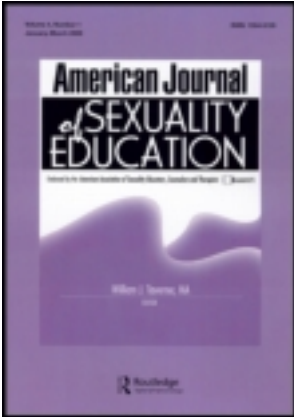


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### Teaching Men's Anal Pleasure: Challenging Gender Norms with "Prostage" Education

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## Teaching Men’s Anal Pleasure: Challenging Gender Norms with “Prostage” Education

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*To help students critique sex/gender norms, sexuality educators should address men’s anal pleasure. Men’s anal receptivity blurs accepted binaries like male/female, masculine/feminine, and straight/queer. By suppressing men’s receptivity, the taboo against men’s anal pleasure helps legitimize hegemonic sex/gender beliefs—and the sexism, homophobia, and male dominance they encourage. Conversely, by deconstructing men’s anal taboo and creating a new language of anal pleasure—“prostage” (pro-STAHJ)—educators can help students challenge restrictive gender norms. We base this argument on an anonymous, online, mixed methods survey we conducted with 228 undergraduate men, as well as existing literature on men’s anal sexuality.*

**KEYWORDS** *men, masculinities, sexuality education, anal sex, gender norms*

*“Men use their dicks. Fags use their asses.”* (Respondent #47, gay)

*“When I started experimenting with anal pleasure, it definitely made me question my sexuality.”* (Respondent #139, straight)

*“Perhaps men avoid exploring and discussing anal pleasure because they’re scared of what they would find, and how that would affect their assumptions about sexuality.”* (Respondent #72, straight)

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## INTRODUCTION: MUTING MEN'S ANAL PLEASURE

In his 2009 letter to sex columnist Dan Savage, “Drew” anxiously describes his newfound “fetish:” anal pleasure. Drew, a 30-year-old straight man, recently “let a girlfriend ‘experiment’ on my ass. What started out as a kink with her finger has turned into a full-blown fetish with her dildo.” Interpreting this “fetish” as a sign he might be gay, Drew “tried masturbating to some gay porn.” Although the porn did not excite him, Drew seeks assurance that he can really be straight despite enjoying receptive anal penetration. As he puts it, “I still don’t have any desire to be with a man sexually, Dan, but I LOVE having my ass pounded. Does that tip the scales toward homo?”

Drew’s letter exemplifies men’s anal taboo: the cultural stigma that brands men as gay, emasculated, or deviant if they seek or enjoy anal pleasure (Melby, 2005; Morin, 1981/2010). In reality, men and women of all orientations may enjoy anal erotic stimulation: The anus is densely threaded with nerves, and shares many nerves and muscles directly with the genitals (Agnew, 1985; Hite, 1981; Morin, 1981). Specifically for men, massaging the prostate gland can intensify sexual pleasure and orgasm (Morin, 1981; Niederwieser, 2011; Silverstein & Picano, 2004). To illustrate these sensations, we present three comments from respondents in the 1981 *Hite Report on Male Sexuality*:

“It feels absolutely great to have a finger run up my ass and be sucked off. . . I come like crazy. Total orgasm. It feels great—I get more feeling in my genitals and I come totally satisfied.” (p. 574)

“It’s beautiful. She’s taking me, having me, possessing me. I love to give myself to her in this way.” (p. 575)

“It was one of the greatest experiences I ever had. It felt like the base of my penis was suddenly extended all the way down to my anus. Instead of all my sensations being centered only on the top of my penis, it was now simultaneously centered in both.” (p. 584)

This male capacity for anal pleasure is no secret. A July 2012 Google search for “male g spot” produced 5,080,000 results. Despite this wealth of information, many men—including some gay men—continue to reject the pleasure and intimacy that anal stimulation can offer (Brent, 2002; Damon, 2000; Middlethorn, 2002; Morin, 2010). For example, in John Fox’s novel *Boys on the Rock* (1994), Al insists to his boyfriend, Billy, that “he never got fucked and didn’t want to” (p. 135). In reaction, Billy realizes that Al “is treating me like a girl in a way since only he could do the fucking” (p. 135). Like many men, Al employs the anal taboo as a tool in constructing his masculine identity: By distancing himself from anal eroticism, he feels more “normal” and “masculine.” Conversely, “Drew’s” letter demonstrates how the failure to reject anal pleasure can de-normalize a man and even threaten his own self-image as straight.

This stigma on men's prostatic pleasure is similar to taboos on the clitoris that have faded only recently. In Victorian England, clitoral and prostatic orgasms were both considered nonsexual "paroxysms." Using vibrators, doctors elicited these paroxysms to cure "hysteria" (Maines, 1999). As the 20th century saw greater awareness of women's sexual desire and responses, clitoral "paroxysms" regained recognition as sexual but, as in earlier eras, were often linked to lesbianism (Maines, 1999). Until the third quarter of the 20th century, many women presuming themselves straight avoided clitoral stimulation, assuming it to be lesbian pleasure (Stiritz, 2008, p. 248). Scientific authorities, including Sigmund Freud, supported this misconception.<sup>1</sup> In a culture equating normal sexuality with procreation, clitorises were denounced as extraneous, penis-like organs of deviant, lesbian sexuality (Bennet, 1993; Koedt, 2000; Med, 2002; Moore & Clarke, 1995; Park, 1997; Stiritz, 2008). Similarly, men's anuses can be seen as vagina-like, and men who enjoy anal pleasure risk being stigmatized as gay and effeminate (Branfman & Stiritz, in preparation; Corbett, 1993; Guss, 2010; Halperin, 2002; Keul, 1985; Morin, 1981).

