G
T	E	A	S	E	H	A	R	T	S	N	E	E	
A	R	C	S	E	D	E	V	O	U	T	N	E	S
L	A	K	E	A	R	E	N	A	O	M	I	T	
E	S	S	E	B	E	R	Y	L	W	A	N	E	

4	2	1	5	6	9	7	8	3
6	7	3	8	1	2	9	5	4
9	8	5	4	7	3	1	6	2
3	6	2	7	5	8	4	9	1
1	9	4	3	2	6	5	7	8
8	5	7	9	4	1	3	2	6
5	4	8	6	3	7	2	1	9
2	3	6	1	9	5	8	4	7
7	1	9	2	8	4	6	3	5

### JOKIN' AROUND

"What's Forrest Gump's computer password?"

.. Forrest!

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ILLUSTRATION BY DAISHA SHERMAN

# ‘It just happened’

## SJSU expert & student go deep on sexual consent

By **Bryanna Bartlett**  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

A San Jose State graduate student who preferred to go by Danielle for privacy concerns, said she was in her freshman year at the University of California, Los Angeles when she felt her sexual consent with someone was a “gray area.”

Danielle said after returning to her dorm room following a dinner date, she felt she was “sort of convinced” to have sex.

“It’s not that I didn’t want to hook up with him, I did . . . I just wanted to wait a date or so, I don’t know,” Danielle said in a Zoom call. “Afterwards, I mean, not like immediately but the next day, I just felt kind of weird about it . . . like I really, I don’t know, I just remember thinking ‘it would have still been nice to wait.’”

She said she’s had many friends who’ve also experienced something similar but they “don’t think much about it” most of the time.

Jason Laker, SJSU department of counselor education professor, said he’s been researching sexual consent communication and negotiation since 2012.

Laker said he’s found a prevalent response from college-students when they describe affectionate, relational or sexual experiences: “It just happened.”

He said while there’s obviously more that occurred than that quote, many college students are “mindless” toward sex.

Laker’s research page “Consent Stories” states “it just happened” is a common social convention, whether rooted in a desire to be brief, respectful of private matters or to omit potentially embarrassing or otherwise stressful details.

“This is often how we think about things . . . we often ritualized certain things,” he said in a Zoom call, adding that recalling a sexual encounter for many students is like “waking up” at

their desk after falling asleep.

Laker has been co-investigating alongside Erica Boas, SJSU’s subject area coordinator for social science, in their years-long research project: “Sexual Coercion and Violence in College: Reforming Policies and Practices for Consent Education and Personal Agency.”

“Our study is not about sex or sexual activity, it’s about how you let it be known what someone wants or doesn’t want,” he said.

While their research has been on hold because of the coronavirus pandemic since 2019, Laker and Boas have interviewed hundreds of college students to help them recall their consent experiences.

According to the Consent Stories website, the project is dedicated to: enhancing sexual consent understanding, coercion and assault among college students; identifying prevention and intervention efforts, designing effective prevention education and training programs; and conducting research to evaluate the pilot prevention and intervention efforts’ effectiveness.

Laker said the research method they use in the interviews is akin to a football clip getting reversed, again and again, until the play’s details are retained.

“If you could imagine that, similarly, the encounter from the time that you two met till the time you ended up having sex or in bed, that there had been a camera and that they were going back play by play, just like on the football game, could you help walk us through the details of how it came to that, slow it down,” he said.

Laker said SJSU’s Title IX consent policy, like most college consent policies, include overt ‘yes’ or ‘no’ dialogue as official consent to sex but that’s “not how most people actually do it.”

Graduate student Danielle said she’s been formally asked, “Do you want to have sex?” just twice in her life.

“A majority of the time, it’s like, I’m reading their body language and they’re reading mine . . . we’re teasing each other and I don’t know, it’s usually like we’re on the same page, escalating second by second,” she said.

Laker said not only is it awkward or difficult for many people to overtly ask for consent but in many ways, most

people find that it “kills the mood” or is not erotic - it’s a turn off.

“There’s a real structural barrier,” he said. “How are we supposed to take on the more affirmative, unclear forms of consent requests and responses when we have this social dilemma about being able to even do that at all?”

Laker said sexual consent between college students is predominantly communicated through signals, cues or subtle gestures such as pulling up a partner’s pant leg partway or verbiage that may be intentionally ambiguous.

He said one of the biggest critiques he and Boas have about universities is the primary focus on verbal sexual consent.

“[A college’s] primary focus, and frankly, this is true in the broader society, is about legal and policy lenses to look at this stuff and while laws and policies are important, they are also only a part of what’s going on,” Laker said. “If we just go to the question of whether what happened between those two in the bedroom was violating a policy or not . . . no wonder we have such an unsatisfying and further traumatizing situation there.”

He said as for the events of people “giving in” or “trying to get it over with” or having sex because they “feel obliged” - that’s coercion, some of which is perpetuated by the partner but some of which also has to do with the broader society and the college atmosphere.

“All this stuff is messy. So it’s really important to find potential partners who’re willing to slow it down or be involved in some form of communication about what the two of you, or the five of you, or whatever, agree on,” Laker said. “The consent stories that we share show some creative and circumspect ways for people to navigate that.”



**There’s a real structural barrier. How are we supposed to take on the more affirmative, unclear forms of consent requests and responses when we have this social dilemma about being able to even do that at all?**

**Jason Laker**  
department of counselor  
education professor



**A majority of the time, it’s like, I’m reading their body language and they’re reading mine . . . we’re teasing each other and I don’t know, it’s usually like we’re on the same page, escalating second by second.**

**Danielle**  
SJSU graduate student

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# Masking sexuality causes internal turmoil

San Jose State community members talk about effects of LGBTQ+ discrimination and rejection

By Sandra Santos-Cruz  
STAFF WRITER

Members, allies and researchers from the LGBTQ+ community say sexual repression takes a toll on one's sense of self because of the negative stigma surrounding sexual expression among non-straight individuals.

Christopher Fuller, San Jose State art and psychology junior who identifies as an LGBTQ+ community member, said he had to recover his confidence after carrying the burden of "playing a double life."

Fuller said when he was around nine years old he realized that he wasn't comfortable with his sexual identity because he comes from a masculine family who expected him to behave as a stereotypical "man."

He said he endured more than four years of masking his identity by presenting one version of himself to his peers while trying to "come out" to others.

