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"Who's to Blame?" Constructing the Responsible Sexual Agent in Neoliberal Sex Education

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Abstract Based on ethnographic observations in two high schools, this paper analyzes how sex educators deploy the neoliberal discourse of personal responsibility in their comprehensive and abstinence-only lessons. I focus not just on the explicit and intended messages of personal responsibility but also the hidden and evaded lessons that are imparted in the classroom. The findings demonstrate that sex educators rely on and reproduce gender, race, class, and sexual inequalities in their lessons in personal responsibility that put forth a version of the good sexual citizen as self-sufficient, self-regulating, and consequence-bearing, what I call the responsible sexual agent. Yet, in their hidden and evaded lessons, sex educators also underscore the extent to which people's lives are intertwined with and reliant on others, suggesting the discourse of personal responsibility is inadequate for capturing the complexities and realities of people's intimate lives. The findings point to the importance of examining the translation and negotiation of neoliberal sex education policy at the classroom level.

Keywords Sex education · Sexuality · Gender · Race · Personal responsibility · Neoliberalism

Introduction

In the mid-1990s, the Clinton administration wrote abstinence-only sex education into policy under the aegis of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), also known as welfare reform. The new legislation emphasized the perils of non-marital sex and defined abstinence sex education as any program that teaches "that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity, …that sexual activity outside the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects, and …the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity" (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act 1996, p. 2354). The bill defining and appropriating money for abstinence-only sex education was part of a sweeping neoliberal reform that initiated stringent work requirements and time limits for welfare receipt (Hancock 2004; Hays 2003; Levine 2013; Mink 1998) and coincided with a time of accelerated economic deindustrialization, a rapid rise in low-paying service sector jobs, deregulation of banking and other industries, and increasing levels of economic inequality (Duggan 2003). The language of the legislation within this economic and political context supported the idea that Americans are personally responsible for their well-being and codified the notion that sexual behavior is a key way people can secure the American dream (e.g., through abstinence) or ruin their life chances (e.g., through sex before "attaining self-sufficiency") (Elliott 2012; Fields and Hirschman 2007).

Based on ethnographic research conducted in the mid-2000s in four sex education programs in a state that embraced PRWORA funding, this paper examines how sex educators conveyed a key component of neoliberal governance, personal responsibility, and what these lessons said about gender, race, class, relationships and sexuality, and responsibility itself. Sex education policy, like PRWORA, is tied to larger governmental attempts to regulate populations (Foucault 1977, 1979), attempts that are infused with racialized, classed, gendered, and sexualized meanings and inequalities (Fields 2008; Garcia 2009; Heath 2012; Irvine 2002; Luker 2006; Nathanson 1991) Yet, schools and educators do not seamlessly incorporate policy and curricula: from the state level to the school district to any given school's policies to the classroom

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dynamics, there are multiple occasions for the negotiation of official policy and curricula (Fields 2008; Garcia 2009; Gilbert 2010). The findings presented here point to the importance of examining the translation and negotiation of policy and curricula at the classroom level. I first review the literature on neoliberalism and sexuality education and then discuss the project's data and methods before turning to the findings.

Neoliberalism and Sexuality

Neoliberal economic and social policies have circulated in the USA and been implemented in laws, like PRWORA, and institutions, like the education system, over the past several decades (Duggan 2003; Ferguson 2012; Melamed 2011). With roots in post–World War II challenges to the New Deal, neoliberalism is at one and the same time a mode of governing, a cultural project, and an economic strategy. Neoliberalism as a political economic project advocates minimal government economic regulation, privatizing state resources, and distributing social services through the market. As a mode of governmentality, neoliberalism emphasizes individual choice and autonomy (Brenton and Elliott 2014; Duggan 2003), stressing the importance of self-regulation (Foucault 1977, 1979) and enacting harsh punitive measures for "bad" choices (e.g., mandatory sentencing laws and zero tolerance policies in schools) (Ferguson 2001; Foucault 1980; Rios 2011). Scholars point to several intertwined consequences of neoliberal logic and policies: Growing income inequality as wealth is redistributed upward (Bernstein and Jakobsen 2012/2013; Duggan 2003), a shift from the welfare state to the carceral state, as evidenced by declining welfare rolls and rising incarceration rates (Levine 2013; Jones 2010; Rios 2011), and an overarching emphasis on individual responsibility and self-reliance coupled with a twenty-first century multiculturalism that superficially valorizes diversity while depoliticizing difference and "curtailing social redistribution to underrepresented folks" (Ferguson 2012, p. 192; see also Ahmed 2012; Grzanka and Maher 2012; Melamed 2011).

Gender, race, and sexuality, far from incidental or tangential, are key components of the classed politics of neoliberalism. Neoliberal policy (such as PRWORA) puts forth a vision of the unfettered individual who is not disadvantaged by gender, race, class, or sexual hierarchies, even as it redistributes wealth upward, lauds and promotes the "married, nuclear, and implicitly white family" (Heath 2013, p. 566), and using coded language, demonizes some as undeserving (e.g., Reagan's Cadillac-driving welfare queen) (Bridges 2011; Brooks 2012/2013; Hancock 2004). Moreover, what Ferguson (2012, p. 223) terms "performative stipulations" are attached to neoliberal inclusion. That is, only certain types of raced, classed, gendered, and sexualized subjects are granted legitimacy in neoliberalism's twenty-first century multiculturalism (Duggan 2003; Ferguson 2012; Heath 2013; Melamed 2011). Multicultural representatives are required to perform "good" neoliberal citizenship—to be self-managing, self-responsible, and desiring of self-advancement (Moore 2012/2013)—and to conform to, rather than challenge, existing institutional arrangements (Ahmed 2012). Their inclusion supports the notion that society is open and equal, as long as individuals are willing to work hard and take responsibility. As the language of PRWORA underscores, the sexuality of good neoliberal subjects is adult, private, monogamous, married, and fiscally responsible. Such performative stipulations have, in turn, shaped discourse and activism around sexuality, including gay rights (Duggan 2003; Ferguson 2012; Whitehead 2012) and sex education (Elliott 2012; Fields 2004, 2008; Irvine 2002).

Sex Education Since the 1970s

Since its implementation in public schools in the 1960s and 1970s, sex education has been a controversial and contested site (Fields 2008; Irvine 2002; Luker 2006). Fears of an "epidemic" of teenage pregnancies, especially among African American girls, led to a growing belief in the 1970s that young people should have access to contraception and be taught how to use it (Luker 1996). This type of sex education came to be known as comprehensive. Largely owing to the decentralization of education at the time, sex education was not uniformly implemented nationwide (Kendall 2008); however, those programs that did exist in the 1970s and early 1980s were primarily comprehensive-based (Irvine 2002).

