

Who is the “Joy” of Sex Really For?: A Queer Critique of Popular Sex Guides

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Abstract

Using *The Guide to Getting It On* and *The Joy of Sex*, this paper explores the ways in which sex guides address queer identities. The arguments presented rely on queer theory, particularly the work of Annamarie Jagose and Eve Sedgwick, to understand queer as an unstable and dynamic category of identity. The paper then turns to *The Guide to Getting It On* and *The Joy of Sex* to examine how sex guides uphold hegemonic standards of heterosexuality and whiteness and further marginalize queer identities and people of color, arguing that sex guides cannot account for queer identities and are inherently exclusionary even when they aim to be inclusive.

Keywords: sex guide, queer theory, heterosexuality, whiteness, queer identities

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Introduction

In the preface to *The Joy of Sex* (2009: 8), Susan Quilliam writes: “Joy was not only a product of the [sexual] revolution, it also helped create it... The text and illustrations were designed to both reassure the reader that their sexuality was normal and to offer further possibilities with which to expand their sexual menu.” Who defines “normal,” and what does this imply for those of us who do not see ourselves reflected in the text and illustrations? Reading *The Guide to Getting It On* as an undergraduate was an unexpectedly harsh experience for me; I found myself continually frustrated with the book’s flippant treatment of and exclusion of genders and sexualities outside of the realm of white, cisgender heterosexuality. Under the heading “How Prevalent Is Transsexualism?” for example, the text reads, “It’s not like every third person in your high-school graduating class was transgender, although you may have had your doubts” (Joannides, 2013: 1006). Hence, I decided to critique the ways in which sex guides address queer identities and sexual categories. Along these lines, sex guides, particularly *The Guide to Getting It On* (2013) and Alex Comfort’s *The Joy of Sex* (2009), privilege heterosexual and white audiences and fail to account for the sexual specificities of individuals. This failure implies that the singular “joy” of sex is reserved for the dominant groups while leaving out the joy(s) of the myriad other ways of being sexual, further marginalizing queer forms of sex and sexualities.

Sex guides for queer readers do exist, most commonly targeted at lesbian and gay audiences, such as *The Whole Lesbian Sex Book: A Passionate Guide for All of Us* (Newman, 2004), *Men Loving Men: A Gay Sex Guide and Consciousness Book* (Walker, 1997), *The Joy of Lesbian Sex: A Tender and Liberated Guide to the Pleasures and Problems of a Lesbian Lifestyle* (Harris and Sisley, 1988), and *The Joy of Gay Sex* (Silverstein and White, 1977). Yet of the popular lists¹ of the “best” sex guides, recognition of even lesbian and gay sex guides are few and far between, and guides that go further into the realm of queer are completely absent. This suggests that these guides are not considered pertinent in the way guides targeted at heterosexual readers are; irrelevant to the majority, they are rendered invisible. While a problem in itself, the omission of gay, lesbian, and queer sex guides from the popular eye turns the spotlight on the guides that are included, in this case *The Guide To Getting It On* and *The Joy of Sex*.

Paul Joannides’ *The Guide To Getting It On* (2014; hereafter referred to as *The Guide*) in its current edition is 1,184 pages long, and is split into a robust 90 chapters, including titles such as “Romance,” “The Zen of Finger Fucking,” “The Fairy Pornmother,” and “Gnarly Sex Germs.” It incorporates cartoon-like illustrations rather than photographs to emphasize its points, and includes a disclaimer telling readers that “if your anatomy differs from what is shown, take heart” (Joannides, 2013: 9). *The Guide* has been included on *The Guardian’s* (2012a) “The 10 Best Sex Guides,” and has won numerous awards for its quality as a sex instruction guide, including The American Association of Sex Educators, Therapists, and Counselors Award, the Firecracker Alternative Book Award, the Ben Franklin Award, the American Foundation for Gender & Genital Medicine Book Award, The World Congress of Sexology Society for Human

Sexuality Book Award, the Women's Health Magazine Sex Award, the Sexuality.org Best Heterosexual Book Award, and the Best Book Award from USABookNews.com. Throughout *The Guide*, there are references to other books and sources for information in places that the author feels like *The Guide* may fail to adequately address a topic. Finally, a last notable feature of *The Guide* is its frequent inclusion of reader's questions and comments, which emphasizes the importance of the reader to Joannides.

Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex* (2008, originally published in 1972; hereafter referred to as *Joy*) is perhaps even better known than *The Guide*. This book also includes many chapters, split into sections that are loosely based on famous cookbook *The Joy of Cooking*²: "ingredients," "appetizers," "main courses," "sauces and pickles," and a section with further resources at the end. Born out of the sexual revolution of 1960's and 70's United States, *Joy* was an urbane symbol for "the status-conscious who wanted to keep up with their sexually liberated neighbors" (Allyn, 2001: 229). Originally intended as a middle-class marriage manual, the book includes photographs and illustrations that depict one couple performing the acts described throughout the book. Like *The Guide*, *Joy* has been included on *The Guardian's* list of the best sex guides. Additionally, *Joy* has sold more than twelve million copies worldwide since its original release in 1972, making it certainly one of the best-selling sex guides of all time. It is a self-described "timeless guide to lovemaking," and has been published in dozens of editions.³

In my analysis of these two sex guides, queer sex will refer to any sexual behaviors that are viewed as "not normal," "bad," or "weird," particularly in reference to sex between queer bodies or people with queer identities. With only slight modification to Gayle Rubin's (1984) original list of the outer limits of the sex hierarchy, these

behaviors include: promiscuity or polyamory; sex for money; group sex; cross-generational sex; public sex; BDSM; pornography; sex with or between transgender partners; and homosexual sex.⁴ Clearly, there are myriad ways for heterosexually identified people to engage in non-normative sexual behaviors, which I call queer sex. I do not want to diminish or normalize the experiences of queer identified and queer bodied people by comparing their sex to that of the heterosexual identified majority; the goal in including non-normative heterosexual behaviors in my definition of queer sex is to broaden my analysis in order to examine the ways in which sex guides may or may not privilege certain ways of having sex.

Literature Review & Method

Sex guides rely on identity categories in their effort to impart knowledge about certain ways of having sex, and numerous scholars have demonstrated that these identity categories, as well as their normative status, are products of social and cultural factors. Michel Foucault (1978) describes the identity categories homosexual and heterosexual as discursive productions, constructed in specific cultural and historical ways, as opposed to *a priori* natural sexual categories. Similarly, the need for social and historical contingency has been shown through the argument that the categories heterosexual and homosexual are not ahistorical or universal, as they often are presumed to be (Halperin, 1990; Katz, 2005; Wittig, 1980; Weeks, 2000; Butler, 1993; Ferguson, 2005; Bell and Binnie, 2000; Fraser, 1997; Jagose, 1996; Abelove, 2003). As Jackson Katz (2005: 50–51) asserts: “By not studying the heterosexual idea in history, analysts of sex, gay and straight, have continued to privilege the ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ at the expense of the

‘abnormal’ and ‘unnatural.’” Heterosexuality, then, continues to be the standard by which sex is judged as either “normal” or as otherwise somehow deviant; as a result, any discussion of sex that does not privilege heterosexuality continues to remain invisible. This is true of sex guides as well, because of the ways that we understand the word “sex” as denoting heterosexual, penetrative sex. For example, *The Guide* (Joannides, 2013: 443) assumes heterosexuality through its use of gender pronouns while identifying the “unrealistic” aspects of pornography: “It’s highly unlikely that a guy has bright studio lights shining between his lover’s legs and is staring at her crotch the entire time they are having sex.” Thus, unless explicitly denoted as otherwise, a guide to sex assumes a heterosexual audience.

The homosexual/heterosexual binary and the language of natural sexual preference uphold heterosexuality as the normative form of sexual identity. In her considerations of heterosexuality, Adrienne Rich (1980: 81) makes a point to “encourage heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality as a political institution which disempowers women—and to change it.” Heterosexuality is “compulsory;” that is, it “has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women.” In other words, Rich identifies hegemonic heterosexuality as problematic in that it has become a highly privileged social and political institution. More recently, the discussions of the institution of heterosexuality and the ways in which it defines the borders of “normal” sexuality have further turned to examination of sexual binaries (hetero/homo) and the deconstruction of these binaries (Johnson, 2004; Lorber, 1996; Sedgwick, 1990). Further, Paul Johnson (2004: 188) considers how the hetero/homo binary instructs views of intimate love between sexual partners, demonstrating that:

Whilst the production of identities through the configurations of sexual discourses appear as the benign and neutral expressions of personal ‘preference’, the modern social construction of sexuality masks the very real opposition of the homo/het binary and the strict maintenance of sexual borders which it institutes.

