

**Should Sex Education Be Taught in Schools?**

**Sex Education Within the United States: Analyzing Social and Political Factors of Sex**

**Education Within The United States**

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## **Table of Contents**

Abstract... Page 3

Chapter 1: Introduction... Page 4

Chapter 2: Methodology of Sex Education... Page 21

Chapter 3: Comparison/Analysis of State Sex Education... Page 42

Chapter 4: Conclusion... Page 49

Reference Page... Page 57

## **Abstract:**

Sex education has been a prominent topic among society since the 1800s, coinciding with the prevention and relevance of current social issues. As years have passed, sex education has continued to evolve through the prevailing social situations. However, within the 21st century, sex education started to lack improvement and inclusion of social topics and issues that are prevalent in today's society. This thesis analyzes the history behind sex education among the United States, and defines what it is that shapes sex education in today's society. With society ever changing, and social and political concepts becoming a more central topic in today's society, the issue of sex education has become more of an issue. This thesis addresses the development of sex education among schools within the United States, and emphasizes the difference between each district and state perspective on sex education.

This thesis looks at sex education in not only a social light, but also a political standpoint. Sex education started as a solution to social circumstances, however, with legislation evolving and many social topics coming into play, there are many other factors that shape sex education. By researching eight different states with different political affiliations, this thesis was able to come to a conclusion as to what characteristics of a state or district shape that community's sex education, but also how exactly a state's political background influences and shapes their perspective on sex education. With sex education everchanging, and becoming more of a significant social issue in today's society, it is important to understand why sex education is the way it is around the country, and how the structure of sex education impacts society and individuals as a whole. The result of the analysis and comparison of eight different states

indicates how the political standpoint and authority of each state generalizes what type of stance that specific state has on sex education, and sex education within schools.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction on Sex Education**

### **What is Sex Education?**

Sex education refers to the process of discussing, debating, and providing information about sex, sexuality, reproduction, and contraceptives. It encompasses not only the physical act of sex, but also broader topics such as gender, power, hierarchy, human nature, and the societal implications of sex (Luker 2006: 7). Sex education, whether presented in a classroom or in a discussion, is always influenced by the prevailing social circumstances. Sex education was originally developed in schools in the 1880s due to the social conflict of prostitution and diseases. The Human Papillomavirus (HPV) epidemic, along with the stigmatization of prostitution, is what led to the concept of sex education, sexual orientation, and gender roles. From the mid 2000s to now, same sex relationships, and non binary identities have become more prominent, leading to a debate among specific topics regarding sexual orientation and heteronormativity within education. There are many factors that tie into the reluctance of schools to both introduce and diversify sex education curricula, where most result in a heteronormative perspective that can cause a social impact regarding sex and gender. Heteronormativity is endorsed through state activity, whether that is through education, tax, law, or the unfair preferences that operate in each specific area. Heteronormativity can promote monogamous, marital, middle class, and white heterosexuality through school policy, along with demonstrating ambivalence towards individuals that identify outside of the “normative” identity of heterosexuality (McNeill 2013). The recurrence of heteronormativity in modern-day education stems from the social and political factors that have impacted the societal norm in regards to sex

education since the 1880s.

### **History of Sex Education**

Sex education was invented in the midst of the first sexual revolution, in the Progressive era, between 1880 and 1920 (Luker 2006: 37). The Progressive Era was a revolution with two perspectives on sex education. Within the beginning of the Progressive Era it was believed that the concept of reformation, including the conspiracy of silence and that “ignorance was innocent,” was why exactly society did not want children to learn new information (Shah 2015: 4). However, as years passed within the Progressive Era, the realization that ignorance was impossible, led to the development of the production of a more complex education system. After the 1960s, the increase in cultural conflict and controversy of the “sexual revolution” led to the development of new and improved sex education. These changes in society during the 20th century are what determined the present mindset of sex education; as society still continues to evolve, sex education does as well. It is important to explore the difference of sex education in the 21st century, and how exactly it is related to social situations currently, and what exactly is wrong with the perspective of the educational system.

Teen sexual activity and sexuality is driven by a variety of forces, such as social, familial, economic and educational factors (Perrin 2003: 446). Specifically, sexuality education has a huge impact on an individual's identities, thoughts, and actions. Since 1991, sex education has consisted of two major approaches: abstinence only and abstinence plus. The abstinence only program encourages people to abstain from sex until marriage. The abstinence plus program also promotes abstinence; however, it includes instruction about contraceptives as well. One of the issues with sex education is how indirect the relationship of the federal government is towards the curriculum. The federal government can not institute specific policies directly; however, it

can influence what is being taught through funding (Perrin 2003: 446). The funding for abstinence only education began in 1981, and it was developed as the only solution to help young adults avoid STDs, HIV/AIDS and pregnancies (Perrin 2003: 447). The abstinence only concept entails an educational program which as Perrin (2003) notes,

- A. has as its exclusive purpose, teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity;
- B. teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school age children;
- C. teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems;
- D. teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity;
- E. teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects;
- F. teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society;
- G. teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances; and
- H. teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity. Most schools around the country since the 1990s have used the abstinence only education program to teach individuals about sex and sexuality. It is easy to recognize how heteronormative this program really is, and how exactly this program limits additional factors of sexuality and society. (Perrin 2003: 449)

With school being one of the most influential communities and programs for young individuals, it is beneficial to incorporate sex education into the curricula that reaches a large group of young people. From past experiences, society can only be improved when there is a “change in the attitude of people” (Zimmerman 2015:18). Specifically, sex education is improved by existing in educational situations, which target the younger generation. This is one way to get a head start at changing society and one’s perception of sex.

With sex education being an important component to the school curriculum, it is important to determine what exactly the curriculum should entail, and how complex and in depth

it should be. The debate on whether or not sex education should be complex, abstinence only, or abstinence plus, are all influenced by the social situation and status of the students receiving the curriculum. The movement for sex education to be prominent among public schools began in the second decade of the twentieth century, where sexually transmitted diseases were stigmatized within society. The production of sex education was thought to be one way to prevent these diseases from occurring. The questions asked when developing the function of sex education were to be considered, "dangerous and demeaning ideas" (Carter 2001: 214). It was advertised that educating Americans on the proper uses of sexuality would be beneficial and preventative of prostitution, VD, and men's exploitation of women. Society depends on knowledge as the answer to all problems, specifically, sex education can be perceived as the solution for all illnesses in relation to sex. Education is seen as an extension of the Progressive Era movements that were developed to improve the character and changes of immigrants and those of other races who did not have the high moral standing of the middle and upper classes. The thought of sex education can be one tool to prevent the negative correlations of sex, whether that is physical, social, or political. Education is one way to express knowledge, however, the way it is demonstrated and by who, has a huge impact on the significance.

The founding of the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) was the first group to encourage sex education. Both parts of the term had important resonance for the founders. Specifically, "hygiene" was a term that encompassed health in all its dimensions: social, mental, spiritual, and physical. While "social" was a "euphemism for sex (as in the social diseases), meaning venereal disease," it also included the use of sexuality as intimately related to all dimensions of "hygiene" (Luker 2006: 39). The Social Hygiene movement developed from purity activism during the 19th century, with purity activism being the act of "staying pure before

marriage” (Shah 2015: 4). The concept of purity stemmed from the Catholic religion. With the Catholic church having a large influence over a significant number of people, members of the church felt it was important to advocate for purity. Catholicism is a prominent religion in the United States, and its teachings and ideology can have a significant impact on social perspectives and beliefs. The Catholic Church has traditionally taken stances on various social issues, including abortion, same-sex marriage, and contraception, and these positions can influence the views of Catholic individuals and communities. The Catholic Church has consistently upheld conservative views on sexuality and sex throughout its history, and these views remain prominent today. The Church places great importance on sexual purity, particularly before marriage, and promotes abstinence outside of marriage within traditional heterosexual relationships. The concept of "purity" is a central virtue in Catholic teaching on sexuality and sex. These views have and continue to influence the perspectives of not only Catholic individuals and communities, but also education where curriculum and policies are developed through the Catholic lens. The word "hygiene" was then associated with the concept of sex education, due to the conflict that adolescents within the 1900s were receiving information regarding sex from “foul sources, such as degenerates, obscene images, advertisements, and booklets” (Burnham 1973: 886). Due to the corruption of the taboo topic of sex, society decided to associate sex education as one way of “cleansing” society (Burnham 1973: 886). The discussion of sex is associated with “filth,” as individuals are “besmirched by discussing it in public” (Burnham 1973: 886). Multiple factors have contributed in shaping American society's desire for "cleansing and purification," with one being religion that often provides the moral framework for executing these beliefs (Burnham 1973: 886).

Sex education was developed by Progressives in response to the social epidemic of



prostitution and the perceived need for purification. Progressives emphasized the concept of sex education as the best way to make American society better. Sex was not just the physical act between two individuals, but it was defined for all the ambiguities that society is currently trying to dissolve within the issues of sexuality and gender. What seems to be a common theme with sex education is no matter the time period, and whatever is perceived as deviant during that time period, it is expected to be taught about and addressed to the population. Whatever dominant issue is relevant within each era, is what influences and defines the structure and content of sex education throughout history. Specifically, in the early 1900s, prostitution was perceived as the most deviant sexual act; therefore, society believed sex education would decrease this trend and thus the spread of disease. While in today's society, as teen pregnancies and abortion are becoming more common, society believes that abstinence only education will be the most beneficial in preventing these demeaning acts from occurring. In a more complex standpoint, one should explore why in society today individuals do not want to educate the younger generation on other stigmatized ideas such as non-binary identities, and LGBTQ identities. If these are perceived as common deviant ideas among society, why does one not want to educate the newly developing generation on it?

