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# Women And The Epistemologies Of Pleasure: An Analysis Of Female Sexual Appetites And Practices At Bucknell University

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**Women and the Epistemologies of Pleasure:  
An Analysis of Female Sexual Appetites and Practices at Bucknell University**

by Heather K Wakeman

An Honors Thesis in Women's and Gender Studies  
Bucknell University  
May 2013

**Women and the Epistemologies of Pleasure:  
An Analysis of Female Sexual Appetites and Practices at Bucknell University**

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## **Introduction**

### **My Own Coming to Know**

My first orgasm? It “just happened” when I was fully clothed, making out with my high school boyfriend in his basement. The TV was blaring. I remember thinking, “Wow, that felt really good!” And two minutes later I started the motions again on my own accord. I tried my best to hide my secret, personal mission towards pleasure from him. For some reason, I didn’t want him to know; it was all about me! When it transpired again, I didn’t make a noise; I didn’t know I was supposed to. I didn’t applaud his efforts. I didn’t feel the need to “return the favor,” and I didn’t collapse in ecstasy. I didn’t know how to make sense of it myself, because I didn’t even know that females could orgasm—an obvious sign of my ignorance and lack of understanding sexual pleasure. I was probably fifteen. The possible behaviors that I omitted from that experience show my ignorance to the female social scripts of performing pleasure, the phallogentric view of pleasure in a sexual experience, and even the normative ways to achieve an orgasm. It has been interesting for me to reflect on the experiences afterwards and on how I came to realize what had occurred.

Like every teenager, I took sex-education class. You would think, then, that I would have had a better understanding of sex during my adolescence, but the subject matter usually consisted of a non-judgmental, “unbiased” overview of contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, and heteronormative understandings of sexual partnership. Never did we receive instructions on how to climax or other subjects of female pleasure.

Sex was described as a vague, seemingly magical experience that we should wait for. But if we were to want to have sex we were told to “be safe.”

We talked about sex in terms of reproduction and the idea of virginity. What I got out of those conversations, and what seems to be the experience for many women as suggested by my research, was: losing your virginity is a monumental experience that breaks your hymen if it has not been broken already. If you were to have sex, you could get pregnant. To get pregnant, a man must ejaculate. To prevent pregnancy, use a barrier to block the seminal fluid from entering your uterus and to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. In summary? Sex will be painful and risky for a woman, and for sex to be sex, a man must ejaculate. Intentionally or not, girls can and should be anxious and expect pain. Guys are guaranteed pleasure.

My initial ignorance over time dissipated as I gained knowledge, but in no way does this mean that I am free from the confines of systems that produce ignorance of female sexual pleasure. I learned about the male orgasm from middle school hall gossip, but I never knew that the same thing could happen to women until I did my own research in high school. Getting to know my body as a site of sexual pleasure was and continues to be an experience that requires independent research, self-discovery and experimentation within my relationships. Having very few dependable sources when I was younger, (my mom got uncomfortable anytime I brought up kissing my boyfriend, and I didn't want my sister to “judge” me), I relied on Google. And Google-ing sexual pleasure can be pretty risky, given online predator behavior and misinformation. Through conversations with friends, which continue to be few and far between, as well as articles in *Cosmopolitan*

magazine, I have realized that I was not alone in my initial ignorance, and that many women, not just me, desire to learn more about their potential for sexual pleasure. While these sources built the foundation for my knowledge about female sexual pleasure, they have conditioned me to normative understandings of sex and pleasure. Only through concerted scholarly study have I become more aware of political and social forces that construct expectations associated with sexuality.

Inevitably, my social location has played a role in the development of both my knowledge and ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure. I am heterosexual and grew up in a middle to upper class, predominantly white, rural community. My identity is generally infused with privilege, except for the fact of being female. My religion did not prescribe values associated with sexuality. Through my familial values, I was taught to associate sex with an expression of love. Pleasure was never mentioned.

### **My Inspiration**

I am now able to recognize how the intersectionality of our identity affects our individual experiences. Oppressive social messages can be embodied; and I have become interested in the ways in which our bodies, our biological beings, cannot be separated from the social experience. My interest in women's reproductive health led me to think about the embodied experiences of sexuality, especially sexual pleasure. The seemingly objective knowledge that women receive about sex when becoming sexually aware does not appear to aid in enhancing a woman's sexual experience. Sometimes, topics are omitted, and women must rely on their own curiosity and research to become sexually

aware. This state of affairs inspired me to ask the question: “How do women navigate their bodies through gendered, social scripts of sexuality, so they can learn about sexual pleasure and fulfill their sexual appetites?”

My interest in the topic was solidified when I read Nancy Tuana’s article “Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance” (2004), which uses the example of ignorance surrounding the female orgasm to discuss how knowledge and notably also ignorance is actively socially constructed to benefit those in power. Little is understood and meager and sometimes skewed information is presented about the female orgasm and potential sites of bodily pleasure on a woman, due to the phallogocentric, dominant discourse about sex. Inspired by Tuana’s analysis, my interest in applying epistemological theory and analysis to female sexuality and our sexual pleasure in particular was piqued.

I was further inspired when I learned about Clelia Mosher, a women’s health advocate who practiced at the turn of the 20th century and surveyed women about their experiences of sexuality, sex practice and pleasure on Stanford’s campus. The first of its kind, her sex surveys proved many women were learning about pleasure from either observing farm animals or within the confines of their married lives. Surprised that not much seems to have changed in the past 100 years, I wondered if such research had ever been conducted at Bucknell. Joining Tuana’s analytical and theoretical frame with the idea of narrative accounts of college-aged women, I was moved to research how women at Bucknell come to understand their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure and how they

continue to navigate the ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure on a college campus.

### **Introduction to My Analysis**

In our society, there are both acceptable and unacceptable spaces in which conversations about sexuality and even more specifically female sexuality can take place. Prominent acceptable spaces are scientific, through academic research or in a medical field. Women are expected to keep mum about sexual pleasure; such conversations are silenced. This occurs because of the double-standard that females are held to regarding their sexuality, where women are expected to be either (good) virgins or (bad) sluts, and any discussion of their sexual practices in between is unacceptable. Furthermore, in our patriarchal society, men continue to dominate the conversations about how female sexual pleasure is understood and even created, and it is often the case that a female's understanding of sex and pleasure is also phallogentric.

Historically and up to the present our society publically ignores the importance and personal experiences of female sexual pleasure, making it difficult for any substantial discussion about female sexual pleasure to take place. This perpetuates the cycle of active constructions of both knowledge and ignorance, preventing women's sexual appetites from being understood or recognized. This limits the potential for women to make sense of their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure and fulfill their desires. Lacking in verbal affirmations and sources, women, according to my research, rely on all sorts of modes of knowledge transmission most of which are from unreliable. Women eventually become

knowledgeable but generally remain silent about their knowledge; therefore, once conversation on the subject is stimulated, women are relieved to know that they are not the only ones who have felt alone in their personal and social negotiations towards coming to understand and enact their sexual appetites that lead to sexual pleasure.

Like Nancy Tuana, I am not arguing that females cannot find out about female sexual pleasure. As she says, “Nor am I claiming that there were no discourses on the clitoris as a source of sexual pleasure in medical and popular literature until feminists and their speculums entered the scene. Indeed, one can find dozens, if not hundreds, of accounts of female orgasm resulting from this feminine seat of pleasure in texts as disparate as those written by midwives” (Tuana 2004, 211). I am instead arguing that too few conversations about female sexual pleasure take place, and in too few arenas. Also, gender politics influence sexuality, resulting in a dampening of sexual pleasure for women. When combined, there is a confluence of systems that lead to ignorance about female sexual pleasure. The silences and distortions surrounding female sexual pleasure make young women ignorant to: the possibilities of pleasure in a variety of sexual experiences that go beyond hegemonic thinking of sex; the emotions (often feelings of awkwardness, confusion, embarrassment, and disappointment) during the journey to becoming knowledgeable; the political forces that influence the construction of female sexuality; and the potential solidarity and consciousness-raising that can take place among women

Because of the de-legitimation of conversations about female pleasure, the act of raising the subject of sexual pleasure renders a woman vulnerable to shame. Moreover, it

is not just the women who are creating the silences by staying silent; the lack of positive, educational or enriching conversations involving men and women alike around ideas of female pleasure, female sexual appetites and female sexual behavior make it appear unacceptable for females to breach the subject.

My thesis provides a contemporary feminist account on the epistemological origins of sexual practices and pleasure (and lack thereof). My study employs consciousness-raising conversations about the gendered politics of sexuality and about female sexual appetites, by means of interviews and focus groups. Because feminist praxis often encompasses a cyclical process of vision, analysis, strategic practice, it is important to me that my study contributes to social change. My thesis aims to increase communication about female sexual pleasure in order to reevaluate the sources that women use to learn about sexual pleasure, and in order to revalue women's sexual pleasure itself.

In sexual encounters, female sexual pleasure is generally not accorded the same value as men's sexual pleasure. Whether because of historical, political and social forces or just the inherent differences of females and males, female sexual appetites appear to be different from that of men and their appetites are misunderstood, unacknowledged or silenced. I intentionally choose the wording of "sexual appetites," because appetites go along with tastes, preferences and cravings that may or may not be fulfilled. Additionally, the terminology of "sexual appetites" dovetails with the approach of Michele Foucault, the philosopher whose work initiated a new interdisciplinary approach to sexuality. Foucault discusses how the pursuit of pleasure in relation to a Greek understanding of



sexuality is often regulated by dietetics similar to food; subjects control and regulate their sexual appetites based on moderation (Foucault 1990). This moderation is often driven by morality, or hegemonic understandings of sexual practice that may prevent an appetite from being fulfilled. Because the sexual appetites of females are less discussed, they may go unfulfilled more often, and I view this absence of discourse as an active construction of ignorance (Tuana 2004).

