

edited by  
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HANDBOOK FOR  
**Human  
Sexuality**  
COUNSELING

**A  
Sex Positive  
Approach**

 American  
Counseling  
Association

**WILEY**

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# HANDBOOK FOR HUMAN SEXUALITY COUNSELING

A Sex Positive Approach

edited by

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**American Counseling Association**

2461 Eisenhower Avenue, Suite 300  
Alexandria, VA 22331

Publisher • Carolyn C. Baker

Digital and Print Development Editor • Nancy Driver

Senior Production Manager • Bonny E. Gaston

Cover and text design by Bonny E. Gaston

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Schubert, Angela M., editor. | Pope, Mark, 1952- editor.

Title: Handbook for human sexuality counseling : a sex positive approach / edited by Angela M. Schubert and Mark Pope.

Description: Alexandria, VA : American Counseling Association, [2022] |

Includes bibliographical references and index

Identifiers: LCCN 2022020487 | ISBN 9781556203985 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Sex counseling.

Classification: LCC HQ60.5 .H36 2022 | DDC 306.76—dc23/eng/20220604

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022020487>

## DEDICATION

Thank you to my mama, friends, and dear mentors for all  
your support.

And a very special thank you to my wildlings and lovies for  
teaching me the greatest lesson of all—  
to love with courage and an open heart.

*—Angela M. Schubert*

## PREFACE

To set the tone of this book, we wish to share a clinical vignette to demonstrate the power of a sex positive approach. To do so, coauthor and coeditor Dr. Angela Schubert asked permission from her client to share his personal perspective of what brought him to counseling and the poem that was birthed from the ashes of his personal sexual script—one that was informed by religion, disability, identity loss, and the internal conflict that occurred as each of those aspects challenged the very essence of his sexual being. We give you Henry, in his own words.

### Henry's Voice

One of the main reasons I finally went to therapy was because I felt I had no identity. I was no longer in high school, no longer defined by school pride or religion, or by the characters I had been inhabiting during high school as a means of survival. I felt like a gray blob: unnamed, uncharacterized, unworthy. I hoped I had identities in me; I certainly had questions about what identities I could claim and what claiming an identity meant. I started with what felt most pressing and uncomfortable: disability. I live with epidermolysis bullosa, a genetic skin condition that causes my skin to be as fragile as a butterfly's wings. I have always lived as a disabled person, but only through therapy was I able to comfortably claim and identify as disabled. This poem tackles the intersectionality of disability and sex. It tells my story of how I grappled with sex as a disabled person raised in a Catholic school system that taught purity culture and denied the questions I had about my own

human desire. A denial that ultimately pushed me to pornography as an alternative sex educator. Pornography is, of course, a shit teacher and only heightened my anxieties and worries that manifested over the years. Therapy has been tremendously helpful because it provides the space and safety to explore, unlearn, and craft identities. Self-love has been one of the constant areas of exploration for me to unlearn self-hatred, to challenge incorrect ideas, and, most importantly, to grow and craft and claim the identities I want to live.



*My One Regret*  
*Henry DeAngelis*

I audibly choked  
Swallowing the hopeless taste  
Of purity culture.  
“No, I don’t have any questions.”

My one regret.  
My one moment I cannot forget.  
The beginning of my emotional debt.

Fuck purity culture.  
Fuck it until it restores to me  
What should have always been mine:  
A curious exploration of my body.  
My sexuality.  
My sexiness.

Oh yes.  
Fuck purity culture.  
Fuck it until it lets me ask those questions again.  
Fuck it until it has a better answer than  
“you shouldn’t be thinking about it.” (nasally)

Purity culture pushed me away.  
Purity culture threatened to  
Tell my parents  
All my embarrassing questions  
Threatened to shame me for wondering how sex worked  
with disability.  
Shame me for wondering how I could be loved, when I  
was taught not to love myself;  
Wondering how I could be desired, when I was taught  
disabled people were  
Undesirables.

Wondering how my crippled hands could unclasp a button or bra.

How my tied tongue could french kiss,  
How my coarse hands could soothe,  
And stumpy fingers pleasure, And fragile skin be touched.

Or even how to open the heavy door at the restaurant  
Or have my date be seen as my date and not my nurse  
Or have my date not pity me  
And people not call my date a hero for going out with me

These are the questions purity culture pushed down my throat

to the very bottom of my stomach  
From there it jumped up to my mind

And scolded me for wondering about my own human desire

And before it left

It whispered one final thing into my ear

Shame.