The controversies around sex education have something to do with the concept of exposure and enlightenment. In the beginning of the sex education era, the Progressives believed that sex education was important as it challenged the unfair double standard of women, men, and sexuality. One of the most notable examples of this double standard revolved around prostitution where there were different expectations for men and women's behavior (Luker 2006: 42). Men were permitted to indulge in prostitution and sex without any social consequences, while women who involved in these sexual acts were ostracised and degraded by society (Luker 2006: 42).

Social practices and discrepancies like this one, have continued to be prominent among sex education today, by exploring all social, political, and physical aspects of men and women.

In the 1930s, sex and gender inequality were transforming simultaneously. The new equality between men and women, such as coeducation, divorce, and contraceptives, were arising in new patterns of sexual expression, and through the description of sex education (Luker 2006: 51). The goal of sex was expanding from solely procreation, to include equality and pleasure. The concept of sex education was transitioning from the prevention of venereal diseases, to covering everything under the rubric of “personal and family living” (Luker 2006: 60). Between 1915 to 1920, sex education included sex experimentation before marriage and the understanding of the importance of sex to the success of marriage. In the 1920s, sex education curricula broadened in the sense of exploring marriages, families, new professions, organizations, and ideologies of sex (Luker 2006: 60). However, from the 1920s to the 1960s, sex education was transformed into “family life education,” which strictly imposed cultural agreements that inferred that sex outside of marriage was wrong and dangerous (Luker 2006: 62). Sex education within the 1900s was only consistent with “marriage and reproductive purposes,” where from today’s standpoint this form of sex education can be perceived as limited (Shah 2015: 3). This previous form of information on sex was originally expressed through books that targeted white middle-class Americans, and thus largely limiting access to information to those who are literate and wealthy enough to purchase books and doctors (Shah 2015: 3).

The Sexual Revolution developed during the 1960s is perceived as one of the most influential times within the development of sex education. Specifically, the sixties is perceived as a time when the “world changed forever” (Luker 2006: 65). The sixties was when the

controversy around sex education has skyrocketed, and the change in societal sexual relations and acts evolved. The sixties was the time when the perspectives on sex, gender, and family shifted significantly (Luker 2006: 67). The sixties were so revolutionary, as ideas about gender and sexuality were called into question, along with power relations between men and women (Luker 2006: 71). The Sexual Revolution was an era that separated sex from pregnancy, giving women a greater sense of sexual freedom and allowing women to experience sex in the same ways as men always had. Sex started to be considered a form of pleasure, rather than just perceived as a necessity that coincides with marriage and gender roles (Luker 2006: 73). The Sexual Revolution was not just a transition in the perception of sex, but it was a transformation that coincided with relevance in current society. Rather than urging young people to avoid masturbation and premarital sex, with it being inevitable, sex education's task was to make sex safer instead of denouncing it (Luker 2006 84). Sex education began to become relevant to the current society, such as accepting the fact that premarital sex will occur, by enlightening individuals to avoid hardships.

### **Different Perspectives on Sex Education**

Society today is divided into two groups in regards to the Sexual Revolution: those who embrace the revolution, and those who wish the older perspective of sex was still in place. The two groups are described in terms of being liberal and conservative, or the “right-left dichotomy,” or “traditionalist and progressives,” to represent where certain individuals stand when it comes to sexuality and education (Luker 2006: 92). It is pretty transparent that those who support comprehensive sex education are known as liberal, and those who are opposed to such complex sex education and/or prefer abstinence only education are conservative. The conservative standpoint on sex includes the viewpoint that men and women should not have

premarital sex, that gay sex is deviant, and that a large degree of reticence should surround the whole entire matter of sex (Luker 2006: 92). Like any political issue, both viewpoints are not fully one sided. For example, an individual can believe in abortion but still be “anti-abortion,” where they believe making abortion illegal would not stop it from occurring, therefore legalizing abortion will be beneficial (Luker 2006: 92). An individual may not believe that sex education should be taught beyond promoting abstinence in schools; however, a mother and father should be able to express whatever they want about sex and sexuality to their child. More specifically, to be conservative or liberal is about whether or not any kind of sex, besides heterosexual married sex, should or should not be morally and socially acceptable (Luker 2006: 98). Conservatives consider sex as a sacred act that should be reserved for marriage to preserve its sanctity in fact procreating as part of the sacrament of marriage itself. They oppose any sexual activity outside of marriage and consider it immoral, while liberals view sex as a natural aspect of human life that can occur outside of formal structures like marriage. The controversy surrounding sex education in schools can be attributed to social division, as some believe that the education provided on sex is heteronormative and can have adverse effects on sex and gender. After describing how the controversy over sex education and sexuality has come about, while also understanding the different sides of sexuality in today's society, we can explore why and how exactly sex education and sexuality among schools is subjugating certain minorities. In order to comprehend the significance of sex education and its impact on individuals and society, we need to understand why it is crucial to an individual's education and lifestyle. Additionally, it is essential to consider the political aspect of our society today and how the constant shift in political views and morals influences the education of young individuals in schools. By

exploring these topics, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the importance of sex education in society.

### **The Problem of Sex Education Today:**

The change in social normativity within sexuality and sex education has shifted from the 1900s to today. In the 21st century, debates on sex education revolve around the belief that it is too heteronormative and that it differentiates the sexualities and identities that have become more visible among society, such as trans and cis genders, and the LGBTQ community. State activity is one of the primary reasons why sex education in school curricula is lagging, and why there is a debate about the complexity of sex education material. Heteronormativity can be rooted through federal and state sexuality education laws and policies that are specifically pathologizing homosexuality and articulating the authority of heteronormative families and individuals. Specifically, state laws in Alabama, Arizona, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Utah require that sexuality education presents homosexuality in a negative light (McNeill 2013). The Alabama State Code (Section 16-40A-2) requires an emphasis that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public, and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state (McNeill 2013). The Arizona state code prohibits schools from promoting homosexuality in its education curriculum (McNeill 2013). The state's control over the school curriculum in sex education suggests that the government's political perspective is one of the contributing factors to the heteronormativity of sex education. Another factor is due to the social stigma around the transparency of sex and sexuality. Due to the social expectations of sex, many individuals believe that sex should not be discussed and taught within a public environment, but that it should only be expressed and discussed within the confines of a family's home (McNeill 2013). There is also the concern of the corruption of children, where parents believe that by exposing their children to too much knowledge and information about sex can

lead to their children to have an unnecessary amount of knowledge on these topics. For example, parents have expressed concerns regarding sex education movies, by arguing that they “disclose grown up secrets to previously innocent children” (Zimmerman 2015: 98). One of the debates in regards to sex education in schools, which also leads to the concept of modern sex education, is the fact that one should not teach individuals about sexuality and sex topics that they do not already know about. Certain segments of society are worried and concerned that teaching children about what it means to be gay or transgender will introduce them to a new way of life, which may be unsettling for them. However, the importance of the Progressive Era, and the Sexual Revolution, is to break the “vicious cycle of silence and fear surrounding sex” (Zimmerman 2015: 98). The debate over whether sex education with full transparency is beneficial to society has been ongoing from the 1900s to today. It is beneficial to explain how exactly sex education depicts heterosexuality and heteronormativity, in order to depict how sex education is ostracizing sexual orientations and sex. The importance of a complex sex education can be understood by exploring its potential positive impacts on students and society as a whole. Society can explore how heteronormativity has negative impacts on individuals, and how political views on society can affect sex education. By recognizing the issue with current sex education and its influence on individuals with certain political views, we can see how curriculums are one-sided. Heteronormativity not only presents a limited definition of sex education, but it also discriminates against individuals with other sexualities, which contributes to the overall social stigma surrounding non-heterosexual orientations, gender roles, and inequalities in society.

### **Sociological Theory**

The development of sex education started with the curriculum of abstinence only. The concept of abstinence is what sparked divisive statements and perspectives around sex education. Specifically, conservatives argue for abstinence only instruction as one way to reassert conventional understandings of family, marriage, and morality to society through schools (Fields 38). Conservatives, who can be interpreted as the traditionalists group of the culture war of sex education, are those who believe that abstinence only will provide protection against promiscuity, disease, and moral degradation within society (Fields 38). The Progressives are those who focus on the importance of comprehensive sex education and the discussions of sexuality (Fields 40). The debate between the two forms of education is what has led to the culture war of sex education that is prominent today. The debate on the complexity and content of sex education has been ongoing since the Progressive Era, with discussions revolving around what exactly sex education should include. The ongoing changes, stigmatization, and improvements of sex education curricula in schools across the country have been heavily influenced by politics, leading to a perpetual culture war between conservatives and liberals. By analyzing the culture war of sex education, we can come closer to a conclusion as to why sex education and its curriculum is just a prominent political and social debate within society today.