It may be tempting to explain men's anal taboo as simply a residue of Christian beliefs condemning nonprocreative sex. In colonial times, such beliefs justified widespread "sodomy" laws banning all types of nonreproductive acts, including solo masturbation and heterosexual fellatio, cunnilingus, and anal sex (Chauncey, 2004, p. 514). When science and medicine displaced religion as authorities on sexuality in the 19th and 20th centuries, these new disciplines continued to equate normal sexuality with procreativity—and so perpetuated stigma on most nonreproductive pleasures (Chauncey, 2004; Freedman, 1995; Weeks, 1989). In recent decades, though, many Americans have accepted the notion that sex can serve people's needs for intimacy and recreation. As a result, it has become increasingly acceptable to engage in masturbation, cunnilingus, fellatio, and even anal sex—so long as a man is penetrating a woman (Brecher, 1984; Chauncey, 2004; Melby, 2005). Conversely, until *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003) ruled sodomy laws unconstitutional, some North American states used these laws to harass and arrest gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) individuals into the 21st century (Chauncey, 2004).

Even now, nine years after the Supreme Court legalized all forms of consensual adult "sodomy," men's anal pleasure remains widely denigrated and misunderstood. While other sexual restrictions have faded, men's anal taboo must have unique sources keeping it alive in the present. Furthermore, like all taboos, this stigma must serve a cultural purpose (Morin, 1981, p. 15). As we argue, this purpose is to reinforce traditional beliefs about gender, and legitimize power imbalances that stem from those beliefs.

<sup>1</sup> See Freud's "Femininity" for an account of vaginal versus clitoral orgasm, which became a "truth" about women's sexuality that persists with many today.

## ARGUMENT AND APPLICATION

By normalizing men's anal receptivity, sexuality education can help moderate gender norms and the social inequities they uphold. As numerous theorists have argued, men's capacity for receptive anal pleasure complicates the boundaries dividing men from women and straight men from queer men<sup>2</sup> (Blechner, 2010; Botticelli, 2010; Corbett, 1993; Guss, 2010; Sedgwick, 2010). By obscuring men's potential to be penetrated, the taboo against men's receptivity fortifies these boundaries and reinforces the notion of "naturally" distinct genders with "naturally" unequal roles. Since *stigmatizing* men's anal pleasure helps to *stabilize* these restrictive gender norms, we theorize that *de-stigmatizing* this pleasure may help to *challenge* these norms.

While past analyses of men's anal taboo have enriched academic discussions of gender, there has been little (if any) focus on translating theory to practice. To bridge this gap, we propose that sexuality educators employ the topic of men's anal pleasure as a tool for social change. We offer two strategies for teaching students about men's receptive anal sexuality as a prompt to critical reflection on gender: 1) deconstructing men's anal taboo through historical and theoretical analysis and 2) creating new language—"prostage" (pro-STAHJ, sounds like "massage")—to facilitate easier discussion of men's anal sexuality. We envision prostage education within high school classes, university courses, and adult sexuality education workshops—as well as articles, informational videos such as *Bend Over Boyfriend* (1998), and other media.

With political constraints in mind, we view prostage as a topic mainly for groups of at least high school age. In an ideal world, we believe that sex-positive education on all aspects of sexuality would begin well before puberty. Youth need to be well prepared for the pleasures and responsibilities that adult bodies bring. However, we recognize that all sexuality education remains a hot-button issue in America, especially when it discusses pleasure—and most especially nonreproductive pleasures such as anal eroticism (Houston, 2009). Adding an extra degree of controversy, prostage education serves to explicitly challenge conventional beliefs about gender and sexuality. Therefore, it is likely that almost no U.S. middle schools and perhaps few U.S. high schools would risk teaching about prostage. That said, European schools may be more receptive to prostage education, since European education often discusses sexual pleasure, including adolescents' sexual pleasure, as a normal and healthy part of life (Advocates for Youth, 2000). Organizations such as Advocates for Youth are already bringing sex-positive, pleasure-centered educational ideas to the United States by exposing American legislators, educators, and students to European

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<sup>2</sup> We employ the term "queer" to encompass all men who identify as gay, bisexual, pansexual, or otherwise nonheterosexual.

sexuality education. Therefore, prostate education could potentially gain acceptance in the United States via success in Northern European countries.

## EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Designing sexuality education requires finding out what an audience needs to know. Therefore, from January to April 2011, we conducted a preliminary needs assessment with a convenience sample of 228 straight-, gay-, and bisexual/“other”-identified undergraduate men at an elite midwestern university (Branfman & Stiritz, in preparation). Using an anonymous, mixed methods online survey of 233 questions, our study investigated what these men knew about anal pleasure, what they thought about men’s anal taboo, and how their knowledge and attitudes affected their choices concerning anal sexuality. Although respondents were more knowledgeable and accepting of prostatic pleasure than we had hypothesized, they still reported that this pleasure carries a strong stigma in North American culture (Branfman & Stiritz, in preparation). Through their words, our respondents helped us clarify how men’s anal taboo relates to current Western beliefs and attitudes about gender. We would have conducted interviews and focus groups to develop greater understanding of this topic, but our Institutional Review Board permitted only the survey.

We combined our survey data with historical and sociological research to gain new, if tentative, perspectives on men’s anal sexuality. Integrating these sources extends knowledge beyond previous published contributions and grounds our proposed educational intervention.

## STRUCTURE OF THIS PAPER

As we developed this paper, many colleagues and friends expressed confusion, asking why we deemed this topic important. Because we have found this attitude widespread, we need to lay out in detail why men’s anal taboo is a meaningful cultural phenomenon and why it is so valuable to challenge this taboo. For this reason, we save our discussion of pedagogy and prostate education for last. However, all five sections of this paper offer material for lessons on men’s anal sexuality. Throughout each section, we include theoretical insight and illustrative comments from respondents in our preliminary empirical study.

In the first section, we trace the history and evolution of men’s anal taboo. Next, we review the literature on anal sexuality, which has alternately demonized anal pleasure, questioned the anal taboo, and simply reported behavioral trends. Third, we describe current Western constructions of sex, gender, and sexuality to demonstrate how men’s anal eroticism undermines

them. We then discuss why our culture needs new models of gender in order to improve personal health and interpersonal relationships while reducing violence and inequality. We focus on “inclusive masculinities,” which Eric Anderson (2009) defines as masculine gender styles that reject domination, sexism, and homophobia. Finally, our fifth section calls for sexuality education that provides factual lessons on prostatic pleasure to dislodge myths about sex and gender—and especially to question whether current gender norms are “natural” or healthy. In this section, we propose a new language of anal sexuality, “prostage,” designed to facilitate comfortable discussion of men’s anal eroticism.