My thesis explores how young women today come to know about sexual pleasure and what kinds of social messages are embedded in their sources of knowledge and sources of ignorance that affect their embodied sexual experiences. My data, drawing on individual interviews and focus group sessions with a group of female Bucknell students, demonstrates that while these students desire to understand female sexual pleasure, their quest for knowledge is limited by cultural mores and their sources of knowledge limited. Most markedly, since knowledge is not provided to them as part of their formal educational nor their family-based, religious nor moral socialization during their coming of age, they seek knowledge from invalid and often phallogentric sources.

I would like to argue that cultural mores also limit female Bucknell students' communication with female peers about their experiences of and appetites for sexual pleasure. When such communication does occur, however, my research subjects found this to be gratifying both for its knowledge production and circulation and for its revaluing of their own experiences, of their own desires for knowledge, and of sexual pleasure for women more generally.

In order to complete and support this discussion, my thesis begins with a presentation of my methodology, which I support with a discussion of feminist research and praxis models. Given the lack of gender identity diversity in my self-selected subject-pool, it is important to be aware of the fact that “woman” and “female” are used interchangeably throughout my thesis, which results from all of my participants being cis-gendered. Furthermore, since most of my participants were heterosexual, my analysis and the data which it draws from is primarily constructed around heterosexual experiences. Thus, the scholarship I selected in an effort to build an empirical base for my research most often discussed heterosexual understandings of sex and sexuality.

After discussing my methodology, I review the existing literature on the epistemology of female sexuality and more specifically female sexual pleasure. This review builds an important foundation that should be kept in mind during the discussion of my findings in the thesis. The heart of the thesis provides a close analysis of the data. In the conclusion, I return to its connection with the literatures I have reviewed.

I present and discuss the findings of my research in four chapters. Chapter 1 explores the social forces that construct the initial ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure and continue to silence female sexual appetites, perpetuating ignorance in the research participants’ experiences, as I found on Bucknell’s campus. Chapter 2 goes on to reveal that despite this ignorance, most females have come to know about their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure and in fact are quite knowledgeable. It explores the journeys towards knowledge, as well as my research participants’ have construction of meanings of pleasure. Because all of my research participants seem to have constructed a notion of

sexual pleasure that they are confident in, many appeared at first brush quite confident and assertive about their sexual appetites. Yet my examination of their narratives reveals a much more complex story of ambivalence, self-censorship and shame. Chapter 3 outlines these ambivalences, their consequences as well as the reasons for their persistence. Finally, Chapter 4 begins to hypothesize the ways that the ignorances surrounding female sexual pleasure and female sexual appetites could be eliminated. Using communication and consciousness-raising as means to address the problem, I explore the various points of entry into conversation that could and, in my view, should occur in order to allow for the fulfillment and revaluing of female sexual appetites. I conclude by arguing for cultural transformation through expanded discourse. This discourse should raise awareness about the politics of sexuality, in particular female sexuality, that affects female sexual appetites. It also should serve to educate about the multiplicity of potentials for female sexual pleasure, which would help to eliminate ignorance and give women the opportunity to make informed and confident decisions about their sexual appetites that lead to sexual pleasure.

## **Methodology**

### **Theories Behind Research**

The methods of my research are grounded in the understanding that female sexuality, female sexual experiences and female sexual pleasure are at once personal and also affected by larger social and political forces. Because my thesis looks at how women have come to know or not know about their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure, and because there is a lack of communication surrounding female sexual pleasure generally, it was important to include discourse in my research. The chosen methods involving the encouragement of discussion enabled my research participants to reflect on the sources of their knowledge in relation to their own social locations and individual attempt to find ways to communicate about their own experiences and feelings concerning the subject.

Feminist research, though multi- and inter-disciplinary, most summarily calls attention to gender inequalities that result from social institutions and their structural arrangements. The hope of feminist research is to ignite change within these fields. Additionally, the methods of feminist research often bring forward an array of voices, produced by the intersectionality of identities beyond just “woman” that have otherwise been marginalized or silenced. I recognize that with my very small and relatively homogenous pool of research participants, though, I am falling short of attending to the diversity of female identities. I am not ignoring the feminist scholarship that has come before me on female sexuality but rather applying it to my immediate field of study and to the women at Bucknell University.

Feminist research has an epistemological and methodological focus which “recognize[s] the importance of women’s lived experiences with the goal of unearthing subjugated knowledge” (Hesse-Biber 2007, 3). Taking a feminist approach, I saw the goals of my thesis to be twofold—to study the lack of knowledge and conversations about female sexual pleasure, while using my methods to raise awareness and encourage discussion, reflection and discourse that would be an intervention to this problem. I chose a qualitative, narrative research method to highlight the importance of the subjects’ voices. The personal accounts of women are utilized to build an analysis. Keeping this in mind, I will now outline how specific feminist research methodologies that support my scholarly aims.

Lykes and Coquillon (2007) argue for the importance of participatory action research as a feminist methodology. Such research often emphasizes the value of participants playing a role in the design and execution of the research’s vision, thereby minimizing the degree of hierarchy between and blurring the boundaries of the researcher and the researched. More importantly for my purposes, however, it aims to “[emphasize] subjectivity and involvement throughout the research process and [strive] for consensual validation through data collection and analysis formulated around local priorities” (298). While my participants did not contribute to the design of my research, their self-selected participation addresses and aims to change the lack of conversation and ignorance about female sexual pleasure on Bucknell’s campus. The specific research techniques employed in this study are interviews and focus groups. Feminist scholars before me have found these methods extremely effective in accentuating women’s experiences.

DeVault and Gross (2007) discuss how feminist interviewing can be practiced efficiently in order to produce effective research results. It is important for a researcher to keep in mind the power dynamic of the researcher and participant and recognize the social constructions and location of the interviewee's experiences, in order to form a proper analysis of the experience communicated by the researched. My research participants and I are both students at Bucknell; we share our social location in this regard. I hoped that students would be more willing to discuss personal experiences of sexuality with a peer because of the relative lack of power differential. Also, interviewing as a technique allows for the experiences of women to be heard in their own voices. Because I am extrapolating their responses within the body of my thesis, it should be kept in mind that each woman's individual response is inflected by their social location (identities such as class, race, sexual orientation, etc.). In order to make generalizations about my data, I cannot always include the complete narratives. This is acceptable, I would like to argue, because thinking that each individual experience has to be looked at independently ignores the overarching common political and social forces that influence the development of women's, and specifically college women's, sexuality. Plus, I am analyzing the very sources that socially construct knowledge and ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure, and these sources cannot be separated from their political effects.

The second part of my research technique I employ is focus groups. Focus groups can function as forms of feminist praxis in two ways that are relevant to my own research. First, they provide the opportunity to "draw out opinions on a particular issue, [and] they can be useful in addressing limitations of analyses, collective experience and

silence” (Moss 2007, 378). They cause the researcher and participants to “think again” about the research topic, analysis, data collection and context of the research, because it engages all participants, including the researcher, in a collective reflection, which could result in shifting and alternative points of view (Moss 2007, 379). Second, the use of focus groups are part of a participatory action research design. I held four sessions, with the same students attending each discussion. Lykes and Coquillon (2007) assert that “researchers committed to democratic participation and emancipation seek to raise individual and collective awareness of oppressive practices in the world and organize for change” (315). This applies to the design of my focus groups, in that trusting relationships were formed over the course of the sessions, and the participants became more open and honest about their experiences over time. Because of this trust, the participants acknowledged accomplishing a sense of solidarity. As the conversations deepened, the problem of ignorance about female sexual pleasure came to light, as well as addressed through group consciousness-raising, education on sexual pleasure, and strategizing for change.

## **Design**

After conducting a review of the relevant theoretical, empirical and methodological literature, I used specific data collection methods: individual interviews and focus groups. This approach was grounded in the assumption that the literature review and two data collection methods complemented one another. My literature review built a theoretical and empirical foundation of epistemology and female sexuality. It not

only aided in my formation of interview and discussion topics, but it also served as background knowledge, history, discourse and theories that apply to the experiences of modern female sexuality and women's coming to points of knowledge or ignorance on the topic of sexual pleasure. The interviews provided an initial account of epistemological knowledge and ignorance and women's understandings and experiences of sexuality and sexual pleasure. The focus groups filled in the gaps of these discussions and allowed for the participants to contribute to a critique of the forces behind the knowledge and ignorance that surround female sexual pleasure.

Because my research involved human participants, all of my methods were approved by the University Institutional Review Board. The sensitivity of the subject matter required that I practice measures that would ensure confidentiality during my interviews and attempt to preserve confidentiality, to the best of my ability given the nature of focus groups, during my focus group sessions.

I conducted 10 interviews with 10 different female Bucknell students. My participants were college aged, with a few non-traditional college aged students. Throughout my thesis I refer to the as "Interviewees." The following table outlines their basic, self-reported identities:



**Table 1: Interview Participants**

	<b>Class Year</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>
<b>Interviewee 1</b>	2016	Straight	White
<b>Interviewee 2</b>	2013	Open-Ended Straight	White
<b>Interviewee 3</b>	2013	Heterosexual	White
<b>Interviewee 4</b>	2014	Heterosexual	Caucasian
<b>Interviewee 5</b>	2013	Heterosexual	White
<b>Interviewee 6</b>	2015	Straight	Asian
<b>Interviewee 7</b>	2016	Straight	White
<b>Interviewee 8</b>	2014	Straight	Caucasian
<b>Interviewee 9</b>	2015	Bisexual	Caucasian
<b>Interviewee 10</b>	2013	Straight	White

The students contacted me (via e-mail) to set on a mutually agreed time to conduct the interviews, which were advertised on Bucknell’s Message Center (an online bulletin available to all students), e-mails to diverse campus organizations and word-of-mouth. All of my lead-in questions were pre-determined. I made a few additions to the interview questions after conducting my first two interviews, because I was initially dissatisfied with the lack of information I was getting about knowledge and ignorance on Bucknell’s campus in particular. I only asked follow up questions for clarification or elaboration on a subject. Because I assumed that my subjects may not have been familiar with a subject or may not have participated in a certain behavior, I had prepared follow-

up questions that may or may not have been asked. I attempted to construct the interviews so that the first set addressed more personal views and definitions of sexuality and pleasure, and the second set went into specifics concerning behaviors, emotions, and conversations about sexuality and sexual pleasure. The motivation behind this design was to get the research participants to think about sexuality in order to feel more comfortable in opening up about their specific sexual knowledge.