Sex education soon emerged as central to the culture wars between conservatives and liberals (Irvine 2002; Lesko 2010). Conservative groups initially resisted all forms of school-based sex education, but as concern about HIV/AIDS grew in the late 1980s, these groups moved from opposing sex education to drafting abstinence-only curricula (Irvine 2002; Kendall 2008). These curricula gained substantial federal funding with the passage of PRWORA in 1996, and for a time, abstinence-only sex education looked likely to supplant comprehensive sex education in many school districts nationwide (National Public Radio, Kaiser, and Kennedy 2004). Under the Bush administration, Congress increased federal funding for abstinence-only sexuality education through a federal earmark called Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE). Between 2001 and 2009, CBAE provided direct funding (rather than funding administered through state governments) to public and private organizations to create stringent abstinence-only curricula.

Mounting evidence of the ineffectiveness of abstinence-only programs by the mid-2000s led many states to opt out of federal PRWORA funding. By the late 2000s, half of all states in the nation had opted *not* to receive PRWORA funding for

abstinence-only sex education (Boonstra 2009; Trenholm et al. 2008). In the 2010 and 2011 budgets, the Obama administration eliminated funding for two-thirds of existing abstinence-only programs (e.g., PRWORA and CBAE) and in 2010, created the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) as part of the Affordable Care Act (i.e., healthcare reform). PREP funds the creation of "comprehensive sexual education" at the local and community levels. Forty-three states and the District of Columbia applied for 2010 PREP funding. Following the neoliberal trend, as the name indicates, PREP emphasizes personal responsibility, and despite using the language of comprehensive sex education, it does not leave abstinence by the wayside. In fact, the word "abstinence" and the phrase "delaying sexual activity" precede discussion of contraception in the legislation's mandate for funding, as illustrated below. PREP states that it will fund

> programs designed to educate adolescents on both abstinence and contraception for the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. The State program component must fund teen pregnancy prevention and personal responsibility education programs that have been proven on the basis of rigorous scientific research to change behavior, which means delaying sexual activity, increasing condom or contraceptive use for sexually active youth, or reducing pregnancy among youth (Personal Responsibility Education Program 2010).

As the language of PREP suggests, the distinction between comprehensive and abstinence-only sex education is perhaps not as clear as it once seemed (although admittedly, a clear-cut distinction may have always been somewhat of a mirage (Connell and Elliott 2009; Elliott 2012; Fields 2005, 2008, 2012; Fine and McClelland 2006; Gilbert 2010; Irvine 2002; Lesko 2010)). But what *is* clear is that the neoliberal language of personal responsibility is firmly ensconced in the US sex education. Yet, we know very little about how the discourse of personal responsibility plays out in the classroom, where official curricula are interpreted, negotiated, and potentially challenged (Fields 2008; Garcia 2009; Gilbert 2010). Melamed (2011, p. 46) observes that "power is everywhere contradictory, necessarily producing the conditions of its own undoing, with alternatives constantly being produced out of the same conditions that produce dominant arrangements of power" (see Foucault 1979, 1980). Attempts to get students to abstain from sex, for example, comingle with discourses that burnish forbidden or dangerous sex as highly pleasurable, acting as prohibition *and* enticement (Elliott and Umberson 2008; Elliott 2012; Foucault 1979). Analyzing classroom interactions can thus bring insight into how individuals and groups maintain, manipulate, and potentially contest dominant discourses and power relations, with what consequences.

Schools and Sexual Citizenship

"Youth are citizens-in-the-making" (Fields and Hirschman 2007, p. 8). The institution of education is a key site in the production of neoliberal citizens (Melamed 2011) and has itself been radically reshaped by neoliberal policies and ideology over the past several decades (e.g., high-stakes testing, school accountability, and vouchers and school choice) (Duggan 2003; Ferguson 2012; Ringrose 2007). As critical education scholars observe, schooling involves more than filling students' heads with factual knowledge; education also serves as a crucial site for creating and reproducing social inequality. In this view, elites reinforce and reproduce the status quo through the institution of education by imposing their beliefs, standards, and cultural dispositions as superior and universally desirable; this is the "hidden curriculum" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Fields 2008). Students who do not meet objective and subjective measures of worthiness face unfavorable labeling, tracking, and hyper-surveillance (Ferguson 2001; Garcia 2009; Jones 2010; Rios 2011). Examining sexuality education—from public policy and debate to classroom practices—through the frame of citizenship thus involves examining what neoliberal lessons say about the kind of sexuality that is worthy of recognition and resources, and what kind is not (Fields and Hirschman 2007).

In this paper, I analyze how sex educators deploy the discourse of personal responsibility in their comprehensive and abstinence-only lessons. I focus not just on the explicit and intended messages of personal responsibility but also the hidden and evaded lessons that are imparted in the classroom (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Fields 2008). That is, I look not just at the curriculum and what sex educators say to their students about personal responsibility but also what they do and how they act in the classroom (sites of hidden lessons) *and* what they neglect to do and say (their evaded lessons). "What is absent in a classroom is often as significant as what is present," according to Fields (2008, p. 73). Thus paying attention to what lessons are not offered and how teachers sidestep issues of concern to students (Fields 2008; Fields and Hirschman 2007; Garcia 2009) is crucial for understanding classroom dynamics and the agency of school actors.

The findings of this study demonstrate that sex educators' spoken and unspoken lessons in personal responsibility put forth a limited version of the good sexual citizen, what I call the responsible sexual agent, which is based on and reproduces social inequalities. The responsible sexual agent is self-sufficient, self-regulating, and consequence-bearing. Yet, in their hidden and evaded lessons and classroom interactions, sex educators underscore the extent to which people's lives are intertwined with and reliant on others, revealing how impoverished and inadequate the discourse of personal

responsibility is for capturing the complexities and realities of people's intimate lives. This paper contributes to the body of research that implicates sex education in the reproduction of inequality (e.g., Burns and Torre 2004; Fields 2008; Fine and McClelland 2006; Garcia 2009; Pascoe 2007) and also demonstrates that this process is not seamless or unitary but rather riddled with contradictions, an observation scholars have made regarding neoliberalism as a whole (Cheng 2012/2013; Duggan 2003; Ferguson 2012; Grzanka and Maher 2012; Heath 2012, 2013; Melamed 2011).