### **Culture War Theory:**

The culture war theory is one perspective for understanding the conflict and controversy over sex education both in the past and present. The culture wars theory suggests that the accumulation of social issues debated today, such as abortion, values in school, and homosexuality can be viewed as aspects of a single conflict between worldviews. A culture war is a title for the conflict between ideas, but the source of conflict is found in different moral visions, such as individuals' lives, thoughts, emotions, beliefs, activities, and relationships

(Hunter 2006:52). In a more general sense, a culture war, specifically in regards to sex education, is between conservatives and liberals. The definition of culture wars is one theoretical explanation for the social and political conflict regarding sex education and its complexity. Culture is commonly understood as the collective set of values and beliefs held by individuals. The cultural debate examines the beliefs, values, and moral preferences of individuals. Culture is the process of naming things, defining reality, and framing debate, while the politics of culture is about the push and pull of the mechanisms of power over cultural issues. The culture war of sex education entails discursive politics that are incorporated by emotions. Emotions become politicized, drawing attention to the issue. Emotions and responses to certain social issues can amplify the conflict, enhancing the war between the topic of sex education. The opposition towards sex education can be due to the production of an evocative claim or label which is sometimes referred to as “framing” or “cultural frames” (Irvine 2002:155). By using an evocative claim to describe certain sex education, it can catch people's attention by instigating one's emotions. For example, when a conservative considers a curriculum about homosexual relationships as “sodomy curriculum,” it is instigating emotion by correlating it with that specific negative notion (Irvine 2002:155). When a social movement or issue evokes certain emotions, it is when emotion and feelings are politicized and put into both sides of the culture war. Not only is it that evocative claims can spark certain opinions and beliefs towards sex education, but these representations of social issues intensify individuals' predispositions with certain topics within sex education influencing their emotions and responses. The presence of debate regarding sex education and its complexity and curriculum can be explained by the various factors that shape an individual's stance on sex education, such as their political leanings, personal encounters with sexual diversity, and willingness to accept sexual pluralism (Irvine 2002:146).



In 1993 alone, over one hundred U.S communities were embroiled in conflict over teaching about sexuality in schools. Public debate over sex education has become more present and volatile than the actual act of sex education in the classroom. School board meetings have led to physical violence and even death threats in regards to political point of views on sex education, and personal beliefs. The debate over sex education includes the ideological perspective of religion. Since the late sixties, the “Christian Right” has organized the opposition to comprehensive sex education in the United States. Christianity and religion as a whole has had a huge influence on the perspective of sex education in schools, as sexuality has been central to its campaigns of protest. Sex education has been one way for religion to structurally build a social movement that is geared toward the reformation of American sexual and political cultures (Irvine 2000:59). Sex education includes sexual meanings, identities, and knowledge through discourses, where religion is one way that can shape these meanings into a specific perspective within the sexual culture (Irvine 2000:60). Specifically, narratives, vocabularies, and symbols are all shaped into concrete ways that help construct a perspective on sexual culture. The culture war surrounding sex education stems from concerns that discussions about sex may encourage unhealthy sexual behavior among students, as well as the belief that "talking about sex is the same as sex itself," and that sexual discussions can be emotionally abusive (Irvine 2000: 60-61). The nature of sex education culture wars is not only steered through the lens of religion, but through the fear of promotion and encouragement of sex. The debate between sex education is provoked through the Christian belief that “sex talk triggers sex” (Irvine 2000:62). The conservative perspective Christianity has on sex education, includes the corruption of innocence and purity. Those who adhere to a traditionalist ideology in sex education believe that the discussion and curriculum surrounding sex education can lead to sexual anarchy and

promiscuity. Liberals contend that sex education dissuades young individuals from engaging in risky sexual behaviors, while still understanding the conception of performativity among sex. The culture wars surrounding sex education are evident in schools, where curriculums are one means of disseminating information to society. Specifically, sex education has become a huge debate among school curriculums, as the ideology of sex education was developed for multiple reasons, including the prevention of deviant sexual acts and transmitted diseases, and the explanation of new forms of identities and sexual speech. The culture war of sex education is a manifestation of conflict theory involving an idealistic rather than materialistic perspective on sex education conflicts. The discourse between sex education and sexual speech and identity is explained through ideology, and these specific forms of ideologies stem from clusters in certain parts of society. Specifically, religion is one cluster of society that has influenced and altered the development of the culture war of sex education.

### **The Theory of Gender and Sexuality Within the Culture War of Sex Education:**

The recurring conflict between the development and complexity of sex education stems from assumptions about the nature of sex, gender, and sexuality. The existence of the culture wars in sex education revolves around the debate between performativity and anti-performativity regarding sexual language and subjects. Performativity refers to the idea that individuals perform or enact their identities through language and behavior. This concept illustrates the influence society has on individuals and how people actively express their identities through their actions that are built from social expectations. Anti-performativity is the perspective that challenges the social idea of performativity. Anti-performativity believes that society can be limiting for individuals, and it suggests that people should be able to explore and express their identities without sticking to the confinement of social norms, and in this case social expectations

regarding sex and gender. The conflict between performativity and anti-performativity is depicted through the culture wars of sex education, as the tension between performativity and anti-performativity is reflected in ongoing debates over what constitutes the social norm for sex education and gender, and whether certain approaches are restrictive for individuals and groups. The presence of performativity and anti-performativity in the culture war of sex education can provide insight into the construction of gender and the differences between male and female relationships. This can be explained through the lens of three key theories: essentialism, androcentrism, and gender polarization. Essentialism is the assumption that basic differences in orientation and personality between men and women are rooted in biology and nature. Androcentrism is defined as “male-centeredness,” and is the belief that males are more valuable than females, and that male experience is somehow gender-neutral and normative for all people (Risman 1998: 2). While, gender polarization is the assumption that not only are women and men different, but the difference is due to many social aspects of the world; a connection is forged between sex and human experience, such as modes of dress and emotion and sexual desire (Risman 1998: 3). These sociological theories expose the social split between sex among society. Throughout history, the structural theory of gender has been produced to explain why exactly society executes rights, power, privilege, and responsibilities among certain individuals. Within society today, certain individuals believe that sexual relationships, gender, sexual orientation, and other social concepts are illustrated in a concrete way that can not be altered. However, sociologically, the social context of sex can be shaped through what is inherited. The concept of sex education, and the stigma around the complexity of sex, is due to the development of social perspectives and understandings. If these topics were altered and changed, the new improved perspectives would then become the new inherited structure. Therefore, the social

debate of sex education being too or less complex, is because individuals are reluctant to expand and develop new knowledge. Society and individuals' attachment to historical practices often hinder the development of new gender and sex structures that could potentially become the new norm (Risman 1998:5). However, some argue that individuals will eventually inherit these new structures as a new function of sex. In society, political and social structures have evolved from the older generation or authority that developed these types of practices. The two opposing sides regarding the function of sex education, believe strongly that their perspective on sex education is the only way of life. However, the definition of these sociological assumptions include the concept that any social structure can be improved, changed, and altered at any time.

We can also look at the conflict over sex education as a result of the way society has conceptualized gender. In order to understand the debate among sex education, and how sex knowledge is perceived among society, one must analyze the way gender is considered a social structure. By understanding how gender was conceptualized in the past, we are then able to come to a conclusion as to how gender and sex is altered and changed among society today. The belief that sex and gender were solely influenced by biology was prevalent due to the lack of science education, where one's biological characteristics were considered to determine and shape one's gender. However, as scientific knowledge advanced, it was discovered that our biology and gender can also be influenced by our social environment. Socialization theory, including essentialism, androcentrism, gender polarization, and the concept of gender roles, explains the development of the origin of sex and gender among society. Throughout history, males and females were expected to adhere to socially appropriate roles, and straying from these roles was viewed as deviant behavior (Risman 2018:11). These underlying social traditions have then become exposed, resulting in sex education. Sex education among society is ever changing, as

more and more knowledge and science is being understood. The way individuals are interacting emotionally and socially, are influencing the change in social norms, specifically, in sex education. For example, the concepts of femininity and masculinity have completely changed among society. Masculinity and femininity used to be associated with a specific gender; however, the ways in which individuals actually interact and function contradict the reflection of masculinity and femininity as a gender. The ways of thinking and acting are no longer tied to the sex of the individuals who hold them, as society has begun to recognize that gender and sex are complex and multifaceted concepts (Risman 2018: 12). This theory represents the conflict between sex education among society today. The education of sex and all its aspects has long been considered taboo because it challenges the societal belief that certain individuals are meant for specific situations, emotions, and actions.

Social structures were established in society, including gender roles that exist as a background identity. People use gender framing to enforce interactional expectations and to shape and explain their behavior. The structure of gender and social interaction was developed to illustrate how individuals among society behave a certain way. The basis of social structure intertwined with the concept of sex education. Sex education is the exposure of social structures, by explaining and understanding new and improved ways of sexuality and behaviors among society. The systems within society can be debated, discussed, and changed. The theory of sex education suggests that various interest groups are positioned along different axes and are in conflict with each other. These groups mobilize to promote their own agendas and either expand or restrict the content of sex education in schools. In essence, the sex-role socialization theory is an application of a normative role theory for human behavior (Risman 1998:17).

## **Chapter 2: Methodology of Sex Education**

Each state in the United States has different state or district level requirements regarding sex education among schools. Due to the different political point of views within each state, the construction of the state's sex education varies. This chapter examines one set of states in the United States, including California, Oregon, Massachusetts, and Maine that can be perceived as transforming the sex education curriculum among schools to be more inclusive and comprehensive. Those states are contrasted against Florida, Alabama, Texas, and Pennsylvania, where the curriculum can be described as more limiting and conservative. For each case I examine the state's political affiliation and its impact on the state's district or state level, type of sex education each state obtains such as abstinence only or abstinence plus. Whether or not a state includes a sexual orientation or identity requirement, and the includement of an Opt- in or Opt-out policy. How exactly all these aspects of each state then coincide with the states political affiliation and perspective.

