This research project is a continuation of the paper I entered in last year’s Bankier Library Research Award contest, and the research paper is the main assignment for PSYC 295 (Independent Study Project) for the Spring 2009 semester. After taking a few Psychology courses over the Summer 2008 and Fall 2009 semesters, I became interested in risky behaviors and decision-making, concentrating on adolescent sexuality. I contacted Professor Dave Stout regarding my interest in this topic for further investigation as an Independent Study. In my previous research project, I was examining the debate between abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education curriculum, and which would be the best to implement in secondary schools. For this project, I wanted to examine in more detail what comprises a comprehensive sex education curriculum. Additionally, I wanted to look into how to address current topics of concern, such as teen pregnancy, date and acquaintance rape, and “sexting.” After completing English 122 (English Composition: Writing and Research) in Fall 2007, and writing APA-format papers for both PSYC 105 (Introduction to Psychology I) and PSYC 106 (Introduction to Psychology II), I felt confident that the research process would be a relatively smooth process. I quickly realized I had more growth and development to accomplish in the writing and research process!

The first few weeks of the semester focused primarily on literature review. Using the search engines available through Bankier Library, I pulled up multiple articles on available databases, such as PsycARTICLES and Academic ASAP. At first, the literature review was a challenge because I did not understand the methods and statistical data in the articles. As the semester progressed, I would review the articles and began to understand the explanations of methods and comprehend the data. While reviewing current literature on the topic, I revisited textbooks for previous classes and from Professor Stout’s personal collection. I took notes, and also jotted down from the References section certain
journal articles that sparked my curiosity. This strategy was extremely helpful for me because I could search for and read the journal articles cited in textbooks, and analyze the text and data firsthand.

On several occasions this semester, certain topics were addressed in other courses I am taking this semester. These topics included dating, sexual behaviors, gender identity and orientation, sexual orientation, cohabitation and marriage. Through planning and a little serendipity, I realized that the classes I registered for this semester have beautifully complemented and supplemented my PSYC 295 class with additional information and ideas! Realizing that my research project would span over multiple disciplines, I began to research and evaluate different sociological, philosophical, and psychological theories. I continued to spend more time accessing online databases via Bankier Library, and compiling more research and data for the project.

In November 2008 and March 2009, I attended two interdisciplinary conferences at Monmouth University and the University of Pennsylvania, respectively. From those two conferences, I networked with professors and researchers of many disciplines, especially psychology. I have been able to keep in touch with my contacts, and through them, have been able to network with others. One of my contacts is a social psychologist and sex educator with a background in public health, who works for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, GA. She, as well as others, provided me with insight and new resources to investigate and review. Shortly thereafter, I began to access databases and information from SEICUS, CDC, Planned Parenthood, and Advocates for Youth. I retrieved, reviewed, and analyzed several pieces of literature, data, as well as curriculum standards and suggestions posted on the respective sites.

This research process over the course of this semester has been simultaneously challenging, exciting, and difficult. Nevertheless, this research project was ultimately fulfilling and rewarding to me on an academic and personal level. I have gained more confidence in my research skills, and am no longer intimidated by future research endeavors. My desire is that this research project will encourage
new thinking about human sexuality, and promote new discussions about education, policy, and law. Ultimately, my desire is to inspire positive change and will lead to people embracing the idea that we are sexual beings. I hope that this research project will be a step in that direction.