All of the interviews were confidential. The interviewee was in complete control throughout the interview, as her participation was completely voluntary. Participants provided informed consent before the start of each interview. At any point, an interviewee was able to refuse to answer a question, ask for the recording device to be shut off, or withdraw from the interview. The interviews were digitally recorded and then manually transcribed. The transcription of the interview does not include any of the participants' identifying information, and I omitted parts of responses that could have identified the student as a participant in the research.

Constructing sessions based on my interview results and the previous week's focus group session, I moderated four focus group sessions. The focus group was intended to be a progressive exchange between female students on their personal accounts of coming to understand their sexuality and bodies as sites of pleasure. They also were meant to serve as a consciousness-raising device on the topic of female sexual pleasure on Bucknell's campus. To advertise for the focus group sessions, I re-contacted any interview participants who said they wanted to learn more about the focus group after their interview. I also posted on Bucknell's Message Center, sent e-mails to diverse

student organizations, made public announcements in Women’s and Gender Studies affiliated classes and sent personal e-mails to students who had been involved in reading groups associated with female sexuality. The ability to participate in all four focus group sessions was a requirement, but because of voluntary participation, I could not control for this completely. During the first focus group, I had six participants and by the second I had seven. The rest of the sessions varied with the number of participants due to personal conflicts.

My focus group participants were college age, with a few non-traditional college aged students. Here is a table showing the self-reported identities of the focus group participants, whom I refer to as “Focus Group Participants” throughout my thesis:

**Table 2: Focus Group Participants**

	<b>Class Year</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>
<b>Participant 1</b>	2013	Straight	Not reported
<b>Participant 2</b>	2014	Straight/Questioning	White
<b>Participant 3</b>	2013	Bisexual	Biracial/Mixed Ethnic
<b>Participant 4</b>	2016	Straight	White
<b>Participant 5</b>	2013	Straight	White
<b>Participant 6</b>	2014	Straight	White
<b>Participant 7</b>	2014	Bisexual/Queer	White

Because of the nature of the focus group, confidentiality could not be guaranteed. I had all participants sign a non-legally binding non-disclose form to help create a sense of a

safe-space. Conversation topics were generated based on my initial analysis of my interviews. I also asked the focus group participants to suggest topics that they wanted to cover, because their satisfaction in the experience was important to me. The focus group sessions were digitally recorded and then manually transcribed. I omitted any information from the transcriptions that could identify someone as a participant in my study.

Once I collected all of the data, I used a coding system to interpret it. At first, I brainstormed a list of topics that seemed to reappear in the research. I read my transcriptions for this list and narrowed down my coding list, which helped me to devise a thesis statement and individual chapters. Once I structured and outlined the chapters, I placed applicable codes within the outline and reread and highlighted the transcriptions based on these specific codes.

I used narrative analysis to form the conclusions that I have, which combined with a theoretical foundation to support my data, allows for more generalizability. Of course, feminist scholarship guides me to understand that it is impossible to generalize the experiences of all women, especially from a self-selected, non-diverse, small research pool. Because of the nature of my research as well as the location, there are certain limitations to my analysis to be aware of. While every woman has her own individual sexual appetites, I cannot make generalizations based on these preferences and instead have to look at how social location affects the development of these appetites and the constructions of my research participants' sexualities. Because of my small selection pool, this generalization is yet harder to achieve, not only because the participants (due to self-selection) may be representative of unusually knowledgeable and sexually

liberated group of women (Catania et al 1999, as cited in Wiederman 1999, 64), but also because of the relative lack of diversity on Bucknell's campus.

The national unrepresentative sexual experience levels of college students generally makes it likely that my research participants were more knowledgeable than national average assuming that degree of experience correlates with degree of knowledge about sexual pleasure. Those who are ignorant may not have believed that they were qualified to participate in a study about the knowledge of sexual pleasure, even though I never explicitly said this. Discussing sexual pleasure, especially as a female, may also be considered non-traditional, so my participants' comfort is not representative of all women's comfort with discussing aspects of sexuality. For this reason, I seek to raise awareness about the potential benefits of conversation based on the experiences of my research participants.

Second, the location of the research, Bucknell University, constitute another potential bias. Bucknell is a small, liberal arts school known for its "work hard, play hard" attitude. The majority of the student body participates in Greek life. The campus is characterized by a lack of racial and ethnic diversity, as well as religious and cultural diversity. Marginalization of international students, racial and ethnic and other minorities on campus is frequently cited. Because of the lack of diversity, it is harder to analyze about how the intersectionality of identities affect the construction of sexualities. Going into my research, I knew finding a diverse population would be challenging and unpacking all of the effects of social location on sexuality would be complex, so I decided to limit my analysis to the identity factors of gender, sexual orientation, and race

and ethnicity (where possible), keeping in mind that experiences also differ on an individual basis. Also, parties dominate Bucknell's social scene. These parties, as well as the gender segregation and inequality, and a hook-up, which includes casual sexual encounters, all may affect both understandings and practices of sexual pleasure (and its absence). While my research participants came from somewhat dissimilar backgrounds with varying individual experiences, Bucknell establishes its own set of institutional and social norms, which can make the development of sexuality even more complex. In fact, because of this, Bucknell's campus can be regarded as an environment conducive to consciousness-raising.

I use the accounts of women found throughout my research to cultivate a discussion about female sexual pleasure that could continue to take place. I am not generalizing the experiences of all women, but instead making heard the voices of a certain population of Bucknell women in order to raise awareness about and support the increase of female sexual pleasure, while reducing the ignorance about it that permeates our society and more specifically Bucknell's campus. Through this discussion, one can see potential ways to help eliminate ignorance and critically evaluate the sources of knowledge and the political and social systems at play that affect this knowledge based on a woman's experiences.

## **Review of Literature**

My thesis is one of many contributions to the evolving interdisciplinary conversation about female sexuality. Many scholars have discussed female sexuality, coming of age and sexual awareness, and the history of modes of thought about female sexual practice and desire, as well as how these things affect pleasure. In this review of literature, I will first acknowledge the scholarship with which my own work resonates and then discuss what sets my work apart. I will then outline the theories of epistemology, female sexuality and female sexual pleasure that have inspired and played a role in my analysis and informed the conclusions that I have made.

I am aware of two master's theses that utilized similar methodologies to my own research, as well as discuss how women build self-awareness, and conceptualize and express their sexuality. Caitlin Pittel (1999) conducted 10 empirical interviews with females aged 25-35, asking them to reflect on the adolescent experiences and how these experiences were influential in forming their sexual sense of self. From a developmental psychology background, Pittel discusses how social factors, education, family and various life-courses often challenge women to negotiate contradicting messages during the development of their sexuality. These factors lead to the women feeling a multiplicity of emotions and taking a variety of standpoints when expressing their sexuality or asserting their desires that lead to physical and emotional pleasure.

In the second thesis, Laura Barbour (2008) researched how Canadian women construct their sexualities and enact sexual agency from adolescence through adulthood.

First building an empirical foundation rooted in scholarship that examines correlations of experiences and fulfillment of pleasure, Barbour sets the stage for analyzing a woman's enjoyment during a sexual experience. Using data drawn from interviews and focus groups with women aged 18-24, Barbour concludes that the social constructions of femininity (and inequality between the genders), social constructions of female sexuality as well as a woman's education on sexual health—whether that education takes place in class or among peers—all make it harder for women to fulfill and be assertive about their desires and entitlement of pleasure in a sexual encounter. As a result, there is often inequality of sexual enjoyment within heterosexual relationships.

Some women can move beyond these messages and resultant inequality, and in contemporary culture many women celebrate the fact that they are able to express their sexual appetites in order to fulfill them. Breanne Fahs (2011) is one scholar who explores the “liberation” of female sexuality and female sexual pleasure. Through interviews and their analysis, she concludes that even though knowledge and freedom of female sexual expression including pleasure exist, a huge influence of gendered scripts exists within sex, as well as empowering and disempowering messages that females must negotiate. I would argue that these negotiations aid in the construction of ignorance of what could be a more complete understanding of female sexuality, in particular female sexual appetites and female sexual pleasure.

Much of the relevant literature makes an implicit or explicit argument that the expression of female sexuality leads to a performance of gender roles in a sexual encounter, which ultimately results in inequality in a sexual encounter that mirrors



society. Sanchez, Crocker and Boike (2005) argue that a higher investment in gender norms leads to a reduction in women's sexual pleasure because of the association of femininity with low self-esteem and the tendency to seek the approval of others, in this case sexual partners. When considering stereotyped descriptions of female gender norms, one can see how this most often includes passivity, emotionality, nurturance or motherhood. If these norms carry over into a sexual encounter, the expression of sexuality for a female is skewed to emphasize the woman being an object of desire, valuing romantic connections and intimacy, as well as having sex in order to reproduce. Many argue that sexuality is a biological drive, but the social interactions within a sexual encounter complicate this argument. Drawing on feminist theory and sex research, Jackson, Stevi and Scott (2007) shine light on the fact that seemingly objective, natural or essential embodied experiences of pleasure are in fact social experiences. They argue that interactionism, sensation and perception are all influenced by history, place and culture; therefore, experiences of sex cannot be deemed "pre-social" or "supra-social." Because of this, there are discursive and narrative scripts for sex and orgasms, creating a gendered performance of sex and pleasure.

