History research methodologies (HIST208) prompted my research for, “Reading Playboy for ‘the Articles:’ An Analysis of the Depictions of Women’s Sexuality in the 1970’s. Our professor, Derek Leininger, suggested that we conduct research about a topic that is unfamiliar to us, or at the very least, a topic that we would like to learn more about. Taking his suggestion seriously, I realized that I had always considered myself a feminist, but I knew little history about the feminist movement. Thus, I found Sarah Evans book, Tidal Wave, which provided me with a general historic background to Second Wave Feminism. However, I still struggled to narrow down my research project so I met with Derek to discuss my issue and during that meeting he suggested that I pick a specific date range, article to be analyzed, and subtopic. I chose to research how popular opinion of women’s sexuality evolved over the course of the 1970’s. Derek suggested to me that the Special Collections and University Archives in Hornbake contain the complete hardcopy edition of Playboy magazine. Playboy provided me with the perfect detailed insight into the minds of a variety of men on the topic of women’s sexuality. Playboy had a variety of forums within the magazine to work with. It contains Q&A sections, cartoons throughout, articles, short stories, and obviously photographs.

Using the Special Collections and University Archives for my research was a magical experience. I had an online account for Special Collections so I could request the materials I needed ahead of time. The attendant would then bring me my
selected materials to the large wooden desk that I sat at. The atmosphere made me feel like a “real” researcher because I was waited on and used materials that were not stored in a public area. Once I had the materials, I kept a research journal on my laptop highlighting any points I found noteworthy. If I came across a picture or a section that was particularly important, I would scan it and add it to my research notes. It was incredible having a specialized scanner as a resource for me to use in the Special Collections room. As I went through the material, I had been looking out for key words and issues relating to the Women’s Liberation Movement. Eventually, I starting selecting certain material because they fit into a specific topic or theme that I wanted to write about. However, some material disagreed and did not fall nicely into place with my argument, but that material was also crucial for me to note and acknowledge. During my reading, I teased out subtle trends and that humanized the research process for me. I was learned from individuals who would write in to the Q&A section of Playboy and I would read about their personal sexual, martial, or social struggles. It gave me a connection with them.

While Playboy is an excellent source for my primary research, I was looking for background information for the Women’s Liberation Movement and what women as individuals were saying during that time. Alix Kates Shulman’s, Sex and Power,” and Anne Koedt’s, The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm provided me with the feminine perspective not only on female sexuality, but also taught me about the Women’s Liberation Movement. Derek suggested both of these sources to be as classic literature for Second Wave Feminism.
After my HIST208E class met with Eric Lindquist, a humanities and social science librarian, I began to search on various UMD databases for my secondary sources. He showed me how to navigate different search engines to narrow down the range of sources I was looking at. It was particularly helpful to learn about the date range of individual databases, because I sought for at least one contemporary historian from the 80’s, 90’s, 2000’s, and 2010’s. Mr. Lindquist also taught me how to find only peer-reviewed articles because I told him I only wanted to use those for my secondary sources to ensure that it would be academic. Additionally, I met on the phone with Judith Markowitz, the Women’s Studies librarian, for extra assistance on navigating some of the databases specific to the Women’s studies department. Both my interactions with Eric Lindquist and Judith Markowitz were exceptionally helpful to my research as they served as catalyst for obtaining the specific material I needed. Moreover, they were both inspirational characters in my research process because they were passionate about helping me accomplish my research goals and that motivated me to continue with what can be a daunting process.

Throughout this project, I considered how feminism has made many of the thing that I want to accomplish in my life possible and how many of the restrictions place on women back then still effect me today. Much of the social and legal restrictions placed on women regarding their sexuality parallel the restrictions I had learned growing up in an Ultra-Orthodox Jewish day school. My research forced me to confront the conflicting ideologies from my upbringing and the more western values from my research. It was important for me to have to confront the values of
my upbringing during my research, because as I head into the medical field I will continue to meet people from diverse background that will have values that challenge my own. Learning to tackle opposing values first with my research rather than with my patients will be important for me one day as a physician.

Looking back, I think I would have liked to do more background research on Second Wave feminism. Furthermore, I wish I could have studied more about first and third wave feminism to see if I would have picked up on anything specifically from first wave feminism in playboy magazine and also see if there were things in playboy that foreshadowed larger problems in third wave feminism.