In all sections, we intentionally limit our discussion to men’s receptive prostatic play. Although we encourage sex-positive educators to openly discuss women’s anal sexuality, this topic carries unique stigmas that lie outside the scope of our paper. Meanwhile, though we support education on external anal play and “rimming” (annalingus), we focus on prostate play because being penetrated is such a socially loaded experience for men. As one of our survey respondents commented, “A comedian like Jim Norton will make a joke about having a hooker eat out his asshole, but I don’t think he’s ever joked about having a dildo in his ass” (Respondent #136, straight).

### BIRTH OF THE MODERN ANAL TABOO

As a gender border dividing men from women, men’s anal taboo has a long history. From at least the time of Ancient Greece, Western cultures have equated manhood with phallic domination and penile penetration (Foucault, 1978; Halperin, 2002, pp. 34–36). This model casts anal receptivity as a mark of femininity and subordination that any proper man would avoid. However, the Greeks did not link feminization or anal pleasure to homoerotic attraction (pp. 34–36). Later, Christian dogma, also lacking notions of sexual orientation, defined receptive anal “sodomy” as a sin that any person might be tempted to commit (Chauncey, 2005, p. 521; Foucault, 1978). Only in the 19th and 20th centuries, when the concept of sexual orientation arose, were certain acts linked to “heterosexual” and “homosexual” identities (Chauncey, 2004, p. 521; Foucault, 1978). This paradigm shift, which equated male gayness with gender inversion, presented “straight/gay” as analogous to “man/woman” (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009; Deaux & Kite, 1987; Foucault, 1978; Kimmel, 1994; Lehne, 1976).

In this modern context, the anal taboo gained new meaning as a sexual border dividing heterosexual/masculine/normal men from homosexual/feminine/abnormal men. This perspective conceals the possibility that so-called “normal” straight men might enjoy anal sexuality. This homophobia augments the ancient function of the anal taboo: to naturalize distinctions and hierarchies, including those between men and women.

Like gay men themselves, men's anal pleasure took on added stigma when the AIDS crisis exploded in the 1980s. Doctors, newspapers, and the general American public hysterically demonized gay men as sources of this new contagion—originally termed “Wrath of God Syndrome” (WOGS) and “Gay-Related Immunodeficiency” (GRID) (Treichler, 1988, p. 52). Among interrelated myths about HIV/AIDS was the notion that only anal sex could transmit the virus. For example, a 1985 issue of the science magazine *Discover* assured readers that HIV/AIDS could only enter the body through the “vulnerable anus” and “fragile urethra,” not through the “rugged vagina” (Langone, 1985, p. 41). A tidal wave of media headlines and medical authorities cemented in the public consciousness that anal pleasure = homosexuality = death. While today's young adults may not explicitly recognize this association between anal pleasure and HIV/AIDS, this history provides context for the general paranoia that continues to haunt men's anal sexuality.

Glossing over this homophobic history, some scholars have legitimized the anal taboo by arguing that it stems simply from hygiene concerns (Agnew, 2000; Morin, 1981/2010). While anxiety about hygiene may be a reason for some individuals to avoid anal play, this explanation cannot fully illuminate men's widespread aversion to anal receptivity. For example, the 2011 National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior noted that “more than 40% of men of ages 25–59 years reported ever having engaged in insertive anal intercourse during their lifetime” (p. 259). Hygiene cannot explain why so many men are anally penetrating others but refuse to be penetrated themselves. One of our survey respondents explicitly linked this “anal double standard” to homophobia:

While I am aware that there are ways of engaging in anal pleasure hygienically, I think the concept itself will always feel unclean to me. This is, of course, somewhat hypocritical—I would be willing to engage in anal sex with a female partner, but would probably blanch at the prospect of receiving any form of anal stimulation. There is also the very real influence of sociocultural biases and preconceptions, which—though I am aware of them—likely prejudice me against the practice because I associate anal pleasure with homosexuality. (Respondent #110, straight; our emphasis)

Hygiene, then, is often a “scatological shield,” an excuse camouflaging the gendered and sexualized functions that men's anal taboo plays today.

Some scholars have also asserted that receptive anal play is innately painful and/or harmful (Morin, 1981). In fact, recent studies do indicate that 10% of both men and women who consistently engage in receptive anal practices report severe pain, called “anodyspareunia” (Damon & Rosser, 2005; Stulhofer & Ajdukovic, 2011). However, these same researchers trace this problem to lack of education on the mechanics of safe, enjoyable anal



sex practices. In addition to dismissing the misconception that anal play is automatically harmful, these studies support our argument for sexuality education that addresses anal eroticism. Like hygiene, pain is a reason for some individuals to avoid anal play but falls short in explaining the social taboo against men's anal eroticism.

## RESEARCH

### Limitations and Biases in Scholarship

In recent years, sex-positive resources like *Bend Over Boyfriend* (1998) have begun to encourage straight men's anal exploration. Nevertheless, educators seeking material on men's anal sexuality still face a dearth of accurate information. Scholarly and medical literature has historically marginalized men's anal pleasure with four interlinking stigmas: homosexuality, emasculation, mental disorder, and sexual disease (Blechner, 2010; Morin, 2010). Unfortunate examples of this trend include Feigen's (1954) "Proctologic Disorders of Sex Deviates" and Goligher, Duthy, and Nixon's (1984) *Surgery of the Rectum, Anus & Colon* (p. 1033). Educators might consider teaching excerpts from these works to illustrate the depth of cultural anxiety and ignorance around men's anal sexuality. Meanwhile, much of the empirical data on anal eroticism are subsumed within broad, Kinsey-style studies of human sexuality.

Research that does look closely at receptive anal sexuality has typically focused only on women and MSM (men who have sex with men), ignoring men who only have sex with women (examples include Baldwin & Baldwin, 2000; Carter, Henry-Moss, Hock-Long, Bergdall, & And, 2010; Damon, 2000; Exner et al., 2008; Feigen, 1954; Middlethon, 2002). Interestingly, many studies phrase results in an opaque manner that makes it unclear if researchers even considered the possibility that women might penetrate men. By keeping heterosexual men's receptivity invisible, this oversight contributes to the taboo against men's receptive anal pleasure. Exacerbating this tunnel vision on women and MSM, many studies assume that anal play consists solely of penile intercourse (examples include Chandra, Mosher, Copen, & Sionean, 2011; Reece et al., 2010; Rosenberger et al., 2011). Finally, researchers continue to study anal sexuality primarily as a risk factor for HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted infections, minimizing its potential for pleasure and intimacy (Rosenberger et al., 2011).