Shame for thinking about sex.

Shame for thinking about one day having children.

Shame for not being the asexual person purity culture believes I should be.

And with that purity's damage was wrought

And it left me content with its knowledge

That I would forever shame myself

For my own human desire.

My one regret.

My one moment I can't forget.

The beginning of my emotional debt.

As in that moment,  
Purity.  
Pushed.  
Me. To.  
Pornography.

## Angela Schubert's Voice

Henry was fearless in his pursuit to find his own truth and narrate his own story. His story and reliance on sexually explicit material, also known as pornography, for sex education is not unique to Henry. Considering the utter void of comprehensive sex education across all social fronts, it is no wonder sexually explicit materials have become the sex educator for all who are interested. This is not to say that sexually explicit material is to blame for existing and thriving as the default sex educator, but rather that the finger is pointed at the gap that allows sexually explicit material to be the default educator in people's lives.

Henry chose counseling as a means to explore his own path as a sexual being with desires and needs, to challenge his own assumptions and biases, and to redefine his own sexual script. Henry took the path toward awareness, acceptance, and self-love, and I humbly held the lantern to shine a light on the path. My foundation as a counselor educator and sex therapist is rooted in the firm belief that everyone is deserving of their sexual story, and everyone is capable of narrating their own sexual script. Throughout this book, you will find the term "sexual script" repeated. A *sexual script* is the result of embedded cultural beliefs, social messaging, biology, personal experiences, and any formal/informal education about sexuality a person has received over their lifetime.

In the counseling session, counselors are gifted the opportunity to support a person as they come into their awareness of themselves and, sometimes, awareness of their sexual script. As mental health professionals, we are absolutely capable of facilitating therapeutic conversations to help clients better understand how their upbringing and personal experiences have crafted a view of their sexual selves. We are in the perfect place to illuminate the path as they begin to explore their sexuality, their sexual essence, and as a result, honor the parts of sexuality they wish to keep and release the parts that no longer work for them.

This book is an attempt to help mental health professionals and budding mental health students understand how to approach specific issues with clients yearning to explore their sexual story—without judgment and full of radical acceptance.

## Why We Created This Book

Human sexuality counseling is an area rarely addressed directly in either the human sexuality literature or the professional counseling literature. Human sexuality textbooks generally consist of the fundamentals of sexuality, specifically the physiological aspects. The 2016 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) Standards now address the need for educating counseling students about human sexuality counseling, specifically in clinical rehabilitation counseling (CACREP, 2016, Section 5, Standard D.2.m.); marriage, couple, and family counseling (Section 5, Standard F.2.e.); and rehabilitation counseling (Section 5, Standard H.2.h.).

Furthermore, there is a belief by some that “information is enough.” According to this approach, all that needs to be covered in sex education classes in secondary schools are

basic and introductory facts and data. That approach may then carry over through a counseling student's undergraduate coursework too. By the time that the counseling student reaches graduate school, they too may have integrated into their own belief system that information is enough. Researchers have found, however, time and time again that training in sexuality-related pathology is too limited and that information alone is not enough in terms of which topics are addressed in counseling related to sexuality (Blount et al., 2017). It is, therefore, ethically imperative for counselor education curriculum to include an affirmative and expansive training in known pathologies wherein sexual arousal is attributed directly to typical and atypical (or nonmajority/nonrepronormative/nonheteronormative) fantasies, behaviors, or partners that cause danger, distress, or dysfunction (Blount et al., 2017).

Understanding and comprehensive application of effective treatment approaches associated with sexuality is absolutely necessary for the wellness of the counseling clients. Many people with sexuality-related concerns that are discovered in a medical setting are often referred to a mental health professional in conjunction with pharmacological interventions. For example, the American Urological Association (Burnett et al., 2018) guidelines for treating erectile difficulties recommend that urologists connect patients with a mental health professional to enhance communication about sexual concerns and to reduce performance anxiety. Furthermore, practicing urologists see an average of 70 patients per week, or 3,360 patients per year, and the types of cases they serve also include erectile dysfunction, pelvic floor, urinary tract concerns, penile rehabilitation following prostate cancer, reproduction, ejaculatory dysfunction, hypo-gonadism, penile implants, and sexually transmitted diseases—to



name a few. Specifically, Burnett et al. (2018) explained that “psychotherapy and psychosexual counseling focus on helping patients and their partners improve communication about sexual concerns, reduce anxiety related to entering a sexual situation and during a sexual situation, and discuss strategies for integrating ED [erectile dysfunction] treatments into their sexual relationship” (p. 14).

