



# Sexual Education in PAUSD

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## INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive sexual education should address the physical, mental, emotional, and social dimensions of human sexuality. In 2016, California created the Healthy Youth Act, which describes a required curriculum for sexual education in middle and high schools. This study was created to observe not only how Palo Alto High School follows that curriculum, but what PAUSD can do to further benefit the sexual and emotional health of all students. I spoke with Sarah Powell, a representative and sexual education specialist from Planned Parenthood, as well as Letitia Burton, the Living Skills teacher from Palo Alto High School since 2000.

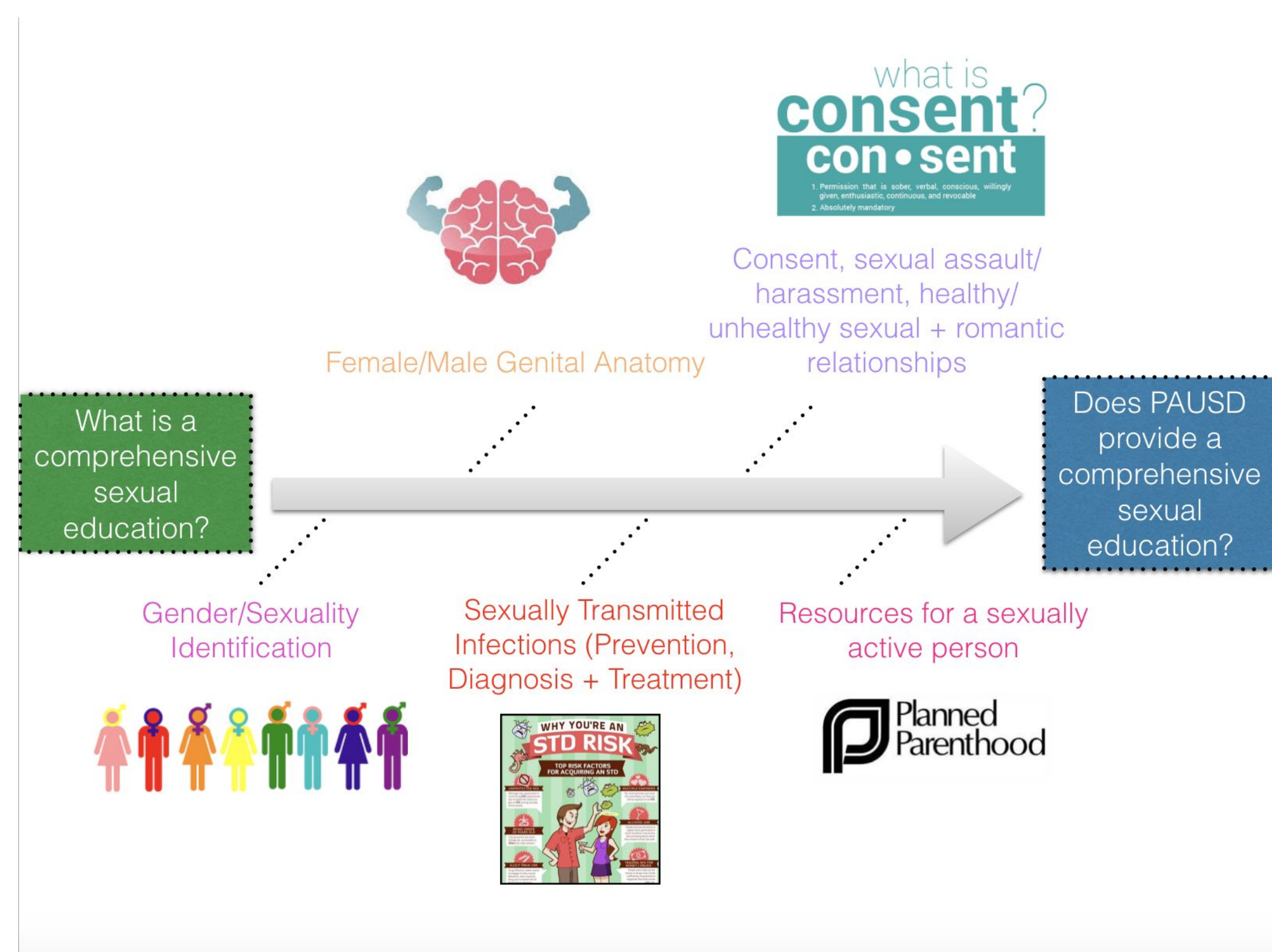


Figure 1 A visual representation of the project plan

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

Special thanks Letitia Burton and Sarah Powell.