Data and Methods

The data for this paper come from ethnographic research I conducted in 2006 in two high schools, Eastside High and Taylor High. Ethnographies involve "observing and/or participating in the lives of others…in order to understand their perceptions, feelings, and behavior more fully and intimately" (Lofland et al. 2006, p. 3). To protect the confidentiality of the schools, sex educators, and students I observed, all names in this paper are pseudonyms. Both schools are located in a liberal-leaning school district in a conservative state. In this state, as in many, sex education is offered in a high school health class that students are required to take before graduation. Eastside High School was located in a dense, predominantly black and Latino, urban area. In contrast to Eastside's urban setting, Taylor High School, a relatively new building, sat in the center of a large field and served a rapidly expanding immigrant-destination suburb. Both schools had a high proportion of Latino and black students (75 % or higher), and well over half the student body at each school was classified as economically disadvantaged.

At the time of my fieldwork, the school district in which these two schools are located used a health curriculum that included a unit called "Making Healthy Choices." This unit listed a range of topics health teachers might cover, such as tobacco use, eating and exercise, and hygiene. Health teachers, in collaboration with their principals and other school stakeholders, had some leeway about what topics they would cover and how during this unit. In particular, schools often differed dramatically in terms of what sexual health information they chose to impart. Thus, despite being in the same school district, Taylor and Eastside had different sex education curricula, although both included information about contraception, which may not have been the norm in the district. My initial contact in the school district was through a middle-school health teacher approaching retirement whom I met through personal connections and who expressed concern about the changes to the sex education curriculum in the state, particularly the emphasis on teaching youth to abstain from sexual activity until marriage. This health teacher became a key informant and put me in touch with the health teachers at Taylor and Eastside. Thus, I was granted access to these schools because of this personal connection and the assumption that I was an ally in these teachers' efforts to offer contraceptive information to their students.

Ms. Fox (late 40s, white), the health teacher at Taylor High, spent 2 weeks with her 9th to 12th grade students on the topic of sexual health, covering things like abstinence, contraception, and healthy relationships. I sat in on two of Ms. Fox's classes a day for the full 2-week session. I also attended Ms. Fox's 2-day-long STD presentation to all Taylor ninth graders. This presentation was held in the school's auditorium and was unique to Taylor High. In addition to her classes, Ms. Fox traveled around the state, training health teachers in sex education. She was known for her dynamic teaching style and her comprehensive lessons. Although her principal supported her efforts to teach students about a range of sexual topics, she expressed frustration about the larger, contested state of sex education telling me, "The [school] district wants nurses, teachers, counselors, et cetera to tell these kids [with questions about sex] 'Go home and ask a parent.' I say, don't do that! That's the worst thing you can tell these kids. Because these children, if they go home and tell a parent, their parent is gonna knock 'em through the wall." Ms. Fox considered herself an important source of information for her students and often mentioned that they regularly confided in her about personal matters. Yet, she justified the need for comprehensive sex education by constructing her students' parents as conservative and even violently opposed to discussing sex with their children (Elliott 2010, 2012). Given that nearly all of Ms. Fox's students were low-income black and Latino/a, this characterization built on and reinforced negative stereotypes about their families. Other studies find that the type of sex education students receive is based on educators' and policy makers' racist, sexist, and heterosexist assumptions about youth (Fields 2008; Garcia 2009, 2012). Low-income black and Latino/a youth, for example, whom authority figures discuss in coded terms as "at risk," may be targeted for comprehensive-based sex education because educators perceive them as adult-like, willful (Ferguson 2001), and hypersexual (Elliott 2010, 2012; Fields 2008; Garcia 2009), and their parents as uninformed (Elliott 2012; Elliott and McKelvy 2014). Conversations about sexuality in black, Latino/a, and immigrant families are, in turn, informed by parents' concerns about the challenges their children face in US society (Elliott 2012; Espiritu 2001; Garcia 2012; Gonzalez-Lopez 2004; Kaplan 1996).

Coach Jones (early 50s, black), the health teacher at Eastside High, allocated 1 week for sex education (in contrast to Ms. Fox's two) and brought in presenters to cover 4 of the 5 days. She invited me to attend these presentations but did not allow me access to the fifth and final day of her sex education unit, during which she said she teaches the students about contraception. She was not opposed to me hearing these

lessons per se, she explained, but wanted to keep the class discussion private to encourage a safe setting. During the presentations, Coach Jones sat quietly at her desk doing paperwork, seemingly not paying attention. In the brief period before and after each class, she dealt with issues around absences and fundraising efforts for the athletic program. While I did not ask Coach Jones why she did not watch or participate in the presentations, neoliberal changes to the institution of education, including funding cuts and an emphasis on standardized tests, have meant larger class sizes, more testing, and more paperwork, increasing teachers' workloads. In this context, Coach Jones may have valued the time made available to her to get work done.

The first presentation I observed in Coach Jones' class consisted of three peer educators, Shontea (24, black, and has 18- and 9-month-old daughters), Katherine (19, white, and has 3-year-old twins), and Anson (20, black, and has 1-year-old daughter and 2-month-old son), who worked for a teen parent mentor program. My research into the program revealed that in line with neoliberal multicultural principles, it strived for presenters who represent the diverse faces of teen parenthood (Ahmed 2012; Ferguson 2012). Although technically not all teen parents (Shontea had her first child in her early 20s), the presenters all had children outside of marriage. The fact that the presentation was billed as "teen parents talk about the realities of parenting" but not all had been teen parents reveals the conflation of teen pregnancy with nonmarital childbearing, with both positioned as problematic and deviant (Hancock 2004). The teen parent presentation lasted one and a half hours. The second presentation I observed in Coach Jones' class was by Mr. Marks, an abstinence-only educator who worked for a faith-based non-profit organization and traveled around the state teaching abstinence in schools. Mr. Marks was white and in his mid-30s. His thinning hair was cut short and he favored polo shirts and faded blue jeans. Like many abstinence-only sex educators at the time, he strove to cultivate a hip persona. His 3-day program involved three one-half-hour presentations.

At the time of data collection, I was a graduate student in sociology. The teachers introduced to me to their students and the presenters as an observer from a local university. I obtained verbal consent from students and presenters to document my observations, assuring them of confidentiality. During class, I sat among the students near the back. Despite dressing casually during fieldwork, however, as a white woman in her mid-thirties with short hair, my age, the color of my skin, and other appearance-related factors meant I closely resembled the school officials and other authority figures with whom the students daily interacted. Students often looked shy or sheepish when I tried to strike up a conversation and addressed me as ma'am, a label that implied both respect and distance. I audio recorded my conversations with adults in the field and jotted copious notes during classes and presentations. Following Emerson et al. (1995), I jotted what I saw and heard, focusing on vividly *showing* what people were saying and doing and in what ways rather than interpreting or summarizing their behavior. These jottings were invaluable as I wrote up field notes immediately after each observation.