This scholarship on the social and cultural construction of sexuality and sexual pleasure informs my thesis. From this work, one can see how a woman's sexual experience, particularly in a heterosexual encounter, is complicated with gender norms, which causes a socially constructed inequality and possible devaluing of a female's experience and pleasure within a sexual experience. These works draw from theorists who have previously analyzed the gendered nature of sources of knowledge as well as the

socially constructed messages and understandings of female sexuality. Some of these scholars used interviews to explore narrative accounts of the experiences of female sexuality but what remain unexamined are the epistemological sources (or lack of) concerning female sexual pleasure.

What sets my thesis apart from the existing literature is its focus not only on the gendered nature of knowledge about women's sexuality but the gendered process of ignorance, in other words of how ignorance is generated and maintained (even as some women are able to overcome the disempowering messages or lack of reliable sources concerning female sexual pleasure). It looks at how these factors play out in the actual narrative accounts of sexual experiences. My thesis brings the discussion into the twenty-first century and onto a college campus. Numerous scholars have investigated the conversations that do and do not take place about sex among college-aged participants, but this has not been carried out recently at Bucknell, especially in relation to sexual pleasure. Furthermore, the research before me was usually facilitated by academics who were older and of greater authority than the selection pool. As a female peer analyzing the narrative accounts that other women students use to describe their awareness or unawareness of their sexual appetites and definitions of pleasure through a feminist and epistemological lens, I am able to make a unique contribution to the contemporary discussion of female sexuality.

## **Epistemology of Ignorance and Knowledge**

Epistemology, put simply, is the study of how we know what we know. A philosophical field, it analyzes the methodologies, questions of objectivity, the use of reasoning, and related matters to show how knowledge is constructed. There ranges of epistemological theory and ways of making sense of knowledge production stretch beyond the scope of this paper, and in particular on how gender influences how and what we come to know.

Stanford's Encyclopedia of Philosophy describes feminist epistemology as a field that analyzes "how the norms and practices of knowledge production affect the lives of women and are implicated in systems of oppression" (Grasswick 2006). Like any type of feminism, there are various ways in approaching feminist epistemology. The theories, practices and strategies for change that come out of analyzing knowledge production vary, but it appears that most feminist scholars see knowledge production as a social experience influenced by race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality. Living in a patriarchal society, one can see how the experience of understanding and knowing may differ on the basis of gender. Males, especially elite males, hold disproportionate power to produce, educate and transmit knowledge that they deem relevant; therefore, it is important to analyze who benefits from the transmission of certain understandings. A small number of men hold the most powerful roles in our society; consequently the knowledge that is actively produced socially aligns in order to benefit those in power.

Just as knowledge is actively constructed, it follows that ignorance is, as well, although this is less commonly recognized. A philosopher who is at the forefront of

thinking about the construction of ignorance, and whose work inspired my own study, is Nancy Tuana. In her article “Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance,” Tuana (2004) unpacks the historical unfolding of ignorance about the female orgasm. Using a deconstructive epistemological approach and the example of the orgasm, she reveals that sexual knowledge (and ignorance) is socially constructed to benefit those in power (men as a class). Patriarchal relations and stereotyped women’s social roles, such as motherhood and the notion that women are passive, help to produce what is considered legitimate and relevant knowledge in a sexual experience. As a result, many aspects of a female’s sexual experience are left undisclosed and incorrectly characterized, resulting in ignorance.

Sex for women in this West has been framed around reproduction, while sex for men means pleasure (Tuana 2004, 218). On a female body, most people are aware of the uterus, ovaries and menstruation, which shows the cultural understanding that a female body is a site of reproduction not sexual pleasure. Moreover, she points out that both sexes know more about the penis than the vagina or clitoris (Tuana 2004, 198). Social values and expectations of female sexuality on female bodies are projected through anatomical, seemingly objective texts and pictures. But the clitoris is often displayed as a “nub of flesh” and the vagina is referred to as interior (Tuana 2004, 210), placing the female in a passive, often objectified and undervalued role as compared to the knowledge and understanding of the penis and a male’s role. This problem is perpetuated, because women are not usually seen as pursuers of physical pleasure. With limited understanding

and even less public acknowledgement of the multiple ways women can experience sexual pleasure, ignorance persists.

Using her understanding of the epistemology of ignorance, Tuana reveals how the women's health movement (1970s-1980s) was a time period that sought to "[uncover] the ways women's bodies had been ignored, to [examine] knowledge that had been withheld from women and certain groups of men, to [reclaim] knowledges that had been denied or suppressed, and to [develop] new knowledge freed from the confines of traditional frameworks" (Tuana, 2006, 17). Yet my research demonstrates that ignorance still exists today. My research is motivated by the desire to understand this ignorance. The purpose of my thesis is to apply Tuana's argument on the social constructions of knowledge and ignorance via my investigations of the ways in which women at Bucknell have come to know or not know about their sexuality as it relates to pleasure and sexual practice. By analyzing the constructions of knowledge and ignorance, I simultaneously bring to light women's sexual appetites that may have previously been suppressed in discourse as well as in practice.

Sexuality, though, is not only a way of knowing (and categorizing); rather, it also encompasses behavior. Alessandra Tanesini (1999) engages German philosopher Martin Heidegger's epistemological account, showing how one feminist epistemological question is how practical knowledge, or knowledge that results in behaviors and actions, represents or embodies theoretically represented ways of knowing (12). She says that women's knowledge is most often associated with practical knowledge, thus considered second rate, because it is the application of knowledge rather than the initial

understanding or insight (12). Using a feminist lens, Tanesini argues that human performances or actions are socially instituted because of the active construction of knowledge in a social world (13). Through “linguistic tools” or “assertions” of knowledge, usually by those in power, comes authority, and the more authority is given to that particular assertion the more someone else *practices* it (14). In relation to these actions, Tanesini argues that a social practice such as a sport is “a nexus of many interrelated performances. They include many actions which are classified in terms of their significance or purpose...People learn what is appropriate to do, in accordance with the practice, in given circumstances” (13). Because these behaviors perpetuate the assertion, the validity of the assertion may or may not be correct, but the social actions endure.

I argue that female sexuality and sexual behavior and experiences can be recognized on the same grounds. The assertions, and thus the behavior, surrounding sexual pleasure have traditionally been heteronormative, phallogentric, and disproportionately beneficial for males. If those in power are making assertions about the knowledge surrounding sex and pleasure, and these assertions are given more authority as normative ways of sex are practiced, then any other understandings will remain marginalized. This epistemological basis exemplifies how ideas of socially proper and improper sex are habituated and how the scripts of sex, and thus ignorance, endure, despite the apparent freedom of sexual expression. Furthermore, sexual experiences may not attain their full potential or match female sexual appetites if those appetites differ from the normative understandings of sex.

In summary, using Tanesini's assertion that, "in order to understand a practice we need to study who engages in it, what sort of people are allowed to do so and why...One of the tasks of the epistemologist is to evaluate which exclusions from practices are acceptable and which are not" (17). This discussion of the construction of knowledge is applicable to my analysis of the narrative accounts of my research participants. Females have been excluded from some but expected to maintain other sexual roles, practices and scripts. What remains in question is why female pleasure is not understood, acknowledged or valued as much as that of men in sexual experiences.

It is important to distinguish female ways of coming to understand sexuality as distinct from those of males, not only because of how this knowledge is constructed, but also in relation to the insights of standpoint theory. Standpoint theory has its origins in Marxist traditions, which can apply to various marginalized identities such as class, but, for the importance of this paper, I will be focusing on feminist standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint theory argues that women's understandings of the world differ from men's to the degree that their social locations vary on the basis of gender. Here, gender and sex need to be considered because as the epistemologist Nancy Harstock (1983) points out, the body lives the social experience (as cited in Tanesini 140). Social codes of sex are prescribed on the bodies, which affect embodied sexual knowledge.

In our society, males are often positioned as sexual subjects, while females find themselves in the sexual object position. In other words, the male's experience often drives the sexual encounters, for which the female and her body become instrumental. This confers privilege to the males in a heterosexual relationship. Feminist standpoint

theory posits that the socially available “standpoint” or perspective of experience often is created by the dominant group—males; therefore, a woman’s perspective is marginalized, because her own experiences might not match the hegemonic understanding of “reality”(Tanesini 138). For example, when putting an experience into words, a woman may find that the socially available conceptual framework may not align with her actual experience (Tanesini 141). In relation to the epistemology of sexual pleasure and sexual appetites, one can see that the phallogentric perspective of sexual experience would limit the possibilities of appetites that might differ for a female. Such limitation, in turn, participates in the construction of ignorance about women’s sexual appetites and pleasures. Sexual pleasure and sex itself are described and taught from a male’s perspective. Women may find that they have limited resources to make sense of, describe, or seek collective knowledge of their appetites and experiences of sexual pleasure.

If women are able to acknowledge that their experiences are in fact different from the dominant accounts of sex and pleasure, such acknowledgment could be a first step toward their empowerment as sexual subjects. Tanesini explores this possibility, suggesting that when women become aware of the disconnect between their reality and the normative portrayal of reality, their marginalized, invisible positions become visible (142). In fact, this can be seen as an opportunity of epistemological privilege. By epistemological privilege I refer to knowledge form more encompassing understandings that goes beyond just a dominant way of knowing. This type of knowledge can be beneficial for critiquing experiences of learning, in the case of a women’s standpoint



being marginalized by patriarchy (143). It is considered a privileged position because women then have various perspectives to draw upon, not just the dominant standpoint. This can be an opportunity for consciousness-raising and ultimately changes in social order, especially as it relates to a female's experience of sex and pleasure.

Not all women are the same, of course, and therefore neither are their standpoints. Women's lives are inflected with; race, class, sexuality, ethnicity and gender expression, to name what are often the most significant vectors. Because my thesis originally had to do with the embodied experiences of pleasure, my only requirement for my participants were that they were sexed female, but I do not want to make the assumption that all females have the same experiences with their bodies, especially since these understandings are influenced by social constructions of knowledge. As Tanesini argues: "Even if having a female body were a source of identical experiences for all women, we still could not derive from this a standpoint unless we assumed that these experiences, which would have a purely biological source, were crucial to being a woman" (147). Consequently, part of standpoint theory is to realize that even though valuable collective perspectives do exist, we must recognize both the individual and grouped variations of experience in order to acknowledge the value and spectrum of possibilities of the individual experience.

