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‘What Did You Do Last Night?’: How Sharing Hookup Narratives Impacts Friendships
and Displays Status Among College Women.

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors Requirements
for the Department of Psychology

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Abstract

Women's use of hookup narratives was examined through their understanding of hookup culture and the benefits and consequences of conversations with their female friends. The traditional sexual script has dictated that women are not supposed to engage in uncommitted sexual relationships; if they so engage, they should not talk about them. Today, however, some women are choosing to take part in the college hookup culture and talk to their friends about their experiences. The purpose of the present study was to understand why women talk to their friends about their hookups and if it transcends the traditional sexual script for these women. Ten college women who had discussed a hookup in college with their female friends were interviewed individually to get an understanding of how each woman constructed her understanding of these conversations and their impact on their friendships. Nine of the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis and one with narrative analysis. The five major themes that were identified in the thematic analysis were social position and appearance, entertainment, communicating friendship, social pressures, and freedom. The narrative analysis was used to analyze the story of a woman who is still a virgin, and included themes of pressure and personal growth. These findings shed light on the changing sexual scripts for women and the impact of hookup culture on female friendships in college.

Keywords: hookup, narratives, status, bonding, thematic analysis, female friendship

‘What Did You Do Last Night?’: How Sharing Hookup Narratives Impacts Friendships
and Displays Status Among College Women.

The sexual double standard in which men are encouraged to be active sexual agents while women are criticized and harshly labeled for doing the same (Reiss, 1956), has been extensively documented in human sexuality research. Traditionally women have been reproached for their engagement in casual sex and have been seen as less marriageable if they engage in casual sex (Reiss, 1956). Even decades later, some women still feel the pressure to live up to certain ideals of “morality, sexual ‘purity,’ and pleasure to men” (Phillips, 2000, p39). This standard means that if a woman has sex outside of a relationship, or just for her own pleasure, she is no longer a pure, virtuous woman. Besides limiting the actual sexual behavior, the double standard has limited women’s expressions of their experience. As recently as 2011, Lyons, Giordano, Manning, and Longmore found that girls were very aware of the existence of a cultural double standard, even if they did not believe it themselves, and they felt that if “you put yourself out there” you are opening yourself up to harsh judgments.

Recently, however, the research on gender and sexuality has started to find some positive views of women’s agency in sex as women’s sexuality becomes more empowered (Peterson, 2010), suggesting that the sexual double standard and traditional sexual script may be becoming less influential. Today, women who choose to “hookup” and have casual sexual relationships without expectations for romantic relationships are believed to have the same sexual desires and agency as men (Reid, Elliot & Webber, 2011).

Hookups are “casual sexual encounters” including anything from kissing to penetrative sex without the expectation of commitment and a dating relationship (Owen, Fincham & Moore, 2011). In recent years, hookups have become more common than dating relationships in college

and the predominant means of sexual encounters during those years (Heldman & Wade, 2010). If the traditional sexual script is continuing to exert a strong influence, then men would be expected to rack up a high number of sexual “conquests” and women would be left without the relationship that they are supposed to desire as they reject, but then ultimately give in, to men’s sexual advances. Reid et al., however, found that dating may carry many of the norms of the traditional sexual script, but actively seeking hookups is becoming more acceptable and equally viewed for women as it has been for men (2011). In fact, the prevalence of men and women hooking up may even be equal (Garcia & Reiber, 2008). This body of research suggests that, at least among college students, there is ambivalence about the acceptability of casual sex (and high numbers of sexual partners) for women, with some research showing the influence of the traditional sexual script and double standard, and some research showing that these traditional gender roles are relaxing.

Today, many sexually active women on college campuses are even discussing their sexual behaviors with their close friends (Lefkowitz & Espinosa-Hernandez, 2007). These sexual narratives move even further away from the sexual double standard because women are openly discussing an experience that they were not supposed to have at all if they want to remain pure. Therefore, hookup narratives are particularly interesting because they show a new way that women are expressing sexuality outside of the traditional norms and standards.

As a college student, I have heard numerous stories from my female friends about their hookups. These sexual narratives have become part of the social lives for several women and do not appear to be seen as taboo subjects among these students. The women I see are more than willing to share their stories whether it was a good or bad experience. I have heard these

narratives occur all over campus, and they seem to be normal conversation topics for many women.

My observations on campus prompted me to question how hookup narratives impact women's lives, how women might benefit from sharing their stories, and how this open sharing is similar to and different from the ways that men have traditionally benefitted from being open about their casual sex. Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to explore the relatively new behavior of women openly talking and bragging about their casual sexual experiences. This is an important inquiry because traditional societal norms would suggest that women should not have casual sexual experiences, but if they do, they should keep them hidden. Why then are college women now openly discussing these sexual experiences? What are the gender dynamics at play here, and does this new behavior suggest changes in the traditional gendered sexual standards?

The Traditional Sexual Script and the Sexual Double Standard

The traditional sexual script describes sexual experiences as something that men initiate and dominate and women must try to delay and control (LaPlante, McCormick & Brannigan, 1980). It is a guide to how to behave based on gender roles wherein women are allowed control only in the sense that they monitor and limit their sexuality. The script details a process where a woman must act flirtatious to get male attention and then hold out until a man tries hard enough and finally succeeds.

Even with many positive strides to alter this script, studies still find that the vast majority of people still at least believe in the sexual script's existence, or recall more easily information that confirms it (Milhausen & Herold, 1999; Marks & Fraely, 2006). It appears that although less restrictive sexual behaviors are becoming more common, public acceptance is not

necessarily keeping up.

While the traditional sexual script describes the defined roles for men and women, the sexual double standard details the consequences of breaking those prescribed roles (Reiss, 1956). In the sexual double standard, women can be stigmatized for engaging in sex outside of heterosexual monogamous relations, while men are free to do so without reproach (Crawford & Popp, 2003). Stompler (1994) found an example of the fine line women walk with their sexualities in some Greek organizations. At some universities, fraternities select female students to be “little sisters,” but the brothers supervise their behavior and can classify these women as either friends or “sluts.” If a brother does not like the sister’s sexual activity, she can be shunned or shamed while the brothers have no restrictions on the same behaviors and no consequences afterwards (Stompler, 1994).

Part of the sexual double standard states that men are supposed to try, and succeed, at acquiring multiple sex partners, while women are chastised if they do the same (LaPlante et al., 1980). Given this standard, men are typically expected to have more sexual partners and to be more interested in sex. It is therefore expected that men can behave in a promiscuous way and can share their stories with other men, but women should be careful if they do the same or fear the stigma of being labeled a “slut” (Hackathorn & Harvey, 2010). The double standard thus limits women’s acceptable behavior and punishes those who stray from the norm.

There is some evidence that the sexual double standard has started to become less relevant, and there are changing ideas of how it works today. Trends show that since the 1950’s the percentage of women having premarital sex has steadily been rising every decade from 48% in 1950’s to 74% in early 2000’s (Finer, 2007). Every decade has seen more women engaging in premarital one night sexual encounters, which shows gradual change in the frequency and

personal acceptance of sexual behaviors. While frequency does not always mean a change in attitudes, it does point to a change where women may be less afraid of a negative stigma and more open to casual sex.

In addition to these trends, a recent study found that some women believe that the double standard exists in society as a whole, but they themselves do not believe it, especially as it pertains to their own friendships (Lyons et al, 2011). Even if these standards and norms still exist in our culture, some women may not be acting on them in personal relationships. This means that among friend group, women are not chastised for their sexualities and can be open about sex without a label. However, Lyons et als' (2011) also unfortunately found that these same women seem to only permit this experience within their peer group and not for all women, suggesting that the sexual double standard is still at play, just selectively.

Another study found that when researchers divide participants' attentions so they do not focus on desirable answers, the double standard emerges in people's views of targets with multiple partners (Marks, 2008). This is an example of how implicit and explicit attitudes can be quite distinct from one another and how people are not always as aware of their internalized thought processes. While they may openly believe that they reject the double standard, they may instinctively act in ways that perpetuate the standard. One study that measured stigma in connection to depression found that people expressed more stigmatized attitudes when they were made to think on an implicit, "gut-reaction" level (Monteith & Pettit, 2011). While depression and hookups are not inherently related, they both carry some attached stigma. The role of implicit attitudes may be related to hookups as well, where people try to actively reject the previous standards of a stigmatized behavior while still holding onto the judgments at some deeper level and occasionally acting in ways that confirm it.

In order to avoid any shame and stigma, the sexual double standard dictates that women should be hiding any deviance from the proscribed, monogamous sex as dictated by the traditional roles. Hookup narratives clearly run counter to this tradition and allotted role, and in fact, approximate the traditionally held standards of male sexuality. Sharing, and seemingly bragging, about sex has long been classified as a male practice, yet some women are now entering freely into these conversations themselves. If the traditional sexual script and the sexual double standard still exist, then what do these women have to gain from their stories? I hypothesize that it is a sign that women are becoming more open to and excited by these behaviors and conversations, but they still feel they must keep it quiet except for conversations with close same-sex peers. Thus, one focus of the present research was to determine if female friendships offer a safe space that defies the traditional sexual script and allows women to discuss and experience sexual freedom.