"Living with repression means that a lot of the time you have to create a new version of yourself for the world," Fuller said. "The world says you don't fit in and you have to create new ways to identify."

Sexual repression occurs when a person can't freely express their sexual impulses and emotions because of guilt or shame, according to the Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential webpage.

The Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential is a searchable, online platform of research work collected by the Union of International Associations, according to its webpage.

Individuals may feel the need to repress their sexual identities because they don't conform to the sexual expressions believed to be acceptable to various cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs and moral standards, according to the same webpage.



**Living with repression means that a lot of the time you have to create a new version of yourself for the world. The world says you don't fit in and you have to create new ways to identify.**

**Christopher Fuller**  
SJSU art and psychology junior

Fuller said repressing his full identity drained his energy, negatively affecting his mental stability on a daily basis.

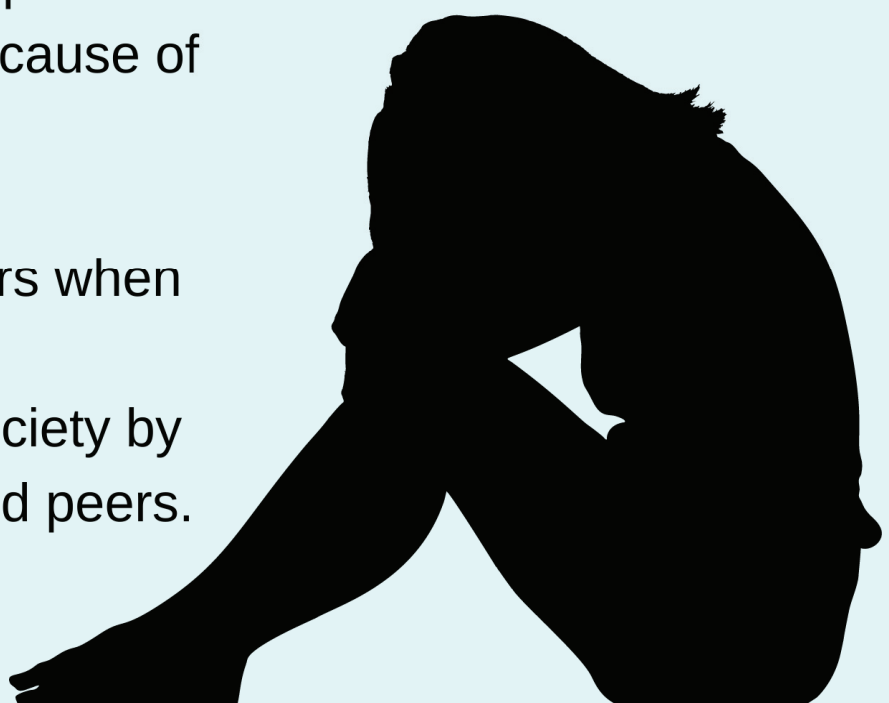
"There was a point where I'd just rather feel the same negativities but be myself rather than keep up being someone else to be accepted," Fuller said.

Registered psychotherapist Ariele Jacobson conducted research for Saint Paul University in Canada in 2018, where 10 LGBTQ+ individuals participated and all reported feelings of repression.

Jacobson found that sexual repression derives from trying to make sense of

## What is sexual repression?

- Sexual repression is when
  - a person can't express their sexuality because of shame or guilt.
- Repression occurs when someone feels
  - unaccepted in society by family, friends and peers.



INFOGRAPHIC BY CHRISTINA CASILLAS; SOURCE: ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WORLD PROBLEMS AND HUMAN POTENTIAL WEBPAGE

one's place in the LGBTQ+ community and gain acceptance from society.

"The participants explained how they perceived that these factors have led to and maintained sexual repression at different points in their lives and how they believed that they have influence in their mental health," Jacobson stated in her 2018 study.

Robert Marx, SJSU child and adolescent development assistant professor, conducted research on how gender, sexuality and adolescent empowerment affect one's mental health.

Marx said LGBTQ+ community members' mental health is affected by sexual repression

"What we know from research is that queer people exist in a society that tells them that they are wrong, tells them they are bad and constantly legislates what they can do."

Marx said many queer people have been taught from a young age about what is "right" or "wrong" in society including using a specific bathroom and wearing clothes that align with stereotypical gender norms.

Societal expectations become subliminal messages that urge LGBTQ+ individuals to hide who they are, Marx said.

"The more that young people internalize messages of rejection, the more they expect negative outcomes, the more [likely] they are to have higher rates of depression, anxiety and trouble in school," Marx said.

Fuller said hiding his identity felt like "twisting a knife" because he was living in fear of rejection, but he eventually found the courage to acknowledge that coming out was his choice in life.

"I realized how much harm [hiding my sexuality] was causing me," he said. "I can't even guarantee this is the same amount of harm it would cause if I would come out, I was inflicting more damage on myself because of the fear and situation."

LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to experience violence, suicide, drug abuse, depression and mental health issues, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) LGBT Youth webpage.

Individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to be victims of assault by their peers, according to the CDC webpage.

34% of LGBTQ+ students are bullied on school property, 28% are electronically harassed and 10% have been physically injured because of their sexuality, according to a 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey by the CDC.

SJSU offers programs to students on

campus who feel unsafe talking about their sexualities.

The university also offers a space for LGBTQ+ students at the "PRIDE" Student Success Center office located inside the Student Union.

The PRIDE program offers counseling, events and resources to support the university's LGBTQ+ students, according to its website.

"It really depends on their communities, religion and who is around that person," said Bonnie Sugiyama, PRIDE and Gender Equity Centers director. "A few things that can happen is that people can internalize [being rejected] and hate themselves then they try not to be that person anymore, based on how people treat them."

Sugiyama said many LGBTQ+ individuals who visit the center are not necessarily looking for a mentor, but a community of other students.

"They want to be around people their age, they want friends who can understand them," Sugiyama said.

Sugiyama also said many students who've reached out to the PRIDE Center arrived with a timid personality but became extroverted as they mingled and interacted with other peers.

In the past five years more students have begun identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community but many don't visit the PRIDE center because they are still coming to terms with their identities, Sugiyama said.

"I know that not all LGBTQ+ spaces are welcoming of all identities but my goal is to let students know that we have these specific groups that are supported of all identities," Sugiyama said. "I am happy with our center. We have a majority of people who identify in the [bisexual/pansexual] spectrum."