***Florida:***

Within the past five years, certain states have appointed new forms of restrictions regarding the sex education curricula within the state and districts. Currently sex education is not mandated in Florida, but schools are required to teach health education that includes the consequences of teen pregnancy. From the state authority, Florida schools are not required to teach sex education that includes an expansive understanding of sexual orientation, identity, and race. The act of teaching sex education is decided by district, and among those districts the curriculum does not need to align with the National Sex Education Standards. If a school does decide to incorporate sex education into its curriculum, it must include the benefits of abstinence as the “expected standard” (SIECUS 2023). Although the sex education that is portrayed among certain districts does not need to align with the national authority, each district does have to

follow state laws that were appointed in response to the use of sex education among schools, this is where authority becomes tricky. The state of Florida does not require every school in the state to obtain sex education among schools, certain districts are able to decide whether or not sex education can be in schools. However, the state still does have standards for the certain districts that do want to implement sex education within the curriculum. Florida provides example curricula that can be adopted by schools to fulfill the health education requirement of abstinence and consequences of teen pregnancy. Florida obtains an aggressive form of legislation that has influenced the structure of sex education throughout the state. On March 28th, 2022, Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law Senate Bill 1834/House Bill 1557, known as the “Don’t Say Gay” Bill. This law has been put in place since 2022, prohibiting classroom discussions on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade (FL Senate Bill 1834, 2022). The development of the “Don’t Say Gay Rule” within Florida is one component of the exclusive perspective that the state has on individuals and sex education. Florida has also established the House Bill 241, known as the “Opt-in and Opt-out policy,” which mandates school districts to enact a procedure for parents to object to instructional materials on the basis of morality, sex, religion, or perceived harm (FL House Bill 241, 2021). This bill also requires prior parental notification of the Opt-in and Opt-out policy. This Bill allows for parents to restrict their children from learning extensive knowledge on gender, sexual identity, and the basic understandings of sex education. With the state allowing school districts to decide its own individualized education, it can cause a disparity among the quality of sex education throughout the state (SIECUS 2023).

***Alabama:***

Similarly to Florida, Alabama as a state does not mandate sex education to be taught in schools. However, from grades 5-12 students are required to receive instruction on HIV/AIDs,

but it is not required by the state to include sex education within the curriculum. Specifically, there is no requirement on expressing education on sexual orientation or gender identity. In 2021 there was an update on Alabama's sex education curriculum requirements through the House Bill 385 (SIECUS 2023).. The House Bill 385 requires sex education instruction to remove requirements on material that highlights the stigmatization and false information on the LGBTQAI+ identities, and emphasizes the importance of delaying sexual activity and risky sexual behavior instead of teaching medical treatment and methods (AL House Bill 385, 2021). Alabama state's curriculum lacks culturally responsive information, such as, addressing myths, stigmatizations, stereotypes, and concerns on sex education and identities. The state of Alabama does not require sex education to be taught in schools, however, each district can determine if sex education can be a part of the curriculum. If districts among the states decide to include a sex education curriculum, the district must follow the Alabama State Code Section 16-40A-2 which sets minimum standards for what must be taught (AL Code Title 16-40A-2). The curriculum must include the minimum standards of abstinence only education, and how abstinence outside of marriage is considered the expected social standard for unmarried individuals, overall emphasizing preventative measures and care. There are current legislative activities released this year, 2023, expressing the restrictive nature of the state's perspective on sex education. Specifically, House Bill 7 prohibits local boards of education from promoting certain divisive concepts relating to race, sex, or religion. It prohibits enrollment or attendance in classes or training on the basis of race or color, allowing the discipline or termination of employees who violate this act (AL House Bill 7, 2023). Lastly, House Bill 6 adds to the existing parental rights legislation that there is the fundamental right of fit parents to direct the education, upbringing, care, custody, and control of their children (AL House Bill 7, 2023).



***Texas:***

Sex education consists of a complex of topics regarding sex and sexual orientation. Each state has a different perspective on sex education, and a different understanding of what type of sex education is important. Texas does not require school districts to teach sex education including sexual orientation and gender, but does require districts to teach health education, such as the anatomy, contraception, and STI prevention. The Texas Health and Safety Code §85.007 and §163.002 state that Texas schools must adhere to the state standard that requires stating that homosexuality is not acceptable to the public, and that it is considered a criminal offense under the Texas Penal Code regardless of the fact of *Lawrence v. Texas*, under Section 21.06, Penal Code (TX Health and Safety Code Educational Materials for Minors § 85.007). Texas also requires the Opt-in and Opt-out policy, allowing for parents to be as restrictive to their children as possible through the House Bill 1525 (TX House Bill 1525, 2021). The state of Texas does not require medically accurate sex education instruction among schools, emphasizing the limiting perspective Texas has on sex education in schools. The act for decreasing the restrictive point of view Texas has on sex education was attempted in 2020, the efforts to repeal the states discriminatory requirements on sexual orientation and gender identity, and to include knowledge on consent was unsuccessful. Sex Education within Texas is controlled by the state level. The Texas Education Code requires that the state board of education must adopt rules to carry out the curriculum required or authorized under 28.002 which includes health, and that all schools must adhere to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Health Education. Due to Texas' political and policy climate, the state is using sex education as one way to attack the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQAI+) individuals, by restricting instruction on these “divisive concepts,” and limit abortion care and other reproductive healthcare services

in relation to sex education among the youth and schools (SIECUS 2023).

***Pennsylvania:***

Pennsylvania does not require state wide sex education. However, health education is required through the Pennsylvania Constitutional Statutes Title 22 4.29, including middle and high schools to teach sexually transmitted diseases. Pennsylvania sex education is run by the district level (PA Constitutional Statutes Title 22 § 4.29, 2008). Specifically, the state does not require all schools to provide sex education, therefore, each district is left to decide what type of sex education, if any at all, will be taught. Within the state of Pennsylvania there has been legislative activity regarding sex education. Specifically, this year the House Bill 319 was introduced that prohibits teaching instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity to students from kindergarten through fifth grade. It requires schools to create a process for notifying parents of students if there is a change in the student's health care services, mental, emotional or physical health. It is prohibiting a school employee or representative from encouraging, or having the effect of encouraging a student to withhold information regarding their mental or physical health from their parents (PA House Bill 319, 2023). Schools in the state of Pennsylvania are not required to teach sex education, but each district is allowed to determine what exactly is taught among schools (SIECUS 2023). With Pennsylvania not being state level, school districts do not need to follow a specific curriculum, but must use the state standard framework of the Academic Standards for Health, Safety, and Physical Education as a base for the development of the district curriculum (Department of Education 1999).

***Oregon:***

Oregon schools are required by the state to teach sex education. Oregon promotes an abstinence plus curriculum, where sex education must be complex but also should promote

abstinence. One component that contributes to Oregon's comprehensiveness, is the fact that the sex education curriculum must recognize different sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expression. The state requires that it must be medically accurate. Classroom education on menstrual health and product instruction is also required as part of the program requirements. Oregon mandates sex education to be at least once annually within grades 6-8, and students in grades 9-12 must receive instruction of sex education twice annually. Specifically, it must promote abstinence, however, it may not be taught to the exclusion of other material and instruction on contraceptive and disease reduction measures. Overall, the state sex education requirements include all schools to provide sex education through the passage of the Human Education Law of 2009, The Healthy Teen Relationship Act of 2013, The Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Law of 2015, and the revision of the Oregon Health Education Standards in 2016. The administrative rule provides specific guidelines that communities must follow when creating their own plan, and it must be approved by the local school boards. Oregon's *Health Education Standards and Performance Indicators* provides a foundation for curriculum development, which includes, "the recognition of diversity among people, age, disability, national origin, race, ethnicity, color, marital status, biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression." The state mandates that sex education should be incorporated into the curriculum, however, the curriculum and frequency of sex education is dependent on the district (SIECUS 2023).

***California:***

Sex education is required by the state to be included among schools, and the curriculum must be culturally competent for all students of sexual orientations and gender identities, including instruction on gender identity and expression. California is not only one of the few

states that mandate sex education, but it also is still including packages of bills to expand access to abortion care. In 2022 the Assembly Bill 2586 was passed to provide one-time small grants to organizations that provide sex education. Funds within this bill were allocated to develop teacher training resources to support LGBTQAI+ youth (CA Assembly Bill 2586, 2022). The state of California has passed the Assembly Bill 1785, which can be perceived as an opt-in or opt-out policy, however, the state of California recognizes how restrictive this policy can be. While an opt-in or opt-out policy can be considered as a way to increase parental rights, this bill can also be seen as stigmatizing the important information that is included within sex education, and can be infringing upon young individual's rights to access this specific form of education. Like all states and communities, there may be a state mandate that sex education must be incorporated into the school curriculum, however, due to the lack of funding, certain areas, such as rural low income communities are not receiving as much comprehensive sex education as other communities within California. California as the state requires every school district to ensure that all students in grades 7-12 receive sex education and HIV/AIDS prevention education at least once in middle school and high school. California law requires schools to teach students about gender, gender expression, gender identity, and gender stereotypes. However, schools among each district can decide if they want to offer education earlier than 7th grade, if done so, the education must adhere to the same requirements and instruction must promote parent-child communication about sexuality, and the effectiveness and safety of contraceptive methods (SIECUS 2023).