A recent post on the listserv for the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT) illustrates the difficulty of finding complete, non-stigmatizing information on men's anal eroticism:

I have a question about how to help a straight male client come to terms with liking anal stimulation (or not). He's been sneaking around using a dildo on himself for quite a while. Most recently his girlfriend found out and they are both uncomfortable with his using the dildo and he wants

to stop. Although he says that he feels compelled to do it because he likes it. I'm working with him to break down the reasons why he thinks this is wrong before making the decision to just stop this. I don't see any real issues in the behavior besides his shame around it, i.e. he sees it as being "gay."

My questions:

- Does anyone know of any literature or statistics on how many heterosexual men use anal stimulation as part of regular sexual activity? If you've had experience working with a case like this and can share insight on how your clients worked through this, that would be helpful.<sup>3</sup>

This email demonstrates how ignorance about men's anal eroticism can stigmatize men and strain their relationships. Furthermore, by demonstrating that even sexuality therapists, counselors, and educators may be uncertain where to turn for accurate information, it illustrates the need for education on this topic.

### Behavioral Trends

Even as researchers have reported a steady increase in women's receptive anal sex practices (Melby 2005), men's receptive anal behaviors remain less explored (McBride & Fortenberry, 2010). The Kinsey Report on male sexuality (Kinsey, 1948, pp. 170–171) dismissed heterosexual anal play as "too rare" to measure. However, in the 1981 *Hite Report*, fully 30% of heterosexual men and 86% of gay men reported having "tried being penetrated with a finger" (p. 574). Furthermore, "most men, of either heterosexual or homosexual experience, who ha[d] tried being penetrated said they enjoyed it" (p. 574). A few years later, in *Love, Sex, and Aging* (1984), science writer Edward Brecher found that "16% of our heterosexual men and women report that, since age 50, they have had their anuses stimulated during sex. Of those who have tried it, 86% of men and 67% of women say they liked it" (p. 363). However, Brecher concluded that "unlike masturbation, cunnilingus, and fellatio," anal eroticism was still taboo even to those who personally enjoyed it (p. 364). Recent studies, which have primarily measured anal play only as penis-in-anus sex, have (unsurprisingly) found it very uncommon. For example, the 2010 National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior (NSSHB) reported that "receptive penile-anal intercourse was the least common behavior reported" by men aged 14–94, performed by "less than 6% of men in any age group in the past year" (Reece et al., p. 259).

In the interest of breaking down stereotypes, educators might note that MSM do not all engage in anal eroticism. A recent study suggested that

<sup>3</sup> The therapist gave us permission to use her posting, but we refrain from citing names and dates to preserve the therapist's and client's anonymity.

contrary to popular perception, some gay and bisexual men often refrain from anal sex. In an Internet survey of more than 22,000 gay and bisexual men, Rosenberger et al. (2011) found that only 37.2% had engaged in anal intercourse during their last sexual encounter with a man (p. 3040). By comparison, 72.7% had given or received oral sex (p. 3040). Unfortunately, this study overlooks a significant portion of the anal receptive repertoire by ignoring anal play with fingers, mouths, or toys.

Overall, current literature helps dispel the assumption that queer men universally embrace receptive anal pleasure while straight men universally reject it. However, with their varying criteria and conclusions, these studies also highlight the gaps in our knowledge. This lack of data leaves educators, counselors, and therapists without the tools they need to effectively destigmatize prostatic play.

### Critical Analyses of the Anal Taboo

Despite this lack of empirical data on anal practices, educators now have theoretical frameworks for analyzing and challenging the taboo on men's anal pleasure. When Jack Morin published *Anal Pleasure and Health* (1981), he began a revolution by questioning prejudices that had previously passed as common sense. For example, his book debunked the myth that anal play is unusual, unnatural, or unhealthy. Analyzing various social motives for the anal taboo, Morin introduced the notion that Western culture stigmatizes men's anal pleasure in order to stabilize gender norms. Morin asserted, as do we, that masculine identity rests on a rejection of all things feminine, and by extension, a rejection of homosexuality (pp. 16, 116–123). Rejecting receptive anal sexuality and linking it to gay men helps “normal” men maintain their distance from femininity, while minimizing scrutiny of the Western gender system. Thus, this taboo naturalizes and guards the border dividing straight men from women and gay men.

Empirical research supports this view of the anal taboo as a political tool stabilizing straight men's identity and privilege. In the *Hite Report on Male Sexuality* (1981), some respondents explicitly linked anal play with homosexuality, feminization, and deviance. For example, one respondent stated he would never explore anal play “[b]ecause I am 100% of a man,” while another wrote that “this would only be desirable by a homosexual—not normal in any way” (p. 574). In 2002, Middlethorn reported that her sample of Norwegian gay men commonly associated receptive anal sex with a “loss of dignity and manhood,” and “felt shame and contempt” when penetrated (pp. 181, 187). Damon (2000) reported similar sentiments among British gay men.

In our own survey of collegiate men, of 161 respondents who proposed reasons for men's anal taboo, 121 (75%) cited cultural stigmas of homosexuality, emasculation, and/or gender nonconformity (Brantman & Stiritz, in preparation). Twenty percent (N = 33) specifically cited straight men's fear

of being perceived as gay. For example, respondent #21 (straight) explained that anal pleasure “is typically associated with gay men. Most guys are terrified of coming across as gay, so the subject is taboo.” Likewise, respondent #191 (straight) commented that because anal eroticism “carries a very homosexual connotation for all men,” men who explore it risk becoming “the subject of ridicule by ourselves, our friends, and our communities.”