In sum, the data come from four sex education programs: two taught by Ms. Fox at Taylor High and two taught in Coach Jones' ninth grade health class at Eastside by outside presenters. In total, I spent over 50 h observing these sex educators and also conducted informal interviews with most of them. The diversity of the presenters and programs makes these data a fruitful site to study the messages of personal responsibility. I did not embark on this project intending to investigate the neoliberal discourse of personal responsibility, however. Instead, from the name of the curriculum ("Making Healthy Choices") to the posters in the classrooms to the sex educators' lessons, I was struck by how pervasive the message of responsibility was. During the course of my fieldwork, I began to see this as an important theme and became especially attuned to its invocation (Emerson et al. 1995). This is a qualitative project, so I am not making the claim that the discourse of personal responsibility appears in all sex education programs. Instead, I am interested in the discourse itself: how sex educators deployed it and to what end, as well as what was left unsaid. My analysis thus focused heavily on language and classroom dynamics to read between the lines of sex education's lessons in personal responsibility.

Language is a form of social practice. In this view, beliefs and attitudes, as well as the social institutions of a society, do not exist "out there" in the world but rather are "the ensemble of everyday social practices through which they are talked into being" (Miller 2000, p. 317), even as that talk is "constrained, hierarchical, and rooted in social inequality" (Valocchi 2005, p. 766). For the analysis, I thus treated the invocation of personal responsibility as a discourse—a form of storytelling that *creates*, rather than reflects, reality (Ahmed 2012; Fields 2005; Miller 2000; Valocchi 2005). My focus was on how, through talk about personal responsibility, sex educators "negotiated, taught, and enacted definitions of sexual health, normalcy, and deviance" (Fields 2005, p. 554), being attuned to the possibility of instability, contradiction, and disruption. Because the social structure has to be created and recreated daily through people's talk and performances, power relations shape but do not fully determine our interactions.

For this analysis, I first conducted line-by-line and focused coding of the field notes (Charmaz 2006). This careful reading of the data helped me to develop conceptual categories. For

example, I noticed the repeated appearance of the codes "making good choices," "staying focused," "being strong/in control," and "taking responsibility" that put forth a vision of the *independent*, *accountable individual*. However, codes that emphasized *mutuality and dependence*, like "relying on others," "give and take in a relationship," and "giving a helping hand," also peppered my coding. Through this early analysis, I came to appreciate the importance of gender as it wove through these conceptual categories. I thus further analyzed these coded portions of the data for gendered, as well as classed, racialized, and sexualized, messages about personal responsibility. This second wave of analysis further underscored the contradictions between sex educators' overt, hidden, and evaded lessons about *the responsible sexual agent*.

Findings

Making Healthy Choices

In her comprehensive sex education class, Ms. Fox routinely asked her students, "If you have sex, what two things must you assume?" Her students answered rotely, "She's pregnant and I've got an STD." "Who's to blame?" Ms. Fox asked. "I am," the students replied in unison. The sex educators I observed routinely used the terms "choices," "consequences," and "responsibility" in their lessons. In these ways and others, they encouraged students to take responsibility for their sexual actions. But what hidden messages are embedded in the discourse of the responsible sexual agent? Above, Ms. Fox constructed a generic male sexual agent ("*She's* pregnant and *I've* got an STD"). Yet, the bad girl from the good girl/bad girl dichotomy loomed in the implication that a willing female sexual participant would be a transmitter of disease. Gendered stereotypes such as these consistently appeared when the discourse of personal responsibility entered the sex education classes I witnessed. In what follows, I examine what the discourse of personal responsibility says about boys' and girls' sexual responsibility. I also discuss the contradictions between sex educators' gendered sexual lessons in personal responsibility and their own actions and personal narratives that underscored people's interdependence.

Overt and Hidden Lessons: Gendering the Responsible Sexual Agent

A good deal of research documents how sex education, abstinence-only sex education in particular, perpetuates gendered sexual stereotypes (Fields 2005, 2008; Garcia 2009; Kirby 2002; Moran 2000). Yet, a focus on personal responsibility might reduce the emphases on gendered sexuality in the abstinence-only classroom since the responsible sexual agent is ostensibly gender neutral. Nevertheless, gendered messages about personal responsibility peppered Mr. Marks' abstinence-only lessons. Mr. Marks spent a great deal of time, for example, addressing the boys in the class and presenting a form of responsible masculinity based on sexual abstinence (see also Elliott 2012; Solebello and Elliott 2011; Wilkins 2008). As he explained it, one can be abstinent and still be manly. Indeed, sex is such a strong drive for guys, not having sex shows great will power. As Mr. Marks put it, "When you guys think about sex, which is about every other second for guys. No that's not right, it's every three seconds!" So in a context in which men think about sex every three seconds, resisting the urge to have sex is the ultimate form of self-control, revealing true inner strength. Thus, in constructing his version of responsible masculinity, Mr. Marks relied on a hegemonic construct: to be masculine is to be sexually virile—but to be *really* masculine is to resist acting on such strong desire. Given the discursive linkages of hyper-sexuality with racialized and sexualized Others in the USA (e.g., blacks, Latinos/as, and gay men), the notion that real men sexually restrain themselves implicitly privileges white heterosexuality (Wilkins 2008, 2012). Later in the presentation, Mr. Marks overtly conveyed this message when he used the gendered- and racially-coded term "playas" to describe people who have sex with many partners outside of marriage. Using this term marked deviant sexual activity as the terrain of black and Latino men, reinforcing the notion that the robust, yet controlled, sexuality of implicitly white heterosexual men is superior to that of others. As Grzanka and Maher (2012, p. 374) observe, "Whiteness is a 'site of discursive silence' in neoliberal hegemony"; this silence works to obscure white privilege, including the ways whites have disproportionately benefitted from neoliberal ideology and policies. Similarly, heterosexuality operates as the unmarked norm, gaining privilege through a taken-for-grantedness that implicitly marks non-heterosexuality as less natural and right (Heath 2013; Valocchi 2005).

