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Carly Wolfer

Washington University in St. Louis

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LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX, BABY: COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CASUAL SEXUAL PARTNERS IN THE COLLEGE HOOKUP CULTURE

Carly Wolfer

Mentor: Jami Ake

This project explores the emotional, physical, and sexual communication between casual sexual partners in the college hookup culture. Study 1 includes quantitative surveys (94 females, 73 males). Study 2 includes qualitative, semi-structured interviews (10 females, 10 males). I investigated 1) the extent to which hookup partners communicate about sexual health, pleasure, consent, and intimacy in a culture built upon casual and emotionless sex, 2) the relationship between sexual communication, health, and satisfaction, and 3) gender differences and power dynamics between and among these variables. I consider not only when partners communicate, but moreover when they do not communicate—when desires, needs, and voices are silenced or muted within the college sexual culture. Meaningful findings emerge in terms of the lack of communication surrounding sexual health, desires, and emotions, the discrepancies and gender patterns between learned and applied consent, and the influence of intersectional identity factors and social location on experiences of communication in the hookup culture. Additionally, the cultural pressure to comply to the implicit norms of the hookup culture—meaninglessness, lack of communication, and alcohol use—tend to paradoxically prevent positive outcomes of equitable pleasure, enthusiastic consent, and fulfilling, explorative sex upon which the culture was founded. This feminist, psychological, and sex-positive study informs sexual education, prevention, and intervention efforts to decrease interpersonal violence, enhance health and pleasure, and provide tools to facilitate safer communication on an interpersonal and socio-cultural level.