Hookup Culture in College

Today, the dominant sexual practices on college campuses have shifted from dating to casual hookups (Paul, McManus & Hayes, 2000). The term hookup is used in different ways by different people, and can indicate a range of behaviors, from kissing to penetrative sex; typically, the term is used to suggest a “no strings attached,” physical relationship (Myers, 2012). One study found that between 30 and 40 percent of hookups involve sexual intercourse while 25 to 33 percent only involve making out without sex (Jhally, 2011). This range in definition leaves the term open and ambiguous and thus at the discretion of the individual or group to assign its meaning.

Reiber and Garcia looked at the role of pluralistic ignorance on college students’ beliefs around hookups (2010). Women correctly associated men with higher levels of comfort with

hooking up, and men correctly associated women with lower levels of comfort, but neither of their estimates was entirely correct. Rather, both men and women overestimated each other's level of comfort around hooking up. It seems that hookup culture is becoming so pervasive that many people are overestimating how many people actually want to engage in this behavior.

There is evidence of a gender difference in the overall preference for hookups. Women more than men prefer traditional dating relationships, while men more than women prefer casual sex and hookups (Bradshaw et al., 2010). This means that women may be hoping for a more traditional relationship and may be feeling regret as a result of hookup culture (Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008).

It appears that hookups, although the norm, are still not fully embraced and desired by many female students. Despite a preference by many students for a dating relationship, students may believe that hookups are the desired choice for others. If there really is this great pluralistic ignorance among students, these women may be discussing hookups in order to fit in with what they think is expected and enjoyed by other students. Even if they do enjoy the hookups and the stories they can share, there could still be an overall misperception and unease with the culture for women.

Peer Pressure, Bragging, and Sexuality

Peer pressure plays a significant role in college students' actions (Lashbrook, 2000) and sexual activity is no different. Research has found that sexual "conquests" are a way for men to bond together and some groups will even make their members take part in sexual activity to make each member feel included (Prohaska & Gailey, 2010). It may be that women are now feeling similar pressures that lead them to hookup and then share their stories.

The pressure that men feel has compounded the rise of such grotesque behaviors like

“hogging” where men hold competitions to sleep with the most unattractive or fattest woman on a given night (Prohaska & Gailey, 2010). “Hogging” is an example of an extreme way for men to bond over sexual experiences, but it points to a culture whereby men use their sexual prowess to bond with their groups over their conquests of women. Some men feel that their participation in these behaviors and retelling of the events is imperative for them to be successful and liked (Regan & Dreyer, 1999). If these men do not engage in sexual activity, they believe they will be ostracized or put down by the group.

This pressure exists for women as well, but it often manifests in a different way. One study found that 23% of teenage girls feel pressure from their friends to have sex (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999). Another study found around a third of participants lied to their friends about their sexual experience and the same percent also believed that their friends made them feel like they had to go further (Muppala, 2011). This type of pressure is less about outward pressure and betting (as was the case among men) and more about fitting into what other friends are doing. These women are not looking to outdo each other, but rather to fit into the norms of the group. Talking is an important part of bonding for women (*Girl Talk*, nd) and being able to share similar stories and encounters with friends could be what is driving some women to engage in these narratives.

In the present study, I specifically examined women’s conversations within female groups because it is possible that sexual narratives are an in-group, bonding experience for some women. If women now believe that their sexuality is something they can share with, and even brag about to, their friends, it is possible that we are coming into culture where women’s sexuality is as rewarded as men’s. It could also be that, like men, women are now beginning to be expected to seek out sex and feel pressured to “keep up” with their friends (Muppala, 2011).

Impression Management & Disclosure Reciprocity

Impression management refers to the way that individuals attempt to consciously and subconsciously control the information that they present to other people (Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). Impression management is also related, in part, to the traditional sexual script for some women. Meston et al. found that high impression management scores in women were correlated with conservative sexual attitudes and less sexual experience (2001). Conservative sexual views and lower sexual experience in women align with the principles of the traditional sexual script, so these women demonstrated an awareness of what a good impression for a woman is in our society.

The impressions women want to create also have an impact on the way they express love and romantic desire. One study found that certain love styles can be seen as more or less attractive based on gender (Davies, 2001). For example, Ludus (game-playing) men and Agape (selfless love) women are thought to be the most socially desirable. This again points to a situation where men's sexual conquests and women's submission are valued similar to the traditional sexual script. Women are not supposed to express their own desire, but instead create the impression that their goal is the satisfaction of their male partners.

Another part of impression management comes from observing how others present themselves. Women can learn what is acceptable and desirable by following the examples of other women. One study found that people were more likely to respond to and reciprocate sexual disclosures with online companions when the other person was the same gender (Wan, Chung & Chiou, 2009). This reaction was linked to the disclosure reciprocity effect wherein if one person shares intimate information the other person feels that they should repay the favor in a sense. This works both by creating the impression that sexual subjects are okay to talk about

and that if one person shares their stories, then you must share yours in turn.

These conversations can come up for many reasons among peers. One psychiatrist had a female client who chose to partake in numerous relationships because it made her the “hottest girl in her friend circle” even though she personally did not enjoy doing it (Aerry, 2011). I expected that some of the women I would interview would also feel the need to reciprocate the same disclosure as their peers when talking about hookups to feel like they can keep up and be just as desirable. If other women are sharing their stories and bonding over a common experience, it could influence some women to do the same. Women may feel pressured to have a story of their own in order to reciprocate the narratives of their peer groups. It could be that the crux of this new narrative for women stems from the desire to keep up with a perceived norm of the hookup culture and relay experiences with friends.

Social Comparisons & In-group/Out-group Bias

Some women who feel unhappy with their status and others’ perceptions of them may choose to compare themselves and their group to people they feel are doing a worse job than themselves, engaging in the process of downward social comparison (Wills, 1981). In the case of hookups, this would mean either comparing themselves to groups that hookup a lot more, or to groups that do not hookup much, depending on the women’s value judgments of hookups.

Another way this comparison manifests is through prejudice and in-group out-group bias, which are ways for people to use downward social comparison to make their group seem better in their minds (Wills, 1981). This was found in one study where women described their in-group as having more traits and in particular more feminine traits than outsider groups (Masson-Maret & Beauvois, 1999). Thus the in-group was seen as more dynamic and valuable than other groups.

I considered that what would resonate in women's descriptions of hookup narratives was a combination of both the desire to strengthen in-groups through commonality, and distance oneself from out-groups through downward social comparison. One possibility for why some women talk freely about hookups without fear is that there will always be another group of women who are having more sex and thus straying further from the traditional sexual script, as well as a group that is having far fewer hookups and thus not engaging in the normalized, campus culture. In this way, these women can rest assured that there is someone else doing worse than they are and therefore their actions are not as wrong. In terms of trait assignment, this could mean that women are more willing to give nuance to their friends' hookups and hookup decisions whereas out-group members are judged more quickly and with less consideration. This could make it easier for women to judge out-group members more harshly for the same behaviors of in-group members because there is less effort put into distinguishing outsiders.

The Present Study

The current study used a constructivist paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005) to understand what hookup stories meant for a sample of college women. Since hooking up and specifically then discussing those hookups publically is a relatively new and unstudied phenomenon, I chose to look at the women's own words and the meaning that they assigned to these shared narratives. Even though the traditional sexual script and sexual double standard have not completely left our society, there is evidence that some women do gain a sense of community and excitement through behaviors once thought taboo. This new potentially empowered stance comes in tandem with the increasing presence of hookup culture on college campuses and the new norms of casual sex. Many women may be feeling pressure to engage in hookups in order to fit in with the

perceived norms of college campuses as well as their own friendship circles. The present study set out to uncover how women view these conversations and hookup culture for themselves.

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: Are women engaging in hookup narratives to gain the same type of status that men are afforded for having and sharing hookup stories?

RQ2: Do women feel it is necessary to share hookup stories in order to be part of their social groups?

RQ 3: Do women therefore feel pressured to engage in sexual behaviors in order to have these stories?

RQ4: Do women feel a sense of empowerment for sharing sexual stories that were once very taboo?

By asking women who engage in, and openly discuss, their hookups to describe and interpret their behavior, I attempted to get a better understanding of how the roles of women may have shifted with the inclusion of hookup narratives in their friendships. Going into the interviews, I considered two potential changes. One shift would be the inclusion of positive outcomes for women that hookup and share their stories, which could include status, popularity, and inclusion in certain friend groups. Equal regard for men and women engaging in hookups means that women have more freedom and will not face the same stigma as in the past, which could be a positive shift toward gender equality.