Despite these lessons that suggested the onus is on boys to resist their urges, Mr. Marks also devoted substantial time to coaching girls to refuse boys' sexual advances. For example, he asked the class, "Who usually decides how far things are going to go? The guy or the girl?" The students responded, "The girl!" "That's right. Guys will go as far as you let them, so you have to be in control, girls, if you want to keep things from just happening." Research demonstrates teen girls report

sex to be something that "just happened," removing forethought and even desire from sexual activity in an effort to avoid being punished for agentic expressions of desire (Martin 1996; Tolman 2002). Although I do not know whether Mr. Marks was aware of this research, he asked girls to instead be aware and in control. To be responsible, according to Mr. Marks, girls cannot passively allow a sexual situation to escalate and let sex "just happen." Within a context of irrepressible male sexual desire, the hidden message Mr. Marks conveyed, however, is that male sexuality is ultimately women's problem (Gavey et al. 2001).

Mr. Marks also presented a version of the responsible sexual agent implying that in addition to girls controlling boys' sexuality, boys should control other boys' access to girls. The topic was "respect," which Mr. Marks defined as "to recognize the value of someone or something." He used a PowerPoint slide of a Hummer to illustrate this point, asking, "Would anyone like to be given a Hummer?" One of the boys in the class excitedly said, "I would!" Mr. Marks said "Okay." He then asked the class, "How do we determine how much he respects that Hummer? By the way he treats it. If he washes it carefully, keeps it shiny and clean." Addressing the student who had said he wanted a Hummer, he said, "Let's say all his friends get food from Wendy's, do you let them eat in your Hummer?" The boy shook his head no and added, "No way!" "That's right," Mr. Marks said. The implication seemed to be that if a boy was fortunate enough to get a Hummer/intimate partner who was admired and desired by all, he had better protect her from being spoiled by others and respect her enough not to spoil her himself, instead keeping her "shiny and clean." The lesson aligns with the neoliberal ideology that consumption and self-investment are key ways to participate in society (Grzanka and Maher 2012; Moore 2012/2013). It came at a time of economic prosperity, when the USA was involved in two wars in the Middle East, and President Bush was urging Americans to consume to show that America was strong and unbowed. Hummers at the time were a symbol of wealth, power, and domination. They were also viewed as a particular masculine accoutrement: Men drove Hummers to prove their masculinity, so the thinking went, much like a middle-aged man might date a younger, conventionally attractive woman to demonstrate his prowess.

To wrap up the Hummer lesson in respect and to reinforce its gendered coding (i.e., Hummer=feminine and sexual agent=masculine), Mr. Marks said,

> You heard me say it before, you're already valuable. You don't have to do something to prove that. And if someone really respects you, they aren't going to expect you to. I'm always really proud when I hear a girl say in a loud voice, "You better not do that again." I go to a lot of schools and I see couples. The guy's got the girl pinned up against the wall because he likes that feeling right there [gyrating his hips; students laugh]. If he's keeping her from going to class, is he respecting her? [Several students solemnly shook their heads no.]

This example clearly indicated that girls' bodies are the ones that should be respected and left no doubt that the Hummer Mr. Marks previously introduced was a stand-in for the female body. Mr. Marks thus stressed both that boys should respect (and control) girls and girls should respect themselves and fend off boys' advances. The lesson allowed Mr. Marks to blend the two main themes of his responsible sexual agent into one: Boys are sexually driven and need to learn to control their urges whereas girls need to respect their value and deny boys access to their bodies.

In her classes, Ms. Fox presented an image of empowered, strong femininity, going as far as to share positive descriptions of pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding. Like Mr. Marks, she nevertheless also emphasized that ultimately women have to contain male sexuality. One of her Health Tips, for example, was "No means no." The tip itself was ostensibly gender neutral, but Ms. Fox's explanation was highly gendered: "Be the kind of guy who takes no for an answer, be the kind of girl who can say no." Similarly, in her description of two permanent forms of birth control, namely female tubal ligation and male vasectomy, Ms. Fox implied that ultimately contraception is women's responsibility. Female tubal ligation, she told the class, involves a fairly lengthy operation, whereas a male vasectomy is a relatively straightforward procedure. She went on to say that even though a vasectomy is a much simpler operation, "guys are too terrified to have it done," so she warned her female students not to rely on their husbands to have a vasectomy. Instead, she said, "You will have to gut up, cowboy, cowgirl up and have that major surgery done." This depiction painted a picture of strong, responsible women who must take charge in the realm of sexuality and contraception. It also assumes that all of her female students would eventually marry men.

As I discuss further below, the sexuality lessons I observed uniformly assumed heterosexuality as the unmarked norm. They also posited the (implicitly white) nuclear family as the ideal (Heath 2013). For example, during one of her lessons, Ms. Fox, who frequently referred to her own family in her lessons, told her students that if one of her teen children got pregnant, she would not be like "those parents" whose children become teen parents and are allowed to live at home. Instead, Ms. Fox said, "I would get them an apartment and they can live there and raise that child. They're not going to raise that kid under my roof—they're going to be responsible for that kid." By positioning her white middle-class family's response as superior, Ms. Fox reveals underlying cultural assumptions about race and teen parenting—especially the notion that poor black and Latino families condone teenage

pregnancy (Bettie 2003; Fields 2008; Garcia 2009; Hancock 2004; Kaplan 1996; Nathanson 1991). Her lesson also reflects and reinforces neoliberal ideology about the expansive role of family and the shrinking role of government in individuals' lives. Neoliberal social policies have undermined the social safety net and increased people's reliance on their own networks (Duggan 2003; Heath 2013; Ferguson 2012). Low-income women, for example, report relying more heavily on personal networks for support since the passage of PRWORA (i.e., welfare reform) (Levine 2013). Ms. Fox's performance of neoliberal autonomy for her students in this context positioned the private space of the nuclear household as responsible for "family matters," yet simultaneously privileged only certain types of responsible families: those with the resources to make "self-sufficiency" possible.

The entire teen parent presentation was geared toward making men take responsibility for the children they father. Students learned the different roles of a "biological father," "legal father," and "dad" and the benefits of biological fathers taking paternal responsibility (being "dads" ideally, but at least "legal fathers"). Single mothers were the focus of sex panics in the 1980s and 1990s around teen pregnancy and parenting (Kaplan 1996; Luker 1996; Nathanson 1991). As other scholars have noted, this sex panic was gendered, racialized, and classed. The focus was on poor black women's single parenting and coincided with efforts to portray these women as welfare cheats (e.g., Reagan's Cadillac-driving and welfare queen) and to blame teen single mothers for rising rates of poverty (Luker 1996; Nathanson 1991). In the twenty-first century, through policies and political discourse that emphasize the value of marriage and the importance of fathers (e.g., the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Act of 2005) (Heath 2012, 2013), single motherhood continues to be stigmatized and scapegoated for America's ills. Running parallel to efforts to promote marriage and fatherhood, moreover, are punitive policies aimed at single mothers, such as the time limits and work requirements of welfare reform (Hays 2003; Levine 2013), and the continued racialized demonization of welfare receipt (Bridges 2011; Hancock 2004).