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COLUMN

# Asexuality deserves recognition

## Content creators: all sexual identities should be part of the conversation



**Amani Hamed**  
STAFF WRITER

*Disclosure: words in purple are defined in glossary.*

As an **aromantic asexual**, I feel neither romantic nor sexual attraction to other people.

Now, you may be wondering why you're reading about someone who doesn't experience sexual attraction in an issue about sex. The answer is that exclusion of narratives like mine from conversations surrounding romance, sex, relationships and consent is damaging.



**Someone said, from that silly joke, 'oh, this seals it, I am somewhere on the ace or aro spectrum.' I started sobbing. This kid realized who they were because of some silly joke that I posted.**

**CJ George**  
SJSU junior and behavioral sciences major

In a society that revolves around **heteronormativity** and **allonormativity**, asexual people often feel invisible. We're given the message that romantic and sexual attraction are an intrinsic part of being human and our experiences and feelings aren't just invalid, they're wrong.

Asexual people are infantilized, pathologized and erased. We face obstacles to acceptance not only in heteronormative spaces but even within the queer community.

Luckily, asexual people, or aces, are finding community

online and seeing more representation in media thanks to ace and queer content creators.

Cody Daigle-Orians, now famously known on social media platforms TikTok, YouTube and Twitter as "Ace Dad," didn't discover his own asexuality until he was 42 and married. His husband introduced him to Tumblr and though he had known asexual people in the queer community, he hadn't read much about it and had been identifying as gay.

"It was on Tumblr where I was reading people talk about their experience of asexuality and getting a deeper understanding of what that meant," Daigle-Orians said in Zoom call.

Now, he said his acceptance of his asexuality strengthened his marriage and his other relationships. Daigle-Orians and his husband are **polyamorous** and call their relationships with their other partners a "constellation."

He said everyone's happy and sharing their authentic selves.

As a **homoromantic asexual**, Daigle-Orians enjoys talking about relationships and asexuality on his TikTok account "Ace Dad Advice."

Daigle-Orians said asexuality isn't a liability and compared it to being a feature rather than a bug.

"It's a feature and I have these people in my life who also see it that way and who treat me with love and respect and kindness," he said.

CJ George, San Jose State junior and behavioral sciences major, not only discovered they were asexual and aromantic, they helped their queerplatonic partners discover their own asexuality.

Asexual and aromantic people

are slowly getting more visibility in TV with the help of shows including Bojack Horseman and Steven Universe.

George said in a Zoom call. "I want to be more than friends' has always rubbed me the wrong way. Why is being friends considered less than?"

Daigle-Orians stressed that every relationship requires communication and respect.

"Every relationship is a negotiation, whether you're ace or allo, it's a complex negotiation of your wants, needs

and boundaries," he said. "Asexuality isn't going to stop you from having a relationship that you want. Your asexuality doesn't limit you."

Julie Sondra Decker began reading

that with asexuality as if it means abstinence," Decker said.

Asexual people have been thought of as newcomers, a recent addition to the queer community.

Though asexual people may not face much of the terror visited on our LGBTQ+ siblings, asexual people face harassment, intimidation, erasure, discrimination and "intentional interventions in our lives trying to make us be different," Decker said.

Queerness and belonging in the queer community, Daigle-Orians and Decker agree, shouldn't be defined by oppression.

"It's not like you have a punch card of how much oppression you have to have shown that you have endured before you're allowed to have support," Decker said, "We're not taking from finite resources, we're acknowledging that we're all harmed by heteronormativity."

CJ George said they have connected with fellow asexual Spartans through the LGBTQ+ Discord channel and enjoy

posting about asexuality and aromanticism on social media.

Recently, they posted a joke on social media and someone responded by saying that they felt seen and they now knew they identified strongly with being on the ace or aro spectrum.

"Someone said, from that silly joke, 'oh, this seals it, I am somewhere on the ace or aro spectrum.' I started sobbing," George said. "This kid realized who they were because of some silly joke that I posted."

Cody Daigle-Orians said he sees his social media connection to the asexual community and his position as an ace elder, someone who can give advice and talk about relationships and life experiences, as paying younger asexuals back for being vocal on social media and helping him recognize his own asexuality.

"I see this work as paying back what I was given by young people in the community who knew a lot more than I did and shed light on my understanding of myself," Daigle-Orians said.

Julie Sondra Decker said she enjoys seeing messages from people who realize they're asexual or aromantic after seeing her videos on YouTube or reading her book.

"It's wonderful, because there's so much relief in those comments," Decker said. "Usually, people have struggled for a long time, wondering what's wrong with them."

Asexual people are shrugging off the invisibility that's hindered us in self realization for too long.

In being proud, in making ourselves visible, we are finding community, fighting hetero/allonormativity and claiming our space in conversations about sex, gender, boundaries, consent and relationships.



But, George said the lack of representation of platonic friendships or queerplatonic partnerships is annoying.

"It definitely feels kind of weird, saying 'we're just friends' or 'getting friendzoned,'"

## Glossary of terms related to Queerness

**Asexual:** a person who feels little or no sexual attraction

**Aromantic:** a person who experiences little to no romantic attraction

**Homoromantic:** a person who is romantically attracted to members of the same gender

**Alloromantic:** a person who experiences romantic attraction

**Allosexual:** a person who experiences sexual attraction

**Heteronormativity:** The assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior to all other sexualities; includes the often implicitly held idea that heterosexuality is the norm and that other sexualities are "different" or "abnormal"

**Allonormativity:** the idea that all people are allosexual — that is, that all people experience sexual attraction

**Polyamorous:** people who have the desire for multiple consenting intimate relationships at the same time

ANALYSIS



# Local experts talk: your kinky desires

## People with unconventional sexual desires are plentiful, can benefit from acting on them

By **Madison Fagundes**  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

*Disclosure: words in red are defined in glossary.*

Do you think you're kinky? Does the idea of a little choking or spanking pique your interest? Even a bit of bondage? Maybe your interests go even further, get a little more unconventional. Your intrigue in kinky activities is actually completely normal.

Richard Sprott, California State University, East Bay human development and women's studies lecturer, said kink is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of interests that fall outside or are stigmatized by mainstream culture.

Sprott said that includes **BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism), role playing, sensory play and fetishism.**

"There are some kinks that are unusual and then there are some that are very, very common," Sprott said in a Zoom call. "One of the more common [kinks] is spanking . . . if you talk to a bunch of kinky people, everybody's done spanking at some point. Everybody's done blindfolds at some point, almost everyone."

