



### LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX (POLICY)

It was one of the biggest professional train wrecks of my adult life.

I had co-organized a series of community dialogues about schools, and nearly 50 people came out to an arts center in the Southeast quadrant of Washington, D.C. The topic was, "LGBT Rights & Schools: How Do We Prepare for Change?" which was also the title of an essay I'd published in the *Washington Post*.

The turnout was a beautiful rainbow of people: Well-to-do suburban couples, openly-gay teenagers from the city's roughest high schools, seasoned LGBT advocates, Asian and Latino immigrants, Christians of deep and abiding faith, and more than a few randoms who saw our fliers in the neighborhood and decided to check it out.

What could go wrong?

Roughly 6-7 people sat at each table. A 20-ish man who mentored kids was incredulous that in some neighborhoods in Atlanta, men live openly gay, "like it's OK." Seconds later, I watched him squirm when the bald woman sitting across from him casually referenced her blonde wife sitting at another table. Christians worried about eternal damnation and schools teaching impressionable young people to "choose the gay lifestyle." Seasoned LGBT activists shot down the notion that gayness can be taught or is a choice with no room for debate. At another table, a group of teenagers students did not understand the fuss; at their school being gay was common, and no one cares. But transgender students? An openly gay boy said they made him "uncomfortable." Other kids at the table nodded in agreement.

At still another table, someone wondered aloud why someone's private sexual preference is an appropriate topic of public conversation at all.

Looking back on it, I don't know which rankled me more. Was it the people who hurtfully told people sitting across from them that they belonged back in the closet? Or was it the sexuality "experts," feeling old scabs ripped raw, dripping with condescension and disdain at the less informed people sitting across from them? In the middle of all this were IF facilitators I had poorly prepared for the task sitting at each table. They did their best to mediate the conversation, stuttering and tripping over rhetorical landmines that could and did explode on all sides at every turn.

That intensely awkward afternoon was one of the inspirations for this project. Even two years later, as gay marriage is the law of the land, and a former U.S. Olympian named Bruce Jenner told *Vanity Fair* readers to "Call Me Caitlin," as a country, we don't have a lot of practice talking about gender and sexuality. With the speed of the changes in sex policy in the past decade, we have a lot of catching up to do. We need *more* awkward conversations. That's the only way they will get less awkward.

This is not the kind of policy report that will tell you what to think. We developed this discussion guide as a tool to open up conversations about how society may approach gender and sexuality in the future—from a diverse array of perspectives. The ideas in this report were developed by a panel of experts and lay people invited to do so by the Interactivity Foundation. (Please see Appendix A for more information about our process.) We encourage you to explore some of these possible policy approaches, even and especially if you do not agree.

We intentionally did not explore issues such as gay marriage, or gender parity in work and school, because while the march toward equity continues, these have been settled policy questions. Instead, we sought to look ahead at the future and grapple with changes that may be on the way. Gender and sexuality are enormous, interlocking and overlapping spheres of society that affect everything from how we label public restrooms to what kind of private conversations we can have with our doctors. In the future, what role will tradition, religion, popular culture, and education play in sex policy? How will emerging science in reproduction, gender assignment, population control, and sexual health affect policy? We couldn't begin to have the answers, but we hope these policy possibilities are a way to start to develop your own.

These conversations work best when guided by a designated facilitator. The next page offers some possible ways to set the stage for the discussion. Feel free to select one of the three possible icebreakers, and then dive in to exploring policy possibilities that begin on page 3.

Now go talk about sex—policy!

--Natalie Hopkinson, Ph.D. Project manager, Future of Sex Policy discussion project

### GROUP INTRODUCTIONS

Ask participants to arrange chairs around a circle. Prompt each person to take turns introducing themselves using the following information:

1) NAME; 2) WHERE THEY LIVE or WHERE THEY ARE FROM ;3) PREFERRED GENDER PRONOUN

After everyone has a turn, discuss: Why might there be a need for strangers to introduce themselves by identifying their preferred gender pronouns? What if any social benefit is there to making this the default?