These experiences apply to epistemology, because each individual woman's social location, both figuratively in terms of social hierarchy and literally in terms of embodied location, inevitably affects her knowledge of sex and pleasure. An individual's

position within the community in which she was raised may affect what types of sexual knowledge or experience she was exposed to:

According to these arguments, one's perspective both shapes and sets limits on how a particularly located individual can know, at least through her own achievements. Such arguments also suggest that institutions of knowledge production that are dominated by a particular group may be influenced by the perspective of that group, without that perspective being recognized. (Grasswick)

In my own research, drawing on individual interviews, I was able to trace some of the contours of each participant's knowledge base and to consider it in light of her social locations. Such factors as where participants grew up and religious identity affected their understandings of sexual pleasure. Further, the ways in which Bucknell's institution and environment has shaped, altered or perpetuated this understanding or ignorance of sexual pleasure, appetites and behavior are also a focal topic of my study.

Particularly in the case of constructed ignorance and subjugated knowledge, the active production of knowledge and concomitant critiquing of the forces involved must involve dialogue, analysis and reflexivity with a foundational understanding of power and privilege, as well as subjectivity and objectivity (Naples 586). My methodology aligns with this strategy as well as the understanding of standpoint epistemology. Through my interviews and focus-groups, each participant was given the opportunity to reflect on and speak openly about their sexual knowledge and practice. Regardless of commonalities that can be drawn out based on social location, I cannot ignore the power of the individual experience. Using subjective self-selected discursive patterns, they not only described their own experiences of coming to know about female sexual pleasure but also

produced them dialogically. Then in the focus groups, the participants were able to theorize and form their own opinions on why certain standpoints exist that affected their individual experiences, eventually applying it to the context of Bucknell's campus. Each female had the opportunity to agree or disagree and give counterexamples to the seemingly "universal" gendered experience of sex or objective sexual education and awareness-raising. Through this consciousness-raising activity, the women in my study created knowledge informed in relation to their own subjectivities. Their personal accounts make evident the forces involved in creating standpoints and normative understandings of pleasure.

### **Theorizing Sexuality and Pleasure**

The interdisciplinary nature of sex and sexuality studies extends the discussion to myriad academic and scientific domains. In different time periods, different political and historical climates have affected the understandings of sex and more specifically female sexuality and pleasure. These forces are relevant to my analysis, in that they help me to understand the behaviors and practices of my research participants. Knowledge of these forces sets a foundation for why sex in the twenty-first century is understood as it is. Some may argue that what is constant over time is the idea of sex essentialism, the idea that sexuality exists before historical and social influences due to the nature, hormones and psyche of each individual (Rubin 1984,149). While it is futile to argue that sexuality has no biological component, because of reproduction and innate human characteristics, for the purpose of my thesis and the construction of knowledge and ignorance about

female sexuality, I focus on the historical and social factors that play a central role in even the assumed objective knowledge about female sexual pleasure.

Michele Foucault's three set volume *The History of Sexuality* explores political and religious history that influenced ideas of sex at the turn of the twentieth-century. He describes the interdisciplinary regulation of sexual behavior, criticizing the power relations in religion and the government. Even it is common to think that discussions of sex and the expression of sexuality were being repressed during this time period, Foucault makes evident that those in power were utilizing their authority to discover, control and regulate sexual behavior and even pleasure by controlling when the discussions could take place (even instigating the conversations) and what knowledge was available. Furthermore, Foucault argues that this regulation requires the sexual subject to control his or her sexuality using the guise of morality, a process of control which can be compared to the appetites for food, insofar as in both cases desires are not satisfied. His argument is one of the first of its kind to make clear the social and historical construction of what was assumed to be the natural functions of human behavior, and to outline the regulation of sexual behavior vis-à-vis social systems of power.

Public acknowledgement and discussion of sexual behavior outside of the context of marriage and reproduction became more prevalent during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The emergent academic discipline of sexology began to survey men and women about their sexual behaviors and motivations to engage in sexual activity. For example, reports about female and male sexual behavior in the last one hundred years include the Kinsey Report (1954), Human Sexual Response (1966), the Hite Report (1974) and The Social

Organization of Sexuality (1994). All of these give evidence to the practice and knowledge of sexuality and sexual pleasure for both men and women; however, they fail to address the epistemological origins of the behaviors.

The sexual revolution of the 1960's and 1970's brought a new sense of freedom of expression and practice of sexuality in particular sectors of the US populous. With the support of second wave feminism, women ignited discourse about female sexuality and gained access to more sexual consumer goods such as pornography and the pill, which combined with "free love" shifted the moral consciousness to allow their pursuit of sexual pleasure in contexts outside of marriage. During this time, *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (1969) was first published by the Boston Women's Health Collective. Including an informative, instructional and comprehensive account of female sexuality (including female sexual pleasure), this book was published in hopes of driving the public discussion and education about female sexuality, including how women can have satisfying sexual encounters. While this movement received a lot of attention—both positive and negative—and made strides towards the freedom of expression of sexuality, it is debatable how thorough and sustained the changes have been, given that education about female sexual pleasure is still not explicit or readily available, and the politics of sexuality are still complex and power-laden.

The sexual revolution was founded in the freedom of expression of sexuality, but much of its influence had to do with sexual health. While the focus on sexual health teaches, creates, and disseminates valuable knowledge about the body, it does not erase the social factors that are still at play. Gayle Rubin summarizes the biological, historical

and constructivist understanding of sexuality saying: “The body, the brain, the genitalia, and the capacity for language are necessary for human sexuality. But they do not determine its content, its experiences or its institutional forms” (1984, 149). A feminist analysis (one that encompasses a critique of power in relation to gender and sexuality) remains necessary today for analyzing the multifaceted forces that influence sex practices and the pursuit of pleasure for women (and men).

Because the current construction of knowledge and ignorance ultimately leads to understandings of and experiences of sexual appetites and pleasure that are normative, it is important for me to discuss the various feminist schools of thought regarding sexuality. Analyses of late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist approaches to this subject often describe two “camps” that appear to have opposing visions for what sex and pleasure should look like if one is to overcome oppressive social forces that influence sexual practice. These camps are frequently designated as radical feminism and libertarian feminism. Some scholars have not only analyzed and criticized the dichotomy that exists between these two poles but also have made evident the many commonalities that exist between them, ultimately concluding that a fresh stance needs to be taken when it comes to philosophizing about sex in relation to power and gender. In what follows, I will outline the debates of each camp and show how my research fills in the gaps and fulfills the visions of certain scholars that precede me.

Ann Ferguson (1984) outlines the lines of debate. In short, radical feminists prioritize egalitarian intimacy through expressions of mutual enjoyment during a sexual encounter, while libertarian feminists value the primacy of pleasure free from moral

strictures. Two points from each pole that relate to my own research are exemplified in the following side-by-side comparison of Ferguson’s interpretation of the debates:

**Table 3: Feminist Theories of Sexuality, taken from pp108-109 of Ferguson.**

	<b>Libertarian Feminism</b>	<b>Radical Feminism</b>
<b>As feminists we should reclaim control over female sexuality by:</b>	<i>demanding the right to practice whatever gives us pleasure and satisfaction.</i>	<i>by developing a concern with our own sexual priorities, which differ from men's—that is, more concern with intimacy and less with performance.</i>
<b>The ideal sexual relationship is between:</b>	<i>fully consenting, equal partners who negotiate to maximize one another's sexual pleasure and satisfaction by any means they choose. primacy of pleasure theory</i>	<i>between fully consenting, equal partners who are emotionally involved and do not participate in polarized roles.</i>

This table shows how what seems to be inherently problematic with sex is the question of power. While libertarian feminists seek to settle the sex and power debate by letting everyone practice what they so choose, radical feminists say that patriarchy needs to be eliminated, and female needs, which are different from those of men, must be acknowledged in order to prevent unequal power dynamics in sexual relationships. The libertarians fail to recognize that sex and the knowledge surrounding sex are inextricably linked with patriarchy and socialized norms that prevents freedom of sexual expression from being conducive in our society, while the radical feminists do not recognize the legitimacy of anyone who finds pleasure *from* the power and gender inequalities;

therefore, an alternative stance must be explored. The gaps between these stances themselves have epistemological consequences including the construction of ignorance. The work of Gayle Rubin and Linda LeMoncheck help move us beyond this impasse.

Rubin argues that sexuality has its own politics. Rubin's argument is founded in the belief that sex behavior is inseparable from social organization, which includes political, economic, medical, and other spheres. It is problematic to assume, like most people do, that sexuality's only influences are gender relations. The politics surrounding sexuality have been used as an oppressive force through the creation of a "sexual value system" or a sex hierarchy where sexual behaviors are scrutinized from various disciplines that move beyond just gender (154). There is a spectrum of "good" sex and "bad" sex, and both men and women can be marginalized as a result of their sex practices. Rubin would be considered a libertarian feminist, in that she argues that society needs to stop policing sexual activity and practice what gives individuals sexual pleasure. While influential in arguing that sex should not be policed, or people should not be persecuted based on their sexual practices, Rubin falls short in her argument, because she fails to recognize the politics of gender, in particular of women, who are influenced by oppressive systems of patriarchy when constructing their sexuality and sexual preferences. The freedom of expression of sexuality, especially for women, is not that simple. Linda LeMoncheck is a feminist philosopher of sex who helps to broaden the picture of sexual politics.