In other words, this binary is a tool for policing sexual behavior; indeed, George Chauncey (1994) notes that the policing of non-normative sexual behavior is a significant way of policing the dominant culture itself. So, by setting a standard for “normal” sex, society creates a framework with which to recognize “abnormal” behavior. The sex guide instructs in behaviors that are already seen as “normal,” and, by choosing to include behaviors that are non-normative, seeks to normalize those behaviors. For example, *The Guide* in its chapter on period sex acknowledges that often the male sex partners of women on their periods are uncomfortable or do not know how to react; by providing tips on how to have sex when a woman is on her period, *The Guide* takes a step away from our reactions of disgust toward periods and toward the normalization of periods and period sex. While *The Guide* assumes a heterosexual relationship by identifying the partners of women on their periods as grossed-out men, it also educates readers on a non-normative sexual behavior. Still, *The Guide* upholds heterosexuality and reinforces the heterosexual/homosexual binary by exclusive use of male gender pronouns when discussing a female partner and use of female gender pronouns in reference to men.

“Deviant” sexuality is not limited to what we typically think of as queer sexual acts—queer scholars of color argue that whiteness, like heterosexuality, is a problematic assumptive category of “proper” sexuality and is also, as I will argue, the assumed

audience of sex guides. Discussions of sex within queer theory have been sorely lacking in analyses of race and class, harmfully privileging “queer” as the ultimate and only category of oppression (Harper et al., 1997; Ferguson, 2004; Cohen, 1997; Johnson, 2005; Muñoz, 1999; Rich, 1980; Eng et al., 2005; Hennessy, 2000). Roderick A. Ferguson (2004: 4, 6) proposes a “queer of color” analysis that “presumes that liberal ideology occludes the intersecting saliency of race, gender, sexuality, and class in forming social practices” and that recognizes that “racialization has helped to articulate heteropatriarchy as universal.” Specifically, Ferguson is arguing that blackness has come to signify deviance and dysfunction while whiteness signifies normality, or “normative heterosexuality.” By ignoring the intersectional nature of identity, academic discussions of sexuality have created a “heterosexual/queer divide” between everything heterosexual as privileged and everything queer as marginalized; this is problematic because even within marginalized communities, there are discrepancies in power based on normative rules and behavior (Cohen, 1997). Studies of intersectional identities must, then, include thoughtful and thorough examinations of multiple and interlocking systems of oppression if they are to be helpful in moving forward. The assumption of whiteness within queer studies and the promotion of the hetero/queer binary have, if nothing else, demonstrated again the danger of analysis from a place of assumption and privilege; simply put, “intersectionality will become positively hazardous to everyone’s health if we choose to adjudicate among these differences rather than to nurture them all at once” (Eng et al., 2005: 5). For example, *The Guide*’s section on pornography completely lacks discussion about the racial stereotypes that pervade pornography and what these stereotypes mean for people of color within and outside of the industry; *Joy*, too, has nothing to say about

the intersections of race and sexuality. In their effort to educate about one factor of identity—sexuality—sex guides have done just this privileging of sexual identity that queer critiques of color warn against.

Hence, sex guides promote the hegemonic view of sexuality as a separate and distinct aspect of identity, and subsequently privilege white, heterosexual behaviors above most others. According to Rubin (1984), the behaviors that have been excluded from the realm of “bad” sexuality—that is, where all types of sexualities, viewed within a moral framework, inherently lie—include those that fall within the institutions of love, marriage, and reproduction. Within the confines of our sexual value system, there are some gray areas in between “good” and “bad” sex, including but not limited to unmarried heterosexual couples or promiscuous heterosexual couples, masturbation, and stable homosexual relationships (Rubin, 1984). Scholars of color have argued also that most forms of non-white sexualities have been demonized and controlled by the dominant culture because, even when engaged in heterosexual behavior, the very nature of racialized sexuality is seen as “deviant” (Cohen, 1997; Ferguson, 2004). These situations highlight the moral complexity of our sexual judgment system and the ways in which we have labeled some behaviors and certain groups of people as morally suspect sexually (Rubin, 1984; Cohen, 1997). As Bell and Binnie (2000) put it, there is the implicitly heteronormative mode of sexual citizenship that runs counter to the many forms of dissident sexual citizenship which, as Cohen (1997) points out, can include heterosexual practices that fall outside of the heterosexual norm. Both *The Guide* and *Joy* describe a wide variety of behaviors, but exploration of sex positions is limited to heterosexual couples. This is an important distinction in my consideration of sex guides; part of my

examination includes how queer sex in the popular sex guide—if included at all—is shown and discussed in relation to heteronormativity.