About 50% of people have partaken in BDSM-related activities at some point in their life, according to a September 2017 Journal of Sexual Medicine study.

In today's society, kinkiness is defined by its taboo nature so why do people continue to develop

these interests and why are they so commonplace?

Sam Hughes, University of California, Santa Cruz social psychology doctoral candidate, said it's nearly impossible to find a universal answer to why kinks exist because for every possible kink, there's "a million" different reasons why someone would want to practice it.

"While there are these kinds of general patterns, it's also the case that kink is so unique and so diverse that the

their kinks through being introduced to them later in life, others can develop kinks as soon as their early childhood, he said.

"Some people can point to early experiences, things, games they played, TVs or books or movies that they saw that really excited them," Sprott said. "Sometimes that's before they're even sexually aware. They just know they had a certain, you know, [feeling and] got very excited by what they saw."

That was the case for Hughes, who said he can remember feeling this type of excitement since he was a child.

who get to fulfill a fantasy for the first time.

"I have a friend in the kink community who likes to say the kink community is a space filled with people who like to make each other's dreams come true," Hughes said. "There's something very beautiful about that, about people getting to experience something that they so deeply want and seeing those kinds of needs be satisfied."

Sprott said while most people practice kink simply because they enjoy it, it can also have many physical and psychological benefits.

have that control or they can ask for things that would be helpful for them in terms of sensory deprivation where they can connect with their partner."

Despite the benefits of practicing kink, it's still widely stigmatized by society and kink community members often face discrimination if their interests are made public.

Kink was listed as a mental illness in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) until 2013.

Sprott said kink community members can face discrimination not just from friends and family but also in professional and legal situations.

"There are people [who] have lost jobs, people have lost custody of children," Sprott said. "People have been [discriminated against] when they've reported a crime, the police have ignored them or the police have said 'you must have wanted that to happen,' or other things like that."

However, visibility of the kink community has improved in recent years and led to more accepting attitudes toward it, Schiffman said.

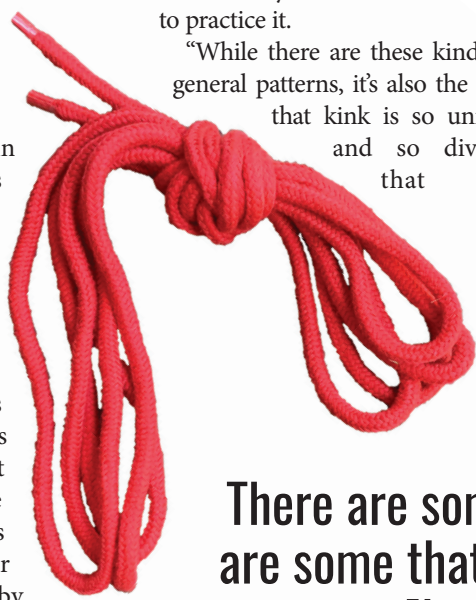
"The huge shift was when [Fifty Shades of Grey] became mainstream that people started talking about kink as fantasy, as realistic, as dominant and submissive, as the idea of pain and pleasure coming out in real life," Schiffman said.

The 2015 romance drama "Fifty Shades of Grey," which is R-Rated, is based on the erotic 2011 novel written by British author E. L. James. The four-novel series became an entire movie franchise.

Hughes stressed that while people should be risk aware and take steps to protect themselves from discrimination or other harm, they shouldn't be ashamed of exploring their interests with like-minded individuals.

He said kinks don't make people "wrong or broken."

"A lot of people are really terrified by some of the fantasies that they have," Hughes said. "Whether it's things that are just sort of on the weird end of the spectrum or things that are sort of deeply personal and very scary, almost like feeling immoral . . . when the reality is that a lot of these fantasies are relatively common."



**There are some kinks that are unusual and then there are some that are very, very common. One of the more common [kinks] is spanking . . . if you talk to a bunch of kinky people, everybody's done spanking at some point. Everybody's done blindfolds at some point, almost everyone.**

**Richard Sprott**

CSU East Bay human development and women's studies lecturer

individual, qualitative stories people have to tell are really important too," said Hughes, who openly identifies as a kink community member, in a Zoom call.

Sprott agreed with Hughes' sentiment, adding there's no blueprint for when people develop their kinks either.

While many people discover

"I have memories from kindergarten and first grade, hanging out with a neighbor friend of mine," Hughes said. "And we would do things like, you know, pretend to be robots together.

And I think that's where some of the earliest inklings that I had some kind of fetish interest, at least in retrospect."

Hughes described himself as a **switch, sadomasochist** and fetishist, specifically with "robot play" and materials including uniforms and wetsuits.

"Some of the fetish plays I do today involves, sort of playing, like being turned into a robot or turning other people into robots and doing a lot of sort of mind control type, role-playing activities," Hughes said. He added that, while he did develop some of his interests during childhood, they didn't become sexual in nature until early puberty and he discovered many of his kinks during early adulthood.

While no one can definitively know why or when kinks develop, it's known that those who willingly practice kink can greatly benefit from it.

Hughes said one of his favorite experiences in the kink community is witnessing the reactions of people

People often use kink as a means of forming closer emotional connections with partners, healing from trauma through "rewriting the script,"

managing chronic pain through creating endorphins and managing mental illnesses including autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or A.D.H.D., Sprott said. Julia Schiffman, associate clinical social worker and author of "Women and Kink: Relationships, Reasons and Stories," said people in relationships with neurodiverse individuals can use kink to connect better with their partners, who might have different needs and sensitivities.