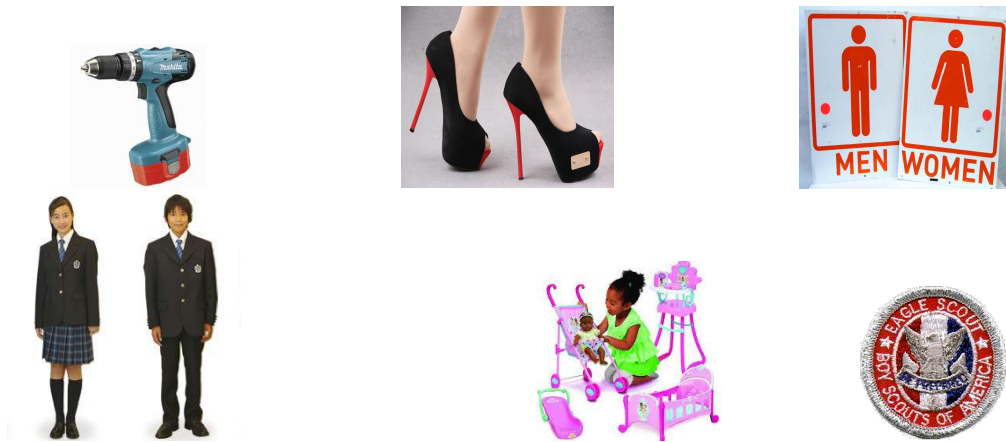
### POSSIBLE ICEBREAKER NUMBER 1 of 3: SHOW AND TELL

Before joining the meeting, ask discussion participants to bring in an artifact that represents a cultural or policy norm tied to gender that will likely change 30 years from now. (Examples can be articles of clothing, toys, tools, badges, prescriptions, etc.) Take turns sharing with the group, and along with predictions for how it will change.

### POSSIBLE ICEBREAKER NUMBER 2 of 3:

Ask participants to choose one of the following images to reflect.

Is their chosen object tied to a certain gender? If so, what societal purpose does it serve to be tied to associated with a certain gender?



### POSSIBLE ICEBREAKER NUMBER 3 of 3: Is Gender Hard-wired?

Play first 4 minutes of this PBS video: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/biology-gender-identity-children/#.VVStcG9MfYc.email>

What is difference between gender and sexual identity?

## POLICY POSSIBILITIES

Once the group is warmed up, they can explore the following possibilities developed by the IF Future of Sex Policy panel. You will find a brief description of a possible policy approach, reasoning behind it, possible implementations as well as space for opposing views. Feel free to fill in the blanks, edit or alter these ideas and/or develop possibilities of your own.

**Page 4: TELL NEW STORIES**—Public narratives should achieve gender parity and affirm the value of all sexual identities.

**Page 5: BUILD ON TRADITION**—Maintain policies that recognize that there are important differences between men and women and between LGBT people.

**Page 6: BAN THE BOX**—All publicly funded institutions and public spaces should stop recognizing gender and sexuality categories altogether.

**Page 7: HEALTH FIRST.** Health policies must be implemented strictly from an equity perspective.

**Page 8: EMBRACE A DIVERSITY OF FAMILIES** Government should recognize various forms of affective and familial relationships and support people in building family in a variety of ways.

**POLICY POSSIBILITY 1: TELL NEW STORIES**—Public narratives should achieve gender parity and affirm the value of all sexual identities.



**Reasoning behind such a policy:** The stories we tell are powerful forces for maintaining or changing social norms and expectations. Historical and prevailing corporate-driven images often marginalize women and sexual minorities. Children especially could be presented with diverse views of the world around them to affirm all human value without imposing any predetermined hierarchies. People of all ages need to hear stories that affirm their human dignity and that recognize those with sexual and gender identities different than their own. Supporting the creation of new narratives about gender and sexuality would reflect the reality of the world beyond nuclear or hetero-normative families and individuals. Telling new stories about gender and sexuality would both counteract prevailing narratives, and lead to equity in who gets a public voice.

**How such a policy may be implemented:** Arts and humanities councils and public access programs could commit at least half of their budgets toward telling stories by and about women, and proportional representation for sexual minorities. Such cultural content such as film, oral histories, books, television and Web programming would reflect diverse individuals, sexual identities and family structures, fluid gender identities and evolving social norms. K-12 curricula, public libraries, and “Sex ed” must include sex-positive lessons that reflect diverse sexual identities beyond the hetero-normative. Require equal funding to cultural programming in that reflects women and sexual minorities in television, film, the Web, and publishing, video games. Private philanthropy could step into help accelerate the road to gender parity in public narratives.