LeMoncheck also favors a move beyond the radical and libertarian divide on female sexuality and more specifically female sexual desire and pleasure. She tries to



reconcile such dualistic understandings of oppression in regard to female sexuality by advocating for a "view from somewhere different." This philosophy acknowledges that social locations and their complex intersectionality affect the construction of sexuality. Women in particular have different experiences to the degree that the politics of their social location affect the development of their individual desires; therefore, consciousness-raising about the commonalities in these systems needs to take place in order for women to recognize the role they have played in the construction of their individual sexual appetites. This view does not dictate what is "good" sex and "bad" sex, but rather it encourages discussion and practice, "conversation and collaboration," to challenge all social forces that negatively influence expressions of female sexuality (218). One must go beyond mere "listening" to such perspectives, but act, advocate and try to transform the common institutions that subjugate them, so that each woman's individual experience of sexuality, sexual appetites and sexual pleasure can be actualized. LeMoncheck's "view from somewhere different" is rooted in a recognition that the epistemological variation in female sexualities based on the particulars of identity (ultimately leading to individual desires), calls for awareness-raising of these differences (as well as commonalities) to enhance women's sexual experiences, more generally.

From the perspectives of Rubin and LeMoncheck taken together, one can see that a more encompassing analysis of sexuality needs to be conducted in order to transform the epistemological barriers of female sexual pleasure and their consequences. Indeed, entrenchment in one feminist camp or the other is itself a source of ignorance constraining women's expressions of sexuality and pleasure. An optimal approach in

coming to understand sexuality needs to recognize the complexity of the historical and contemporary construction of female sexuality, as well their effects on individual women's experiences. Rubin proposes the destruction of moral hierarchies of sexuality, while LeMoncheck calls discussion into action; the two would agree that this discussion needs to be more open to critiquing forces that go beyond gender normings only. The end goal is to not develop a new politics of sexuality, not to construct norms of good and bad sex, not to define female sexuality, but instead to accept that women have individual sexual preferences that are not only personal tastes but are also rooted in social locations where political forces including patriarchal forces, influence the construction of their sexuality. Recognizing the contexts of women's different social locations as well as their individual preferences is important, so long as one keeps in mind that common political forces are at play. Through conversations about these forces and the powers that aid in the construction of ignorance, in particular around female sexual pleasure, as well as active conversations about personal sexual appetites, women can make more informed choices about their sexuality and decide on what gives them pleasure.

By bringing together different women's perspectives in my thesis, I am initiating this very epistemological collaboration in order to provide broader perspectives on the actual sexual experiences of women. While the overarching theme of female sexuality is important to my thesis, my work focuses primarily on sexual pleasure. I am, thereby, only opening up one dimension of the debate; yet in the process various cultural transformations can occur. Through the focus group discussions, actual epistemological collaboration commenced as the research participants discussed their similarities and

differences concerning their knowledge and experience of sexual pleasure. This awareness raising helps to eliminate ignorance and enact change around the politics of pleasure.

## **Chapter 1: The Construction of Ignorance Around Female Sexual Pleasure**

As is true with any sort of knowledge, there was a moment in which my research subjects did not know about sexual pleasure, but my research has shown that it is hard for women to find out about sexual pleasure because of the taboo against talking about sexuality in general, and women's sexual pleasure in particular. For women, a lack of explicit education and reliable or respected sources at the stage that they are becoming sexually aware contributes to this difficulty. Even though my research participants eventually did find out about their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure, their journeys to, and continued exploration of, coming to understand sexual pleasure were, and still are, filled with confusion, shame, guilt and consequently the suppression of discourse. In this chapter, I would like to look at the details that contributed to the ongoing trajectory of not knowing and the reasons why so many of my research participants had to rely on their own curiosity or sheer experience to learn. In this chapter, I will outline the factors that contribute to the construction of ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure on the site of a woman's body, both its initial construction and the factors that prolong such ignorance today.

Failing to recognize that our knowledge is socially curated to benefit those in power leaves marginalized populations struggling to understand and make sense of their own experiences. The absence of knowledge is not a mere absence but a construction of ignorance. In other words, ignorance has its own history. Thus, ignorance is not a mere lack of knowledge but rather a form of epistemology itself. As Tuana says:

We must also understand the practices that account for *not* knowing, that is, our *lack* of knowledge about a phenomena or, in some cases, an account of the practices that resulted in a group *unlearning* what was once a realm of knowledge. In other words, those who would strive to understand how we know must also develop epistemologies of ignorance. (2004, 195)

Such an epistemology of ignorance is the subject of this chapter. An examination of social, familial, religious and institutional factors in life-courses that caused my research participants to not know or continue to question their understandings and experiences of sexual pleasure facilitates the delineation of epistemological ignorance. Because knowledge is produced by overlapping and complex social systems, there are not only different factors that produce ignorance but also ways to overcome ignorance and gain the knowledge that my research participants sought.

Many women voiced that at one point they were unaware of female sexual pleasure. In our culture, we all start out this way, but it is important to recognize the gendered nature of the construction of ignorance in order to explore the reasons that this might be longer lasting for women. For example, before entering into a sexual encounter, most of my research subjects were not aware that women had the potential to orgasm, but they knew that men could: three women during Focus Group 2 said that they didn't know women could orgasm and two interview participants expressed the same ignorance. Interviewee 8, when asked how she learned about the female orgasm said, "I am actually not sure...I know that I definitely learned about it after the male orgasm, because I remember thinking to myself that I didn't realize that women could orgasm the same way men did." Similarly, although *Cosmopolitan Magazine* taught Interviewee 10 to expect

sexual pleasure in a relationship, she didn't realize that sexual pleasure for women included orgasming:

**How did you learn about the female orgasm?**

Probably Cosmo and seeing movies and TV shows or whatever.

**But earlier you said you didn't really know about it until college?**

I had never had one until college. Yeah! Before, at your naïvest point about sex you know that it's supposed to feel good, but I never necessarily thought about there being a beginning and an end, but now I definitely think of it as there being a finite end.

**And do you think that same thought for men as for women in heterosexual sex?**

No, because it is a little more obvious when a man finishes than a woman. I think I always knew that that was there.

Interviewee 10's narration and the other participants' statements about the lack of knowledge or expectation of female orgasm during a sexual experience are important to my research, because it shows how the female orgasm seems to be less discussed or taught. When thinking about the value of a female's sexual pleasure in a sexual encounter with a male, it could be a source for the initial devaluing of the woman's sexual pleasure, because if there is no knowledge or expectation, but an awareness of a male orgasm, then the idea of fulfillment might be skewed. The knowledge surrounding a female orgasm appears to be acquired differently from the knowledge of male orgasms, if not neglected, aiding in the ignorance that my initial research question was motivated by. Reasons for this ignorance around the orgasm, as well as other types of sexual pleasure, will be explored later in this chapter.

Another form of ignorance surrounding the female orgasm that the research participants brought up was the "myth" of the g-spot. The g-spot has been studied and debated, promoted and debunked in many scientific and social spheres, which aids in the

construction of both knowledge and ignorance about this erogenous zone that could potentially lead to orgasm. Interviewee 3 brought this up when discussing the female orgasm: “Of course orgasm achieved through sex—I don’t know if that has an actual name, G-spot? Does that exist or is that a *Cosmopolitan* thing?” This confusion was supported during Focus Group 1 when the women debated which were more powerful, “external” or “internal” orgasms. When making their argument, many participants referenced their own sources such as class materials or mere experience, but one participant said, “I thought [the internal orgasm] didn’t exist!” Focus Group Participant 6 summarized the confusion and ignorance about this potential site of pleasure at the end of the conversation saying, “It’s amazing how we don’t know our own bodies.” These two instances exemplify how even knowledgeable women still have points of ignorance surrounding sexual pleasure that need to be analyzed. Tuana argues that the uncertainty of the g-spot and other internal sites of orgasm exists due to societal and scientific understandings of the female orgasm, which stems from the emphasis that is placed on clitoral stimulation for female sexual pleasure.

In addition to the orgasm, other forms of ignorance concerning female sexual pleasure on the body were expressed by the research participants. For example, one woman’s first experience of sexual pleasure was lying on her bed when the pressure of her mattress provided good feelings on her clitoris. Not knowing what she was doing, and continued to do after this specific incident, she thought, “I have no idea what is going on but it feels great!” A few other women shared the same experience where they just started to experiment with erogenous zones on their body and then these good feelings were later

coupled with independent research that brought a better understanding of sexual connotations with the acts. Here, the feelings of sexual pleasure preceded the embodied knowledge.

Part of the reason women don't know about the potential possibilities or sites of sexual pleasure could be a result of the messages that are conveyed about the experiences of sex, especially for women. These messages not only prevent women from exploring sexual appetites that could lead to pleasure, but they also embed sexual expectations that don't include pleasure. I will now look at the messages my research participants receive when coming to understand their sexuality and their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure. These messages include ideas about virginity, a woman's body as a site of reproduction, societal constructions of proper and improper sex and education on sexual violence. I will then critique specific sites or sources that aid in the construction of ignorance by communicating or omitting, explicitly or indirectly, messages about female sexuality.

Whether or not the idea of virginity is religiously based or not, the socially constructed value placed on virginity, especially for females, aids in the construction of ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure. With social scripts, ideas of romanticism and even anxiety surrounding losing your virginity, a woman's sexual pleasure is usually not part of the expectation. As communicated by the research participants, females are expected to protect, not express, their sexuality by withholding their virginity. Focus Group Participant 7 said she believes that this idea is sexist and causes a woman to "cage her sexuality." When female sexuality is discussed, though, most often it is associated with motherhood or reproduction.