"[For example, some autistic individuals] have sensory sensitivity and in kink, what you can do is there's something called **sensory deprivation**," Schiffman said in a Zoom call. "It's either the person who is autistic can



### GLOSSARY OF KINK-RELATED TERMS

**BDSM:** a range of sexual preferences that relate to enjoyment of physical control, psychological control and/or pain

**Role-playing:** to play a role during sexual activity

**Fetishism:** an object or bodily part that's real or fantasied presence is psychologically necessary for sexual gratification and that is an object of fixation

**Sensory play:** describes a wide variety of activities that use the body's senses as a way to arouse and provide stimulation to a partner

**Switch:** a person involved in BDSM play who may play either a dominant or submissive

**Sadomasochism:** the derivation of sexual gratification from physical pain or humiliation on another person or on oneself

**Sensory deprivation:** a form of sensation often incorporated into BDSM, which involves depriving a person, usually a submissive, of one or more of their senses, such as sight and hearing



ANALYSIS

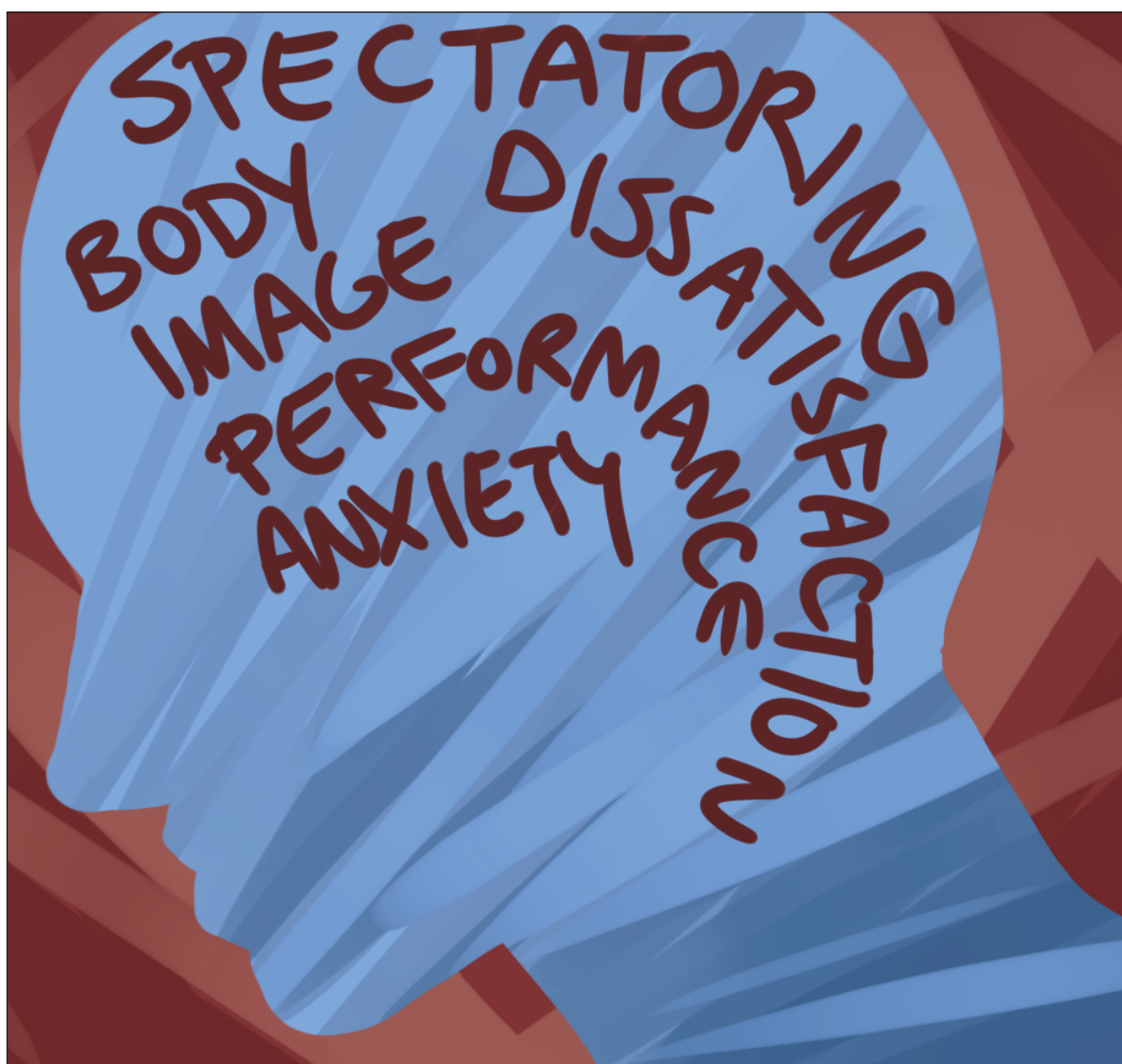


ILLUSTRATION BY DAISHA SHERMAN

# Body image affects sexual gratification

By Christine Stevens  
STAFF WRITER

How you feel about your body when you look in the mirror plays a major role in having pleasurable sex.

Poor body image is associated with low libido and low sexual satisfaction, whereas positive body image has been linked to a higher sex drive and positive sexual satisfaction.

Libido is instinctual psychic energy that is derived from primitive biological urges and is expressed in conscious activity, according to Merriam-Webster.

Amanda Walters, a licensed psychologist and sex therapist based in San Jose, said body image influences sex and how someone feels about having it.

“If you feel really amazing about your body, it helps you feel more enthusiastic about sex. It helps you feel more okay about giving and receiving pleasure,” Walters said in a Zoom call. “On the flip side, if you struggle with aspects of your body image, it can make it more challenging to allow yourself to enjoy sex.”

If someone has poor body image, it can distract them during sex because they’re thinking about their insecurities instead of focusing on what they’re doing, according to a Sept. 14 Psychology Today article.

Walters said having negative thoughts about your body during sex can trigger a biological stress response.

“If you’re caught in your head thinking self-critical thoughts, it can trigger the stress response in your body,” she said. “That stress response reduces your ability to experience pleasure, especially sexual pleasure.”

Extreme self consciousness can lead someone to experience to “spectatoring,” where they judge or monitor themselves during sex as if they were another person observing from the outside, Walters said.

“And people who have less positive body images tend to engage more in spectatoring and it reduces [their] ability to enjoy the sexual experience because [they’re] not really present,” she said.

Spectatoring can happen to both women and men but women experience it the most, according to the same Psychology Today article.

Body image issues are a problem that affects mostly women. 90% of women and 20-40% of men report body dissatisfaction, according to the same Psychology Today article.

There are two kinds of body image issues that influence a woman sexually: what she thinks of herself and what she believes her partner thinks of her body.

If a woman has poor body image, she will have a low libido and it will affect her sexual satisfaction. Likewise, if she thinks her partner finds her unattractive, that will also lead to low sexual satisfaction, according to a Dec. 20, 2018 Psychology Today article.

The media promotes unrealistic body standards for women that make it almost impossible for them to be considered “beautiful” or “sexy” in the eyes of society. Women are often sexualized and judged for their appearance and if they don’t look a certain way, they are shamed for it.

Body insecurities have less influence on sexual satisfaction in lesbian women

compared to heterosexual and bisexual women, according to a May 9, 2019 study by the department of psychology at University of Jaén in Andalusia, Spain.

