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Yasmin Boakye

Mentor: Carolyn Sargent

Contraceptive use in urban Ghana has been covered extensively by public health and anthropology scholars looking to document and analyze the beginnings of the West African fertility transition. Significant attention has been directed towards the gendered socialization of adolescents, condom use in rural and urban populations, and the contraceptive use practices of married men and women, but there is a gap in the literature on the ways that collegiate populations come to understand the varied hormonal and barrier contraceptive methods available to them.

This work seeks to develop an understanding of the gendered strategies that men and women enrolled at a major university in urban Kumasi use to broach the socially taboo topics of sex and sexuality. I conducted fieldwork at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology under the auspices of the campus’ chapter of Planned Parenthood of Ghana (PPAG). Fifty individuals, including thirty currently enrolled university students, were interviewed about their views on contraceptive use. I also spent time observing at the PPAG clinic and analyzed popular media, including billboards, newspaper articles, and commercials, as well as PPAG’s promotional material.

Preliminary analysis of the data suggests that students view contraceptives in a highly oppositional gendered light because of Ghanaian social mores, and that these burgeoning understandings are highly shaped by popular media, which introduces non-specific messages about contraceptives that are meant for married or partnered couples. Because Ghanaian university peer groups are primarily single-gendered, both men and women rely on hearsay and rumors to construct their perceptions of the other gender’s views on contraceptives, which creates distinct gendered narratives on contraceptive decision making that align with traditional values but differ greatly from the displayed knowledge of each group.