Sex education often links sex to the idea of reproduction, which leaves little to no room for the discussion of pleasure. Many of my research participants discussed how their sex education classes were strictly anatomy based or biological, with no mention of female sexual pleasure. Interviewee 1 said, “I definitely didn’t learn about [the female orgasm] in school.” For many, the conversations that took place during their sex education were about “safe sex,” skimming over the pleasure aspect. Interviewee 2 said her sex education was: “So, here is the place where sexual pleasure happens,” while Interviewee 5 has no recollection of sexual pleasure being taught, and even if it was, she said her sexual education did not occur in a time in her life she felt like she needed it or could understand it. A counterexample to the lack of pleasure discussed in a sexual education class was expressed by Interviewee 9 who had a comprehensive “how to” class during high school, but she did not start having sex until college and has recently been looking up female sexual pleasure and orgasms on the Internet. She is unsure whether or not she has achieved an orgasm and admits that she does not know how to achieve an orgasm. It is up for debate, because of the political influence of what can be taught in schools, whether or not sex education should be more open to ideas of pleasure. Often this is because there is an anxiety surrounding children engaging in sex. After hearing the voices and grievances of women, though, who said that a more pleasure comprehensive sex education could have helped, it is clear that the gaps and silences in their sexual education aided in their construction of initial ignorance, which still has its effects today.

In the process of learning about sex, sex gets boxed into competing categories of what is “good” sex and “bad” sex. For example, Focus Group Participant 1 discussed how sex education promotes just the missionary position. She says,

There [may] be so many types of sex that we don't know [about], which could be pleasurable, but I mean in so many countries, there are [sic] only way—like the missionary position!...women [may] be hurt from that position, but they don't talk about it... Her pleasure is not important.

Here, one can see how sex education again constructs ignorance surrounding the multiplicities of ways in which to fulfill sexual appetites. There are ways to achieve pleasure that go beyond the missionary position, beyond intercourse and beyond certain partnered behaviors, but they are taboo, thus often ignored.

A few explicit messages that my research participants received that would cause ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure and instead promote expectations of pain, whether it be emotional or physical, are exemplified in the following conversations. First, Focus Group Participant 1, who grew up outside of the United States, said that when she learned about losing her virginity, she was taught that it would be a painful experience. People told her that “sex is so bad. It's so painful for women.” This made her question whether or not she even wanted to have sex. Similar messages of pain associated with sex that other research participants who grew up in the United States expressed had to do with sex and assault, rape or the physical threat of men—lessons that instill fear of getting hurt or feelings of vulnerability during sex, instead of pleasure. These messages build valuable knowledge around certain realities of sexual violence, but they

simultaneously construct ignorance insofar as they ignore the potential of pleasure for women.

Moreover, because these lessons emphasize the harmful potentials of certain types of sex, any acts associated with these behaviors are also deemed wrong. This ignorance restricts the possibilities of sexual appetites for many women. For example, Focus Group Participant 5 describes how this relates to her potential ignorance of her sexual appetites. She sometimes likes the feeling of being held down, but she said, “Some messages of bad experiences... affect how I feel about *that*. Like maybe if I didn’t associate being tied up and blind folded with being raped, maybe I would enjoy it more!” This represents how lessons about dangerous sexual behavior are potentially preventing the possibilities of pleasure. Raising awareness about sexual assault and rape is important, but if these messages are incessantly repeated, then certain potentially pleasurable acts get associated with these nonconsensual experiences, limiting the exploration of these acts within the context of consensual encounters.

But because silence is just as powerful as communication, especially from a feminist lens, it is not only important to look at what messages were communicated at a younger age but also what was omitted. Through this examination one can see how ignorance surrounding sexual pleasure is constructed and maintained. First, conversations or sources about sex may not have mentioned sexual pleasure, and second, a woman may model these sources by not talking about sexual pleasure, perpetuating ignorance.

A few research participants discussed how their sexual knowledge was taught by their parents. The research participants who brought up their parents appeared to have

varied experiences of exposure and communication concerning sexuality but little to none about sexual pleasure. Some parents were extremely conservative while others were more open. One woman discussed how she never saw her parents kiss; another said that she could ask her parents anything. Even though two participants acknowledged that their parents were very open, they each found it extremely awkward to breach the topic of pleasure; two women accepted this and said they either realized that they would just have to figure it out on their own or within the context of relationships. Additionally, Interviewee 4 said she didn't learn about female sexual pleasure from her mother, in fact telling me to "underline that shit" as I took notes during her response. Interviewee 7 said that her parents didn't *want* her to explore her sexuality and tried to shield her from sex but put her on birth control to be safe. In the cases of these women, their mothers and/or parents may have been willing to discuss aspects of female sexuality or may have even expected their daughters to be sexually active, but they never mentioned sexual pleasure. This silence aided in the construction of ignorance and can be viewed as a missed opportunity to have let these women learn about female sexual pleasure, because they all said they figured it out on their own.

Reasons that parents and children don't talk about sex were discussed in the focus group discussions, and these conversations shine more light on the construction of ignorance around female sexual pleasure. During Focus Group 2, the women talked about how our society holds true to the idea that children cannot be sexual or should remain innocent. Concurrently, this is usually the time in which adolescents are becoming sexually aware and are joking and talking about sex or even having sex with their peers.

According to Focus Group 2, this denial may exist because of the anxiety around the discussion of pleasure or sex with a child being interpreted as obscene or pornographic. Because the parents are not talking about it, the children feel shame breaching the subject. The women in the focus group hypothesized that the parents are in denial, which upset them because they said that their parents, especially their mothers probably faced the same obstacles to knowledge. Whatever the reasons may be, the lack of communication influences whether or not future communication will take place and the types of communication, especially those that tangle sex and morality, can cause ignorance about female sexuality.

Some specific morals can affect a woman becoming sexually aware and coming to understand her body as a site of sexual pleasure. These values contribute to ignorance around sexual pleasure, because they often emphasize other aspects of sexuality, such as femininity, marriage or reproduction. Religious values were discussed in one focus group, including the idea that religion prevents any discussion of sex from occurring, because sex should only occur within marriage or should be an act that is highly valued. Two of the most explicit examples of religion aiding in the construction of ignorance were Focus Group Participant 1 who grew up non-Christian, and Interviewee 4 who grew up in a conservative, religious household. Focus Group Participant 1 said:

From the country I come, [being aware of your sexuality] is taboo, that not even kids—until you get into a relationship, like you're an adult [or] after 18—it's taboo for women to know about, to even think about their bodies! They are made to feel like it is bad. It's bad! You have to cover it always...so for a really long time I did not know about it. I was always curious, but you are always sure in your mind that you cannot have it. And

you are also so sure you don't want to have it with anybody, because you don't know how it is, so you don't want to take a risk.

In her culture, even though she was curious as a child, the stigmas of not talking about it made her confused about many aspects of sexuality. She goes on to say that once she did experience sex, it was not for pleasure but it had to be in context of love. Interviewee 4 had a similar narrative account saying her background taught her that sex happened during marriage, when a husband wanted it. It also taught her that the missionary position was the most acceptable form of sex, and masturbation was a sin. These two examples show how familial religious values silence female sexuality. Women are the object of desire, there to please a man and to remain passive, even to their own sexual appetites.

To contrast these religious morals, Interviewee 7 grew up in a non-religious community and attributed the hypersexuality of her adolescent peers to the fact that no religious value was placed on sex. Whether or not pleasure resulted from this hypersexuality is questionable, but in Interviewee 7's experience, the lack of religious upbringing did not aid her coming to know about female sexual pleasure. In fact, she said that she learned about it in her current relationship. As a result, I cannot make a broad claim that religion is the cause of ignorance. One can see from this analysis that certain religious values provided specific moments of ignorance, but there are other systems at play.

Outside of religious values, social norms that are often communicated through the media aid in the construction of ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure. For example, the idea of the Madonna-whore complex, slut shaming or the cultural negative associations of females experimenting, watching porn or masturbating were all discussed

by many of my interview participants. All of these taboos or stigmas would prevent a female from seeking pleasure, possibly making her think that the pursuit of pleasure is not worth the shame. The participants discussed how certain media outlets promoted phallocentricism or romanticism. For an example of phallocentricism, Interviewee 4, when learning about orgasms, said Harlequin romance novels taught her that the male orgasm was “*the point*” of sex. In terms of romanticism, movies, TV shows and fantasy books showed many of the participants that sexuality was about romance. Because of the romantic messages that these outlets conveyed, one would think that sexual pleasure might effortlessly transcend the emotional connection, which is not the case. It establishes unachievable expectations. For example, Interviewee 3 discussed how films do not portray the awkwardness of sexual exploration, because what they do show seems perfect. Interviewee 6 discussed how because her parents did not let her out of the house besides school, she constructed her opinions of relationships from TV shows, most of which were heterosexual. As a result, she did not know any other forms of relationships, and even though she thought she was originally attracted to girls, she was influenced by these shows saying she thought the relationships were “cute.” She now openly identifies herself as heterosexual, saying that she has come to realize that sexuality is about what she wants for her future, which is a family, and in her opinion, a man can provide that. This may or may not be as a result of the lack of diverse relationships shown in the media, but it exemplifies how the qualification of relationships most often shown in the media is an active construction of ignorance. Many participants explicitly said that these media outlets distorted their understanding of female sexuality, because the narratives did

not match up with their experiences. All of these examples show how what is displayed in the media is not always the only way of understanding sexuality, especially sexual pleasure. Generally, these ideas of phallogentrism and romanticism publically affirm how female sexual pleasure is publically ignored.

No matter how aware my participants are, they discussed the ignorance that still exists due to Bucknell's socialized and institutionalized factors. The factors that contribute to a general ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure at Bucknell that were acknowledged and discussed by my research participants were: the hook-up culture and the Greek system, especially the fraternities, controlling the social space. These factors were not only discussed in a few select interviews, but were also elaborated on during the focus groups.