Suppression of knowledge is a key means of perpetuating stigma. However, we found only one study that investigated what men know about anal pleasure and how their knowledge affects their sexual choices. Middlethorpe (2002) found that some gay men remained ignorant of the prostate’s sexual potential and expressed “joy and relief” on learning that their anal sensations stemmed from universal aspects of male anatomy (p. 194). The men’s surprise suggests that Western culture still suppresses knowledge of the prostate as it once suppressed knowledge of the clitoris (Bennett, 1993; Kulish, 1991; Maines, 1999; Mitchell, 2000; Moore, 1995; Laqueur, 1990; Rosario & Bennett, 1995; Sherfey, 1972; Stiritz, 2008). Further, just as “cultural literacy” education (Stiritz, 2008) has empowered women by explaining that their “dysfunctional” sexual experiences stem from basic aspects of human anatomy, “prostage” literacy education can empower men.

Our own 2011 study of university men revealed a knowledge paradox: While 96% (N = 218) of our respondents had heard of men’s capacity for anal pleasure, 54% reported that they did not want to explore anal pleasure themselves (Branfman & Stiritz, in preparation). Interestingly, most of our respondents reported learning about this topic from pornography (N = 99, 43%) or a friend (N = 97, 42.5%). The least common source was a family member (N = 1, 0.4%). A small number of students (N = 28, 12%) did report learning about men’s anal pleasure in high school sex education classes—and the actual number may be greater, since an error prevented respondents from selecting the option of “high school sex-ed” until one week after the online survey launched. However, even if twice the recorded number of students learned about men’s anal pleasure in class, “pornography” and “a friend” would still lead by far as primary sources of (potentially inaccurate, stigmatizing) knowledge.

These data suggest a cycle of suppression: the anal taboo suppresses informed discussion of men’s anal eroticism, and this silence suppresses desire to explore it, which in turn keeps men from feeling certain that this pleasure truly exists and understanding that many men of all orientations can experience it. This cycle may explain the disconnection we found between men’s knowledge of pleasure and their (lack of) desire to enjoy it.

## POLICING GENDER: THE RECEPTIVE ANAL TABOO

While the stigma on men’s anal pleasure plainly shapes behavior, it may be less evident how this stigma also shapes gender identities and hierarchies of

privilege. Below, we analyze how men's anal taboo relates to broader issues of gender and power and why challenging this taboo can help promote social change. For educators who cover this analysis with their classes, it may be helpful for students to first study basic tenets of feminist and queer theory, especially the work of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Raewyn Connell (formerly R.W. Connell).

### Sex as Social Control

Building on the work of Michel Foucault, we consider sexuality an “especially dense transfer point for relations of power” (Foucault 1978, p. 103). Foucault views the very idea of sexuality as a form of social control—specifically, “bio-power,” which governs people by influencing how they experience their own bodies (1978, pp. 140–144). By investing certain acts with meaning, sexuality organizes people into categories and hierarchies, coercing the masses into an arbitrarily ordered society. Foucault argues that attempts to “liberate” sexual categories like “women” or “homosexuals” “chain us more fully to the power system of sexuality” by playing within the rules and identities this system has created (p. 157). Rather, Foucault explains, we must oppose “the grips of power” and control with “the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges” (p.157). That is, we must celebrate our own complex, ambiguous bodily sensations without relying on categories set forth by sexual ideologies.

While prostage education cannot realistically abolish sexual ideology, we hope to *complicate* sexual categories in order to flatten the hierarchy they currently form. Education on men's anal pleasure can facilitate this project because it challenges the “naturalness” of current sexual categories and the ways they distribute social power. To use a metaphor, prostatic pleasure is a wrench in the machinery, obstructing the smooth and automatic operation of the Western sex/gender system.

### Creating Sex and Gender

Today, Western cultures work hard to maintain that only two anatomical sexes exist, male and female. This assertion ignores the natural occurrence of intersex people, whose existence indicates that sex is a continuum rather than a binary (Fausto-Sterling, 1993). Michael Foucault and fellow theorist Judith Butler argue that sex is *not* a natural fact but a social construct (Butler, 1993, p. 1; Foucault, 1978, p. 152). By compelling us to view our bodies as heterosexual puzzle pieces designed for one preset sexual destiny, the notion of anatomical sex legitimizes our ideal of “normal” (hetero) coitus (Foucault, 1978, p. 152). On the basis of anatomical sex, Westerners build the cultural ideal of two polarized gender identities, man and woman, as-

sumed to be natural, “opposite, complementary, unequal, and heterosexual” (Pascoe, 2007, p. 27).

Like categories of anatomical sex, gender is also a social creation. Judith Butler (1990/2008, p. 191) explains that all people’s gender is a performance, a type of drag show, “a stylized repetition” of acts that our society has artificially labeled “masculine” or “feminine.” Those who do not conform to conventional gender scripts suffer punishment by exclusion, ridicule, legal sanction, and/or physical violence. However, as Butler (as cited in Bem 1995, p. 331) argues, even as society punishes these “perverse” individuals, it also needs them: Only by contrasting themselves against sexual and gender “deviants” can “normal” people create their own sense of naturalness and goodness.

Gender identity organizes people into hierarchies of power. To explain how Western cultures currently distribute this power, Raewyn Connell has proposed the concept of “hegemonic masculinity” (1987, p. 58). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the social practices that enforce patriarchy, meaning men’s dominance over women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). However, any given culture may also include many types of masculinity forming an “internal hegemony,” with certain masculinities considered superior to others (p. 844). For example, in the United States, white manhood is commonly valued over Asian manhood. Furthermore, as Coles (2008, p. 3) points out, various subgroups within a society may exalt different ideals of manhood, such as the elite businessman, the professional athlete, or the blue-collar construction worker.

In constantly navigating among these “multiple dominant masculinities,” men seek to validate their own forms of manhood and challenge other dominant models (take, e.g., the rise of the loving, engaged father). As different forms of masculinity become hegemonic, a society can redistribute respect, power, and resources among different people and groups.

### Defining Manhood: Masculinity as Misogyny

What model of masculinity enjoys hegemony today? How do men currently perform masculine identities? As sociologist Michael Kimmel (1994, p. 125) has argued, European and American cultures historically define masculinity as “the repudiation of femininity” and the inverse of “feminine” traits like weakness, dependence, and emotionality. Thus, we have only a negative definition of masculinity: “I am masculine (strong) because I am *not* feminine (weak).”