There is another potential shift where some women may feel required to have sex narratives in order to gain status and peer acceptance in some groups. This could indicate a problematic shift with women feeling pressure to engage in sexual encounters that they do not necessarily desire themselves.

Method

Participants

The ten women in this study were all students at Dickinson College (see Table 1). Only heterosexual women were allowed to participate in order to look at the way the heterosexual traditional sexual script operated in hookups. They were all enrolled in a 100-level psychology course and received participant pool credit for their time. All of the participants were given a pseudonym in order to keep their information confidential.

Materials

All of the interviews took place in the Kaufman interview room using the Axis camera system to record the audio. The interview was organized around the following 4 domains of questions: (1. Background on friends' and own attitudes about sex, 2. Defining sexual partners, hookups, and getting details about participant's history, 3. Discussing hookups with friends, 4. Gender, status, sexual experience, and talking about experiences). Questions in the interview were formulated based on existing research and literature including traditional sexual scripts, sexual conquests and status, and hookup cultures (see appendix). Several additional questions were added based on my observations of college culture and conversations around hookups. The interview was broken down into sections to focus the participants on different aspects of sexual experiences and expectations for themselves as well as their friends. Please see the Appendix for the full interview protocol.

Procedure

I conducted individual, semi-structured interviews that ranged from half an hour to an hour. Using the participant pool, I only accepted heterosexual women who indicated (via pre-screen) that they have hooked up at Dickinson and that they have then shared a story of this

experience with their female friends. The women arrived at the research suite and were taken back to the interview room once I confirmed that they did meet the qualifying criteria.

Following guidelines for qualitative interviewing (Dilley, 2000), each interview helped to inform the themes and questions in the following interviews. To allow for new ideas and insight in the research, the interview protocol was seen as a living document. The initial questions were based mostly the themes in the psychology of men and psychology of women literature and my own observations, so it is important that the questions were able to change as more women shared their personal insights and stories. Due to the novelty of this topic, I kept the protocol open to revisions in order to allow for the participants' answers and feedback to inform the later interviews, so I could get the clearest picture of this behavior.

The biggest change to the protocol was the switch in terminology for the question about empowerment. After a few interviews it became clear to me that the women struggled with the term empowerment, so I began asking about feelings of power and control. This change resulted in women being able to vocalize feelings of empowerment more easily while also allowing women to deny all of these feelings if they did not see the fit. In the end, only a few changes were made and the rest of the variability in the questions came from following the women's stories and asking clarification questions as they arose.

After completing nine of the interviews, I determined that interviewing a woman in Greek life or on a sports team would be beneficial, because of the added prevalence of group norms and their potential to influence behavior. Perceived group norms often lead to an overestimate of behaviors that can lead to an increase in that behavior (LaBrie, Hummer, Grant & Lac, 2010). Women in these groups may therefore feel more pressure to engage in hookup narratives because of their perceptions of the group's behaviors and standards. Thus, I changed

the prescreening information to recruit only women in a sorority or on a sports team. This is an example of critical case sampling used in qualitative research to find cases that can more fully illuminate the phenomenon under study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). With this additional requirement, I interviewed my final participant, Caroline. Data collection stopped following her interview because I reached saturation (no new themes were identified; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Reflexivity Statement

I first became interested in this topic my first year in college. When I arrived on campus I felt the need to fit into a new community and form friendships with new people. I soon became aware of the “hookup culture” on campus and how casual sex and making out was the norm for most students. My friends would go out Friday and Saturday nights and attempt to find someone to hookup with and then share the story at brunch the following morning. I soon learned that if you did not have a story to share you had to applaud your friends who did and sit back as they received the group’s attention. I wondered how other women perceived the culture on campus and what that meant for their friendships. Through some of my classes in Women and Gender Studies and the Health Studies departments I learned that I was in fact not alone in my thinking as the term “hookup culture” was brought up several times and students discussed the positive and negative implications of this campus norm.

As a White, heterosexual, college-aged woman I fit the demographic of most of my participants, and am thus an insider in many ways; however, I have never had a hookup in college and therefore am also an outsider in some ways. There are some advantages to remaining an outsider as a researcher. By looking at a phenomenon from the outside, it is harder to take anything for granted and you can keep an open, inquisitive stance in the interviews and interpretation (LeGallais, 2008). Even though I do not have hookups of my own, I am still part

of the culture as a college student and understand the motivations and pressures that exist. I am able to understand the terms that these women use and the situations that they encounter and thus share in and better understand their experiences.

Data Analysis

Nine of the ten women's interviews were analyzed with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows for themes to be drawn from both the participant's unique individual experience as well as the overarching, societal experience. It proceeds through a series of recursive steps. First, I transcribed the interviews from the live recordings and read through them several times to make sure I was deeply familiar with each interview. Then, I started coding the transcripts to categorize words and statements that seemed to speak to my research questions. From those codes, I identified themes that appeared throughout multiple women's interviews.

To assure that the themes were relevant, I reviewed the codes and transcripts again at this point. This allowed me to check that the themes were pertinent to the women's statements, were grounded in their statements, and helped answer my research questions. I used both inductive and deductive data analysis when looking for potential themes. I first used inductive analysis to find themes based related to my four research questions. In addition, I also looked for common themes that arose from the interviews that I had not covered in my initial questions. This gave me a fuller understanding of the experiences of these women by not limiting my interpretation to those themes that I had assumed I would find before starting data collection. Once I was confident that all the themes were representative of the interviews, I gave them specific names and organized them into themes and subthemes based on theoretical or practical similarities.

For one interview, I chose to use a narrative analysis (McAdams, 2001), which allows for

a more focused case study. This method of analysis was chosen because this participant differed from the data set as a whole. In particular, she was a virgin, and the way she described and understood hookup narratives was unique. Rather than incorporate her into the thematic analysis, a case study approach allowed me to interpret her answers as a holistic individual who had something new and different to contribute compared to the other nine women. A narrative analysis keeps the individual interview separate from the others in order to explore the themes individually and go in depth into an experience that is unique, so that it does not get lost or overlooked.

Results and Discussion

It is first useful to understand how these women defined a “hookup.” In line with prior quantitative research, most of the women explained that a hookup could range from making out to nudity and sexual activity, excluding penetrative sex or intercourse. However, when asked to recall a recent time that they shared a hookup narrative, most women chose to tell stories that included penetrative sex. This discrepancy may have been due to the timing of the questions and thus the women’s comfort in the interview. I asked for their definition early in the interview, and at that point, they indicated that the term hookup did not typically include intercourse. I asked for their own story later in the interview, when the women were opening up more and appeared more comfortable with me and with the interview process. By that point, they shared a story involving penetrative sex. Many of the participants also said that they sometimes use the term hookup when they are around people they are not close to in order to keep it ambiguous, so it is possible that they were trying to rework their definition for me at the beginning to remain ambiguous.

For this analysis hooking up will refer to vaginal intercourse. This is based off of the descriptions the women told in their stories saying they were having sex, and the assumption that since only one percent of hookups involve anal sex (Jhally, 2011) it is likely they were having vaginal intercourse.

For the women who had sex, five main themes were identified when discussing the phenomenon of hookup narratives. These were (I) social position and appearance (II) entertainment (III) communicating friendship (IV) social pressures and (V) freedom. A full outline of these themes and the subthemes can be found in Table 2. The order of the themes is as follows for clarity and continuation from one theme to another and does not represent a hierarchy of number of responses per theme.

(I) Social Position and Appearance

The first theme encompasses the social standing of the women when they can talk about a hookup. Most women mentioned some positive social advantages to hooking up and to sharing those stories. They relayed feelings of social approval and gains, as well as feeling some envy from others for their ability to have and share hook up stories. This theme encompassed four subthemes: attention and feeling attractive, bragging, jealousy, and status.

Attention and feeling attractive. Many women said that they felt attractive and desirable when they hooked up. They felt proud to be able to have hookups because it meant that a man found them attractive and therefore wanted to hookup with them.

Oh yea it's definitely a self-esteem booster if someone is willing to hookup with you, they want to hookup with you. The more interested people are, the better you feel about yourself. (Liz)

If you asked me how I felt about talking about my hookups it would be like fun and it

makes me feel kinda, I don't want to use cool because it's so cliché, but you have a boyfriend or a guy you're hooking up with and you're found attractive by some guy.

Which is a positive in most people's eyes. (Donna)

Men's high value of physical attractiveness for sexual partners could be what is leading some women feel this boost in self-esteem (Lewis, Al-Shawaf, Conroy-Beam, Asao & Buss, 2012).

Women may feel it is an indicator of their physical beauty when men want to hookup with them.

Some women feel that being considered attractive and desirable gives them power and makes them feel sexy (Tolman, 2002).

For some of the participants, the attention was also welcomed from their female friends.

After telling their friends about their hookup story, some of the women said that they liked being admired by their group.

Yea I mean it's nice to get the attention (laughs) it's not something I want 24/7 but it's nice to have your friends admire you a little bit because I do the same for them.