### Works Cited:

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation/ABC Television, *Sex in the 90s: 1998 National Survey of Americans on Sex and Sexual Health*, Sept. 1998.

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## DATA AND FINDINGS

### Sarah Powell

With a comprehensive sexual education students are “more likely to use protection... another benefit, that doesn’t get talked about as much, is getting more comfortable talking about sexual health and normalizing the idea that it’s ok to talk about things like STIs... it helps when laws reflect the statistical realities about how comprehensive sex education actually works and how it helps people to be healthier.”

### Sarah Powell

There are “a lot fewer schools that have dedicated health classes... a lot of schools and a lot of teachers are not as comfortable yet going into relationships and communication and identity and just sexuality in general.” Regarding Paly “there wasn’t a specific request for introducing the harm of gender stereotypes... it’s really strange to talk about consent without mentioning gender”

### Letitia Burton

“Over the years, the importance of living skills has been denigrated or demoted... viewed more as ‘oh its just a graduation requirement we have to take. The district itself kind of used living skills, like years ago when you had to pay for summer school... helped fund summer school. There’s more sessions of living skills in the summer than there are in the school year, and now summer school is three weeks long. Anyone can teach living skills in the summer.”

### Letitia Burton

“If students at Paly took living skills their freshman or sophomore year... then perhaps we wouldn’t have seen some of the behaviors we saw on campus. This class needs to happen sophomore year... and then again senior year... In response to what happened, there was a group of parents that came together over the summer, who feel really strongly that there’s not enough information and education provided to students around affirmative consent”

## CONCLUSIONS

Looking at the USA as a whole, it is very clear that the majority of the people desire a comprehensive sexual education but that it is not provided in most states, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. When focusing on Palo Alto High School (a school that must follow the regulations of the California Healthy Youth Act), we see perhaps less obvious, yet still present problems within the system. Sarah Powell expressed how Palo Alto may not focus quite enough on gender and the role it plays in our society’s standards and sexual beliefs. Letitia Burton reflected on the importance of time and that Palo Alto High School does not provide enough guidance for students to properly understand consent and the importance of discussion. From Burton’s comments, it is clear that Palo Alto has made many steps forward but still has many more to take. The next steps to a completely comprehensive sexual education would be repetition in schooling, more time devoted to the topic, and an expression of the importance to both students and staff about sexual education and the direct effects it has been proven to have on students and communities.