***Massachusetts:***

The state of Massachusetts does not require schools to teach sex education. If there is sex education within schools, the curriculum does not need to include instruction on sexual

orientation or gender identity. If sex education is offered, curriculum is not required to include instruction on consent. Massachusetts includes an opt-in or opt-out policy. The state has no regulation on medically accurate sex education instruction. School districts are left to decide what type of sex education, if any at all, they will provide. Many districts, specifically, Boston Public Schools, use the Rights, Respect, Responsibility Curriculum, but over 70 percent of districts use abstinence plus education (Advocates for Youth 2022). The state of Massachusetts has a pending legislation of the Healthy Youth Act, which would ensure youth receive research based, medically accurate, and culturally competent sex education in districts that require sex education. The state requires that if a district decides to implement sex education, it must require state standards that are developed by community stakeholders, like parents and physicians. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Framework, updated in 2022, suggests that sex education curricula must include information about “abstaining from and postponing sexual intercourse,” and approaches reproduction and sexuality in an appropriate and factual fashion, while also defining sexual orientation using the correct terminology (Department of Education 1999). Even though Massachusetts’ sex education curricula is not state run, there are still developments of improvements and inclusiveness of the curriculum through the state and districts (SIECUS 2023).

***Maine:***

Maine schools are required to teach sex education through their course on “comprehensive family education.” However, this curriculum does not align with the National Sex Education Standards that every state is required to follow. Specifically, there have been incremental advancements in sex education over the past five years, as in an effort to make the curriculum more comprehensive statewide. In 2019 there was the development and passing of

Legislative Directive 773 bill, that requires there to be a “comprehensive family life education.” This bill is perceived as an important step among Maine’s sex education requirements. Even though Maine’s curriculum must include a comprehensive description of consent, STDs, and contraception, it does not require a description on sexual orientation or gender identity and the needs of people of color. The state requires The Comprehensive Family Life Education to be taught in kindergarten through grade 12, and the information must be medically accurate, age appropriate, and must respect community values, which includes abstinence, healthy relationships, contraception and family planning, STDs, affirmative consent, and conflict resolution. The state of Maine is still in the process of improving the curriculum regarding sex education, specifically, sexual orientation and identity in addition to the family life component (SIECUS 2023).

***Background of political history of each state:***

From a political standpoint, every state within the United States has their own form of political views. From a political and legislative perspective, there are states that are considered “blue states” which are states that are of the Democratic party, while “red states” are states that are of the Republican party. Starting from the year 2000, the terms “red states” and “blue states,” have referred to the states in the United States whose citizens predominantly voted for either the Republican or Democratic party during the presidential and senatorial election. The colors are what help determine how conservative or liberal a state is; a “blue state” is considered to be a more liberal state, and a “red state” is considered to be a more conservative state. There are multiple deciding factors within a state that determine what makes a liberal state liberal, and a conservative state conservative. Specifically, income is important in political perception, such as minimum wage, tax rates, and social security among individuals. Geography, too, is another

factor in state political perception, as geography has an influence on state spending and other policies (Gelman 2009, p. 31). Therefore, there are many reasons as to why certain states are considered, red or blue, or conservative or liberal. The position of each state changes from election to election, which is what explains why some states that are discussed may be considered conservative but their sex education perspective is liberal, and vice versa. A state can be considered a specific point of view due to the majority vote of the state among the presidential candidates. Politics is not just a two sided concept, there are multiple perspectives and angles that go into politics. What color a state leans under does not necessarily determine the state's overall political perspective. How a state votes in a presidential election isn't all that matters, as the state can then have different votes for the state governor and legislature, and the population's party affiliation may go another way. There are such things as "purple states," where the state swings back and from Democratic to Republican during election to election. The terminology of colors may be useful for a generalized description of a state's political point of view, but it may not determine the overall complex understanding of the state. Specifically, these states' perspectives on sex education can differ from the state's political point of view in general. For example, the state of Florida can be perceived as a purple state in how the state votes in the presidential elections. The state government is firmly in Republican control and has been for most of the 21st century. There has been the recently elected Democratic Commissioner of Agriculture Nikki Fried, however, the other three elected state executive officers of governor, attorney general, and chief financial officer are all Republicans. Both the state house and senate of Florida are solidly red. All being an example of how complex politics are among each state (SIECUS 2023).

In the section below I outline the political context for the six states, noting the legislative

and executive structure, party composition, and past party composition. Unless otherwise noted, all of the data for this section is drawn from ballotpedia.

***Florida political context:***

Florida is a closed primary state. A closed primary is a type of primary election that is conducted to vote for the candidates who will run in the general election, and are within the state. With Florida being a partisan and a closed primary election state, it means that a voter may only vote for the candidates of the party in which he or she is registered. That is why there are different types of ballots in primary elections. Voters that are registered with no party affiliation are not eligible to vote for partisan candidates in a primary election unless there is a Universal Primary Contest. A Universal Primary Contest occurs if all candidates for an office of a state have the same party affiliation and the winner will have no opposition in the general election. Florida is a partisan state, which means that the majority of the votes will go towards one candidate that is among a specific political party. This explains why the state of Florida leans towards specific political views in regards to the state's sex education. Specifically, the Florida Constitution mandates a bicameral state legislature which means there are two chambers among the legislature. There is the upper house known as the Florida State Senate, and the lower house known as the Florida House of Representatives. Florida has term limits, where house members may be only elected for up to four terms, while State Senators can be elected for up to two terms. The members of both of these houses participate in hearings, town hall meetings, and legislative discussion throughout the year. These two houses are what influence the state's perspectives on sex education. Florida, specifically being a red state, has a Republican trifecta. The Republican Party controls the office of governor and both chambers of the state legislature (Florida State Legislation). The House Speaker, Senate President, and the Governor of Florida are the two



leaders who are considered powerful statewide leaders who control most of the agenda of state business. The Florida Senate is the upper house of the Florida State Legislature, there are 40 members in the senate. Generally, Senators in odd-numbered districts are elected in years divisible by four, and Senators in even-numbered districts are elected alongside elections for Florida's statewide offices. From 1992-2022 Florida State Senate has been under Republican Control, which is new for the state. Prior to 1992 Florida was under solid Democratic control. Before 1992, Democrats had controlled the Florida State Senate since the 1876 Elections, which came after the Civil War and Reconstruction. Starting in 1994 the Republicans took control of the Florida State Senate, and by 1998 the Republicans have controlled 25 of the chamber's seats and continue to take over the majority of the seats today. The Florida House of Representatives is the lower house of the Florida State Legislature, and it is composed of 120 members, each representing a district. Representatives are elected to two year terms during even numbered years, once elected, representatives are limited to four terms. The Speaker of the House is elected by the representatives for a two year term, and The Speaker has the power to preside over the chamber during a session, to appoint committee members and chairs of committees, to influence the placement of bills on the calendar, and to rule the procedural motions.

***Alabama political context:***

Alabama is an open primary state, meaning that independent voters are allowed to vote in primary elections for the state. In Alabama a voter may participate in any party's primary by declaring his or her preference for that party at the polls on that day of the election, but do not have to be fully tied to that party. In the 2010 elections, Republicans gained control of both chambers of Alabama, House of Representatives and State Senate, for the first time since 1874. Like Florida, Alabama has a Republican trifecta, where the Republican Party controls the office

of governor and both chambers of the state legislature. The Alabama State Senate is composed of 35 members representing an equal number of districts across the state. The Senate can confirm or reject gubernatorial appointments to the state cabinet, commissions and boards. The Lieutenant Governor of Alabama serves as the president of the senate, but can only cast a vote if there is a tie break required. In the meanwhile, the President Pro Tempore presides over the Senate, and they are elected by the majority party followed by the confirmation of the entire Senate through a Senate Resolution. The President Pro Tempore is the chief leadership position in the Senate, while the other Senate majority and minority leaders are elected by the representative party. From 1990 to 2022 the Alabama State Senate has transformed into a Republican advantage, coinciding with the American South shift from 175 years of Democratic dominance to solely Republican. After 1983 the Alabama Senate began to slowly conform to the overall Republican trend in the American South, Republicans won five seats in 1986, seven seats in 1990, and 12 seats in 1994. In 2010 the Republican party picked up an additional 10 seats and a 22-12 advantage over Democrats, being the first Republican majority since 1868. The Alabama House of Representatives is the lower house of the Alabama Legislature, being one of the five lower houses of state legislatures in the United States that is elected every four years. The Speaker of the House presides over the House of Representatives, and The Speaker is elected by the majority party. The House Speaker is also the chief leadership position, who controls the flow of legislation and committee assignments. Following the end of the Civil War in 1865, Democrats began competing with republicans within Alabama. Until 1983 Republicans gained 12 seats in special elections, and continued to slowly gain majority between 1998 and 2006. In 2010, Republicans picked up 23 seats and won a 66-39 majority, being the first Republican majority in Alabama since 1868 (Alabama State Legislature).

***Texas political context:***

Texas is an open primary, allowing individuals to vote for the primary elections regardless of one's political party and if an independent. The Texas Legislature is considered the dominant branch of the state government for Texas. Like most southern states, Texas has a Republican trifecta, where the Republican Party controls the office of governor and both chambers of the state legislature. The current make-up of the Texas Legislature consists of 31 Senators in the Texas State Senate. Between 1992 and 2022 the partisan control of the Texas State Senate shifted in the favor of the Republican Party. Republicans flipped the chamber in 1996 and, by 2022, expanded their majority to 19-12. The movement from Democratic control to Republican control from 1992-2022 was gradual. Among the House of Representatives there are 150 representatives, and like the Senate, between 1992 and 2022 the control shifted in favor of the Republican Party. It seems to be a common theme among the southern states that each state used to have a heavy control by the Democratic party, to be taken over in the 21st century by a landslide by the Republican party. This transition is an example of the ever changing political viewpoints and standpoints of each state throughout history (Texas State Legislature).