(Samantha)

When I can talk about it to other people, and especially if that aren't as open and seeking it out, they kind of admire that I am able to do that. So I guess that makes me feel more desired or attractive. Not [more] than my friends, but in general. (Kara)

Becker and Luthar's (2007) study on popularity and peer regard measured how many times a student was rated as the most liked minus the number of times they were rated as least liked and how those measures were related to physical appearance, rebelliousness, and academic achievement. They found that peer-perceived admiration was correlated with all three; physical attractiveness, academic achievement and some rebellious behaviors. These women may be receiving some of that peer admiration for their ability to have a hookup and appear desirable to

men. It is also possible that they are being admired for doing something that is still a little rebellious. Even though the traditional sexual script for women has seen some changes, studies still find that most people still believe in its existence (Milhausen & Herold, 1999). Kara's friends admired her for being able to go out and have hookups and share those experiences even though they themselves are not "as open" to it. It could be that their admiration is in part due to her willingness to engage in a more rebellious behavior.

Bragging. For some women the attention goes a step further, and they choose to boast about their ability to hookup with men. Almost all of the women said that they knew of some one or some group that bragged about hookups even if they believed they did not.

If she's bragging about it to get attention, it makes it seem like she's hooking up with people to get attention instead of hooking up with them to just be sexual with someone and experience that. (Kara)

I have had friends, or girls that were in my friend group who talked about their hookups all the time and got really obnoxious and gave off the vibe that they thought they were better because all of these guys liked them or thought they were attractive (Audrey)

According to the sexual double standard, bragging about hookups should be reserved for men. Some men feel like they must be able to frequently recall hookup stories in order to be part of the group, so bragging about the frequency of hookups is in their best interest (Messner & Sabo, 1994). Women, however, are not part of this norm, so bragging theoretically should be inconsistent with the feminine standard; the women's quotes above show that they expressed some derision for those women whom they perceived to be bragging.

However, the women's descriptions of bragging were varied even within single interviews. Sometimes the women described these situations negatively and looked down on

those women who brag about their hookups. Other times women were more neutral about the subject and saw it as something that happens and is generally accepted.

[We] acknowledge the fact that you just said something a little bit cocky and they laugh and accept it and move on. So we can say things like you looked hot and say it without them taking it in a negative way. (Liz)

Hooking up is dominant culture on college campuses (Paul et al., 2000) and being able to brag about your engagement in them may be a way for women to show that they are able to fit in and be accepted. Although the act of bragging may always not be welcomed, women may still feel like it is acceptable in some cases.

Envy. Where there is room to brag, there is often room for envy. If hooking up can make women feel and appear more desirable and attractive, and those who are hooking up are bragging about it, it is not hard to see how envy can arise. A couple women mentioned feeling jealous, or feeling like someone might be jealous of them when sharing a hookup story.

I think that personally sometimes I would get a little jealous. (Danielle, referring to the status of women who have a lot of hookups)

I think this happens a lot even at college, if you talk to one of your girlfriends who wanted to hook up with this guy, and not even want to but can't and you did, you feel a little awkward and almost cocky by talking about it. You don't want to make the other person jealous... or come off as cocky with them... I can definitely do that with my girlfriends and almost make them jealous or vice versa. (Audrey)

For these women, the envy they describe arises from a place of competition where the woman who gets the hookup is the one to be admired. Danielle went on to make a fairly harsh statement about women who have a lot of hookups ("I think my friends would secretly be like 'oh my god I

can't believe she did that, she probably has a bad reputation among certain guys or a group of guys.'"), reflecting the ways in which some women are critical of other women who they perceive as a threat (Joseph, 1985). Some support has also been found that women can experience romantic jealousy of their popular, female peers (Mayeux, 2011). As these women stated, there is a covetous component to hookups, and envy can arise when someone feels outdone by a woman that was perceived to be more desirable.

Because it is a competition I think, it's competitive. You don't want to be the one alone at a party. (Danielle)

This sense of competition around sexual relationships has been documented before in female friendships. Often the friend that is perceived to be less attractive feels a greater sense of rivalry in relationships (Bleske-Rechek & Lighthall, 2010). Competition to be more feminine and attractive is common for many women (Joseph, 1985), and racking up hookups could be a new form of competition. Attracting a sexual partner could then be perceived as a rivalry between friends and create envy and competition in some women's friendships.

Status. For some of the women, the number of hookups, or ability to get hookups, was seen as an indicator of a higher social standing. They perceived that telling people about hooking up can be a way to show others how popular or attractive you are and position yourself higher than others.

Especially with my friend group it's like very apparent that some of my friends strategically plan their hook ups according to who will get them boosted on the social scale... I think it is one of those things like, it shows social status who you've hooked up with. So if he's a cute, good one, then you feel pride because he's interested, or he made the moves on you. So yea it's a social pride thing. (Caroline)

Girls hookup with guys or girls hookup with girls just to show, well not just to show that they can hook up with other people and they are attractive, but I think that might be a factor. (Audrey)

I think it's a really twisted thing. Like my close friends we don't see that as a status symbol, but that's just my friends, and I think a lot of people say that, but they don't subconsciously realized that you look differently at people who do a lot of hookups. And I know there are girls that are seen as really popular because they hook up with a lot of guys... and I know groups of girls who see girls who have hooked up a lot as a positive status improver. (Donna)

Women have been able to gain some social recognition for having sex, but traditionally this has only been true within a long-term relationship, not in a casual one (Tolman, 2001). The idea of hookups as a status symbol is something that has so far only been documented in groups of men (Kreager & Staff, 2009), but has not readily been associated with women. These women, however, believe that there can be some social rank advantages to having a certain number of hookups, and sometimes that can be especially true when compared to other women.

If... someone is faster than you, but you've had more hookups than them, that might be something you're holding over their head to say that, "oh you might be better at running, but I'm better at relationships. (Liz)

There is a stipulation to this rule that some women pointed out. While having multiple partners may make you appear popular in the eyes of your friends, other groups can disapprove of the behavior.

I think in the friendship your friends think you're cool or whatever, but I think outside of the friendship group it's looked down upon. (Ana)

This different standard may be due to out-group bias wherein outsiders to a group are more critical of those within that group (Hewstone, 1990). While having numerous hookups and talking about it was a positive status symbol within the group, Ana believed that outsiders to the group would not see it the same way. Lyons et al. (2011) found that women often do not hold their friends to the sexual double standard, yet many believe that it still exist in society. These women may see status operating the same way here where groups of friends can create an inner hierarchy, but that does not translate outside of the group.

Another part of this rule is that there has to be a limit on the number for a woman to be seen positively. After a certain number of hookups has been reached, the woman can be labeled a slut. As Donna put it “there’s nothing wrong with having hookups, but at a point, let’s draw a line.” This shows that even though hookups are seen as a good thing for many women, there is also a point when a limit has been reached and it becomes too much. It can also be seen as too much for certain people who hold more traditional ideals.

But I guess with people around the same age, it’s not a level of respect, but it almost is for people that have had more. But it also depends on the friend group because in some situations some of our friends that are more traditional, the more sexual partners you have, the more you’re not as good of a person I guess. (Kara)

Even though some of Kara’s friends believe that amassing hookups can be a matter of respect and status, she is also aware that others hold traditional views that follow the sexual double standard and label women as bad people if they have more hookup stories.

(II) Entertainment

The next theme that was identified in all of the women’s transcripts was entertainment. The women felt that having hookups and then sharing those stories with their friends was a fun

and engaging part of their friendships. It appears that these hookup narratives are often happy stories that women want to share for laughs and enjoyment with their friends. This theme comprised two subthemes: an exciting topic and friends were interested.

An exciting topic. Overwhelmingly, women said they talked to their friends about their hookups because it was exciting to share experiences. Not only did they find the hookup itself to be exciting, but also the process of telling their friends what had happened.

I think a lot of it is that it's just a fun part of life and it's a good story and something fun to have a conversation about. (Kara)

I was really excited and I just wanted to talk to my friends about it. It's kind of a fun subject I guess. You know everybody gets excited about it. (Samantha)

Well it's kind of funny, there's a lot of laughing. (Audrey)

Laughter was present in most women's accounts of sharing their stories with their friends. Sometimes the laughter and fun is accompanied with feeling a little awkward, but most women just described it as being fun and an exciting topic that their friends enjoyed discussing.

Excited and like joking around like "oh my god I can't believe you finally hooked up with this guy. (Donna)

The lighthearted nature of the conversation points to a sense of comfort and thrill with the topic, and an overall positive experience sharing the stories.

Friends were interested. Along with feeling excited sharing stories, many women also felt that their friends were interested in hearing their experience and that sparked the conversation further.