This model inherently positions women and femininity as inferior. For example, to gain the respect that comes with being a “real man,” men must constantly avoid “[a]ny interest or pursuit which is identified as . . . feminine” (Gorer, 1964, p. 129), as suggested by the common warning, “Don’t throw

it like a girl!" Since this model of masculinity relies on misogyny for its own definition, it innately produces and reinforces sexism (p. 65). Sociologist Eric Anderson (2009) describes this defensively anti-feminine (and by extension, anti-gay) form of manhood as "orthodox masculinity."

To be penetrated is the ultimate "feminine" act that men must reject in order to be regarded or to regard themselves as masculine (Agnew, 2000, p. 171; Bersani, 1988; Halperin, 2002). In Western cultures, sexual penetration holds great power as a metaphor for all gender relations (Brownmiller, 1975; Dworkin, 2006; MacKinnon, 1989). Anatomically, we imagine male and female genitalia as perfectly inverse systems designed for a single role—a "pole" and a "hole" (Paradis, 2007, p. 202). Metaphorically, this (supposedly) neat genital dichotomy symbolizes all gender difference: Men are embodied as the dominant, "penetrating phallus," and women as the submissive, "vulnerable vagina" (Guss, 2010, p. 125). The ultimate distinction between masculinity and femininity, between power and weakness, is the distinction between penetrator and penetratee.

Accepting men's capacity for anal receptivity provokes difficult questions about this model of sex and gender. Given the existence of men's prostatic pleasure, are the genitals really inverse systems, or are they parallel? Men and women both have "poles" (the penis/clitoris) and "holes" (the vagina/anus). This question destabilizes gender stereotypes based on the notion of men and women as opposite, complementary puzzle pieces (i.e., strong/weak, dominant/submissive, aggressive/nurturing, stoic/emotional, sex subject/sex object).

Thus, men's "anal eroticism *subverts categories and complicates norms of gender and power*" that our society wishes to stabilize (Guss, 2010, p. 125; emphasis in the original). This challenge not only undermines accepted hierarchies of power and privilege but also upsets people's lifelong understandings of themselves, their bodies, and their society.

### Queer Men: Scapegoats for Femininity and Receptivity

Since our culture constructs men as the "opposite" of women, it must downplay men's natural capacity for "feminine" traits like emotionality, nurturance, and sexual receptivity. In the modern era, Western cultures assign men's femininity to a specific class of men—gay men—who are often derided as hardly men at all (Miller, 1990, p. 128). Like early sexologists Krafft-Ebing and Havlock Ellis, many Westerners stereotypically assume that gay men have an "inverted," feminine gender (Blashill & Powlishta, 2009; Deaux & Kite, 1987; Lehne, 1976). Therefore, any man who breaks the rules of masculinity can be conveniently dismissed as "gay," not quite a man anyway. This defensive strategy deflects critical questions about whether the norms of masculinity are actually natural or real.

Men's anal taboo is perhaps the clearest example of this defense: While men's receptivity threatens Western beliefs about gender, assigning anal pleasure to gay men minimizes this "threat" (Guss, 2010, p. 129). If only gay men can enjoy receptive anal pleasure, then Western cultures can avoid questioning their beliefs about "normal" (straight) men. Respondent #47 (gay) neatly summarized this imagined binary with his wry comment, "Men use their dicks. Fags use their asses."

Straight men both benefit and suffer from the notion that only gay men can transgress masculine norms. As long as straight men can paint homosexuality as the feminine, receptive "inverse" of manly, penetrative heterosexuality, their own masculinity appears safer (Connell, 2005, p. 40). Thus, homophobic rejection of gay men stems at least partially from sexist rejection of femininity (Pharr, 1988), and both are central aspects of orthodox masculinity (Anderson, 2009). However, this model also makes gayness the perfect tool for bullying men into "proper" masculine behavior: Since any man could be a closeted homosexual, men constantly face the stigmatizing label of "faggot" if they stray from expected masculine scripts (Anderson, 2009; Pascoe, 2007).

As a proxy for womanhood, gayness becomes a humiliating insult that intimidates men into conforming to orthodox masculine norms. Gayness both clarifies and threatens heterosexual masculine identity. Men's anal taboo is a perfect example of this double status: Assigning anal pleasure to gay men stabilizes heterosexual masculine identity but also makes any hint of anal eroticism a powerful threat to that identity.

Acknowledging that many men may enjoy anal sexuality erases a key difference between "normal" and "deviant" males—between "men" and "fags." This undermines the strategy of scapegoating gay men to distract from the similarities between men and women, creating new pressure to reexamine our sex/gender system. This subversive potential makes men's anal pleasure a powerful point of resistance to traditional (and traditionally oppressive) gender norms. As respondent #15 (gay) wrote, "I actually used this [topic of anal pleasure] to question my theology teachers in high school on whether the male/female combination really was the only one that made sense." Here, anal sexuality became a lever for resisting heteronormative indoctrination. This is exactly the type of resistance that we hope to foster through informed discussion of men's anal sexuality in sexuality education classes, informational videos, scholarly and popular articles, collegiate gender studies courses, and other educational venues.

### Inclusive Masculinity

For decades, scholars have built on each other's work calling for revision to the repressive norms of the Western sex/gender system. For example, Judith



Butler has insisted on the importance of “troubl[ing] the gender categories that support gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality” (Butler, 1990/2008, p. viii). Meanwhile, a chorus of authors has specifically called for new models of masculinity. Kimmel asserts that for the 21st century, “we need a different sort of manhood, a ‘democratic manhood.’ The manhood of the future cannot be based on obsessive self-control, defensive exclusion, or frightened escape” from the specters of femininity and homosexuality (1996/2006, p. 254). Connell, likewise, has called for the creation of new forms of masculinity capable of “democratizing gender relations” and “abolishing power differentials, not just of reproducing hierarchy” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 853).

Building on empirical ethnographic studies, sociologist Eric Anderson (2008, 2009) asserts that these “democratizing” masculinities have already begun to emerge in certain circles (primarily white, middle-class, university-attending circles). Specifically, Anderson coins the term “inclusive masculinities” for models of manhood “predicated on the social inclusion of those traditionally marginalized by hegemonic masculinity,” such as gay men, women, and people of color (Anderson, 2008, p. 606).