**What other policies can help us to tell new stories about gender and sexuality?**

**OTHER POINTS OF VIEW:** Some may believe that individuals and institutions in the private sphere should shape such values as opposed to the public.

**What other problems can you see with implementing such a policy?**

**POLICY POSSIBILITY 2: BUILD ON TRADITION**—Maintain policies that recognize that there are important differences between men and women and between LGBT people.



**Reasoning behind such a policy.**

Traditionally defined gender and sexual roles are tools that families and private institutions have used to preserve and carry on culture, history and wealth. Maintaining these gender distinctions prevents erasure of individual, group and family legacies, institutions, and history. Many biological distinctions tied to gender and sexuality have health and other implications that cannot and should not be ignored.

**How such a policy may be implemented.**

Maintain bathrooms segregated by gender, cultural traditions such as prom king and queen; create toys for boys and girls, all-women and all-male colleges, gender-segregated sports teams. These could all be supported as long as they reflect no false hierarchies.

What are other ways to build on tradition when it comes to policies concerning gender and sex?

**Opposing points of view.** Such traditions have proved oppressive to many.

What other problems can you see with building on tradition?

**POLICY POSSIBILITY 3: BAN THE BOX**—All publicly funded institutions and public spaces should stop recognizing gender and sexuality categories altogether.



**Reasoning behind such a policy.**

Historically, gender and sexuality has been inextricably tied to certain hierarchies of power and value. Eliminating these distinctions puts those historically disadvantaged (women and sexual minorities—lesbians, gays, transgendered) on an even playing field.

**How such a policy may be implemented.**

Make all public restroom facilities unisex/gender-neutral. In high school prom, students would elect two “monarchs” as opposed to “kings” or “queens.” Schools would welcome all genders and sexualities. Sports would all become co-ed. Census and other reporting forms could ban the use of gender as a category altogether.

**What other ways can we as a society break out of the gender box?**

**Opposing points of view.** Tracking gender allows us to recognize disparities that persists and allow us to act on them.

**What other potential problems do you see for not recognizing gender differences?**



**POLICY POSSIBILITY 4: HEALTH FIRST.** Health policies must be implemented strictly from an equity perspective.



### **Reasoning behind such a policy**

This policy would put the health needs above other considerations, including maintain separation of between religion and the actions of the state. This policy would aim for optimal health, regardless of the environment or social conditions. Being unable to tell a health care worker that you are a sex worker, or gay, or part of any perceived minority group presents numerous health hazards to society. A “health first” approach would ensure that people get the health coverage they need without personal biases getting in the way, and exposing people to various diseases and related dangers.

### **How such a policy may be implemented.**

The state could train health care workers and government agencies with this priority in mind. That means providing health insurance coverage for gender reassignments, provide free reproductive health planning tools free and accessible, family planning, preventing and treating communicable disease, supporting health of sex workers, prosecuting partner and domestic violence and street harassment under the umbrella of public safety and health. Train health care workers in their biases.

### **What other ways can we as a society put health above all other concerns around gender, sex and sexuality?**

**Opposing points of view.** Supporting this policy approach may conflict with the private beliefs of individuals and some religious or other social institutions.

### **What other potential problems do you see with putting health first?**



**POLICY 5: EMBRACE A DIVERSITY OF FAMILIES** Government should recognize various forms of affective and familial relationships and support people in building family in a variety of ways.



**Reasoning behind such a policy.**

The notion of “family” is evolving beyond what was once the dominant American cultural ideal. Advances in reproductive technology will eventually render some roles that were historically determined by gender or sexuality obsolete. New economic imperatives mean that non-romantically linked individuals pool together and operate as “families,” including poly families. The government must create rules that acknowledge this reality, support the needs of all families, and allow them to continue to carry out socially necessary roles such as caring for homes, children and the elderly.

**How such a policy may be implemented.**

For the purposes of government support through benefits, workplace policies, “family” could be defined as a small unit that provide social and economic support to individuals, regardless of their composition, including various “intimacy constellations” and “fictive kin.” This approach would provide child or elderly care stipends for all such units. Strengthen work rules for job protection and benefits for wage earners as well as salary earners. Government subsidies and regulation of quality childcare, tutoring, school fundraising, child-transportation, school volunteers would not discriminate against any such unit.