That’s because heterosexual and bisexual women feel more pressure to fit the beauty standards defined by the “male gaze,” causing them to be more susceptible to sexual dissatisfaction and insecurity when they can’t meet those impossible ideals, according to the same study.

The male gaze is the idea that women are sexual objects who solely exist for the pleasure of men, according to a Sept. 11 Verywell Mind article. By removing themselves from the male gaze, women are more confident in their bodies and this helps them to have a better sexual experience.

Verywell Mind focuses on mental health topics and provides answers to wellness questions, according to its website.

Men can also have poor body image but it’s more common for women and doesn’t affect men as much during sex. Women report higher levels of appearance-based distraction during sexual activity than men, according to a Nov. 24, 2009 study by the department of psychology at the University of Texas, Austin.

However, men are more likely to experience performance anxiety during sex, according to the Sept. 14 Psychology Today article.

Performance anxiety is stress about sex, particularly the ability to perform well during sex, according to a February 2020 WebMD article.

Walters said in her experience, while

women aren’t the only ones who struggle with body image and stress during sex, they’re most affected by it and focus on it more.

Aspects of body image that predict sexual satisfaction for women include weight, physical condition, sexual attractiveness and thoughts about the body during sex, according to the same study by the department of psychology at UT Austin.

Women aged 14 to 74 years reported body image satisfaction was associated with greater comfort with one’s body during sexual activity, higher frequency of sexual behavior, increased initiation of sexual activity by the women and increased orgasm frequency, according to a Dec. 28, 2000 study by licensed psychologist Dr. Diann M. Ackard, who specializes in eating and body image disorders.

There are ways to combat negative body image when it comes to sex.

Becoming a “critical thinker” when using social media and not comparing yourself to others, as hard as that may be, can prevent body image issues, according to the Sept. 14 Psychology Today article. Being kind to yourself and surrounding yourself with positive people who don’t constantly discuss their bodies can help as well.

“I think mindfulness is one of the most useful tools with sex in general really, like when we’re talking about sexual issues,” Walters said.

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# Abortion providers discuss their work, Texas ban

By Amani Hamed  
STAFF WRITER

Illustration by Hanz Pacheco

As state legislators continue to pen bills that restrict abortion access and penalize those who perform abortions, clinical and at-home abortion providers renew their fight for the right to provide and receive an abortion and the people most affected by such laws.

Dr. Raegan McDonald is the CEO of Power to Decide, an organization that empowers people with access to contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancy and information and sexual health resources, according to its website. McDonald is also an obstetric and gynecologic physician who's provided pregnancy and abortion care for nearly 20 years.

McDonald said the consequences of delaying or being denied an abortion can affect the life trajectory of those unable to obtain abortions and children from unwanted pregnancies.

"People who are unable to get the abortion care that they need are much more likely to live under the Federal Poverty Level compared to people who were able to get abortions that they wanted. Those people are more likely to continue to be in abusive relationships and to report anxiety and lower self esteem again, compared to people who were able to get abortions that they wanted," McDonald said in a Zoom call. "The consequences also extend to the children of that unwanted pregnancy as well as for the existing children of the family."

She said restrictive abortion laws including Texas State Bill 8 (SB8) can have grim consequences.

Texas enacted SB8, also known as the Texas Heartbeat Act, on Sept. 1. The bill, signed into law by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott in May, restricts abortions after fetal cardiac activity is detected, usually at six weeks, and allows any citizen to sue a person who performs or induces an abortion or aids and abets the performance of an abortion for a minimum of \$10,000 plus legal fees.

Though the bill doesn't criminalize performing or receiving an abortion after six weeks, it opens doctors and abortion care providers to lawsuits that can be brought against them by anyone except patients for whom they provided a consented abortion or anyone who impregnated someone receiving an abortion through rape or incest, according to the abortion law.

People who don't reside in the state of Texas can sue an abortion provider or anyone who aided or abetted an abortion provider.

"The impact of the law on people's short and long term wellbeing is nothing short of catastrophic," McDonald said.

## Restriction consequences

She said she saw these catastrophic results firsthand as she witnessed the death of a woman who was unable to access a safe abortion when she traveled as a college student in El Salvador, which has restrictive abortion laws.

"I saw a woman who died from lack of access to safe abortion services, which impacted me greatly, obviously, and put me on this pathway to dedicate my life to ensuring that people have access to services and care," McDonald said.

The U.S. Department of Justice announced it had filed a

lawsuit to prevent the state of Texas from enacting SB8, according to a Sept. 9 statement on the department's website.

The bill shifts law enforcement from the executive branch to citizens who serve as "bounty hunters," who get \$10,000 for reporting those who aid "a woman's exercise of her own constitutional right," the Justice Department said in the statement.

The department's complaint alleged the new law allowed Texas to effectively outlaw abortion while evading responsibility for violating the constitution.

SB8 makes no exceptions for cases in which a person was impregnated through rape or incest and only allows for abortions after six weeks if the health of a pregnant person is in jeopardy.

Legislators crossed out the word fetus in SB8 and replaced it

with the phrase "unborn child" and also required that a sonogram, photographic imaging that shows the fetus, and description of the fetus's cardiac activity, size, health and presence of limbs must be provided to the patient prior to a procedure being performed.

## Procedure safety

McDonald said abortion as an outpatient procedure is not high risk as nearly 40% of abortion recipients in the U.S. have opted for a medically induced abortion rather than an abortion procedure in the last year.

But the abortion procedure remains "about as safe as a colonoscopy," according to a Oct. 9 article by The ACLU Texas.

"Abortion is extremely safe, it has one of the lowest complication rates of all outpatient procedures but it's simply unjust to put unnecessary roadblocks and barriers in between people, their families and carers," McDonald said.

She also said at the six-week mark, at which cardiac activity is normally detected, most people don't know they're pregnant.

"It's important to note that many people don't even know that they're pregnant, you know, by the time six weeks passes, right, like we sort of count and track pregnancies by your last menstrual period," McDonald said.

## The underground

An at-home abortion provider, who preferred to go by the alias Kaya for privacy concerns because her work has been criminalized, said the ability of ordinary citizens to civilly prosecute abortion providers is the SB8's most disturbing aspect.

"It creates this sort of atmosphere of vigilante finger-pointing," she said in a Zoom call. "It's just like the witch hunts in Europe."

Kaya's part of a California network of underground abortion providers.