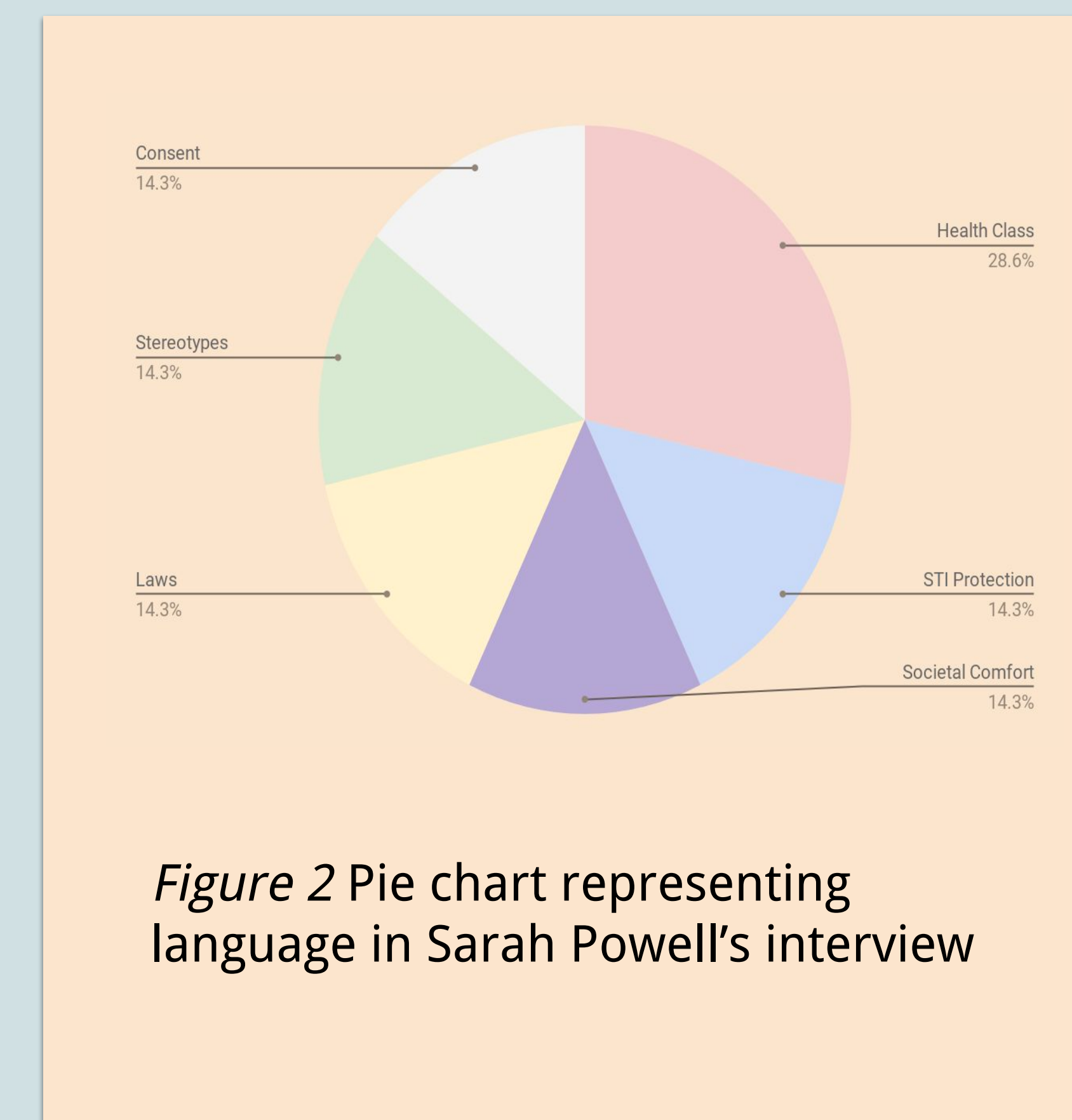


Figure 2 Pie chart representing language in Sarah Powell's interview

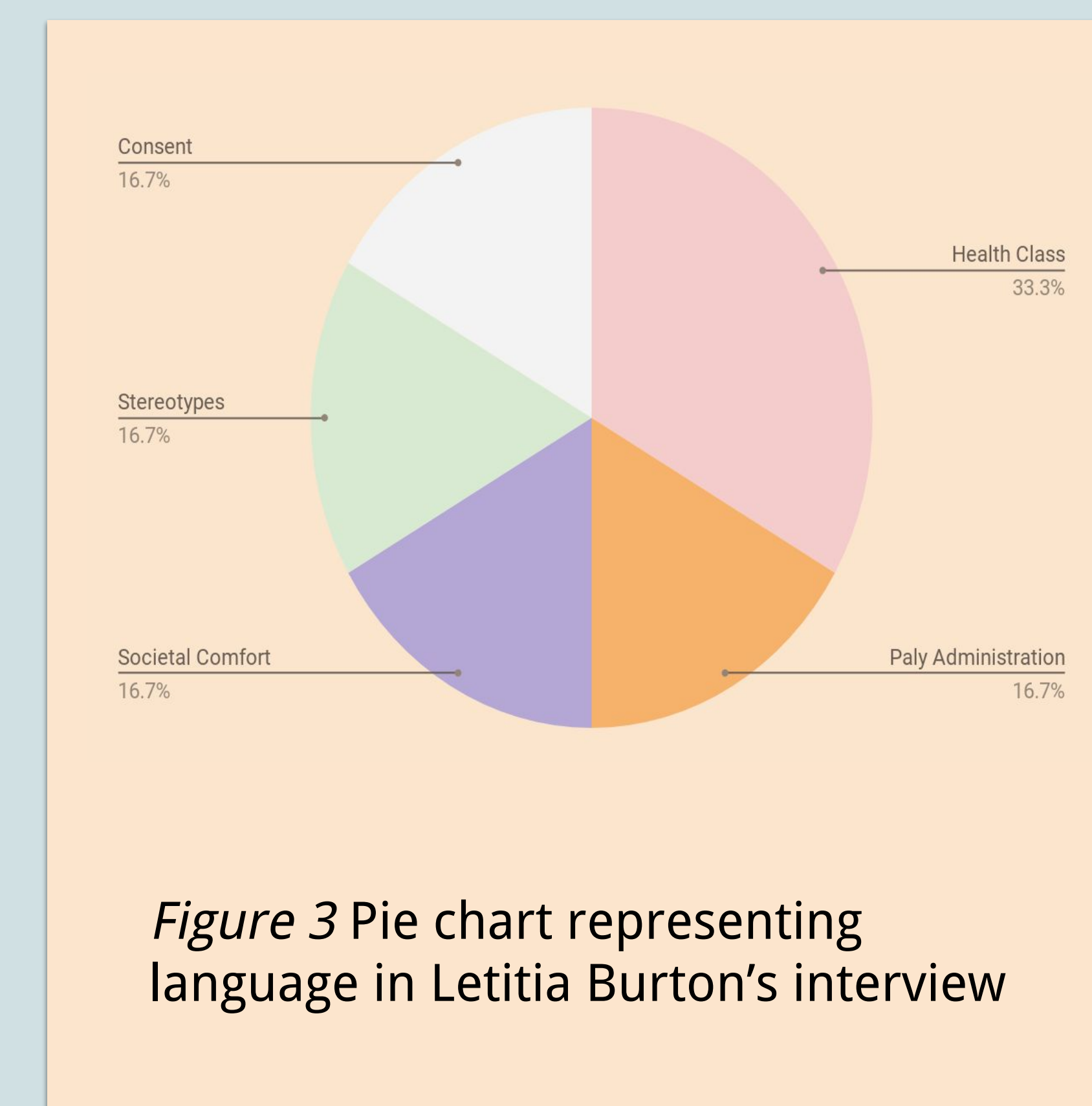


Figure 3 Pie chart representing language in Letitia Burton's interview

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Most--if not all--of my research was qualitative. I researched papers and studies about the psychological effects of comprehensive sexual education and the effect on student STIs, unwanted pregnancies, and knowledge of consent. A large section of my work was interviews with teachers and administration in PAUSD as well as workers who educate people on sexual education in non-profits, such as Planned Parenthood. The interview questions asked participants to evaluate the state of sexual education in the United States in general and PAUSD in specific, and to look at the effect the current state of sexual education has on students. I used a recorder and writing equipment for these interviews. Within the interviews, I followed the discussion questions and expanded on specific points as appropriate for each separate interview. Before beginning the interview, I explained the purpose of my project and received verbal consent to record the interviewee.

## DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

In both interviews, there was an overarching theme that sexual education can not be held within one class in school. Both interviewees believe that sexual education consists of discussing it as a community, within classes, and within families. Further, both interviewees showed belief that sexual education should begin at a young age, both for safety reasons and to introduce the aspects of identity of individual differences within gender, sexuality, and beliefs. Both interviewees also showed belief that sexual education should be consistently taught throughout our lives, including at universities and--regarding consent/stereotypes/harassment--within workplaces and communities.