***Pennsylvania political context:***

Pennsylvania is a closed primary state, as only registered party members can participate in a political party's primary election. The Pennsylvania General Assembly is Pennsylvania's State Legislature. Pennsylvania has a divided government where neither party holds a trifecta. The Democratic Party controls the office of governor and the lower chamber of the state legislature, while the Republican Party controls the upper chamber of the state legislature. The Pennsylvania State Senate is considered the upper house of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, where Senators are elected for four years. Between 1992 and 2022 the partisan control of the

State Senate shifted in favor of the Republican Party. Republicans gained a majority in 1994 and held it through the 2022 elections. The Pennsylvania House of Representatives is the lower house of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, and between 1992 and 2022 the partisan control of the House of Representatives fluctuated between the Democratic and Republican parties. After the 1992 elections, the Democratic party held a 105-98 majority, and since then the control of the chamber changed four times with Democrats winning a majority of the seats in 2022. The split between political parties among the General Assembly in Pennsylvania can have an influence on the perspectives of different state topics, such as sex education (Pennsylvania General Assembly).

***Oregon political context:***

Oregon is a closed primary state, meaning that only individuals registered in a particular party are allowed to vote in representation of that party. The Oregon Legislative Assembly is the state legislature for Oregon, it is a bicameral body consisting of the upper house, the Oregon State Senate, and the lower house, the Oregon House of Representatives. Oregon has a Democratic trifecta, as the Democratic Party controls the office of governor and both chambers of the state legislature. Within the Oregon State Senate there are 30 members of the State Senate representing 30 districts across the state. Between 1992 and 2022, partisan control of the Oregon Senate passed from a Democratic majority to a Republican one, then switched back. The shifts in partisan control of the Senate were gradual between 1992 and 2022, with three major changes to control of the chamber in that time. Within the 1994 election, Republicans gained five seats and took control, and would remain in control until 2002. Democrats then gained three seats in 2004 and have been in control ever since. Among the House of Representatives there are 60 members of the House, representing 60 districts across the state. Between 1992 and 2002, control

of the House of Representatives shifted in favor of the Democratic Party. Between 1992 and 2004 the Republican majority remained pretty steady, with Republicans having their strongest majority in the 2002 elections. Democrats then regained the majority during the 2012 election, and have had control since. It is evident that the United States states are split by political party, having an impact on the political stand points among the states. The fact that Oregon is predominantly Democratic, coincides with Oregon's perspective on sex education throughout the state (Oregon State Legislature).

***California political context:***

In regards to primary elections within California, the state conducts the Top Two Candidates Open Primary Act, meaning that all candidates for voter-nominated offices are listed on one ballot and only the top two vote-getters in the primary election, regardless of party reference, move on to the general election. Write-in candidates for voter-nominated offices can only run in the primary election. The state of California consists of the lower house, the California State Assembly, and the upper house, the California State Senate. Both chambers have been controlled by the Democratic Party since 1959 to the exception from 1969 to 1971, when the Republican Party held both chambers. California voters imposed term limits on their state senators and state assembly members in 1990, where senators could not serve for more than two terms and assembly members could not serve for more than three terms. Prior to 1969, state Senate districts were restricted such that one county could only hold at most one seat. However, due to *The Reynolds v. Sims* decision by the United States Supreme Court, all states must draw up districts that were apportioned by population rather than geography, therefore, equal representation was provided. From 1992 to 2022 the California State Senate was controlled by the Democratic Party, the heavy Democratic tilt was not unusual, as California's chamber history

consists of Democratic majorities. The only time that Democratic control was threatened was when the chamber split evenly in 1968 and 1972, both years when native Californian Richard Nixon was elected president. The California State Assembly has the largest population per representative ratio of any lower house in the United States. In the 1960s Democrats first established their majority that mostly stayed intact until now. The only time that California has Republicans win a majority was in 1968, when Richard Nixon became the first Californian to be elected president. California is very much Democratic heavy, and it influences certain sections of the state political perspectives, such as sex education (California State Legislature).

***Massachusetts political context:***

Massachusetts is an open primary state, as any individual affiliated or not affiliated with a political party can vote for the primary elections of their choice. The Massachusetts General Court is the state legislature of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It is a bicameral body, split into the Massachusetts State Senate, and the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

Massachusetts has a Democratic trifecta, where the Democratic Party controls the office of governor and both chambers of the state legislature. There are 40 senatorial districts in Massachusetts named for the counties in which they are located. Democrats have maintained control of the Massachusetts State Senate from 1992 to 2022. Even though there was a national trend toward Republican state legislatures during the presidency of Barack Obama, the Massachusetts Senate was resistant to that trend. The Senate never fell below 34 seats of Democrats. Within the House of Representatives, representative districts are named for the primary county in which they are located, and tend to stay within one county. It has been consistent throughout Massachusetts history that the Democratic party has stayed the majority (Massachusetts).

### ***Maine political context:***

Maine has just recently become an open primary state, allowing affiliated and non-affiliated individuals to vote in the state primary elections. Maine House of Representatives and the Maine State Senate make up the Maine state legislature. Main has a Democratic trifecta, where the Democratic Party controls the office of governor and both chambers of the state legislature. Between 1992 and 2022 the partisan control of the Maine Senate fluctuated, swinging back and forth between Democratic and Republican parties. Democrats were able to regain control of the chamber after the 2018 elections. Between 1992 and 2022 the Democratic and Republican parties both claimed a majority, resulting in ties. A power-sharing agreement was reached between Democrats and Republicans, where Democrats would hold the top leadership position in 2001 and Republicans would hold the position in 2002. Democrats held the state Senate from 2002 until the 2012 elections when Republicans gained five seats and took control of the chamber. Republicans then lost their majority in 2012 elections, resulting in there to be a continuous majority of Democrats. Between 1992 and 2022 the majority of the House of Representatives changed two times. Democrats held control from 1992 to 2012 and have held it since the 2012 elections. Republicans won control of the state House from Democrats in 2010 elections, and held the majority until the 2012 elections. Democrats have contained control since 2012 elections, evidently influencing the political point of views among the state (Maine State Legislature).

### ***Summary and analysis of political contexts***

From a general standpoint, the political history of all 8 states' standpoint, coincides with each state's perspective on sex education. However, below I explore how a state's political party majority may or may not coincide or influence the state's point of view on sex education. A

predominantly Republican state may have similar requirements on sex education as a predominantly Democratic state and vice versa. With politics being extremely complex, this paper is going to explore what each state's requirements and mandates are for sex education, and how certain circumstances of each state differ from one another and impact the state's overall outcome of their political point of view on sex education. The next step in this analysis is the construction of a “truth table,” which is one way to depict a comparative study. This specific comparative analysis examines the patterns of similarities and differences across eight states and their development of sex education (Ragin 105). A comparative research study, studies diversity and tends to look for differences among specific cases. Within comparative research, it examines patterns of similarities and differences across cases, and tries to come to terms with the diversity that is established (Ragin 107). Within this specific case, the cases of each state's sex education is examined through a pattern of similarities and differences among all states. This specific case study is examining eight states' development of sex education, by analyzing different aspects of each state's sex education. It is emphasizing different patterns that may exist within these eight specific states. Specifically, among these eight states it is split into eight different subgroups. Each subgroup is connected to different outcomes in relation to the sex education within that state. There are causal patterns that lead to these specific subgroups, separating each state into these different subgroups, therefore, then resulting in specific outcomes (Ragin 108). Among these eight states, eight subgroups are examined in order to determine patterns of similarities and differences. Each state is examined through the presence of state or district level authority, party affiliation, type of education such as abstinence only or abstinence plus education, the acknowledgement of sexual orientation and identity among the curriculum, and lastly, the presence of an Opt-in or Opt-out policy among the curriculum. These subgroups are not only



putting each state into different categories in regards to its level of complexity and inclusion of its sex education curriculum, but it is also determining causal conditions and outcomes of each state due to these specific subcategories. The description of each state and the relationship between each category, helps determine what conditions lead to certain outcomes. In other words, it will determine that each subcategory is one component to determine the type of sex education each state will have in relation to its political standpoint. This comparative analysis will be able to illustrate how certain conditions of each state's education is what will infer on the overall development and functioning of the sex education curriculum. For example, this study will help determine if a state's curriculum is run by the state, and how exactly that will impact the overall functioning of the state's sex education, if it is inclusive or exclusive and more. All subgroups have an impact on the overall outcome of the state's sex education curriculum, and its political point of view, and this comparative analysis is going to help determine what exactly makes up a state's sex education curriculum and political viewpoint.

Within the figure below, each row determines a specific causal category of the sex education. Each column means different conditions. District Level means that a state requires each district within the state to determine the type of sex education, if any at all, that school will include within its curriculum. State Level is where the state authority is what mandates every single district within the state to include sex education within school curriculums. Abstinence only is where a state's sex education curriculum must include an abstinence only education, where it is preaching abstinence as the only and most effective. Abstinence plus is where a state's sex education curriculum emphasizes abstinence, but also includes other inclusive forms of perspectives on sex. Sexual orientation/identity requirement is where a state's sex education includes the teaching of sexual orientation, sexual identity, LGBTQAI+ group, and social

stigmatization. Opt in- Opt out policy is where the state allows individuals to opt out or opt in to sex education courses within schools. If the specific state includes these types of protocols and policies, then it will have a check mark in the columns appropriate for that specific state, if a state does not have these types of subgroups then there will be no check mark in the column of that specific state.