Despite ostensibly being about fathers' responsibility, however, many of the lessons the teen parent mentors offered focused on how to prove paternity and file for child support and were at times overtly and at times covertly aimed at the girls in the class. The presenters spent a great deal of time, for example, explaining how new mothers can go to court to force a DNA test to establish paternity. They also described in detail the Acknowledgment of Paternity form which new mothers can get fathers who are willing to acknowledge paternity without a DNA test to sign. In this way and others, these lessons were not unlike those of Ms. Fox and Mr. Marks, who emphasized girls' and women's responsibility for controlling male sexuality. PRWORA ushered in mandatory paternity establishment as a criterion for welfare receipt, thus these lessons also served to educate primarily low-income black and Latino/a youth about how to establish paternity and in line with neoliberal governance, stressed the importance of men, not the government, providing for the children they father (Hays 2003; Levine 2013).

The teen parent mentors' lessons in how to establish paternity did not paint a very positive portrait of heterosexual relationships nor did some of the peer presenters' personal stories make heterocoupling sound very enviable. When Shontea told her boyfriend she was pregnant, she told the class, "he told me he was married. I said, 'Well I am going to have this child with or without you.'" They have stayed together, despite the many obstacles Shontea mentioned, including his onerous debt for not paying child support for his other children and the recent summons he received to take a paternity test because he might be the father of yet another child. Katherine noted that she owed heavy legal fees from taking the biological father of her twins to court for child support. After outlining the monthly costs of raising a child, Katherine asked rhetorically, "So how do we do it? We work two jobs and we have to get regular child support." Here, Katherine laid out the stipulations required to perform the ideal teen parent and demonstrated her adherence to these performative requirements (Ferguson 2012).

Overall sex educators sketched a picture of heterosexuality that was highly unequal and antagonistic. As other research on abstinence-only curricula has documented (Fields 2008; Kirby 2002), many of Mr. Marks' activities had a battle of the sexes theme. He also took pains to describe his own 15-year marriage as hard work because men and women are so different (i.e., they think differently, communicate differently, have different needs, and so on), mirroring a "men are from Mars, women are from Venus" approach. Ms. Fox also discussed heterosexual coupling in ways that suggested these relationships are often antagonistic. She frequently described corrosive heterosexual relationships and ordered her students in bad relationships to "Dump him/her, just get rid of him/her." Her message was clear: Responsible sexual agents do not waste their time in bad relationships.

Sex educators also at times portrayed heterosexual coupling as highly unequal. Some of Ms. Fox's lessons emphasized the importance of men protecting themselves from potentially diseased women by responsibly contracepting. In discussing the myths surrounding sexually transmitted infections, for example, Ms. Fox provided a lengthy and graphic description of World War II soldiers pouring lemon and salt on prostitutes' vaginas to detect whether they had a sexually transmitted infection. As Ms. Fox explained it, if the salt or lemon hurt the prostitute, the soldier would assume she was infected and would avoid having sex with her. Ms. Fox provided this example to show how young people often get very misleading, weird information about ways to stay safe sexually. Yet, she did not address the misogynistic aspects of

this apparent practice. In fact, she went on to joke with a male student about hoarding little packets of salt to take on dates. Like her other lessons, as well as those offered by Mr. Marks, Ms. Fox assumed a hyper-heterosexual male sexual agent who must protect himself from a potentially diseased, degraded female sexual partner. These lessons have a deep history in US contraceptive policy. Even as the Comstock Act of 1873 made it difficult for women to access contraceptive information and devices; in the early part of the twentieth century, condoms were marketed as a disease preventative, and men could purchase them in drugstores, although in many states they had to attest that the condoms were for the prevention of venereal disease (Collier 2007). Men and women likely used condoms at the time to prevent pregnancy, but the policy restricting their use to disease prevention stemmed from and bolstered the idea that men needed sexual outlets and that available women might be carriers of disease. Similarly, the US military distributed condoms to male soldiers during WW II on the basis that these men would have sex with prostitutes and needed ways to responsibly protect themselves and their women "back home" from disease (Collier 2007).

In sum, the overt and hidden lessons of the disparate sex education programs analyzed for this study reveal gendered, racialized, and heteronormative meanings running through the construction of the responsible sexual agent, with men primarily acting responsibly by resisting their hyper-heterosexual urges and owning up to paternity, and women demonstrating responsibility by resisting male advances, controlling male sexuality, and getting men to own up to paternity. According to sex educators, both men and women are equally responsible for getting out of bad relationships. Yet, what else do these lessons say about responsibility and what is left unsaid?

Hidden and Evaded Lessons: Silencing Alternatives, Modeling Interdependence

In their actions in the classroom and their hidden and evaded lessons, sex educators revealed the limits and contradictions embedded in their lessons in personal responsibility. In examining these contradictions, I first analyze how lessons in personal responsibility silence alternative masculinities and silence girls in general, as well as evade lessons in same-sex desire and abortion. I then demonstrate the extent to which sex educators' hidden and evaded lessons inadvertently revealed the complex web of relationships on which people depend.

Although Mr. Marks' ostensible purpose was to get boys to embrace a new form of masculinity, based on abstinence, control, and responsibility, Mr. Marks routinely silenced alternative masculinities. For example, after Mr. Marks described a girl in a short skirt and thong, a male student in the class said, "Gross." Mr. Marks immediately responded, "You're lying." His implication was that all red-blooded young men *should* lust after such a woman, who is dangerous because she is desirable. Mr. Marks' response also assumed heterosexuality, evading the possibility of same-sex desire. Later in the class, he asked the students, "You got a guy and a girl together, what's the guy's hand doing?" A male student ventured, "Getting sweaty?" "No," Mr. Marks rejected this answer and waited for another. A female student eventually said, "No, he's trying to touch." This was the gendered answer Mr. Marks was looking for. "Right," he said. He then hammered home his point, emphasizing boys' and men's sexual virility and girls and women's passivity: "Guys, we're like microwaves. Push a button and we're on. Girls, you're like ovens, you've got to preheat, to slowly warm up." The only way men can be responsible, then, according to Mr. Marks, is by resisting their overwhelming urges to have sex with women. So, the only masculinity that was allowed into Mr. Marks' lessons was hyper-heterosexual: Same-sex attraction and male vulnerability were elided.

