

Thanks for Chris for inviting me to speak today.
My subject is Sexuality as Social Research

Imagine your next pick-up line being, “I have some homework from my university course. Would you be willing to help me with some ‘social research’?”...or slowing down your more habitual sex practice to ask, “So what happens if I apply a little more pressure here or lightly touch you, there?”...These are the sorts of possibilities which can emerge, when we contextualise - Sexuality as Social Research.

My name is Kim Gotlieb and I am passionate about SEX! That does not mean that I have sex 6 or 10 times a day or that I have “sex on the brain”. Rather that I am passionate about the journey of exploration that can unfold when we tune into our erotic process with the enthusiasm, focus and perspective of a social researcher.

I hope you find this presentation interesting and welcome any questions at the end. Feel free to note them down during the presentation, so we can address them afterwards.

I also realise that I am reading from a queue sheet that means my eyes may not be as engaging as I would hope. But trust you will be understanding.

I live in Sydney Australia where it is midday on Thursday so I could tell you all about tomorrow, if you're interested.

But I understand you are enrolled in a course about sexuality which makes me think you may also have at least a passing interest in sex...maybe more. I am not talking about what is often dismissed in

muffled tones...”doing it”,or “the act”... but rather a generalised inquiry into a subject of great interest to me today, tomorrow and for as long as I can experience sensation in my body.

And talking of bodies, I realise that they vary in size shape, gender presentation, sexual orientation, values and a whole lot more. Transgender is the new frontier, challenging gender binary norms. This makes for an exciting time of development, but also a certain degree of clunkiness for all of us who endeavour to come to terms with aspects of cultural change, not the least of which can be the limitations of language. So I will begin with an apology for the gay male biases that may influence both my language, content and delivery. Like all of us, I am a work-in-progress and certainly invite any email feedback. I am keen to learn and grow. But we do not do so in a vacuum. It is said that “It takes a village to bring up a child” and I call upon your sense of community and good-heartedness to forgive whatever transgressions may be evident in today’s presentation and look forward to your comments and suggestions via email.

I have been a Psychotherapist for many years, influenced mainly by Process-oriented Psychology and Narrative Therapy. I then studied Sexological Bodywork and have been weaving the various healing pathways I have encountered, into an integrated wholistic approach to erotic vitality.

I would like to tell you a little of my personal story, to give you a sense of how I developed this idea of Sexuality as Social Research. You may also find elements which resonate with your own narrative.

Growing up, I knew I was a bit different, which led to a somewhat tawdry rite of passage into the gay world of public toilets, saunas, and niteclubs. The journey to personal power for those of us who feel “other” has its challenges, but also many rewards. “A fish does not know what water is”, because it has not known anything else. Once we are “other”, we have been pushed out of the fishbowl, and our

ability to notice what is going on becomes much more sensitive - Our very safety often depends on this! Herein lies the seed of the social researcher in me. Of course, you do not need to go through the challenges which I faced. If you find yourself more identified with the mainstream, it can be a little harder to realise the filters that bias your perspective. However, we all have them. Awakening is simple, but not necessarily easy.

For me, I came to realise that what was once anxious hyper-vigilance, has turned into a broad-based curiosity for the human condition and I believe that curiosity is the key to a boundless body of knowledge that can nourish many aspects of the human journey - but for the purpose of today's discussion, let us focus on how it might inform our sexual exploration.

I went to university later in life, where I wrestled with the notion of “academic rigour” - the act of tracing the source material from which my meaning-making processes were formed - on whose shoulders were my ideas resting.

I am now grateful for developing the relevant disciplines as those principles of research now inform the basis of my ongoing inquiry into both my own erotic process and a generalised interest in sexuality.

I invite you to consider your own erotic process as a research project. In so doing, you will be called upon to reflect on the prevailing narratives which have informed your relation with your body, your experience of sensation, and whatever you have come to believe is sex!

All of us have been influenced by a sex-negative, body-negative Judeo-Christian culture. Even if our particular upbringing included more progressive ideologies, there are many aspects of this “download”

which were reactive against prevailing narrative, and these do not always translate to a wholesome outcome.

Einstein said “Genius is 10% inspiration and 90% perspiration”.

Any area of inquiry calls for us to slow down - maybe go to google...but definitely don't just rush out and believe we can do whatever we dream of - In an analogy using a recipe as the model, one could say that the souffle you want to prepare to seduce your partner is unlikely to rise without the right ingredients or oven temperature. You need to slow down and do some “research”.

Slowing down is one of the cardinal rules for learning more about sex, and exploring the subtleties which can emerge, when we slow down.

There are some aspects of our sexuality which will benefit from a google search, but we have an amazing search engine that needs no wi-fi, no download speed, no computer interface....and it is available 24/7. Of course, I am talking about our own body.

Two cornerstones of my research are Embodiment and Presence. The more I am aware of the subtle and not-so-subtle sensations which arise and pass away on and within my physical self, the more I am open to experiencing the pleasures which are nestling just beyond the habitual filters which mask some sensations, and require others to present - on demand - like some kind of pay tv - with all manner of critical reaction when the expected outcomes are not delivered in the appropriate time...Are you reading my scenario?...whether you are responding with a giggle or a stoic expressionless face, I am sure many of you get the picture.