Furthermore, physiological sexual dysfunctions in women are predominantly treated by pelvic floor therapists. Pelvic floor therapists are physiotherapists and occupational therapists who specialize in pelvic health. Berghmans (2018) identified a psychosomatic element in cases of female sexual dysfunction that cannot be treated with pelvic floor therapy alone. Instead, Berghmans advocated for a biopsychosocial approach that includes mental health treatment in conjunction with physiotherapy. Counselors need to be prepared to have these conversations with clients struggling with physiological disturbances in their sexuality and sexual expression to enhance the client’s quality of life.

*The Handbook for Human Sexuality Counseling: A Sex Positive Approach* is a straightforward, honest, and positive book on human sexuality counseling. This book consists of much more than the fundamentals of sexuality and gender. It is a book that steers away from the older views of human sexuality and that eschews pathology and “othering” approaches that pathologize and discriminate against sexual behaviors and expressions that are not heteronormative, repronormative, or cisnormative. Sexuality is part of the human experience; however, it is often disregarded in both counselor training and the actual process of counseling (Reissing & Giulio, 2010). Ultimately, students and counseling professionals alike are left with resources that address the basic concepts of sexuality and gender many times from a narrow cisgender,

heteronormative, and pathological framework. The foundation of each of the mental health professions' codes of ethics is a nonjudgmental approach to issues of counseling. A sex positive approach to sexuality in counseling is a perfect integration of these issues as it challenges pathology and emphasizes nonjudgmental openness, sexual freedom, and liberation of sexual expression (Donaghue, 2015).

This book will be useful for both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as counselors and other mental health professionals. It is designed for those whose work will bring them into contact with clients of all types of sexual backgrounds and experiences. Most books try to broadly cover sexuality and gender-related topics in hopes to be generalizable, but the material is foundational at best. In this book, we selected expert authors to write on a variety of diverse topics related to sexuality. Our aim was to be both fun and sex positive in the book's approach to human sexuality.

As counselor educators with a combined 40 years of experience training counselors, we find that counseling students still complain of a lack of training in working with clients regarding sex. Many graduate programs provide only a cursory treatment of human sexuality counseling as part of their multicultural counseling course or as a small part of their foundational counseling courses, with school counselors especially noting a lack of knowledge and skills in this particular area. We believe that this book is a critical resource in bridging that gap in the training of counselors and other mental health professionals.

## Sex Positive Counseling

The task of sex positive human sexuality counseling is to view all people and their sexuality as central and self-

defining, rather than as marginal and defined by cisgender and heterosexual norms (Morrow, 2000). Sex positive human sexuality counseling is geared to the creative enhancement of an individual's sexual and cultural identities. To be effective in their work, counselors must understand their own sexual orientation; have an appreciation for gender diversity; and understand their own sexuality, sexual beliefs, and values.

The bottom line is that clinicians of any theoretical framework can practice sex positive counseling, as long as they have examined their own heterosexism, homonegativity, or bi-negativity and the oppressive messages around transgenderism and clients who are questioning (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). Therefore, it is our perspective that experience and expertise are more important than the counselor's sexual orientation when practicing affirming human sexuality counseling with clients.

In the core traditions of the counseling profession, this book includes a strengths-based, developmentally appropriate, psychoeducational, and sex positive approach to human sexuality counseling. This approach permeates each chapter.

As Phillips (2000) stated, "Students with little experience are especially appreciative if they are given examples of what . . . therapists tend to do and say and what they tend not to do and say" (p. 349). Since training in this area is limited, it is not only students who are hungering for concrete examples of human sexuality counseling. Counseling professionals who are many times already licensed and practicing are also eager to understand what they should be doing and what they should be considering when working with clients addressing issues of their sexuality (Dworkin & Pope, 2012). In addition, both

students and professionals need a constant reminder about how important it is to get in touch with and stay in touch with biases, stereotypes, and the negative messages from religion, society, and even parents.