I will engage in a “queer” analysis with these two sex guides to reveal patterns of exclusion perpetuated by and inherent in sex guides generally. As follows, references to these guides will be necessary, and will be made with great care so as to avoid the very tendency toward generalization that I am seeking to question. My arguments will rely on a definition of “queer” derived from a queer postmodern perspective that sees queer and normative identities as non-essential and innumerable (Preves, 2001; Butler, 1990; Floyd, 2009; Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 1999; Haraway, 1988; Nicholson and Seidman, 1995). To define “queer” for my purposes, I borrow Jagose’s (1996: 131) theoretical conclusion on the term “queer”:

Queer, then, is an identity category that has no interest in consolidating or even stabilising itself. It maintains its critique of identity-focused movements by understanding that even the formation of its own coalitional and negotiated constituencies may well result in exclusionary and reifying effects far in excess of those intended... Queer is always an identity under construction, a site of permanent becoming.

To this, I will add Sedgwick’s (1990: 22) beautifully simple first axiom from the introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet*: “People are different from each other,” as well as the notion that “queer” is impossible to define (Warner, 1993; Halperin, 2003; Jagose, 1996; Sedgwick, 1990; Abelove, 2003). These positions form a queer framework that defines queer based on three tenets. “Queer” is an identity that is constantly changing, it encompasses individual differences among people, and it is unable and

unwilling to be defined. Still, “queer” as a theoretical tool has tended to privilege sexual identity at the expense of race and class issues, and these forms of oppression and their connections to sexuality are invisible in a white, class-specific framework such as the one laid out in both *Joy* and *The Guide* (Cohen, 1997; Ferguson, 2004; Muñoz, 1999; Hennessy, 2000). Situated in ideas about “queer”—and the ways that “queer” has failed people of color⁵—I see the popular sex guide as a concept as problematic because of the ways in which it caters to a heterosexual, cisgender, and white audience. In other words, the sex guide reifies existing structures that privilege these groups in failing to provide information for non-dominant cultures. The third way I want to problematize sex guides is directly rooted in queer theory’s explication of “queer” identity—the sex guide does not and cannot account for the multiplicity of identities and the ways that these identities, both inside and outside the realm of “queer,” relate to sex and sexualities.

Analysis

The Guide perpetuates heteronormativity by including limited information about queer bodies and queer sex that is not integrated throughout the entire text. For instance, the “Orientation and Gender” section is a mere 34 pages, while the entire book is nearly 2,000. Also, the section starts after the chapter devoted to animals having sex, so it is not ranking high on the author’s list of important topics to cover. This section includes four chapters: “Orientation in Flux”; “Same-Sex Fun & Luvin”; “Gender Benders”; and “Intersex” that present information in ways that are entirely detached from queer experiences. For example, “Orientation and Gender” seems to have been included in

order to educate the heterosexual reader about “other” genders and sexualities. In fact, Joannides (2013: 985) comments:

Most books on sex written for a predominately straight audience have an obligatory Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgendered chapter...there is no way this material can or should be covered in only one chapter, or in only ten... This chapter now has the goal of getting you to think differently about one aspect of being gay. You pick the aspect—it doesn’t matter which one.

By relegating queer sexualities and genders to a separate section of the book and hoping readers will change their thinking about “being gay,” Joannides constructs these identities not for queer people, but for the heterosexual reader. While queer readers may find information that is pertinent to them in other sections—for example, the oral sex chapters “Vulvas & Honey Pots” and “Penises & Popsicles”—they will not see that information represented in a queer way, as demonstrated, in part, by the illustrations of heterosexual people engaging in these acts. Another pointed example of this comes in the chapter “The Zen of Finger Fucking” (Joannides, 2013: 197): “The truth is, finger fucking is not something a man does to a woman, but something he does with a woman. It’s all of him — his smile, kiss, laughter, strength, and tenderness focused in the ends of his fingers.” This statement patently ignores the importance to many of “finger fucking” as part of the queer sexual experience. Similarly, *The Guide’s* (Joannides, 2013: 297) definition of sixty-nine speaks for itself here: “69 is when a man does oral sex on a woman at the same time that she does oral sex on him.” The implication of this exclusion is that queer identities do not matter or, perhaps worse, do not exist.