Girls—not just female sexuality, but girls themselves—were also habitually silenced in the sex education classroom. The sex educators were generally less likely to call on girls or use girls in their activities, yet they also relied on female students' compliance in class (Ferguson 2001). As we have seen, a prominent strand running throughout sex education's messages about personal responsibility is that girls and women must be strong and stand up to boys. Mr. Marks devoted a fair amount of time trying to get girls to reject passivity and compliance (hallmarks of femininity). But his hidden lessons actually encouraged and enforced female submission. In one telling example, he ignored a female student's repeated pleas to be released from an activity called Lust versus Love. For the activity, Mr. Marks chose a Latino student to wear a sign around his neck with the word "LUST" written in all-caps while he selected a Latina student to don the word "LOVE." He then directed them to read lines associated with their signs (e.g., Lust: "You're gorgeous!" Love: "I love you for who you are."). As with his other lessons, through the depiction of sexuality as an arena in which the sexes battle it out, with women concerned about love and men focused on sex, this activity perpetuated gendered sexual stereotypes. Both students were clearly uncomfortable acting out these roles. Over the course of the activity, the Latina student quietly but repeatedly pleaded, "I don't want to do this." This was such an electrifying few minutes, I wrote in my field notes that the hairs on my arms were standing on end and I truly considered intervening. Had I closed my eyes and just listened to what the female student was saying, it would have sounded very much like a rape was taking place. Yet, Mr. Marks ignored her completely and essentially forced her, by not responding, to continue to participate in the activity. During the same activity, the other participant early on expressed similar discomfort, sat down, and Mr. Marks replaced him with another male student. Although it could be argued that the female student should

also have simply opted out of the activity, the fact that she did not showed that she felt compelled to comply with Mr. Marks, a white male authority figure. That Mr. Marks ignored her pleas to be released powerfully demonstrated his ability and willingness to overrule her expressed desires. This incident was a chilling one for what it implied about the unimportance of listening to and respecting female and minority voices (Ferguson 2012).

There were also many covert messages about femininity going on in Ms. Fox's class. Neighboring male teachers regularly interrupted her class. They came in at any time to crack a joke or go to her desk and take a drink from her mini-fridge or a snack from her drawer. She always smiled and joked with them, even though she expressed mild irritation about the interruption after they left. Ms. Fox took teaching seriously and I suspect she found the interruptions belittling. She also acted as her male colleagues' anchor, doing things for them like teaching their classes when they had a meeting and loaning them videos to show in their classes. Ms. Fox not only fed her male colleagues but she also brought food for her students. Apples, oranges, raisin bread, and peanut butter were staples during my fieldwork. Students complained when the "pantry" (which is what they called it) ran low and Ms. Fox would apologize and promise more goodies soon. She often told her students how much she cared about them, just as a mother would her children and called them "baby" (especially the boys). Through all of these actions and others, Ms. Fox emphasized the value of female nurturance, compassion, and being men's helpmate. Her actions also implied that it is important for women to gain men's approval and to comply with their demands (whether they want to or not). Although neoliberal logic privileges the autonomous, self-managing individual, and neoliberal policies such as workfare push poor women into the labor market (Hays 2003; Levine 2013), neoliberal policy and rhetoric simultaneously promote and idealize the private, heteroprocreative married family (Heath 2012, 2013), within which domestic and care responsibilities have historically been associated with women (Hays 2003). These tensions and contradictions are evident in Ms. Fox's lessons in femininity, which both encourage strength and independence and model care and submission.

Along with the absence of same-sex desire, abortion was a powerful evaded lesson throughout the sex education lessons I observed. None of the presenters mentioned considering abortion when they told their stories of becoming parents, for example. In fact, they skirted around the issue of how they conceived in the first place. Shontea's story of discovering she was pregnant implied a surprising lack of knowledge about her body. Shontea explained to the class that she had a tattoo of green eyes on her stomach and only came to realize she was pregnant when the eyes started looking down rather than out as her belly swelled, implying she was quite pregnant before she realized it. Anson did not mention his girlfriend's pregnancy directly instead saying he found out he "was going to be a daddy," suggesting that a pregnancy automatically translates into parenthood. Katherine was the most explicit, explaining "I was a freshman [in high school] and I started seeing this guy. We really liked each other and, well, use your imaginations. I didn't get my period, took a pregnancy test, and found out I was pregnant." The matter-of-a-fact way these peer mentors described becoming parents to the students in Coach Jones' class implied that the only course of action for a pregnant youth is to become a parent. To be sure, Coach Jones' students also learned about contraception in a class I was not invited to observe and perhaps abortion was covered here, yet I suspect it was quite powerful to hear from their peers that if they got pregnant, the natural and responsible course of action was to have and keep the child, despite the challenges.

Mr. Marks' abstinence-only lessons also presented these stark binaries: abstain and be safe or have sex and ruin your life chances. For the finale to his three-day presentation, he used an activity to hammer home this point. He stood in front of the class and spun a plate on top of a stick. As long as he kept his eyes on the plate, it kept spinning. When he looked away, the plate wobbled and toppled off the stick, at which point Mr. Marks addressed the class:

> You need to keep your eyes on your futures and not be distracted. Sex is distracting. It makes you think about sex in the here and now—you don't need to be doing that at this point. You need to be focusing on your goals in life. What do you want to achieve in life?

Sex educators emphasized that youth have the power to control their destinies and that any bad choices are theirs alone. As Ms. Fox warned her students "These are your choices. Your health is your choice. I can't do anything about it. It is up to you." Thus, only a certain type of neoliberal sexual agent is encouraged in these lessons: the responsible, future-focused, non-pleasure-seeking abstainer (Burns and Torre 2004), or the responsible, consequence-bearing teen parent.