Imagine pushing that whole neural pathway to the side, and navigating towards the notion of open-hearted curiosity for what presents itself in the moment - and then broadening the lens and the removing the filters which muddy our relationship with our own bodies and our ability to be Present to ourselves and anyone else who may enter our realms of intimacy.

The three research methodologies I value most are:
Awareness, Touch & Breathwork.

Awareness is the over-arching principle which informs every aspect of our practice, and our research. Noticing what we are aware of, what might be at the periphery of our awareness, and opening to what may be hidden in our blindspots, just beyond our awareness.

We are invited to become our own Private Investigator...Our own Private Eye....Sherlock Holmes, Madame Poirot...Have we got a case for you!!

The second methodology is the extraordinary device we have at our disposal, called Touch. There are so many subtle elements to the act of touch - whether it is with self or other. When you take time to reflect on the process, it can break down to three phases:

- 1) the impulse to touch
- 2) movement towards touch
- 3) actually delivering the point of contact....Yummmm

Experiment

Shut eyes....Notice breath...focus attention on left hand...and allow the impulse to arise, that you would like to touch your right hand...then gentle begin to move that hand toward the other, incorporate your breath with this action...allow yourself to be filled with anticipation for the thrill of contact...then

gently allow the hand to land like a graceful bird on your right hand, and begin to explore this landscape...as if you have never felt skin before....as if you never knew what a hand was made up of - fleshy bits, boney bits...hard and soft bits...And then allow both hands to come to rest...and take a breathe in and out...to bring this research project to a close. Take some mental notes...sort your reactions into “pleasant”, “unpleasant” and “nothing much”...What could you do different next time?” How could you make it even more pleasant/exciting/satisfying/fulfilling/risky/adventurous/flirtatious/ sexy?

Breathwork is crucial. We belong to a culture which does not breathe enough. I encourage two forms of breathe: a slow deep breath....In ...Out...and a fast intense breathing pattern with no break between in and out breath....In Out...In Out...In Out...Let's try that.

When we breathe more, we feel more...Feelings fall into three categories: wanted, not wanted...and not sure. Generally, we judge sex on the basis of how many ticks in the wanted dept. Breathing more deeply into these experiences can both amplify the pleasure, and sometimes catapult us into something completely unexpected. However, breathwork can also provide a vehicle to allow us to “hang out” with less desirable sensations. Breathing into less known or less comfortable sensations or emotions, can propel our process into some glorious landscapes - At times powerful emotional release. At times unexpected sensations arise. At times....bliss. Pain,hurt,regret or sadness can lead to tears, tears to laughter, laughter to something in between pain and laughter...which is a little weird, but you know it when you get there. Sometimes there is a subtle call for adjustment in speed, intensity, pressure, placement, position, even lighting.....the possibilities are endless. Opening to research is a case of ever-refining our hypothesis until it settles into a viable theory.

When the guru was asked by his over-zealous student, “What is the path to enlightenment?” He took a breath and replied “One step at a time.” I have offered you a taste of possibility to add to your repertoire of research, inquiry and curiosity. Now I would like to add a single do-able thing, that might remind you of these various skills and techniques. The invitation is that when you take your shower or bath, you take an extra moment to slow down your bathing ritual, to take time to notice the breath and explore longer or stronger breath, and how it affects your awareness of sensation as you soap down your naked body....Maybe you could open to some caressing, or a little pinching or slapping...Once you have mastered some of these arts, you may want to share them with a friend, or a group of friends....the possibilities are infinite, like the universe we have the privilege to participate in.

To be alive, is to awaken to the birthright afforded us to feel sensation in every part of our body. Emotions are more complex as some seem stored within the corporeal nature of our flesh, while others are inextricably linked to thought processes which may call for unpacking and re-evaluating.

I like the work of Erich Fromm who suggests that, in sex the two become one, while in birth the one becomes two....a model in which dual and non-dual identities quiver between polarities until they are located beyond the localised limited experience of time and space and point towards the ineffable answer to the very question of our existence and our purpose....May your research move you beyond sense of self to landscapes beyond your imagining.

Let's take a breath together.

I hope that this presentation has percolated, postulated, permeated, complicated or disturbed some of your own ideas about sex and research.

Let's chat some....Open to any questions or BRIEF comments u may wish to add.
My email is kimgotlieb@gmail.com

In my professional work, I generally start the sessions with a three part scan of the body: The first is simply seeking to identify sensations as we move our attention from the top of the head to the tip of the toes; the second aims to identify emotions (which will be linked to either the past, present or future) and the third is about tuning into what I call our erotic vitality - which is not simply the impulse to engage in sex (though it may include it) but rather the potential to locate what can feel like a bristling, tingling, va va voom in the very fibre of our being aligned to a glorious sense of our vitality, linked to the Creative Source of all being - at home with self, and opening to union with other.....Otherness and sameness merge.