This exclusion is even more salient in *Joy* in that there are no “obligatory” chapters on genders and sexualities; where *The Guide* makes a point to, however briefly, discuss the differences between biological sex, gender, and orientation, *Joy* engages no such discussion. As a result, the book’s audience is explicitly heterosexual. More specifically, its sweeping title *The Joy of Sex* emphasizes what sex is and what sex is not, privileging the heterosexual, penetrative model. Like *The Guide*, *Joy* (Comfort, 2009: 41) comes with a disclaimer: “This book is written for the straight reader but, within the context of a loving relationship, behaviors borrowed from the whole range of possible preferences can have their uses.” Essentially, Comfort is acknowledging that certain sexual behaviors can become “queer” depending on their context, which is in alignment with my definition of “queer sex.” Still, it is absurd to assume that the queer reader looking for a guide to sex will even bother with *Joy* after the swift realization that the book is not intended to be instructive to any kind of queer sex. A more careful, complex, and critical sex guide would not include such “obligatory” chapters on queer identities or the exclusionary disclaimers about the intended audience. It would integrate queer bodies, queer sex, and queer lives into its narrative rather than constructing queer sex as an obligatory addition or a lack in the book that can be explained away in a sentence or two. And if, as in the case of *Joy*, the aim is not to be inclusive but to cater to a specific population, Comfort may have chosen a more accurate title, such as *The Joy of Heterosexual Sex*. Otherwise, the problem becomes the proliferation of sex guidance for the dominant group and the lack of queer platforms for engaging in sex instruction.

This exclusion is also perpetuated along the lines of race, indicated especially by the whiteness of the illustrations in *The Guide*. Where the book does discuss race, it is

more of a mention than a discussion, treated as something that the reader should probably be aware of. For example, Joannides (2013: 152) cites a study that found that straight, white women fake orgasms twice as often as Hispanic women, offering this as explanation: “One possible conclusion is that... white males may expect their partners to have more orgasms than Hispanic males do, and so the white females... felt more compelled to fake orgasms.” There are numerous problems with this speculative statement, including that it assumes that heterosexual white women are only having sex with heterosexual white men.⁶ There is one sentence in the book that—though still absolutely lacking—seems to be the closest thing to a discussion of race and sexuality that the book provides: “People raised in different cultures may define what’s sexy in different ways” (Joannides, 2013: 40). Missing here is the link between the ways in which dominant cultures define what is sexy for everyone else. While I would not suggest that the mere inclusion of people of color in the illustrations would adequately address this problem, we cannot neglect the implications of ignoring the relationships between race, sex, and sexuality. Power dynamics related to race are connected to sexuality, and this means that as sexual beings, people of color move through society in very different ways (Cohen, 1997; Ferguson, 2004). Cohen (1997: 450) writes, “Because of my multiple identities, which locate me and other ‘queer’ people of color at the margins in this country, my material advancement, my physical protection and my emotional well-being are constantly threatened.” Ferguson (2004: 17) also addresses this concept: “The variety of [nonheteronormative] racial formations (Asian, Asian American, Mexican, Chicano, Native American, African American, and so forth) articulates different racialized, gendered, and eroticized contradictions to the citizen-ideal of the

state.” Put simply, sexuality and race are deeply connected. As Ferguson (2004: 17) puts it, “heteronormativity is racialized.” More specifically, because of the ways that the sexualities of people of color have been equated with deviance, not everyone is able to nor chooses to prioritize sex. A guide solely devoted to sex by virtue of its delineation of sex from other aspects of identity ignores the ways in which race affects experiences of sex and sexuality. In this case, *The Guide* serves as an example of both the problems with disassociating sexuality from overall identity and of catering to a white audience.

Joy demonstrates that its intended audience is white in even more obvious ways. The book uses one couple throughout in a series of photographs and drawings to depict various sexual acts. Interestingly, the original publication deliberately utilized illustrations of a rather unconventional couple; though still white, Allyn (2001: 230) writes:

It was no accident that the book’s drawings showed a couple who defied middle-class standards of beauty. Her underarm hair and his unruly beard and uncircumcised penis were meant to suggest a couple more ‘in touch’ with their own bodies than the ‘uptight straights’ of middle America were.