Unlike men who embrace “orthodox” notions of manhood, men who identify with inclusive masculinities appear “less concerned or entirely unconcerned whether others perceive them to be gay, straight, masculine, or feminine” (p. 608). In groups such as fraternities and sports teams, inclusive masculinity leads men to reduce or even reject prejudices like misogyny, homophobia, and racism (pp. 612, 616). Furthermore, men in these groups tend to encourage and respect emotional intimacy and vulnerability (p. 615). Meanwhile, contradicting Connell’s (1987) theory of hegemonic masculinity, many inclusive masculinities can thrive side by side without forming a hierarchy of respect or privilege (Anderson, 2009, p. 97). In other words, inclusive masculinity offers a valuable alternative to the exclusionary and harmful demands of orthodox masculinity.

The exploration of men’s anal pleasure complements discussions of “inclusive,” “democratizing” masculinities. In *Masculinities* (2005), Connell suggests that these new models must stem from a re-embodiment for men: “new ways for men to understand their bodies, ways that erase the power relations that permeate our current notions of masculinity (p. 223). Psychoanalyst Jeffrey Guss (2010) specifically ties this idea to experiences of anal penetrability, claiming that masculinity could “be softened” and enriched “through an embodied experience of receptivity” (p. 132). The relationship between anal sexuality and inclusive masculinities is mutual: Even as these new masculinities may grant men social permission to experiment with anal sexuality, education on anal sexuality can motivate men to seek less rigid models of masculinity that allow them to seek this pleasure without shame.

Furthermore, the interior sensations of anal sexuality may help straight men understand and empathize with women and queer men in ways that

seem impossible without firsthand experience of receptivity. For example, one respondent in the *Hite Report* (1981, p. 572) stated,

I never really understood how a woman could let a man enter her until I was entered myself. I enjoyed the feeling . . . To be penetrated is very different from penetrating, [which] applies equally well to nonsexual things. To let someone into your life, into your heart, into your fears and desires is a quality that is much more highly developed in women. Perhaps this difference is what makes it difficult for men to love. I know my fear of love is like a fear of letting in.

By exploring the “feminine” experience of receptivity, this man reached a new appreciation, understanding, and respect for women. Furthermore, he came to reevaluate how masculine (penetrative) norms might limit him emotionally. This is the type of personal growth and critical reflection that we believe prostatic exploration can foster on a personal level—especially when paired with educational discussions.

Meanwhile, on a societal scale, “normalization” of men’s anal pleasure and receptivity could contribute to Bem’s (1995) vision of a world that respects all configurations of gender, sex, and desire as equally natural, preferable, and fluid. This is the value, the “why?” of studying and de-stigmatizing men’s anal eroticism.

### SEARCHING FOR NEW MASCULINITIES

Feminist and queer educators may often need to explain why it is so important to reform current notions of manhood. The answer is that traditional scripts of masculinity engender costly consequences for many people, including the straight men whom they privilege (Anderson, 2009, p. 41). Despite progress by feminist, GLBT, and queer movements of the 20th century, GLBT-identified people continue to suffer hate-based violence, inadequate health care (Banks, 2003), employment discrimination, and legal marginalization; women of all sexual orientations still face unacceptable levels of domestic abuse, sexual assault, unequal pay, and corporate glass ceilings; and the demands of work keep many men strangers to their own children (Williams, 2010, p. 81).

Meanwhile, men face constant pressure to anxiously censor themselves to avoid any trace of femininity or queerness (Kimmel, 1994; Pascoe, 2007; Yoshino, 2001–02). Michael Messner (2011) has written extensively on the ways that restrictive masculine models “shut boys down emotionally” and drive men to commit “violence against women, against other men [and] against [them]selves” (pp. 10–11). As *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow (January 10, 2012) notes, hegemonic notions of manhood impose “se-

vere constriction or self-denial” on most men. This pressure leads men to destructive behaviors like steroid use, excessive alcohol consumption, and refusal to seek treatment for injuries or illness (Sabo, 2005). The limitations of masculinity can also inflict lethal emotional trauma: American men are five times more likely to die by suicide than by accident (Kimmel, 2006, p. 220). Our culture systematically produces these misfortunes through its inability (or unwillingness?) to depart from gender models that inherently produce stigma and inequality, and the dehumanizing scripts that support them.

A recent scandal at Buffalo High School in Wyoming illustrates the shame and abuse that our sex/gender system heaps on even heterosexual men. In November 2011, school coach Pat Lynch presented the football team with a facetious “Hurt Feelings Report” to document bullying (Towle, 2011). Under “Reasons for Filing Report,” the form mocks anti bullying efforts, offering options like “I am a pussy,” “I have woman like hormones,” “I am a queer,” and “I am a little bitch.” The form further insults the victim of bullying, asking for the signature of the “little sissy” and “girly-man” filling out the report alongside that of the “Real Man” accused of harassment. The coach’s “joke” positions femininity and gayness as shameful opposites of manhood while linking them with weakness and victimhood.

Aside from fanning the flames of homophobia and misogyny in impressionable young men, Lynch apparently sought to discourage his players from the “unmasculine” behavior of expressing their emotions or seeking help. Although Lynch was reprimanded and forced to resign as coach,<sup>4</sup> his behavior demonstrates the ongoing existence of orthodox masculinity and the problems it generates: To enjoy the safety and privilege of manhood, many men must still deny their own pain while abusing and demonizing others.

It is precisely to alter this harmful status quo that our culture needs less restrictive models of masculinity. New, less exclusive masculinities can provide tools for challenging our sex/gender system, whose androcentrism, misogyny, and heterosexism feed aggressive and harmful behaviors (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 2000; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Guss, 2010; Kimmel, 2006). Discussions of men’s receptive anal pleasure can support this search for less destructive masculinities. By revising our culture’s perceptions of men’s anal sexuality, we hope to challenge conventional beliefs about the “naturalness” of orthodox masculinities and the rest of our sex/gender system. Our ultimate goal is to promote more inclusive, “partnership”-seeking (Eisler, 1988, 2003) models of manhood that minimize the importance of gender boundaries. These transformations will involve translating our theoretical explorations of masculinity and anal pleasure into practical changes at the personal and societal levels.