**How else can society support families that fall outside dominant family structures?**

**Opposing points of view.** Without a clear definition of what constitutes a “family” and what society expects each individual to contribute, some important societal functions may fall through the cracks.

**What other problems do you see with this policy approach to families?**

## Appendix A. Notes on Facilitation

Jessica Solomon, Program Associate

*Jessica Solomon, MSOD is a systems-thinker, facilitator and instigator of arts and cultural projects.*

We began planning for the Future of Sex Policy project as a six-month engagement by mapping the journey and visioning the end of the project. What would we have created at the end? What would be its impact on the participants and the growing cannon of discussion tools at Interactivity Foundation? What would success look like? We knew to get to our vision the total experience (and discrete experiences) would need to be productive, participative, friendly, and cooperative - from the initial invitation to the facilitation of the final meeting. We started the process by identifying the types of people that would help us get to the vision. Through our network and extended networks we curated virtual and in personal panels to include a mix of professional experts - people engaging in the content for their work and lay people - experts of personal experience. The virtual and in personal panel discussions were designed using principles that helped us to get information and ensure dialogue.

### **Design Principles**

#### **Create a comfortable safe space**

Examples: Created shared agreements, developed protocols for video calls

#### **Honor experiences**

For example, built in time for micro stories; opportunities to share ways personal and professional experiences connected to gender policy. We gave the same weight to stories told from lived experience and professional lives.

#### **Keep policy in mind**

Our end goal was to develop policy ideas to be edited into a report and published as a discussion guide. We identified distinct ways we'd get closer to our end goal at each meeting.

#### **Get creative**

We embedded creative process and creative activities throughout the engagement.

#### **Be consistent**

Reviewed shared agreements at each meeting, sharing agendas, honoring time.

We concluded the engagement - with both virtual and in personal panels - with reflection and celebration. I believe our facilitation style and design principles helped heighten empathy and set the stage for ongoing relationships, a powerful by-product of the project.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

There are several films and books that can be launching points for conversations. Here is a sampling of some titles that may be of interest.

#### FILM

***LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX:*** A film by James Houston

<http://letstalkaboutsexthefilm.com/>

***MILK:*** This [2008 American biographical film](#) follows the story of Harvey Milk (Sean Penn) and his struggles as a gay American activist who became California's first openly gay elected official.

***THE CELLULOID CLOSET:*** This [1995 documentary](#) is an insightful examination of the history of the portrayal of LGBT characters in Hollywood films.

***PRAYERS FOR BOBBY:*** Sigourney Weaver stars in this [true story of Mary Griffith](#), a Christian suburban housewife and mother who struggles to accept her young son Bobby being gay.

***PARIAH:*** Story of a Brooklyn lesbian teenager's challenges in her home, school and community.

#### BOOKS

Baldwin, J. (1954) *Giovanni's Room*. New York: Vintage.

Bornstein, Kate. (2013) *My New Gender Workbook: A Step-by-step Guide to Achieving World Peace Through Gender Anarchy and Sex Positivity*. Routledge. 2013.

Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). *Selections from Sexing the body: Gender politics and the construction of sexuality*. New York: Basic Books.

Kimmel, M. (2015). *Angry White Men. American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. New York: Nation Books.

Lorde, A. (1984) *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde. New York. The Crossing Press.

Marcus, E. (2005) *Is it a Choice? Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions about Gay & Lesbian People*. New York: HarperOne.

Mundy, L. (2012) *The Richer Sex: How the new majority of female breadwinners is transforming sex, love and family*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Mottier, V. *Sexuality: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press. 2008.

Prasad, A. (2012.) *Like a Virgin: How Science is Redesigning the Rules of Sex*. London: Oneworld Publications.

Savage, D. (ed.) (2012) *It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living*. New York: Plume.

Silverberg, C. (2015\_) *Sex is a Funny Word: A Book about Bodies, Feelings, and YOU*. 2015. New York: Triangle Square Press.

Slaughter, A. (2015) *Unfinished Business: Women Men Work Family*. New York: Random House.

Vernacchio, A. "For Goodness Sex: Changing the Way We Talk to Teens About Sexuality. Harper Wave. 2014.

Wolf, N. (1991) *The Beauty Myth. How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*.

BACK PAGE OF REPORT WILL HAVE ALL ID INFORMATION

Future of Sex

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