I guess I'm kind of excited because I know they're very interested unlike if you were telling someone who wasn't interested and you would kind of feel like you were being

judged, but I've never felt that way with them. They're always very eager... It's also nice just to have somebody to share it with, you're excitement. (Liz)

I guess, usually my friends are interested in it, so I think they, if something has happened, you assume that they want to know. So if I don't say anything, usually they'll ask, but sometimes I might bring it up because I know that usually in the past they have asked. Sometimes also I think it is exciting so they might want to know, and I know one of my friends gets all giggly and wants to know all about it. (Audrey)

Hookups and hookup narratives are not only important to the women by themselves, but it also appears to be important to their friends. Their friends express excitement at hearing a story and knowing what happened in some detail. Self-disclosure is prevalent in most female friendships and talking about sex with friends is very common among sexually active college students (Lefkowitz & Espinosa-Hernandez, 2007). Women report that they can talk to their female friends about anything and feel like they are being heard (Johnson & Aries, 1983). Many of the women in the present study felt that their friends wanted to know about their sexual experiences because it was part of their lives and something they found interesting. Hookups are exciting for these women and they believed that their friends wanted to be part of that experience too.

(III) Communicating Friendship

Part of friendship for women is being able to talk freely about whatever is important in their lives (Johnson & Aries, 1983). All of the women described the value of talking to their female friends because of some importance that it brought to their friendship and themselves. This theme includes three subthemes: advice/ help, sense of connection, and bonding.

Advice/help. All of the women valued the advice they received from their friends when sharing a hookup narrative. They received feedback, both positive and negative, and felt that they were able to get help from someone whose opinion they valued.

Advice mostly. Like how to deal with certain things. Sometimes it's like I'm going to be super awkward because I don't really know what the rules are for this, so sometimes it's just like, "HELP me figure out what is going on. (Polly)

The women both gave and received advice from their friends on how to act, what was okay to do, and how to handle their hookups. Friends have been found to be important informants on sexual behavior for girls and their opinions are considered to be reliable and helpful when making decisions about sex (Powell, 2008). The women in this study believed that, good or bad, the advice they got from friends was positive and a benefit to their friendships whether or not they choose to accept any suggestions. They want to get a feel for what their friends think and know if they are doing everything right. Getting advice offers them the chance to check in and make sure that what they are doing is okay.

Well I talk about it to them I guess as a justification that you're not doing something wrong and if they're like "oh you shouldn't have done that" or "oh you must have had a good time" or something. Seeing their reactions and comments makes me feel like oh I shouldn't do that again or it's ok to do it another time. Getting their approval or disapproval will help me make decisions in the future. (Liz)

Polly also demonstrated the desire to receive "help" from friends when working through her understanding of the situation. Emotional support is seen as a crucial requirement in female friendships and those who cannot provide comfort and help are often rejected (Holmstrom,

Burleson & Jones, 2005). Helping friends with something as personal as a sexual experience could be seen as a strong social support and demonstration of friendship for these women.

Sense of Connection. Friends often share a plethora of similarities that tie them together and aid in the ease of friendship formation (Goodreau et al., 2009). Several of the women enjoyed sharing their hookup narratives with friends who share similar hookup stories.

Usually I'm a lot closer with the people I can talk to about it without being uncomfortable or anything like that. Also I think that friends who I've never talked to about it and then I talk to about it, it makes us have something more in common if they have or we can talk and it's openly talked about as a discussion topic. It makes us a little closer. (Donna)

Yea I think the reason why I talked about it was like to compare stories. Like have you done this or that? Or what was your experience with that? Or should I try this, what was your experience with it? And I think to get advice and compare stories and stuff like that. (Danielle)

The women liked knowing that there was someone who could relate to their experience and understand what they felt. They often expressed a feeling of closeness to those friends who were similar to them in their hookups and could listen to them without judgment. Assortative mixing, where relationships are formed and maintained due to similarity, is common particularly in female friendships (Goodreau et al., 2009).

So it's kind of nice when we're all on the same page and we've all got a story to tell, whether it's all bad or all good it's just easier for us to communicate and help each other. (Liz)

It was nice to just talk to them and have them relate. I don't know it was just a feeling of closeness I guess. (Samantha)

Having a common hookup experience can help friends talk to each other and give feedback and advice, which was shown to be an important process for these women. Knowing what their friends were going through made the women feel closer to each other because they could relate to each other's lives.

Bonding. Many of the women felt that sharing hookup stories brought them closer to their friends and helped reinforce the relationship. This subtheme relates to the other two under the theme of Communicating Friendship, but especially deals with the women's sense of added attachment to their friends as a result of sharing stories. While Sense of Connection speaks to the commonality that women feel they have with each other, Bonding refers to the way that women increase their friendship and attachment with one another because of sharing these stories.

We're very open with each other, but I think her knowing that she can talk to me about this means she'll talk to me about it again in the future and she's excited that she can talk to me. (Kara)

I definitely think, I don't know if this is a good thing or bad thing, but I definitely think it brings you closer and you get to know the person on a deeper level I think. It's kind of interesting because I know in my sorority it was very "there are no boys in the sorority and blah blah blah, there's no talking about that," but when we were all together and kinda on our own not associated with sorority we would sometimes talk about those sorts of things and it definitely did bring humor and entertainment and kinda bring us closer. So I don't know I guess it definitely brings you closer to someone and the fact that you can trust them with that information. (Audrey)

Women describe their friendships in terms of trust, sharing, commonalities, and support

(Greif & Sharpe, 2010). Through previous subthemes most of these terms exist in the description of sharing their hookup stories with their friends. Bonding occurs for these women when they are able to communicate all of these attributes to one another through their hookup narratives and thus prove that they value the friendship. All of the women expressed that they only share these stories with their closest friends because it involves a lot of trust in the other person.

I think being able to talk about sex and sexuality showed that we were close to each other. So it brought us together a little bit. (Samantha)

By sharing their stories they are essentially communicating closeness and forming bonds with one another. Samantha said that it “showed” her friends that they were close. These narratives are ways to prove that the women are friends and bring them together over a common experience, excitement and trust.

(IV) Social Pressures

Many of the women described some level of social expectations from the campus culture and their friends. This pressure was not always overt, but they were aware of its existence and its ability to influence hookups and their hookup stories. This theme includes three subthemes; expectation to talk, campus culture, and friends’ pressure.

Expectation to talk. Some of the women felt that their friends expected that if they had a hookup, they would and should talk about it. This subtheme was interesting because several of the women said “no” when directly asked if talking about their hookups was expected, however, most of them went on to describe situations that showed that it was an expectation. It is possible that they may not have wanted to admit that it was an expectation even though various conversations with friends indicated that it was. When considering that Communicating

Friendship was one of the common themes, this disclosure expectation could come out of the feeling that if you do not talk about it, you are not showing your commitment to the friendship.

It's expected that I share what happened. And I would expect my friends to tell me.

(Danielle)

Most of them were like, "You did this and didn't tell us about it until now?" Mostly that's the reaction I get. Now they expect that I won't say anything. But before they would kind of get mad that I wouldn't tell them what happened. (Polly)

Just because I think that sometimes it's the mark of friendship with girls that you're talking about boys. So I think that sometimes it means that you're friends if you can talk to them about boys. I think I try to open up more to certain people so that they would know I wanted to be their friend. (Ana)

For women, many friendships are formed and maintained through "collaborative efforts of constructing conversation" (DeCapua, Berkowitz & Boxer, 2006, p408). This means that everyone is expected to contribute to the conversation and add something to the mix. Ana felt that her friends did not have "anything else to talk about," so hookup narratives were a way to keep them communicating and preserve the friendship. Her interview also shows how some women may feel that they have to have these stories, and thus have hookups, in order to keep friends satisfied and interested. She mentioned that sometimes she even embellishes or lies about an experience in order to have a better story.

I think that sometimes my friends expect me to always have a story. So sometimes I'll not make one up but kind of like, something that I might not think is that interesting, I'll make it seem more interesting. (Anna)

This could be problematic if women feel so compelled to have a story that they are making up scenarios in order to fit in with the groups' expectations. It appears that friends' expectations can be very strong in some groups and they may put pressure on women to constantly have stories. Friends may also get upset if they feel that a member of the group is holding out on them and not sharing a hookup story.

With my friends at home, when I didn't talk about it at first some of them got a little insulted that I didn't and I felt that I was hiding something from them... For me I've realized that it really depends on the friends. So I know that some don't really care if I share that information, whereas other are like, "Audrey, you're supposed to trust us."

(Audrey)

My friends take it as lying if you don't openly admit that you had sex with somebody.

(Caroline)

Personal disclosures are key elements to maintaining female friendships (DeCapua et al., 2006) and not sharing these disclosures could be seen as lying, or hurting to the relationship. Sharing hookup stories involves trust and not sharing them was seen by some as a demonstration of mistrust and caused tension in the relationships.

Campus culture. Many of the women were aware that there was pressure to hookup because it was considered the campus norm. Most of them said that it never influenced their decision to hookup and talk about it, but some admitted that it made a traditional dating relationship more difficult to pursue.