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<sup>4</sup> Ironically, Lynch was kept on as a guidance counselor.

## DECONSTRUCTING THE TABOO AND TEACHING “PROSTAGE” IN SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Specifically, we call for sexuality educators of high school, university, and adult students to discuss men’s receptive anal pleasure in an honest and informed manner in their curricula, as well as in publications and other media. To facilitate such discussions, it may be helpful to create new language. As social scientists Lisa and Marcia Douglass (2002) note, our culture has few terms for sexual pleasures outside of penetrative heterosexual acts. They suggest inventing new words, arguing that language can change how one thinks and behaves. For example, the Douglasses coined the term “clittage”—clitoral stimulation with fingers, toy, or tongue—to help women specify a practice that triggers orgasm more surely than intercourse (pp. 254–255).

Following this lead, we propose a portmanteau of our own: “prostage” (pro-STAHJ), prostate stimulation using fingers, toy, tongue, or penis. While current language for anal acts remains overly medical or pejorative, “prostage” is neutral. Discussing “prostage” could sidestep the stigma and shock that “anal sex” triggers. Asking for “prostage” would seem neither gay nor straight. Using the word “prostage” could allow men to voice receptive anal desire without employing stigmatized terms and allow everyone to articulate recognition of men’s erogenous zones.

Educators can address prostage to enrich discussions of feminist theory, queer theory, and social constructionism. We recognize that some students may initially have strong reactions against prostage education: In our teaching experience, although most women avidly absorb lessons on the clitoris, many men are apt to walk out of lessons introducing prostage. However, we encourage educators to use this resistance as a teaching opportunity: After all, such reactions perfectly demonstrate the influence of men’s anal taboo. Before beginning the first lesson on prostage, teachers might inform students, “We are about to discuss a subject that may bring up strong feelings for some people. If this topic does make you feel uncomfortable, I encourage you to share and articulate those feelings. This is a safe space for all of us to express our points of view.” By helping students to voice and analyze their reactions to men’s anal sexuality, educators can minimize classroom tensions while powerfully illuminating the existence and effects of men’s anal taboo. As another useful tactic to help students keep an open mind, educators can highlight the similarities between men’s anal taboo and the former taboo against clitoral pleasure.

After this introduction, a unit on prostage might begin with a lesson covering men’s anal anatomy and the mechanics of safe prostatic play, while dismissing common myths about anal eroticism. An excellent resource for this initial lesson is Megan Andelloux’s (2012) “Securing the Back Door.” In a second lesson, educators could engage students in a discussion of their own feelings and beliefs regarding men’s anal sexuality. This discussion may

include guiding questions such as, “How does learning about the prostate challenge common beliefs about male bodies and men’s sexuality? How does this knowledge complicate our ideas about ‘normal’ sexual acts and roles? How does it blur the boundaries we use to define men and women, straightness and gayness, masculinity and femininity? How may it impact our own self-image and behavior? What are other examples of constructed restrictions that our sex/gender system imposes?” Excerpts from this article may also help to foster such discussions. Finally, a third lesson could cover the history of men’s anal taboo, rationally examining its sources and social functions over time. Students could then discuss their reactions to this lesson. Throughout, educators can link these discussions to the topic of inclusive masculinities, and the value of challenging the norms and prejudices of our current sex/gender system.

This approach reflects Brown, Macintyre, and Trujillo’s (2003) research indicating that information alone cannot change stigmatizing beliefs. By combining information with critical thinking, discussion, and bold new language, our approach reflects their finding that multi-modal education reduces stigma more effectively than using one channel alone. To facilitate this type of education, we call for more research on best practices for diminishing stigma, for promoting sexual creativity, and for helping people keep an open mind about men’s anal sexuality.

Our provisional research suggests that prostage education would create space to question the rigidity of the Western sex/gender system. In addition to our survey and literature review, our own classroom experiences also support this argument. For example, after a class discussion on prostage, one of Susan Stiritz’s students wrote the following:

What really struck me about this lecture was the uncovering of the reasons why I feel so uncomfortable getting “prostage” or even thinking about exploring the anus sexually. Although there is still some feeling of it being a little gross, I couldn’t help but think I, like many other men my age, have been socialized to believe that men’s anal pleasure is weird and wrong. There is a huge tendency in our culture to degrade and disassociate with anything pertaining to male homosexuality, and that obviously includes anal stimulation for men. I never really stopped to think about why I thought it was weird, but our discussion that week really opened my eyes to the “norms” we think we believe. . . . *These discussions have really helped me break down gendered norms in every action and thought I have.* (Anonymous, personal communication, November 14, 2012; our emphasis).

As this student notes, prostage education can help challenge traditional norms of gender and sexuality continue to misrepresent men’s sexuality and colonize men’s bodies. These norms constrain behavior and thought, even as some men come to espouse less rigid models of manhood. Prostage educa-

tion can provide all people, not only men, tools *and* motivation to question the beliefs that underpin sexism, homophobia, and male dominance.

Of course, prostatic orgasms do not magically erase restrictive norms or power imbalances. Sexual acts like prostate stimulation do not “necessarily carry with them particular empathies, meanings, or politics” (A. Friedman, personal communication, January 18, 2012). For example, MSM are just as capable of misogyny and homophobia as straight men (Spindelman, 2010). However, sexuality educators can explicitly employ prostate as a *starting point* for critical reflection: a wedge for dismantling current beliefs about gender, masculinity, and sexuality. As Jeffrey Guss concludes in his article *The Danger of Desire*, “anal sex does not destroy the boundaries of male and female, masculine and feminine, hetero and homo, activity and passivity—but it certainly complicates them. And in these complications, we can locate its ultimate productivity” (2010, p. 139).

We concur. By challenging conventional knowledge and the conventional gender order, prostate could potentially throw doubt on all types of limiting norms, including the notion that penetration (physical or metaphorical) is the only respectable means of relating to others. This reflection may influence how we behave as individuals, romantic partners, citizens, and global actors. As a launch pad for discussion, prostate education could perhaps play a significant role in furthering equality and justice in our society.

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