Her colleagues and their clients operate in a "triangle of trust" in which she said is threatened when fear of prosecution enters into conversations about guiding someone through an abortion.

"People are reassessing themselves and people are taking

risks and others are scared," Kaya said. "I mean, we're all scared, I should say."

Kaya said because SB8 doesn't criminalize or control traveling out of state to provide or receive an abortion, those with the means and ability to travel will be able to receive an abortion while those with disabilities, living below the poverty line, lack resources or support because of language barriers or experience isolation from domestic abuse will face challenges.

"Let's be really, really, really clear: rich folks in Texas will always have access to abortion," Kaya said. "They'll hop on a plane and come to California, they'll hop on a plane and go to wherever. It's people living in poverty that are going to be affected and we're going to see them die at higher rates."



Everything that we do in this world, whether it's fighting to take down the wall, whether it's fighting for immigrant rights, whether it's tearing down our prison industrial complex, whatever it is, that all ties to abortion. When you ask me 'Why do I do this work?' I do this work because we as humans deserve to be witnessed. We deserve to heal and to have the ugliest parts of ourselves crack open.

Kaya

at-home abortion provider

She said in addition to being concerned about how restricted abortion access will affect Black, brown, non-English speaking, immigrant and underage people, she worries about gender-diverse individuals who already face discrimination in the healthcare system.

"[Transgender] people do not have access to healthy or to good care because most of our providers haven't been educated in how to care for a masculine-presenting person who has a uterus," Kaya said. "They won't even get their pronouns right, let alone give them competent care."

## "Pro-life" vs. "Pro-choice" rhetoric

Much of the rhetoric surrounding abortion is presented in a way that is divorced from medical terminology. Instead, McDonald said, it frames abortion not as a medical procedure but as one side in opposing "pro-life" or "pro-choice" ideologies.

Framing abortion in this way is problematic because it doesn't acknowledge the complexities surrounding abortion in people's lives, McDonald said.

"There aren't women who have abortions and women who have babies but people that might need different types of care throughout their reproductive life," she said.

In addition to creating a false dichotomy, which turns abortion from a medical procedure into a moral dilemma,

the "pro-life" and "pro-choice" narratives surrounding the abortion debate create a framework of who deserves an abortion, McDonald said.

"We shouldn't stigmatize one aspect of that care or have a hierarchy of pregnancies, of good pregnancies and bad pregnancies or good choices or bad choices," McDonald said. "This is the life course of people capable of reproduction."

She said the pro-life rhetoric surrounding restrictive legislation such as SB8 doesn't take into account that preventing abortion contributes to high maternal mortality.

Texas' maternal mortality rate is higher than the national average with 18.5 deaths per 100,000 births, according to a May 2021 article by The Guardian.

"It's not about promoting life or improving people's life or health at all," McDonald said.

She said rather than speculate on why Texas legislators continue to restrict abortion, she preferred to focus on the clear detrimental outcomes to undercutting public health by restricting abortion and denying proper care to parents and infants.

"We need to invest in support and comprehensive reproductive health care including safe legal abortion, which the data clearly shows is associated with better maternal and infant health outcomes," McDonald said.

Texas' racial disparity in maternal mortality is also extreme as Black women in Texas are more likely to die from complications related to childbirth than any other race and account for 11% of live births but 31% of maternal deaths, according to a September 2020 state report.

## Decolonizing birth and abortion

Kaya said she wants to see more emphasis placed on decolonizing of abortion practices with more power and agency being placed in the hands of Black and brown gynecologists, midwives and abortion care providers.

She said moving midwifery and abortion care back into the home environment and divorcing this care from corporate medical establishments would empower those providing and seeking abortions.

She noted that modern obstetrics and gynecology are rooted in the research and teachings of J. Marion Sims, who performed experiments on enslaved women without the use of anesthesia. Prior to J. Marion Sims and the reformation of healthcare as an industry, midwives and healers prevented pregnancy implantation and performed abortion in addition to assisting with births.

"I want to see more Black and brown people succeed in that career because they are shifting this narrative," Kaya said. "They're pushing the boundaries of what medicine looks like in the U.S."

Kaya said as a person of mixed Indigenous and European heritage herself, she performs at-home abortions as part of her

connection with her lineage and seeks to bring back the long-held traditions that were stripped from Black and Indigenous midwives when obstetrics and gynecology became heavily regulated and commercialized.

She said funding smaller collectives of birth workers and abortion providers can address many of the systemic issues in the abortion care system.

Kaya said while Planned Parenthood has access to more funding, smaller collectives need financial assistance to reach marginalized individuals and people living in rural areas.

"Fund the people who are looking at things intersectionally or holistically because they're the ones who are going to have a bigger picture of how to fix this," Kaya said. "Because they're the ones who are living it."

McDonald also stressed the importance of voting to keep abortion accessible.

"We need to make sure that we're voting for lawmakers who are aligned with providing high quality care to people regardless of their decisions and choices with their pregnancies," McDonald said. "We need to encourage, at the federal level, Congress to pass laws like the Women's Health Protection Act that would prevent states like Texas from enacting these undue restrictions for unnecessary restrictions to for abortion care."

## The future

Though they perform abortions and care for patients in different systems, both Kaya and McDonald said they look forward to a day when providing and receiving abortions is safe, easily accessible and entirely legal.

"I dream of a day when we can really center the experiences of people where people don't feel shame and stigma and that when they feel fully supported in their decisions," McDonald said.

Kaya emphasized the U.S. needs to be completely changed systemically for that to happen.

She said the denial of people's agency over their bodies is directly connected to capitalism, the colonization of people's land and the destruction of lives and livelihoods.

"My prayer is that we all are able to do that in ways that are responsible and are less focused on white supremacy and making money and more focused on having healthy lives and helping healthy ecosystems. Our bodies are microcosms of what's happening on a global level," Kaya said.

She said though it has risks, she's invested in the work she does because it's connected to her values.

"Everything that we do in this world, whether it's fighting to take down the wall, whether it's fighting for immigrant rights, whether it's tearing down our prison industrial complex, whatever it is, that all ties to abortion," Kaya said. "When you ask me 'Why do I do this work?' I do this work because we as humans deserve to be witnessed. We deserve to heal and to have the ugliest parts of ourselves crack open."

Bryanna Bartlett contributed to this article.