Here it's like when are you going to meet a guy? Hardly ever down in the library. I mean they're there, but like you don't really meet them there. You meet them at parties and

stuff and it's sort of a one track situation, so [dates] are harder to find, but it's also that I don't think anyone is ever really looking for that. (Polly)

I went into college it just seemed like it was more acceptable for people to just hookup. That's the way all my friends talked about it, that's the way the media displays it, so I always thought people didn't date much when they went into college. (Samantha)

On most college campuses, hookup culture has replaced dating culture as the prime means of sexual involvement (Paul et al., 2000). For Samantha, she came in already expecting to behave a certain way because of media portrayals and friends' depictions, and that could be part of the reason the culture seems as pervasive for many of the women.

One woman did say that she did not believe that dating was out of the question in college, but she was also a little hesitant when she thought about her own experiences.

It might have been me where I haven't really found anyone here that I've wanted to date and have been attracted enough to date. But at the same time I haven't really found any guys that necessarily have wanted to date me. So I think it definitely depends on your school. I think at this school not as many people date but I have been to other schools where a lot less people have dated. (Audrey)

Audrey seemed to put some of the blame on herself for why she has not dated much in college, rather than on the campus culture in general. She also believed that hookup culture is particularly strong on this campus and not necessarily on all college campuses. This is an interesting perception as studies have shown that hookups are the dominant sexual practices on most campuses and not just a few (Paul et al., 2000).

Friends' pressure. In addition to the global culture in college, the micro culture of friendship groups also exerted pressure in various ways. None of the women expressed feeling

overt pressure from friends, but a few mentioned expectations and implicit pressure to keep up with everyone else.

I think that sometimes my friends expect me to always have a story. So sometimes I'll not make one up but kind of like, something that I might not think is that interesting, I'll make it seem more interesting. (Ana)

I've seen where bragging about your hookups is seen as like a cool thing to do, especially if you're in that kind of friendship where everyone else is hooking up with guys and you haven't really done it recently so you have to say something to keep up with that.

(Donna)

One study found that 23% of teenage girls feel pressure from their friends to have sex (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1999). While the women in this study all believed that they had control over their decisions to hookup and share the subsequent story, most were aware of campus and group pressures that enticed women to hookup. Some women also alluded to their own positive value judgments towards hookups, which could create some covert pressure.

But I guess with people around the same age, it's not a level of respect, but it almost is for people that have had more. (Kara)

If it was good they're like "oh congratulations!" or something like that. (Liz)

I think that some people who are at that level because they can't hookup with other people because other people won't hookup with them, I definitely don't think of them as any less or any more. I do sometimes feel bad like "oh I wish that person could find someone," but at the same time I know that eventually that time will come. (Audrey)

None of these statements by themselves point to a strong form of pressure, but when considered alongside the fact that women who can talk about hookups get "respect" and

“congratulations” and those who do not get pity, women are receiving implicit messages from their friends that they should be hooking up. No one wants to be pitied for not being able to achieve something that is getting praise, so women may feel that they have to have hookup narratives to be respected in some groups.

(V) Freedom

Most of the women mentioned the freedom they experienced in relation to dating as a positive component to hookups. Traditionally, women have preferred dating relationships to casual hookups, especially when compared to men (Bradshaw et al., 2010). However, most of the women in this study described several positive features to the lack of commitment in hookups. This theme includes two subthemes: independence and physical without emotions.

Independence. Women reported enjoying the lack of responsibility for someone else and the freedom to explore their own desires without being attached to another person.

But then you don't have to develop a relationship with anyone and you can go do anything you want to do at that time. (Polly)

And there are times when people, or myself, are like attracted to someone and want to hook up with them but are not attracted enough to date them and have them be a pretty strong role in my life. (Audrey)

So I guess wanting to be with someone without having that attachment is a freeing thing. That you can just be with someone and have that be an experience you had and just kind of move on. (Kara)

These feelings are in opposition to the finding that women seek men out who are willing to invest in them (Townsend & Wesserman, 1997). By remaining independent, they are defying this norm and acting more like what is expected from men. The women were very excited by the

independence that hookups afforded them and the ability to remain unattached while also having fun.

Another possibility as part of this independence is the ability for the women to explore what they want out of sex and relationships. Having hookups allows them to learn what it is that they like while remaining independent and free to keep searching in the process.

Hookups I would say because you're in college and you're not going to marry the person right now. It's so you can meet different people and so when you do have a serious relationship you know what you're looking for and what you want in a boyfriend or girlfriend. If you hookup with one person and there's qualities you don't like you'll try to avoid that for your next situation. (Liz)

As Liz demonstrates, college is sometimes seen as a time to remain free in order to discover what a woman likes and does not like. Hookups are often short-term encounters and the lack of attachment to a partner makes it easier for the women to move on and have new experiences until they are ready to commit.

Physical without emotions. This subtheme also goes against previous literature on women's desires. Research has found that even when women actively seek casual sexual relationships they still have difficulty separating out the emotional component and often end up unhappy (Townsend & Wasserman, 2011). Most of the women in this study, however, found the separation of emotions from physical pleasure to be positive.

It's fun to have all the physical things, but without the emotional. You don't have to worry about it affecting your life or feeling sad about someone not liking you back.

(Samantha)

You don't have to talk to the person everyday and make them grumpy if you don't. You don't have to talk to them about feelings or anything. (Ana)

These responses provide a new understanding of how some women see casual sex. Instead of seeing casual sex as a means to a dating relationship, some of these women see it as purely physical and good because there is no emotional pressure. Even though the lack of emotional connection was a positive for most women, there were a few cases where emotional attachments caused problems.

I have been on and off with a fraternity boy for a very long time - like over a year or almost a year – or something along those lines. And, like he's the only person since my last relationship on this campus that I did want something from and it was a nightmare.

(Caroline)

As Caroline demonstrated, hookups can develop emotional components that lead to a “nightmare” for the women to try and sort out. She also mentioned later that she did not always want to share her stories with her friends because they worried about her emotional attachment to this particular hookup. Although Caroline was not the norm in this group of women, her story does reflect the trouble that some studies have found wherein women become too attached and end up hurt (Townsend & Wasserman, 2011).

Thematic Analysis Conclusions

The five themes identified above encompass the ways that these women explain and understand their involvement in the college's hookup culture and their own hookup narratives. Most of the themes showcase the positive experience women have themselves during hookups and the positive reactions that women receive from friends when discussing hookups. There is an overall pattern of happiness and friendship that is created and cultivated through the telling of

these stories. Having hookups is a freeing, independent experience that women can then go on to tell their friends about and bond over the shared experiences and the excitement of sharing fun experiences.

There are, however, some negatives that include pressure from friends to divulge information and the potential for status concerns to play a role in hookup decisions and willingness to share the stories. Some women believe that hookups can be competitive and can lead to bragging and jealousy, but most women believe that experiencing hookups and being able to share their stories has been a way to explore their desires and also bond with their friends. Instead of hiding their desires because of the stigmas that come with breaking the double standard, these women have found solace in their friendships where they can be open and advise one another in a safe space.

Case Study: Julia's Story. "I'm a junior in college and I haven't had sex yet, which I think is atypical."

Julia's story was characterized by what she felt was an unconventional approach to sex in college. Whereas other women were comfortable experiencing and living hookup culture, she felt uncomfortable having physical experiences outside of an emotional relationship. She did engage in hookups, but unlike the other participants, she did not have sexual intercourse (and was a virgin). Some of her reasons for talking about hookups were similar to the other nine women, but she also expressed reservations, and experiences that were different in sometimes very interesting ways.

Like the other women, Julia mentioned that she enjoyed receiving advice from her friends. Unlike the others though, she was mostly concerned with getting lessons from women with more experience who could help her understand what happened and what she needs to do.

It's more a sounding board to help process the information and help digest everything. If it's something that's new, it's like "this is what happened, now what?" or "is this supposed to happen?" or "How do I deal with this?" and "How do I go on further?" It helps me digest the information.

Getting advice from more knowledgeable and experienced peers was supported by another study where older peers were contacted for sex related advice (Powell, 2008). Julia's peers were the same age, but followed what she believed to be a more typical pattern of hookups for her age and were therefore seen as having more expertise.

She also saw the bonding potential in sharing stories and how these stories can make a group closer than before.

I'd say to a certain degree it's reaffirming. To a certain degree it's a bonding experience and a commonality, or increasing a commonality that maybe wasn't as strong of a tie before.

Fortunately, while Julia was aware of the potential positive connections that could be made with friends, she was also hesitant to fully enter into the hookup culture that she considered the norm. She felt that she could not separate the emotional components of a hookup from the physical, so having hookups could be damaging to her sense of wellbeing. She understood what hookups were supposed to be, but unlike many of the other women, she did not see the detachment of emotions as a positive factor.