### **Chapter 3: Comparison/Analysis of State Sex Education**

A Comparative Analysis of sex education and political point of views in eight states within the United States

	FL	AL	TX	PA	OR	CA	MA	ME
District level	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	
<u>State level</u>		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
<u>Republican state</u>	✓	✓	✓	✓				
<u>Liberal state</u>					✓	✓	✓	✓
<u>Abstinence only</u>	✓	✓	✓					
<u>Abstinence plus</u>					✓	✓	✓	
<u>Sexual orientation/identity requirement</u>					✓			
<u>Opt in-opt out policy</u>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	

As established in the case studies above, states exhibit considerable variation in both sex education policies and partisan politics. That leads to the central question in this analysis: To what extent can we use states' political context to explain and predict policies about sex

education? For example, Florida is considered a red state, a conservative state, and does that mean that its political views on sex education may be inferred as exclusive and restrictive?

The state of Florida does allow for each district to decide whether or not sex education should be included among the school curriculums. The ability for each district to have their own decision on whether or not sex education should be included, can be perceived as inclusive, however, the state of Florida has a strict curriculum that those districts who decide to incorporate sex education must follow. With Florida being a district level state, that means the state does not need to follow the National Educational bureaucracy, however, the state level bureaucracy is then followed. With Florida not requiring every single district to include sex education, those districts that do decide to incorporate sex education must then follow the state examples of curriculum. The state bureaucracy is what has the most influence towards a state's position on sex education. Throughout these states, there are bills, laws, and mandates that the state enforces that shapes the viewpoint on sex education. Every state except Texas, Oregon, and Maine require each district within the state to determine sex education curriculum within schools. Specifically, in writing every state except Texas, Oregon, and Maine allow each district to determine whether or not to include sex education among their schools curriculum. However, throughout all the states whether district level or state level, the state bureaucracy is what determines the content and complexity of every district's sex education curriculum. The states that are specifically run by the state bureaucracy such as Alabama, Texas, Oregon, California, and Maine require all school districts to follow the state of national code. However, the states that are run by district level still manage to have some form of state authority over the curriculum if the district has decided to include sex education within the curriculum. Specifically, Alabama requires those districts who decide to incorporate sex education into the curriculum, to follow the Alabama State Code

Section 16-40A-2. Alabama is another example as to how the state legislation and the educational bureaucracy determines the states standpoint on sex education. The state as a whole may not mandate all schools and districts to include sex education, however, the state legislation still does have control over individuals by mandating specific curriculum requirements among those districts who have decided on their own to include sex education. It is also mandated by the state that a specific form of sex education must be included among all school curriculums between the grades 5-12. This shows how not only does the state legislature's political perspective influence the sex education curriculum and policies, but it also shows how much power the state legislation has on school districts and individuals. Within Texas, schools need to follow the Texas Health and Safety Code, along with the Texas Penal Code. Within Pennsylvania, complex sex education is not required within the state, however, through the Pennsylvania Constitutional Statutes Title 22 4.29 it includes that middle and high schools must teach about sexually transmitted diseases. The House Bill of 319 also prohibits teaching instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity to students within kindergarten through fifth grade.

Specifically, among these four republican states, with the history of each state's political party affiliation, the amount of authority towards sex education coincides with the states political affiliation. Even if the republican state allows for each district to determine the type of sex education, the state legislation still tends to have some form of guidance or influence on what the curriculum entails. For example, Florida, Alabama, and Texas all allow for each district to determine if they want to include sex education into the curriculum, however, it must adhere to state authority when done so. The state authority then determines certain regulations, bills, and laws that are influenced by the state's political beliefs to then shape the state's development of

sex education. Throughout all the states whether it is state run or district run, each state has a different form of education. The republican states and liberal states have a different perspective on what type of sex education should be expressed.

The state's political affiliation coincides with the state's type of sex education. All four republican states, except Pennsylvania require abstinence only education, and none of the liberal states require abstinence only education. With Texas being a prominent red state, the state government has determined certain laws and regulations that exemplify conservative beliefs, such as the stigmatization of homosexuality, and the emphasis on abstinence. With there being an extensive perspective on sex education, the required curriculum that is mandated towards the districts that want to include sex education, must include abstinence only education, and how abstinence is considered the expected social standard. The educational bureaucracy among these republican states, specifically Florida, is what shapes the state sex education curriculum. Specifically, within Florida the House Bill 1557, known as the “Don’t Say Gay Rule,” and House Bill 241 known as the “Opt-in and Opt-out Policy,” are laws that are developed from the state bureaucracy that shapes the viewpoint and function of that state's sex education curriculum. The state’s party affiliation is an additional component to the position each state has towards sex education. For example, Florida’s sex education curriculum is shaped the way it is not just from the educational bureaucracy developing bills to be followed, but these bills are influenced and made through the lens of the political viewpoint that that specific state follows. The state's party affiliation is also recognized, as the state's party affiliation coincides with the state's laws and bills that are made in the function of sex education. The state’s bureaucracy is what has a huge impact and influence on the making of the sex education curriculum among this state.

All four liberal states except Maine depict an abstinence plus curriculum, coinciding with

the liberal political point of view. Oregon requires the whole entire state to include sex education within the curriculum, but it does still offer abstinence plus education. Abstinence plus education can be considered more liberal and inclusive than abstinence only curriculum, however, it can be argued that the act of including abstinence in general can be considered conservative. On the contrary, unlike the four conservative states, Oregon requires the sex education curriculum to include the recognition of different sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. The state also requires that the sex education must be medically accurate, and emphasize the normality of menstruation. California is another liberal state that requires the expression of sexual orientations and gender identity among schools. What seems to be the common theme of analysis among sex education, is how impactful and powerful the state legislation is towards sex education. The state legislation requires all schools to include sex education within the curriculum. California's state government is currently in the process of developing bills to expand access to abortion care, and other social topics among the state. Specifically, within 2022 the Assembly Bill 2586 was passed which provides a small grant to organizations that provide sex education. Funds for this bill were then allocated by the state to develop teacher training resources that required support of the LGBTQAI+ youth. California has been extremely proactive within the state authority to develop a liberal and inclusive education in regards to sex education. In addition to the four liberal states' position on abstinence plus education, Oregon is the only liberal state that significantly emphasizes a sexual orientation and identity requirement. Oregon is different in relation to the conservative states, as it includes a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to sex education and sexual identity. Massachusetts seems to be one state, where the state's political affiliation does not have much of an influence on the severity of the state's sex education. The state does not require schools to teach sex education, and if there is

sex education within the school, the curriculum does not need to include instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity. School districts are then left to decide what type of sex education, if any at all, will be provided. However, the state does require that if a district decides to implement sex education, it must require state standards that are developed by community stakeholders. It can be argued that unlike the state of Massachusetts political affiliation, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Framework, suggests that sex education curricula must include information about abstinence. Abstinence can be considered restrictive, not correlating with the state's affiliation as liberal. However, it does seem to be evident that the state legislation does have control over the function of sex education, even though it does not require all districts to include it, when it is included it is run by the state. Massachusetts still coincides with the hypothesis that each state's sex education is shaped through the state government, and the state's educational bureaucracy. Even though it may seem that the party affiliation of Massachusetts now does not coincide with the state's legislation like all the other states do, if we are to go back and analyze the state of Massachusetts political history it does make sense. One explanation to this can be that the state of Massachusetts was not always considered a democratic state throughout history. Also the fact that Massachusetts is an open primary state, meaning that any individual affiliated or not affiliated with a political party can vote for the primary state elections of their choice. This means that there can be certain representatives that have been elected that feel differently in the eyes of political affiliation towards specific issues within sex education. Therefore, there can be certain social issues within sex education that are addressed differently among the current state's party affiliation. However, like all the other states analyzed, it is prominent that the state's bureaucracy is the main influence towards the development of sex education.

Out of all eight states six of the states include an Opt-in and Opt-out policy.

Oregon and Maine are the only two states out of all republican and liberal states that do not require an Opt-in and Opt-out policy. By having the Opt-in and Opt-out policy it is allowing for individuals to stop their children from being exposed to stigmatizations, stereotypes, and other social concepts. It can also be depicted as a way for parents to take the rights away from their children, by determining what they can and can not learn or discuss. Among all eight states the educational state bureaucracy is the most important when it comes to the explanation of why sex education is the way it is within each state. No matter the state's severity or position of sex education, every state except Oregon and Maine give individuals the opportunity to opt in or opt out of sex education. Similarly to Oregon, California does have an Opt-in and Opt-out policy, however, the state is aware of how this bill can be limiting the children's rights to access sex education and certain education. With California being historically and currently a liberal blue state, the state's legislation from a liberal standpoint can be inferred as the main influence towards the function of the state's sex education curriculum. Not only does state legislation and state party affiliation have an impact on the state's sex education, but the state's fundings towards certain communities also has an impact.

After analyzing all eight states, it is safe to conclude that political affiliation and state bureaucracy modifies politics. Politics and bureaucracy can go hand in hand, as the state bureaucracy is influenced and developed through the state's political affiliation, overall controlling the state's perspective on sex education. The state's government and educational bureaucracy has the most influence and control over the state's sex education. Yes, the party affiliation of each state does have an impact on what exact laws and bills are developed in relation to sex education. However, no matter the political point of view, each state's government



is what determines the making and development of that state's sex education curriculum. If you are to infer other states' function of sex education, it would coincide with the state's educational bureaucracy, which is either slightly or entirely influenced by the state's political affiliation and political beliefs.