In a sense, then, *Joy* has actually moved backward. The choice to have just one conventionally attractive, heterosexual, shaved and sanitized white couple experiencing “the joy of sex” speaks clearly to the book’s lack of interest in depicting the ways of having sex that fall outside of the heteronormative and white realm of “good” sex (Rubin, 1984; Cohen, 1997). This couple absolutely represents these white, middle-class beauty standards. Rubin (1984: 12) discusses the societal and cultural impacts that follow from engaging in “good” sex over “bad:” “Individuals whose behavior stands high in this

hierarchy are rewarded with certified mental health, respectability, legality, social and physical mobility, institutional support, and material benefits.” Cohen (1997:452) agrees, but challenges the presumed hierarchy that assumes heterosexuality is always privileged above queerness without regard to the impact of other factors of identity in her discussion of “heterosexuals on the (out)side of heteronormativity.” Here, race is not just falling low on the hierarchy of identity factors – it is not considered at all. *The Joy of Sex*, then, implies that “good” sex full of “joy” looks like a white, heterosexual couple having sex; the rest of us are supposed to interpret this depiction based on our lives and bend the information to accommodate our needs and our “other” ways of having sex.

With such vast and different ways of having sex and so many idiosyncratic differences between individuals, sex guides may, in fact, be limiting rather than encouraging. The information *The Guide* and *Joy* provide is meant to be general enough that a huge variety of people will find the book useful, but specific enough that it is still applicable to distinct sexual practices, resting on the assumption that sex can and should be guided. The “Warning & Disclaimer” at the start of the book (Joannides, 2013: 9) provides words of caution in accepting the book as the ultimate truth on sex and qualifying statements establishing that *The Guide* may not be for everyone:

Hard as we tried, this Guide isn’t perfect nor was it intended as a final authority on sex... While the techniques mentioned in this book work well for some people, they may not be good for you... This book was written to help expand the consciousness of its readers.

Despite this warning and all of its “comprehensive” information, *The Guide* excuses itself via this disclaimer from critically engaging with its exclusion and the implications of its

token gestures of inclusion. For instance, *The Guide* includes a great deal of information about “queer sex” in the heterosexual sense, meaning heterosexual couples engaging in sexual behaviors other than missionary sex in the bedroom. There is a section devoted to heterosexual couples engaging in kink sex, and the book in general is largely devoted to non-reproductive sex. Still, and despite its length, *The Guide* admits that it cannot cover everything, and it would be absurd to try. As a result, there will always be people who turn to the book for advice and cannot find the information or support they need, and who may then feel inhibited from engaging in the kind of sex they want to be having. This point has evidently not escaped Joannides’ (2013: 9) awareness: “Ultimately, it is your body and your sexuality—venture beyond the bounds of common sense at your own peril.” This serves as a reminder that *The Guide* covers common sense, “normal” sex, and the reader should beware the consequences of exploring their sexuality in a way not covered in the book, even if that means engaging in safe behaviors that Joannides left out. Of course, people are more than the sum of their sexual choices, but *The Guide* makes no real effort to consider how it privileges the behaviors of white heterosexual people.

Other than its brief acknowledgement that the book is for heterosexual readers, *Joy* also fails to account for the diversity of sexual needs, acts, and identities, and does not regard these exclusions as a topic worthy of discussion. Like *The Guide*, it includes a great deal of “queer” sex behaviors, including depictions of anal sex, oral sex performed on women, and women experiencing sexual pleasure, to name a few. Importantly, these “queer” behaviors in both books are still experienced within the context of a heterosexual relationship, as implicated by *Joy*’s depiction of a single, heterosexual couple, and both guides’ privileging of heterosexual readers, discussed above. As follows, the concept of