I know personally I tend to attach a lot of emotional meanings to things, so for me I think another reason I'm more reserved about hooking up is because I know I would have a hard time isolating physical contact from anything more substantial when I know

abstractly that it's not meant in that way. And kind of seeing the divide is what makes me hesitate in the sense where I know what I'm going to do as opposed to what it means.

Julia knew that hookups were supposed to be unemotional, but she felt distanced from the culture because she was not able to separate her emotions and feel comfortable. Her belief about her own comfort level being much lower than her peers was also interesting given results from Reiber and Garcia that found that students tend to overestimate others comfort levels with hookups (2010). Julia may be more prone than the other women in the study to feel like not hooking up is atypical and therefore feel uncomfortable because she is experiencing it from the standpoint of the perceived minority.

Another way that Julia experienced the hookup culture was through subtle and not so subtle hints to what behaviors were valued and which were not. Julia mentioned that those friends, including her, who do not frequently have hookup stories to share were often treated differently in her friendship group. She claimed that occasionally there was even some teasing that occurs by those friends who have stories to tell.

Um it could be a pressure teasing, it could also be "oh have you hooked up with anyone yet?" or "what's taking so long?" But it's always given, and understood, in the context of being very lighthearted teasing.

Even though Julia said that she understood the teasing as something that was not intended to be harmful, teasing still does convey a message about what is good and what is bad. While she may not feel (or admit to feeling) hurt by the teasing, she is still being sent a message that her behavior is somehow different than what is expected. This message is further conveyed during the few times that she did have story. While not having stories caused teasing, being able to share one led to cheers and congratulations.

It's congratulatory. It's positive, happy, "good job," "it's about time" (laughs) you know stuff like that.

Just as teasing can inform someone that they are doing something wrong, receiving accolades can tell someone that they are doing something very right. Receiving praise could also be a very positive thing for Julia. It is possible that these comments are helping to reinforce a behavior that she sees as "personal growth."

I saw [hooking up] as personal growth because I broke out of my shell a little bit more. And was there any part of it that wasn't positive and if there was part of it that wasn't positive how do I address that and change it for the future?

Since Julia sees herself as atypical for her age, having hookups and being able to share her stories could be a really important step in her development as a woman. Her inquisitive nature about what to change for the future points to this being something that she wants to develop and continue, so receiving some praise for her actions could potentially be a good thing. Receiving praise has been found to motivate college students to continue and increase their initiative for personal growth (Stevic & Ward, 2008) and this praise could be good influence in Julia's own quest for growth.

General Discussion

Traditionally, hookups have been seen to benefit and be enjoyed more by men than by women (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Today, hookups are the dominant sexual experience for many college students and women are freely engaging in them and enjoying the rewards of a physical relationship without an emotional attachment. Furthermore, some women are openly discussing their experiences with friends even though these sexual experiences have a times come with the label of "slut." It appears that women are starting to adopt some of the roles typically associated

with men, even if there is still some stigma. Like the men in a study by Regan and Dreyer, women are looking at hookups and hookup narratives as something that brings status and is part of their peer norms (1999). Women are supposed to want a traditional dating relationship, but the women in this study were more interested in physical pleasure and group norms, which align more with the traditional roles for men (Regan & Dreyer, 1999). The fact that women are openly discussing and benefiting socially from hookup narratives shows some change in the sexual double standard.

The purpose of this study was to understand why some women discuss their hookups with their female friends and what benefits are associated with telling their hookups narratives. I found that there were many reasons why women chose to have and discuss hookups with their friends and in this General Discussion, I will relate those findings back to my original research questions.

RQ1: Are women engaging in hookup narratives to gain the same type of status that men are afforded for the same behavior?

Status was linked with hookup stories for most of the women and most saw some social rewards for their ability to hookup with men. For many of the women, having hookups showed that you were attractive because a guy was attracted to you. Essentially, her ability to pique someone's interest was proof that she was desirable. Women felt that they were admired by their friends for their hookup stories and in turn admired those friends who had them. A few women also believed that they could boost their status by sleeping with the right type of guy and his status would reflect back on them because of their ability to sleep with him. This shows some strategy and planning for hookups that is not usually associated with women.

For those women who had hookup narratives, some level of bragging was observed from other friends and outsiders. Many of the women indicated that they either felt that they bragged or their friends bragged occasionally about hookups. Bragging further indicates a status motive because not only is it something to talk about and have fun with, but it is also something to be proud of and hold up to other friends to show superiority. Having hookup stories therefore is a means to put you higher socially than others. Having higher numbers of sexual partners is often thought of as a status symbol for men, but these women talked about how their desirability for hookups can be indicative of status amongst their female friends too. It was not always an easy connection for them to express, but they still brought up social gains and positive effects that were awarded as a result of a hookup.

RQ 2: Do women feel it is necessary to share hookup stories in order to be part of their social groups?

Although most of the women said that they did not feel pressured to talk about hookups when explicitly asked, most of them discussed instances where they felt that their friends expected them to share their story. For some friends it was perceived as hurtful if a woman did not talk about her story with them. They felt like they were being lied to or kept out of something that is a natural part of their friendship when a woman did not immediately share her hookup story with them. Many of the women saw it as a sign of trust and true friendship if you were open about your sexual experiences. Sex is a very personal topic and sharing that with others conveyed friendship and the desire to connect with one another. This could be especially important for first years and sophomores who are still trying to form new friendships and fit in to a new environment.

Sharing hookup narratives could be a way for women to quickly connect with one

another and form strong bonds over a shared experience and the expression of trust that comes with talking. Even though the pressure was not overt, it was still lurking in many friendships. Women felt closer to those friends who they could talk to about sex and that could be reason enough for some women to share a story of their own. When other friends are bonding over hookup stories, it might be hard for these women to not feel pressure to also share one of their own in order to fit in and bond on the same level.

RQ 3: If it is expected that women talk about it, do women therefore feel pressured to engage in sexual behaviors in order to have these stories?

All of the women said that they felt in complete control of their decision to hookup and felt no pressure from their friends. I am not completely convinced that social pressure does not play a role in hookup decisions, however, as all but one of the women had hookup stories to share and therefore would not know what it is like to not have a story. It could be that because all of them are already willingly participating in the culture, they are not aware of any pressure to push them into it.

The one woman who was actually still a virgin said that she was teased, and despite saying that it was not malicious, there is still pressure in being teased and essentially told what is acceptable and what is not. None of the other women mentioned feeling teased about sex because they were already having hookups, so there is no need for a push from friends. One woman did say that she felt that her friends expected her to always have a story, which implies consistent hookups, but she was already having them on a weekly basis and thus felt that there was no pressure. It appears that these women were already doing what was expected, or were doing it more than their friends, so there was no evidence of feeling pressured to have sex.

RQ 4: Do women feel a sense of empowerment for sharing sexual stories that were once

very taboo?

The concept of empowerment was difficult for most women to verbalize, but they did mention feeling free to have and talk about hookups. The fact that most of them felt free to do so and enjoy the independence of not being part of a committed relationship points to some empowerment for women compared to the past. Even if the women in this study did not always feel empowered themselves, they felt powerful and independent as a result of their hookups. Many of them were very aware of the hookup culture in college, so the taboo nature of hookups may not be as prevalent to them because they have never seen it that way.

The term hookup itself may also contribute to the diminishing taboo nature. Hookup covers anything from kissing to sexual intercourse, so in order to be part of the hookup culture a woman does not need to have sex. A woman can still do what is expected as dictated by the perceived cultural norm, but also keep her actions ambiguous so there is not as much stigma placed on her.

Future Studies and Limitations

One limitation to the study was the homogeneity of the participants' races and potentially socio-economic status. Most of them identified as White and they attend a private school that costs a substantial amount of money. It could be that they felt more freedom to express their sexuality because of their more privileged status in society compared to other women. Although this is a limitation to understanding hookup narratives for a larger population of women, the goal of qualitative research is not generalizability so much as it is a better understanding and description of a particular situation (Schofield, 1993).

Also because I was a student at the same small college as the participants, it is possible that they concealed some of their thoughts from me. The women may have been concerned that

I would think poorly of their social group if they said certain things and thus kept information from me to preserve their image.

Finally another limitation was that I only interviewed one woman whose hookup experience was limited to making out. Julia became a case study because she differed so much from the other participants. I do not know, however, if her experiences are similar to other women with equal experience, or if she was an anomaly.

An interesting next step for this research would be to compare women who feel comfortable hooking up and those who have reservations or do not hookup at all. After seeing the differences between the nine women who were sexually active and the one that was not, it is clear that the way women view hookups is dependent on their personal experience. Going into this study, I was not aware of the differences that would come up between these different women. At this time, since there was only one woman who was a virgin, it is not clear whether these differences were due to idiosyncratic personality traits or to the more limited experience. Future studies could also look further into the differences between women who are having penetrative hookups and those who are not having penetrative hookups. It may also be interesting to get the perspective of women who are choosing not to hookup at all, especially in cases where it is not due to religious convictions. Women who do not have hookup stories because they do not feel comfortable hooking up may offer an interesting perspective on pressure and fitting in with friends who do have hookups.

