

# Are You “Sex Positive?” Here’s What It Really Means

By [Erin W.](#) | [Huffington Post](#)

I am a sex-positive feminist. That is how I choose to identify myself. This label highlights how I see the world and how I choose to interact with it. I’ve come to this association after years of struggling with my own sexual identity and history – a long and torrid journey.

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Nowadays, though, I just like to talk about sex. A lot. I love to hear people’s stories around sex and their relation to it. I read as many public health, sociological and scientific articles about sex as I can get my hands on, and I hope to one day become active in the sexual education field.

But for now, I just identify with the simple term “sex positive.” It’s a compact term that contains a lot of information. While to me the term means a lot, I do get a lot of blank looks when I use it.

When I say it in conversation, I hear a lot of, “Sex-positive – who doesn’t love sex?”

I inevitably have to clarify that in this context, positivity and enthusiasm are not the same things. The term is an attempt to address the individual and social place of sex and sexual identity. Sex-positivity boils down to the view that sex is a healthy and necessary part of human existence. It’s about acceptance and inclusion of the ways individuals choose to express themselves sexually.

But to really understand the term sex-positive, it needs to be

contextualized in the history of sexual characterization. Historically, sex has been pathologized in our culture, treated as something dirty and harmful. Moral authorities throughout Western history have shaped how we as a society view sex, labeling it as sinful and indecent. In the 19th century, science was invoked to shift the connotations of sex to something more pathological. This process imparted false, negative associations between sex, disease and other physiological and psychological afflictions. These ingrained connotations still resonate in how our society approaches the social and personal place of sex today.

This is impounded by structures in place that define what is “normal” and “acceptable” sex, and what is degenerative and wrong. For example, the distinction that sex for procreative purposes is valid and acceptable, but sex for pleasure is “unnatural” and “sinful,” or that sex between certain combinations of individuals is natural, while others are unnatural. (If you’re interested in a more in-depth analysis of this history, Michel Foucault’s “History of Sexuality Vol. I” offers a great breakdown)

All these things contribute to an overarching sex-negativity that is prevalent in our culture. It can be found in the language used around sex, the framing of news stories around issues involving sex, the way we teach about sex and how we approach the political dimension of sex.

Sex-positivity is a counter-perspective that attempts to disentangle sex from associations of morality and pathology. It’s a disowning of this belief that sex is inherently dirty, shameful and/or wrong. Instead, sex is an inherent and natural part of human identity, and no expression of sex and sexuality is more valid than any other. Sex-positivity is about celebrating sexual diversity.

**As a sex-positivist...**

*I believe in being inclusive of all expressions of and approaches to sexuality.* As long as it involves consensual participation of adults and causes no psychological or physical harm to the participants, all sexual expressions are equally legitimate. This includes kinks and non-monogamous identifications. Also, no one sexual identification is better or more “normal” than any other. This includes accepting the sexual expression of all races, genders, classes, orientation, ability, age without preconceptions or discrimination.

*I believe in acknowledging each individual's ability to decide whether or not to engage in sexual activity, and not judging how and for what reasons they choose to do so (as long as it is consensual).* People have the right to make their own choices around sex. There are many reasons why people choose to engage or not engage in sexual activity.

*I believe sex for pleasure is a worthwhile pursuit and sexual expression is a necessary part of being human.* Sex and sexuality are inherent to being human, and the experience of sex should not be shamed or maligned. And therefore...

*I believe sex should be talked about.* One of the worst ways shame is perpetuated is by silence. By not moralizing sex as an act within itself, the desire to curb public conversations loses strength. Talking is also a key component to undermining victim blaming directed toward victims of sexual violence and the dehumanizing of sex-workers.

*I believe in comprehensive, age-appropriate, pleasure-inclusive sex education.* This means making sex education more than about anatomy and STIs. Discussions of consent, pleasure, and the emotional component are as equally important. So much misinformation and judgment is disseminated around sex. People are more likely to make poor and uninformed decisions without sex education. We should teach people about all-dimensions of sex without judgment or shame, and start the conversations that will allow everything to lead healthy and happy sex

lives.

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