## **Chapter 4: Findings and Conclusion**

### **Main Findings**

Sex education has been part of the American school curriculum since the 1880s, and is constantly evolving. Sex education encompasses not only the physical act of sex, but broader topics such as gender, power, hierarchy, human nature and rights, sexual orientation and identity, and the societal implications of sex. Social factors are what influence the complexity and severity of sex education curriculums throughout schools within the United States. The type of sex education that is taught within schools is due to the state activity and authority. Sex education throughout history has constantly changed due to the current social situations and conflicts. Since 1991 sex education has been characterized by two broad approaches, abstinence only and abstinence plus. The abstinence only curriculum encourages people to completely abstain from sex until marriage. The abstinence plus curriculum does promote abstinence, but it also includes instruction on contraceptives, abortion, and the overall understanding of partaking in sexual activities. This thesis was able to address the complexity of each state's sex education within the United States. The federal government does not have the authority over every state and school board to preach specific policies, however, it can influence what will be taught through funding. The forms of policies that have been developed, such as the abstinence only program, are what are implemented into every state. The American Social Hygiene Association is another program that was implemented into the option of sex education curricula. The

American Social Hygiene Association encompassed the social, mental, spiritual, and physical health of individuals and society. The American Social Hygiene Association developed another perspective on abstinence, and was another way for states within the United States to use as a guide for the sex education curriculum. Each state's government has the authority to decide what exact curriculum will be implemented into that state's education system, with the abstinence only, abstinence plus, and American Social Hygiene Association programs as a form of influence and guide.

Throughout history, sex education was developed in response to the social conflicts of that time period. Specifically, as prostitution and venereal diseases were the main influence to the start of abstinence only education, the Sexual Revolution was another influential time period in the 1960s that helped expand the knowledge of sex education. The Sexual Revolution was the time period when ideas about gender and sexuality came into question, expanding the knowledge on gender inequalities and the stigmatization around sex before marriage, and same sex relationships. The Sexual Revolution was the turning point for the development of a more complex educational program for all states. In today's society the conflict between whether or not sexual orientation and identity should be included within each school's sex education curriculum, is in relevance to the current social stigmatizations of sexual orientation and identity.

By analyzing eight different states, each state's political standpoint and beliefs are what influences that state's complexity of the sex education curriculum. Social conflicts and current political point of views within each state are what influence each state's type of sex education. Society today is divided into two groups, liberal and conservative which distinguish where individuals stand in multiple political topics. Specifically, those who support comprehensive sex education are known as liberal, and those who are opposed to such complex sex education, and

prefer abstinence only education, are perceived as conservative. The conservative standpoint includes the viewpoint that men and women should not have premarital sex, that gay sex is deviant, and that a large degree of reticence should surround the whole entire matter of sex. However, politics is a very complex concept, and although certain individuals and certain states are considered liberal or conservative, there are still factors that do not align with their title. The debate between the two forms of sex education is what has led to the culture war of sex education among schools within the United States. The concept of a culture war is the perfect explanation for the conflict between the complexity and severity of sex education within schools. The culture war theory is one explanation for the political and social conflicts each state has in regards to sex education. The culture war theory explains how certain beliefs and values have an influence on the overall state's perspective on sex education.

Each state in the United States has different state or district level requirements regarding sex education, and the state's political point of view is what influences and constructs the state's sex education. This thesis examined eight different states within the United States and how exactly each state presented and included sex education within their school curricula. By examining four conservative states, and four liberal states, it was illustrated how each state's political point of views have a significant influence on that specific state's point of view on sex education. After analyzing each state's political histories, it was easy to come to a conclusion as to how the states political background correlates with the states current perspective on sex education. By comparing each state's level of authority towards sex education, political party affiliation, type of sex education curriculum, and the inclusion of education on sexual orientation and identity, the description of a state's sex education curriculum and comprehensiveness was easily described. In other words, after using the eight different categories to describe each state's

sex education curriculum, it was easy to explain to what extent a state's political context can explain and predict policies and the complexity of that specific state's sex education. In conclusion, by understanding whether or not a state's education is run by the state authority or district level, along with what specific sex education curriculum is then taught, along with the state's political party affiliation, it is easy to conclude what type of sex education that specific state teaches within their schools. It is safe to conclude that a state's political affiliation and complexity of the state's bureaucracy is what modifies that state's politics. It is concluded that a state's political affiliation and the state's level of bureaucracy not only go hand in hand, but it also influences that specific state's perspective on sex education. Every state within the United States has control over what exactly is depicted and expressed, however, the specific state's political affiliation is what influences the type of control the state bureaucracy must express. At the end of the day, each state has a different level of bureaucratic control, and that variety of control is always influenced by that state's political beliefs and affiliations. Overall, not only is sex education influenced by social conflicts and issues, but it is also influenced by the social and political affiliation that each state has encompassed. Politics has a huge influence and control over a state, and specifically, a state's depiction and complexity of sex education through schools and society.

### **Why Significant?**

Sex education is one resource for society to develop a conceptual sense to the language of social and political conflict, along with individual identity. Sex education throughout history has been one way for society to come to an understanding of why exactly certain individuals, personalities, behaviors, and genders act the way they do in certain situations. With a deeper understanding and explanation for these social conflicts and topics, society as a whole can create

a new framework for interactions and behaviors that are more conducive to the current society's needs and goals. In other words, throughout American history, sex education has been one component to the explanation for social topics and conflicts. Sex education, whether it has been a structured system, or a discussion and debate of certain topics, needs, and goals, it is one way for individuals and society to act and behave a certain way. It is significant to develop the understanding of what makes a certain state's sex education the way it is, as it is exposing to what extent the United States has an influence on the social and political issues and topics. By realizing who and what determines each state's perspective on certain political and social topics, explains to the world that there is a form of influence and bias. That there is and will always be a form of influence and authority in regards to social and political topics. As society is continuously evolving, it is hard to understand why it is that certain government authority expresses certain perspectives. Is it that each state's political affiliation has an influence on the state's perspective on certain social issues? Is it that the opinion and beliefs of the majority of the states population determines the states perspective? By understanding what it is that determines the perspective of sex education for certain states and schools, will help conclude why it is that people, schools, and states have different perspectives and beliefs on certain social topics.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

After conducting research on eight different states, and the process of each state's sex education, it is evident that each state's perspective on sex education and certain topics are due to the influence of state authority. The state's political affiliation, and overall bureaucracy of the state is what influences and constructs the district curriculum and acknowledgement of certain social issues. However, future research should include the findings of other forms of influence among each state. Future research should expand towards the influence of funding towards sex

education foundations and federal organizations. Future research should also include an expansion of analysis on the public opinion of sex education at a local level, which could include looking at a variation in sex education curriculum in states that allow districts to adopt or not adopt a standardized curriculum, and how it is exactly that the local opinion has an impact on the state curriculum. An analysis of all the states within the United States would also be beneficial, in addition to eight, in order to get a larger understanding of what types of states having certain types of sex education. This examination of eight states enables us to come up with a conclusion as to how political point of views of each state impacts the perspective of that state's sex education curriculum, however, a larger case study of all the states would help strengthen the evidence that state bureaucracy and legislation is what influences that specific state's sex education curriculum and perspective. In addition to state-specific analysis, a larger analysis and understanding of the involvement of the national legislature would be beneficial for the conclusion of authoritative influence on sex education. By understanding how impactful the country's legislation has on state specific sex education, would help determine what exactly it is that makes sex education at certain schools, in certain states the way it is. Other factors besides political affiliation, present policies and curriculums, would also be beneficial in concluding what exactly influences each state district curriculum. For example, party affiliation of town citizens among a certain state, number of certain genders, and political association within each state would all be beneficial factors to the conclusion of different perspectives on sex education. In addition to current state sex education curricula, past curricula would also be beneficial in understanding either the state's development or limitation of the sex education curriculum. It would be particularly beneficial to examine instances in which significant changes were proposed to state-level sex education curricula which either were adopted or failed to be adopted.

There are many more factors that can be analyzed that would help strengthen the understanding of why certain states have certain forms of sex education, and how it is that these forms come about. With more time and more in depth analysis on all the states within the United States, the understanding of sex education among each state would be way more complex and conclusive.

### **What kind of policy should be adopted**

After analyzing how influential political affiliation has on a state's sex education mandation, it is easy to conclude how exactly a conservative state's perspective and opinion on sex education must be, along with how a liberal, progressive, state's perspective and opinion on sex education must be. Every state bureaucracy, also known as the state authority, has control over their own specific state standards of sex education. Due to state authority and influence, each state's political perspective on certain policies and beliefs coincide with that state's specific point of view on sex education. Each state, no matter the state's political affiliation, must produce standards for state districts or the state as a whole. After analyzing and researching the different types of political policies, and understanding to what extent politics impact sex education in every state, it is easy to conclude a preferable and possible policy of sex education from a public health perspective. In other words, from a public policy perspective, sex education should be mandated in every state and every district. Each school should incorporate an intensive inclusive curriculum that includes every aspect of sex education from past to current social topics. Specifically, sex education within the United States must include an up to date version of social topics and issues, such as gender equality, sexual orientation and identity, contraceptives, and abortion. There also should be a form of policy that includes individual students to have their own right to their expression of identity and opinions. It should be mandatory for every student and every form of gender to participate within sex education courses throughout one's

educational career. Sex education among schools should be an open minded, non judgemental zone, that is continuously up to date on every aspect of society, whether that includes national political policies, or social terms and conditions that are expressed and developed throughout the country. A preferable sex education policy, that would be beneficial in many ways to society, certain states, and the country at large, would include an acknowledgment of every different aspect of sex education, and the recognition of the different form of beliefs and ideas, which gives every student the right to their own beliefs and actions. Ever since the beginning of the 1800s sex education has continued to change. It would be beneficial to society at large, if sex education was present among the young population to not only shape the upcoming generation, but to also keep the ever changing social and political issues regarding sex, gender, and sexual orientation and identity present.



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