the sex guide sets a standard of what “good” sex is and subsequently ignores the multitude of ways of having sex and sexualities that fall outside of the heterosexual, white norm of sexuality that “queer” seeks to amplify. For example, *Joy* (Comfort, 2009: 151) defines penetration as “the most powerful, most unifying sexual act.” Even if the accompanying picture of the man penetrating the woman with his penis were not there to imply penile penetration, penetration itself would still be elevated as the ultimate sexual act. This suggests that everything except penetration, whether by a penis or not, is somehow less than. Aside from being utterly phallogentric, this notion of penetration as the ultimate sexual act undercuts all other sexual acts, many of which are “queer.” Because no guide could possibly include all ways of having sex, the questions become what *should be* included in a sex guide, *why* are certain sexualities chosen, and *who* gets to decide? Even though these guides have clearly made great efforts to include “queer” *heterosexual* behaviors, queer sex outside of heteronormativity is superficially represented at best and at worse completely absent.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that sex guides have provided people with valuable information about sexual health, sexual safety, and communication. They are an embodiment of sex positivity’s goal of fighting the notion that sex is problematic and threatening, described by Queen (1977: 131) thus: “Sex radicals see as a problem—and a source of oppression—in any one’s conviction that their own sexual patterns are right while someone else’s are wrong.” And, at a time when many still consider abstinence-only sex education a viable option for the young people in our schools, the importance of

a sex guide—particularly one such as *The Guide To Getting It On*, which contains a great deal of practical information pertaining to sexually transmitted diseases, birth control, and safe sex—cannot be understated. What sex guides lack is critical self-reflexivity and the understanding that inclusivity should mean more than adding a couple of new positions. Given these guides’ long histories, the lack of reflexivity and inclusive revisions becomes even more disturbing. Of course, both were written in contexts that differ from that which we live in today; indeed, Joannides (2013, 16) writes, “Sex books are merely a reflection of the time and culture that spawn them.” This fact makes careful reflection and revision even more crucial. We must ask *whose* culture is being represented, and who is being served by these representations. Everyone deserves access to *better* guides, *better* information, and *better* resources. Perhaps future research will discover that a sex “guide” is not the right approach to sex information as we know it, and so those interested in the project will be tasked with discovering what is. As a young lesbian woman, I have never consulted a sex guide for personal advice—partially because I assumed that sex guides would have nothing *for* me. To a great extent, that is true. As Audre Lorde (1988: 26–27) beautifully writes: “Those stereotypes are yours to solve, not mine.”

Notes

1. See *The Guardian’s* “The Ten Best Sex Guides” (2012) and *The Independent’s* “The Ten Best Sex Manuals” (2008).
2. For an analysis of these cooking-based rhetorical strategies in *The Joy of Sex*, see Valerie V. Peterson’s “The Sex of Joy: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking Rhetoric”.

3. This is not to say that there have not been other culturally significant sex guides; I feel I must mention perhaps the most famous sex guide of all, the ancient *Kama Sutra*. I have chosen to focus only on these two guides because of their significance in current popular culture and the vast amount of praise and credibility they have been granted as sex education resources.
4. Now, three decades after Rubin wrote about “good” sex and “bad” sex, monogamous, committed homosexual relationships fall into what she identifies as a “gray area,” if not in most cases into the realm of general approval as evidenced by the huge national push toward gay marriage rights; however, homosexual sex itself, particularly between men, is still notably absent from mainstream culture and media and is largely still viewed with fear and disgust (Kimmel, 1994).
5. Though I am not working from queer of color or critical race methodological standpoints, I understand the critiques of “queer” for its theoretical use as a white, bourgeois term, and so I hope my analysis will incorporate a more inclusive version of “queer” that is not only for the benefit of the white queer subject, and that it will not uncritically assume that sexual identities can be extricated from issues of race and class. As Johnson (2005) quips in response to Butler’s theory of gender: “To riff off of the now-popular phrase ‘gender trouble,’ *there is some ‘race’ trouble here with queer theory.*” I do not, as Cohen (1997: 438) writes, want to “reinforce simple dichotomies between heterosexual and everything ‘queer’” and in this way ignore how power operates in varying degrees.
6. Here, Joannides uses his understanding of white culture to make a guess at why Hispanic women fake orgasms less than white women, indirectly commenting on how

we perceive the sexual skill of Hispanic and white men. This explanation perpetuates the Latin lover stereotype, prevalent especially in film, which paints Latin men sexy, irresistible, and adulterine womanizers – in other words, as the ultimate lovers who are the best in bed. For more, see *Latina/o Sexualities: Probing Powers, Passions, Practices, and Policies* (2009), edited by Marysol Asencio, Ray González's 1996 book *Muy Macho: Latino Men Confront Their Manhood*, Charles Ramírez Berg's 2002 book *Latino Images in Film: Stereotypes, Subversion, and Resistance*, and "The Complicated Terrain of Latin American Homosexuality" by Martin Nesvig.

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