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COVID-19

# Sexual health testing decreases amid pandemic

By Evan Reinhardt  
STAFF WRITER

Local and national health experts say the coronavirus pandemic has limited the ability to test and treat sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Annual STI cases have risen each year since 2013 and the issue has been exacerbated as resources have been reallocated for COVID-19 testing and treatment, according to an April Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) statement.

Sarah Rudman, Santa Clara County assistant public health officer, said the county reflects the national trend.

“We have seen the same pattern that the state and country have been reporting of year over year, pretty scary rises in rates of all reportable STIs culminating in 2019 having the highest reported rates that we think we’ve ever seen, at least in the last 20 years,” she said in a Google Teams call.

But, Rudman said reported cases dropped by 50% in 2020, breaking the trend.

“That’s not actually good news that rates are going down,” she said. “[It’s] really bad news that people didn’t get tested last year during the height of the pandemic.”

Whether the declines in reported cases are primarily because of decreases in transmission or decreased or delayed diagnosis and reporting remains to be seen throughout the coming years, according to a county health department report titled “Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV Epidemiology Annual Report, 2019 and 2020.”

The Santa Clara County Public Health Department decreased and changed some of its health services during the beginning of the pandemic including shifting staff to COVID-19 care and redirecting supplies like cotton swabs, specific chemicals and machinery to testing sites, Rudman said.

“We were able to reopen pretty quickly once we understood how to do it safely for our staff and our clients,” she said. “We’re still not quite up to pre-pandemic levels, just while we try to make sure that there’s still space in the clinic for social distancing, good safety practices within the clinic . . . because some of our staff have been redirected to COVID-19 response.”

## National trend of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)

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2.5 million reported cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis, the three most commonly reported STDs in 2019

Individuals 15–24 years old make up:

- 61% of chlamydia cases
- 42% of gonorrhea cases



INFOGRAPHIC BY BRYANNA BARTLETT; SOURCE: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

The largest demographic contracting STIs are college-aged people, according to the CDC statement.

Dianna Zamora-Marroquin, director of public affairs for Planned Parenthood Mar Monte, said college students are more likely to become infected for multiple reasons. Planned Parenthood Mar Monte is about 10 minutes southeast of SJSU’s main campus.

“It’s a unique environment where there’s a lot of communal living spaces,” Zamora-Marroquin said. “There’s also oftentimes a lack of education around how certain STIs are transmitted and what can be done to either prevent them or where [people] can go to access that healthcare.”

Emily Rosenfield, wellness and health coordinator at SJSU, said the Student Wellness Center is dedicated to supporting students that fall into the age range of those most at risk: 15-24 years old.

“A major challenge is that STIs often don’t cause any symptoms, so it’s possible to share an STI with a partner without knowing,” Rosenfield stated in an email. “This is why it’s especially important for everyone who is sexually active to talk with their healthcare provider about STI testing.”

She said university’s sexual health resources have been available throughout the pandemic.

“COVID-19 has not affected the Student Wellness Center’s resources to test and treat STIs,” she stated. “The Student Wellness Center is open and available to meet students’ sexual health needs in a variety of ways, including in person and telehealth appointments and STI testing through our onsite lab.”

Thousands of condoms have been distributed through the university’s Condom Co-Op program while free safer sex kits can be picked up or delivered through the Student Wellness Center, Rosenfield stated.

Aside from college students, the spread of STIs also disproportionately affects Hispanic and Black individuals and gay and bisexual men, according to the CDC statement.

Rates of STIs in Hispanic individuals are two times that of non-Hispanic white people, while rates for Black individuals are five-to-eight times that of non-Hispanic white people, according to the CDC report.

Gay and bisexual men account for half of all 2019 syphilis cases and experience gonorrhea rates 42 times that of heterosexual males, according to the same report.

Jo Valentine, associate director of the Office of Health Equity in the CDC’s Division of STD Prevention, said the CDC is focused on treating the hardest-hit populations.

“To effectively reduce these disparities,

the social, cultural and economic conditions that make it more difficult for some populations to stay healthy must be addressed,” Valentine stated in the CDC report. “These include poverty, unstable housing, drug use, lack of medical insurance or regular medical providers and high burden of STDs in some communities.”

While the pandemic has emphasized inequities in healthcare, it also exposed certain tools that will benefit healthcare going forward including the use of telehealth, Zamora-Marroquin said.

“In more rural areas, there was a spike in farm workers [using telehealth] because they were able to take phone calls from the field if they had a 10 minute break and could talk to their doctor,” she said.

The pandemic has forced healthcare providers to reach patients’ demands, Zamora-Marroquin said, encouraging ingenuity in medical care.

“[The pandemic] has empowered us to understand that ‘no’ isn’t an acceptable answer,” she said. “The answer is no longer ‘no’ if we need something. The answer is: ‘What is a creative way to make this happen?’”

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## ABOUT

The Spartan Daily serves as San Jose State’s top news source and was named the best student newspaper in the state. New issues are published Tuesday through Thursday during the academic year with the website updated daily.

The Spartan Daily is written and published by San Jose State students as an expression of their First Amendment rights.

Reader feedback may be submitted as letters to the editor or online comments.

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### EDITORIAL POLICY

Columns are the opinion of individual writers and not that of the Spartan Daily. Editorials reflect the majority opinion of the Editorial Board, which is made up of student editors.

## RESOURCES

**Options for Sexual Health:** This online resource offers sexual and reproductive healthcare, information and education from a feminist, pro-choice, sex positive perspective.

<https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/>

### Planned Parenthood Federation of America:

Planned Parenthood helps people better understand their sexual health by providing up-to-date, clear and medically accurate information.

[www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

## HELPLINES

**Love is Respect:** Visit [www.loveisrespect.org/](http://www.loveisrespect.org/), text “LOVEIS” to 22522 or call 1-866-331-9474 to talk with a peer advocate to prevent or end an abusive relationship.

**Get Tested:** Visit <https://gettested.cdc.gov/> or call 1-800-CDC-INFO to locate local clinics that provide free low-cost, confidential STD services.

### National Sexual Assault Hotline:

Visit <https://rainn.org/> to chat or call 800-656-HOPE (4673) to get connected with a trained staff member from a sexual assault service provider in your area.

### Planned Parenthood Chatline:

Visit [www.plannedparenthood.org/teens](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/teens) to use its instant chatline.

**Trevor Project:** Visit [www.thetrevorproject.org/](http://www.thetrevorproject.org/), or text or call 866-488-7386 to receive crisis intervention and suicide prevention services for LGBTQ+ individuals.