In their actions and in sharing their own experiences, however, sex educators often revealed the extent to which people are interdependent: enmeshed in and reliant on our relations with others. All three of the teen parent presenters, for example, mentioned their mothers as sources of help and support (though significantly, given that their presentation

ostensibly revolved around men taking responsibility for fatherhood, none mentioned their fathers). In another example of how sex educators' own lives underscored our interdependence, Shontea one of the teen parent presenters, was a few minutes late to the presentation. She apologized and explained that her babysitter fell through at the last minute, and she had to scramble to find a stand-in. She eventually found another teen parent mentor to help out. Similarly, Anson shared with the class that when he found out in his last year of high school that he "was going to be a daddy," he already had plans to attend college; plans he initially thought were ruined. He ended up going to college, however, despite the pregnancy and his subsequently becoming a father, because "I was lucky in that my mom and girlfriend were able to care for her [my daughter]." Thus Anson explicitly acknowledged the web of relationships that enabled his pursuit of college. Left unacknowledged, however, are the gendered connotations of this arrangement. As a man, Anson likely believed and was told he should prioritize his education and potential as a future provider, with his mother and girlfriend stepping in to take responsibility in the feminized realm of childcare. Among the three peer presenters, Anson was the only one who did not mention the challenges of co-parenting or his financial struggles. Although these omissions may have stemmed from his effort to present a successful masculine self, it may be that his challenges have been somewhat buffered by family and partner support.

Katherine was the only peer presenter who was parenting without the help of a partner. She told the class that when her mother found out she was pregnant, she berated Katherine, saying she couldn't care for her 15-year-old self, how could she care for a baby? "Luckily, they're almost four and I haven't just cared for one baby, I've cared for two, and people now tell me they're really proud of me and glad that things have worked out so well." Like the other presenters, Katherine put a positive spin on her life, despite describing having little support. She presented herself as a successful, independent mother of two. Yet, when I spoke with Katherine after the presentation, I found out that she was renting a house with another single parent. They help each other out not just by splitting the bills but also with childcare. The responsible sexual agent that Katherine presented to the class thus did not fully capture her own web of interdependence.

So, despite sex educators repeated exhortations that responsible sexual agents should simply end bad relationships, take absent fathers to court, refuse others' sexual advances, and so on, their own actions and experiences reveal the complex web of relationships people depend on for help, care, love, and support. The discourse of personal responsibility elides this complex web and is inadequate for explaining people's behaviors and motivations. Not unlike the rational consumer of economic discourse, the responsible sexual agent does not have multifaceted desires, is not embroiled in relationships with others, and does not live in a world rife with persistent inequalities. In other words, in their hidden and evaded lessons, sex educators revealed that the responsible sexual agent is a fiction of our neoliberal imagination.

Conclusion

The deployment of personal responsibility in sex education classes, what I term the construction of the responsible sexual agent, offers insight into the reproduction of social inequality. As I have documented, the discourse of personal responsibility in a variety of different sex educators' lessons contained numerous gendered and sexualized messages about the good sexual citizen: that real men are in control of their desires yet simultaneously hyper-heterosexual; that women must control men's sexuality yet simultaneously be caring and submissive; and that the only legitimate form of desire and coupling is heterosexual even as these relationships are antagonistic. The discourse of personal responsibility sex educators constructed was also highly individualistic, suggesting independence, autonomy, and strength, even as sex educators' own actions and lives revealed how dependent people are on one another and how existing social inequalities structure people's lives. Their lessons and actions at times also reinforced these inequalities.

What are the implications of neoliberal personal responsibility? Looking at sex educators' lessons in personal responsibility, the message is clear: the responsible sexual citizen should exert individual agency and free choice. Responsible sexual agents take responsibility for their actions. The teen parent presenters did just that when they shared their stories of becoming parents, implying a "you play, you pay" ethos. This kind of personal responsibility displaces any notion of social or governmental responsibility. It puts the onus squarely on the individual for the consequences of sexual activity, absolving adults, schools, and the government of responsibility. Lessons in personal responsibility thus reveal much about the needs of the neoliberal state. In line with neoliberal dictates, the responsible sexual agent is a self-regulating body. In addition, the responsible sexual agent knows that if she makes bad choices, it will be her fault and she will bear the brunt of the consequences. Teen parents who take these lessons to heart, for example, may describe their sexual decision-making in terms of calculated agency such as "I wanted this baby," "I chose to get pregnant," or "I asked my girlfriend to give me a baby," minimizing others' sympathy for them. They may also willingly bear the brunt of any negative consequences of early childbearing because they do not feel entitled to help from government agencies (Bridges 2011), in turn, compounding the difficulties they encounter as young parents.

Yet as I have also tried to demonstrate, even when adults emphasize the importance of being a responsible sexual agent to youth, their hidden and evaded lessons contradict the notion of the free, autonomous agent and emphasize the extent to which we are dependent on others. This is not to say that people do not benefit when others act responsibly, but rather that the responsible sexual agent presented to students in these classes was a mirage that obscured our vulnerabilities and interdependences as well as the ways inequalities inform people's lives and shape our agency. Although my analysis focused on the sex education classroom, the implications of this research extend beyond sex education given the prevalence of the discourse of personal responsibility in public policy. Whether the issue is marriage, obesity, employment, welfare, or parenting, the solution in our neoliberal era is personal responsibility. Future research should examine the construction and deployment of personal responsibility in other contexts, such as WIC and welfare offices, state-mandated parenting classes for divorcing parents, and marriage promotion classes. Future research should also explore how people receive and make use of the discourse of personal responsibility in their lives.

To conclude on a more optimistic note, I propose that rather than emphasizing personal responsibility sex education should focus their lessons on social justice, unpacking how social inequalities are reproduced and how to interrupt them. Previous research into the sex education classroom suggests that when teens take a more active role in sex education, they may reproduce social inequality, but they may also resist messages of inequality (Fields 2008; Garcia 2009; Pascoe 2007). In her ethnography of school-based sex education, Fields, for example, noted that students often tried to interrupt their sex educators' racialized, classed, gendered, sexualized, and adultist lessons. The findings presented here support this argument. The students in the classes I observed at times resisted their sex educators' lessons, yet in each instance, sex educators sidestepped or overruled these moments of resistance, curtailing their generative possibilities. As I have argued elsewhere (Connell and Elliott 2009), these moments of resistance, rather than being cause for alarm or elision, offer opportunities for frank discussion of the complex power dynamics and inequalities surrounding sexuality. Bringing youth into the sex education classroom, not as objects of concern and control, but as agents who actively construct meaning around sexuality thus has subversive potential. Given that sex, as we typically conceive of it, involves two people, sex education should also serve as a site to discuss and encourage empathy, mutual respect, and an ethos of care for self and others (Elliott 2012), without gendering, racializing, or sexualizing these messages. For, whether they intended to or not, the lessons of the sex educators analyzed here consistently brought home the message of our interdependence. We are not invulnerable, autonomous agents, as the discourse of personal responsibility would have it; we are intimately linked with others, a fact that should be acknowledged and unpacked in the sex education classroom as well as in public policy and government discourse.

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