Rather than simply reviewing the literature about therapy with a given population, each chapter in this book integrates current research and clinical practice by providing examples of evidence-based, sex positive, and practical treatment planning and implementation. Each individual chapter author, or group of authors, addresses their topic with a modern, empowering approach and provides a specific protocol to follow in the treatment of clients.

Written from a multidisciplinary perspective, this book uses expert narratives to address treatment approaches for the sexual issues that many individuals and couples are facing today. The chapter authors provide examples of inclusive and affirming language to use in counseling, as well as describing the attitudes and behaviors counselors should exhibit when addressing clients' sexuality. Many of the authors have included a case example illustrating a sex positive approach to working with a fictional client. Some provide answers to questions readers may have "always wanted to ask" about their topic, and some take a personal stance, offering their personal and professional perspectives.

# Chapter Highlights

The chapters in this book are organized into eight sections providing a comprehensive view of the human sexual experience:

- Foundations
- Physiological and psychological
- Attraction, orientation, and gender
- Sexual wellness
- Sexual agency
- Approaches to sexual divergence
- Relationships
- Education

## Part 1: Foundations

[Chapter 1](#) expands on current issues in mental health, explains the distinction between a sexual wellness and a medical framework, and provides a radically informed sex positive approach to sexual issues.

[Chapter 2](#) provides an intersectional perspective on the history of sex, including cultural taboos around the world, contributions of religion to sexuality, and cultural differences in sexual norms. This chapter also addresses the politics of sex, including issues of sexual rights, reproductive rights, and the medicalization of sex.

[Chapter 3](#) expands on the intersecting realities that exist in relation to ethical practices, decision-making, and sexual concerns. This chapter addresses common ethical and professional pitfalls specific to sexuality, including the professional obligation to identify personal biases, assumptions, and belief systems regarding sexuality and

sexual concerns, as well as the need to ensure competency for any given sexuality topic and the process of referring to a sex therapist or other professional in cases where the sexual concern is beyond the competency of the counselor. This chapter provides an informative matrix, the knowledge-based decision-making matrix, to evaluate clinical competency.

## Part 2: Physiological and Psychological

[Chapter 4](#) provides readers with medical information associated with the reproductive systems of the human body as well as the physiology of sex in human beings, including the role of hormones and how human anatomy affects sexual expression. This chapter also describes the ways that a person's physical body interacts with their psyche to promote or inhibit sexual health and response to therapeutic psychological interventions.

[Chapter 5](#) examines the role of the brain during arousal and desire and in human beings. The chapter further elaborates on research that has used advanced brain imaging, such as functional MRI and positron-emission tomography (i.e., PET) scans, during sexual activity. The chapter uses illustrations to elaborate on sexual functioning, sexual response, and arousal in hopes to provide education on how clinicians may better understand how to overcome barriers to sexual wellness.

[Chapter 6](#) explores the perception and act of orgasm through an intersectional lens. It also addresses misconceptions, myths, and prescriptions around orgasm and how they influence a person's perception of themselves as a sexual being. This chapter also examines techniques and strategies to clinically treat and support the orgasm explorations of clients from a therapeutic standpoint.

[Chapter 7](#) explores the messages humans receive and communicate about sex and sexuality and addresses how these messages (implicit and explicit) affect the perception of oneself as a sexual being, such as with internalized anxiety around performance, faking interest and climax, and comparing one's performance to sexual behavior that is depicted in commercial pornography.

### Part 3: Attraction, Orientation, and Gender

[Chapter 8](#) addresses the multidimensional role of sexual attraction in human sexual expression and how expression may change over time. Addressing the role of sexual attraction from a multiculturally responsive perspective, the chapter debunks myths related to sexual attraction and highlights the nuances of attraction and affectional identities.

[Chapter 9](#) explores the sexuality orientation spectrum, including sexual and romantic attraction, straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, and asexual. This chapter also addresses constructs of sexual attraction that fall outside of these labels, such as men who have sex with men.

[Chapter 10](#) reviews the spectrum of gender identity and gender expression. Topics include cisgender and transgender, sex role stereotyping, intersex, agender; masculinity and femininity explored; derailing the binary, trans people of color, hijra; two-spirited; eunuch; and more.

### Part 4: Sexual Wellness

[Chapter 11](#) reviews historical and current literature on the health benefits of masturbation and helps to familiarize counselors on how to support and empower clients to begin to see themselves as the protagonist of their sexual story. Myths surrounding masturbation are critiqued and factual explanations are provided. A sex positive approach is