It would also be valuable to look at how the same women view hooking up and hookup narratives when they first get to college and then again after they have been in school for some time. A lot of women mentioned sharing hookup stories as a bonding experience and first year women in their first few weeks of class would probably feel the most pressure to fit in and bond.

Seeing what their level of pressure is compared to those women who have developed friendships may provide some insight into how women use hookup narratives in their friendships.

Implications

This research has implications on ways to look at hookup culture on the level of small group norms. Women said they only talked about their hookups with close friends and if we want to understand this culture, we should look at how groups of friends influence one another and discuss sex and sexuality. For colleges, this could mean talking to women about sexuality in the context of close peer norms in order to influence healthy sexual choices.

In addition, this study shows that women are enjoying engaging in and talking about hookups in a way that has not been looked at before. Talking about sex and sexuality builds a sense of community for some women and being able to talk about hookups has been beneficial to their understanding of their experiences. Talking through what has happened can help women feel comfortable and proud of their sexual experiences and create a positive self-identity. It can also be a strong bonding experience, and a safe space to talk to peers and should be seen as a positive network for women.

This study does, however, point to some potential problems wherein women may feel pressured to engage in sexual activity or show interest in hookup culture when they are not comfortable with it. Feeling like you are expected to share your experiences could make some women uneasy if they do not want to share such an intimate moment with other people. College administrators should be aware of the potential pressures that women feel in their circle of friends to engage in behaviors that could be detrimental to their wellbeing if they are not ready for them.

There is also potential danger in the association between hookups and status. While hookup culture gives women the freedom to have sex outside of relationships, it is concerning that there is now a link between engaging in these behaviors and status. This could lead to some potentially dangerous consequences where women are choosing to enter into sexual relationships solely because of social status and perception, and not because of her own sexual desire or sense of agency. This behavior, then, could just be a new way for women to feel pressure to have the “right” type of sexual experience.

Overall it appears that the double standard has been altered and slackened, but is still working on some level. While the women in this study felt free to have and discuss hookups, many women still felt they had to hide their conversations from other groups. The women described a new standard that involved having hookups and gaining status while also understanding that too many hookups would give them a negative label. In fact many women may use the term hookup because its ambiguity allows them to share stories and be part of the campus culture, while keeping the actual behavior obscure so they can avoid labels (Glenn, 2001).

It appears that the new standard for women involves being aware of the right amount of hookups to have and being proud of those hookups when sharing stories with friends. While many of the women believed that sexual experiences were a matter of pride, power, and status they also admitted that some women went too far and were “sluts.” This conflicting message may be part of a new sexual standard for women where being a modern “together woman” means knowing how much and what kind of sex to have in order to be powerful without garnering a negative label (Phillips, 2000). Within a group of friends the limit seems to be greater and more positive attention is given to sexual experiences and stories, but outsiders can

be labeled and contemned more easily for the same behaviors. While the double standard has loosened in some regards, it appears that in some cases there are still limits on boundaries for women's expressions of sexuality.

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Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Age	Ethnicity/Race
Polly	22	African American
Audrey	21	White
Donna	18	White
Samantha	18	White
Ana	18	Asian/White
Julia	20	White/Biracial
Liz	19	White
Kara	18	White
Danielle	19	White
Caroline	20	White

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Social Position and Appearance	Attention and Feeling Attractive Bragging Jealousy Status
Entertainment	An Exciting Topic Friends Were Interested
Communicating Friendship	Advice/ Help Sense of Connection Bonding
Social Pressures	Expectation to Talk Campus Culture Friends' Pressure
Freedom	Independence Physical Without Emotions

Appendix

Domain 1: Background on friends' and own attitudes about sex

1. Tell me about your closest circle of female friends – what are their attitudes like around sexuality?

Would you say they are pretty traditional (having sex only in romantic relationships and keeping it private)? How do you know?

Do your friends tend to talk about sexual experiences?

2. How many of your friends do you think have had sex?

About what percentage - all of them, none of them, about half?

How do you know?

3. Do your friends think it's okay to have sex with someone you are not actually dating?

4. Tell me about your own attitudes around sexuality.

Would you say you are pretty traditional or not? What do you mean by that?

Do you tend to talk about sexual experiences?

Domain 2: Defining sexual partners, hookups, and getting details about participant's history

People have different definitions of hookups, with some people calling it a hookup when they make out with someone and other people only using the word hookup when they have sex.

1. So that I understand what you are talking about in the rest of the interview, what do you consider a hookup?

When you say you've "hooked up" with someone, what do you mean took place?

How is hooking up different than dating? Do you think that they are mutually exclusive or is hooking up sometimes a means to start a dating relationship?

Do you sometimes mean different things when you say you've hooked up? When and why. (Will follow up and probe to try to get at whether it's a useful phrase in terms of purposeful ambiguity – you don't have to be explicit, you can let other people assume it was more or less sexual than it really was.)

2. Thanks for that information, now I'd like to switch to just talking about hookups. How regularly do you have hookups?

3. What reasons do you have for hooking up rather than dating?

(Follow-ups): What are the advantages to hooking up and not dating?

What are the disadvantages to hooking up and not dating?

Is it something that you do because dates are hard to find in college?

Do you feel in control of your decision to hook-up, or is it something you do because it's consider to be the campus norm?

Did you want some of your hook-ups to become relationships, or were they strictly just casual hook-ups? Did any of your hook-ups become relationships (how?)?

Do you think you will continue to hook-up the same way you are now after school? (just having fun for now, not settling down)

Domain 3: Discussing hookups with friends

What we're most interested in is finding out about how and why people discuss their sexual encounters with their friends. So, you volunteered for this study because you have discussed a hookup with your friends before, right?

1. Tell me about one of the recent times that you discussed a hook-up with a group of your female friends.

Why did you want to talk about it with your friends?

What level of detail did you share with your friends? Did they know exactly what you did with the guy?

When did you talk about it (next morning, a week later)?

How did the conversation come up?

How long did the conversation last?

Who did most of the talking?

Did you talk to all your female friends about it, or only some? Which ones, and why?

What were you thinking and feeling as you were telling your story?

Do you feel empowered when you talk to your friends about your hook-ups?
What do you mean by that, how did it feel? Does it make you feel in control? Attractive?

Did you ever feel like you were bragging? How/why/explain.

Do you ever feel like you have to have these conversations in order to fit in with your friends? Is it expected of you to talk about your sex life? If it's expected that you'll talk about it, how does this influence your decision to hook-up?

Do you ever feel like you must embellish a story in order to keep up with the group's expectations? Do ever feel like you need to lie? (frequency and behaviors)

What were your friends' reactions? What did they say? What did their tone of voice imply to you?

How did this conversation impact your friendship with these friends?

If you're sharing a hookup story of your own, do you like it when your friends also have hookup stories to share, or do you like to be the only one with a story?

What are the benefits of telling your friends about your hookups?

What are the drawbacks of telling your friends about your hookups?

2. Tell me about one of the recent times that a friend of yours discussed a hook-up with you in a group.

Why do you think she wanted to talk about it with your friends?

What level of detail did she share with your friends? Did you know exactly what she did with the guy?

When did she talk about it (next morning, a week later)?

How did the conversation come up?

How long did the conversation last?

Who did most of the talking?

What was your reaction to hearing her story? What did you say in response?

Do you ever feel like she was bragging? (How, why, explain) Did you judge her differently because she was bragging?

How did this conversation impact your friendship with this girl?

Did you think her story was similar to yours? Can you explain how?

Are those friends that do not have hook-up stories to share treated differently? How, why, explain.

Domain 4: Gender, status, sexual experience, and talking about experiences

Research shows that when a man has a lot of sexual partners, he gains status, but when a woman has a lot of sexual partners, she loses status or is labeled a slut. But, in some friendship circles women can also gain a higher status. For instance...

1. Here at Dickinson among your friends, how does the number of people a girl has hooked up with affect her status with other women in your friendship group?

Do you yourself think more highly of a girl who has a lot of sexual partners or fewer sexual partners?

Would your judgments of her differ?

Does it matter if she was in a relationship with those guys? In love with those guys? Drunk when she hooked up? What else affects how highly you think of someone, when considering her sexual experience?

Do you think some women hookup a lot to bond with other women?

To get attention from men?

What other reasons do you think women have for hooking up, in terms of their social status here at Dickinson?

Do you think some women brag about hooking up to bond with other women?

To get attention from men?

What other reasons do you think women have for bragging about hooking up, in terms of their social status here at Dickinson?

How does it change your opinion of a girl who has a lot of sexual partners when she brags about it?

Conclusions

Is there anything else that you can tell me that can help us understand why you and your girlfriends talk about hookups with one another?

Any other reasons why you hookup instead of date?

Is there anything else about this topic in general that you'd like to share?

Do you have any questions for me?