Most people agreed that Bucknell's campus culture prescribes a hook-up culture, which expects college students to have casual sex, but these types of sexual experiences lack in many possibilities of pleasure. As communicated by my research participants, the hook-up culture creates expectations on what sexual acts will be included or excluded in a sexual encounter, and the hook-up culture prevents meaningful relationships from forming. These factors combined prevent the development of emotional connection or a lack of communication between partners: two things that most women found necessary to achieve sexual pleasure. For example, Interviewee 3 talked about the "Hey, what are you doing?" texts that women (and men) receive at the end of the night on campus, which prevent a meaningful sexual encounter that could possibly result in pleasure, because in her mind, these texts do not fulfill the emotional and trusting component that is required



for pleasure. Interviewee 4 said through her own experiences, she has come to realize that hook-ups distort the idea of what pleasure “should be” or “is supposed to be.” The ignorance around sexual pleasure on Bucknell’s campus in relation to the hook-up culture is best exemplified in the following conversation from Focus Group 1:

**Me:** Speaking of campus, do you think it is easy or hard to find sexually pleasurable experiences?

**Someone:** Hard

**Participant 4:** I’d say sexual experiences easy, pleasurable ones hard. [Almost everyone says “Yes” or “That’s so true!”]

...

**Participant 5:** I think that a guy is more likely to try to pleasure you if he cares about you, but if it’s just a hook-up, and he doesn’t think he’s going to see you again, and he’s drunk, he’s probably only going to worry about himself.

**Participant 6:** I am surprised with how many guys that I have hooked-up with that literally have no idea what they are doing [a bunch of people laugh]. They are juniors in college, seniors in college and I’m like “You are so going to struggle when you get out of here.” Like the only real sexual experience that I have had here was a guy that I was hooking-up with my freshman year, and he was four years older than me. It was the only time that I have had an experience that was remotely mutual. And everyone else has been like—here, not at home—a lot of people I have been with just don’t get it. I don’t know if it’s just the guys that are here at Bucknell. I don’t know how there could be such a disconnect with them.

**Participant 5:** You know there is a transfer that I had really, really good sex, with but he was a transfer [laughs].

**Participant 6:** Exactly!

**Me:** So are you just comparing that to experiences you’ve had yourself? So you know about your own body, but these other people don’t?

**Participant 6:** ...I think it might be the subculture here on campus that leads to that, because people will just have sex and then they don’t get any idea of how to pleasure girls. Then they go on to the next person, and they don’t learn anything, because they are just having sex with more and more people [two people say “yeah”], but there’s not communication; there’s no discussion about anything, so the next girl is just as screwed at the one before [laughs]. No pun intended. This whole hook-up culture is leading to that.

**Participant 3:** I think that goes on both ends though.

**Participant 6:** I agree.

**Me:** I am curious what made you think of that [to Participant 3].

**Participant 3:** Just everything like “Well the guy’s screwing up. He doesn’t know what he’s doing.” But I think it’s the same way, because I don’t think the girls know what they are doing either.

**Participant 6:** I completely agree

I think it is important to include this entire conversation, because it exemplifies the general social atmosphere at Bucknell in terms of hook-ups and pleasure. It shows from a women's perspective that men appear to be more selfish in terms of pleasure than women. It exemplifies how sexual encounters are more one time occurrences, and it shows that there is an ignorance of sexual pleasure on both the male's and female's side when it comes to how to achieve it in a sexual encounter. This problem is worsened with the effects of alcohol, because of the lack of sober hook-ups. The communication in an intoxicated hook-up, again, often prevents meaningful interactions. In one case, a participant discussed how alcohol can enhance her sexual experiences; she said it can be used as "social lubrication" in order to initiate a sexual encounter, but most people agreed on the fact that drunk interactions do not lead to as much sexual pleasure, because it is an additional barrier to the emotional connection that my research participants agreed was often essential to achieve sexual pleasure. Not all students on Bucknell's campus participate in this hook-up culture, but those who are find the ignorance about female sexual pleasure and the devaluing of female sexual pleasure discouraging, because they cannot enact their appetites.

But it is not just hooking-up or during a hook-up that causes ignorance surrounding sexual pleasure on Bucknell's campus, it is also the gender segregation that is further perpetuated by the Greek system. Interviewee 5 said that she believes the gender segregation at Bucknell prevents proper relationships from developing. She said that what happens on campus, the interactions between men and women on campus are

“not real life.” She discussed how the fraternity meal plan system divides the genders (because fraternity brothers eat in their houses, while sorority members do not have houses), limiting the communication that does occur between genders to mostly happen at the bar or at parties and occasionally in class. These ideas of gender segregation and the Greek system were further discussed during the focus groups and how it relates to ignorance around female sexual pleasure. During the focus group, there was consensus that communication “outside the bedroom” needs to happen in order for pleasure to occur “inside the bedroom.”

Additionally, the idolization and control of social space by fraternities propagates phallogocentric ideas of a sexual encounter. Because most parties are thrown by fraternities, the men have control over who can attend a party. In fact, women have to walk by the brother working the door in order to gain entrance; therefore, the ability of a woman who desires to participate in this fact of Bucknell’s social culture is determined by men. Some women expressed that because of the fraternity’s authority over the social scene, there is an idolization of fraternity brothers. Consequently, underclass women, especially those who are not yet fully aware of these inequalities, may participate in a sexual encounter with a man for his benefit, not her own. Furthermore, because men control the social space, the conversations and stories about sex are often told from a male perspective. A few women discussed how they inhibit their own expression of sexuality for fear of what their partner may express to their friends and how it could spread like “wildfire” at such a small school. The male’s perspective is heard or overheard, by both males and females, which instills male ideas about hook-ups and expectations of sex. The campus culture and

gender segregation prevents discourse, trust from building, and awareness raising about female sexual pleasure.

In this chapter, I have explored possible reasons why there is ignorance concerning female sexual pleasure and how this ignorance is maintained especially at Bucknell. Understanding that everyone, including males, are all initially unaware of their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure, factors such as experiences of sex education, religious and social values, silence in the family and the media's portrayal of romance and phallocentricism make it particularly harder for a woman to understand her body as a site of sexual pleasure. Through further analysis of these factors, one can see that cultural mores also challenge a woman to express her desire to know about and pursue pleasure. Many women encounter obstacles that prevent knowledge, expression of that knowledge or exploration of pleasure, such as messages about sexual violence, virginity, silences in the family, romanticism and phallocentricism. The example of the orgasm shows how women were naïve about their own bodies but knew about the male orgasm. Messages surrounding sexual violence or values associated with the social construction of virginity show how conversations that do occur about female sexuality ignore aspects of female pleasure or construct stigmas surrounding sexual behavior that may inhibit pleasure. Religious and social values perpetuate expectations of femininity within heterosexual relationships, which is further exemplified in the media, where female pleasure is evaded. Finally, and more specifically, on Bucknell's campus, women may no longer be ignorant to the fact that their bodies can produce feelings of sexual pleasure, but there is still ignorance about female sexual pleasure during a hook-up that is perpetuated by the

institutionalization of gender segregation. No matter how much knowledge has been produced by my research participants, the social factors at large originally and at Bucknell continue to aid in the construction and maintenance of ignorance. Ignorance may keep a woman from expressing herself sexually, or it causes her to rely on her own independent research in order to overcome the obstacles and make sense of experiences of sexual pleasure.

## **Chapter 2: Coming from Knowledge: What is Female Sexual Pleasure?**

Despite initial ignorance, or the factors that contribute to a continuation of ignorance specifically on Bucknell's campus, all of my research participants know what sexual pleasure is and have experienced some sort of sexual pleasure. In this chapter, I will explore how my research participants learned about sexual pleasure. To do this, I will first outline how they became aware of their sexuality and the influential sources in defining sexuality and constructing their own sexuality. A presentation of the various definitions of sexuality will help to better understand sexual pleasure, because an understanding of sexuality provides the foundation for the motivations behind learning or wanting to learn about sexual pleasure. I will then outline how my research participants define sexual pleasure and explore their various definitions by discussing how both physical and emotional pleasure can play a role. My research shows that emotional pleasure seems to be a requirement in a complete understanding of sexual pleasure, and the majority of my research participants seemed to learn the most about sexual pleasure from trusting relationships. Keeping this in mind, I will then outline the primarily informal educational devices that my research participants used in order to learn about sexual pleasure, before their experiences were complemented, completed or are continuing to be understood and transformed by experimental experiences, primarily with trusting partners with whom they can experiment and enact their knowledge of sexual pleasure.

Female sexuality is discussed and understood either normatively in society or radically diverse ways in a feminist circle, and there is a lack of epistemological bridges between these viewpoints and society at large; therefore, most people had a difficult time putting sexuality into their own words. No matter what, and sometimes acknowledged by the research participants, sexuality plays various roles in a woman's life, which causes different expressions and understandings of her sexual identity. In other words, sexuality is personally adopted or practiced against cultural mores, and how this happens can be based on age, experience or in relation to life's other activities. Because of this, the path to sexual pleasure is diverse.

It is clear from my research that there is no universal definition for what sexuality is in relation to one's identity; therefore, it is interesting to take note of the sources that my research participants used to understand sexuality, and specifically their own sexuality. This eventually plays a role in the knowledge surrounding female sexual pleasure and the development of her sexual appetites, because one can look for how sexual pleasure fits into the expression of sexuality. It also shows the sources that aid in the construction of sexual knowledge. Ultimately, a basic understanding of what sexuality is reveals how society inspires or deters a female's pursuit of sexual pleasure. In what follows, I will briefly outline how the research participants described sexuality and the sources that either were influential in coming to understand sexuality in the way they described it or in forming their own sexuality.

In Focus Group Session 1, I asked my participants to remember the first time that they became aware of their sexuality. Most of the instances that they shared were

moments in elementary school of attraction or desire. They discussed how they saw older couples kissing or being affectionate and wanting to imitate these behaviors because of their feelings of desire, but they didn't necessarily understand the sexual nature of these relationships. All of their moments of sexual awareness were at a young age, whether or not they could make sense of these feelings. Over time, they gained knowledge to construct definitions of sexuality.

I opened the conversations of my interviews with what sexuality was for each participant. Most women had a hard time putting this identity to words and described their own sexuality in various ways: for some it was about sexual orientation, others it was how often they had sex. One woman linked sexuality with her body, a few women with their gender. The descriptions of sexuality from my interview participants can generally be divided into four broad qualitative categories with a few exceptions: gender, relations with another person, an independent identity, and sexual pleasure. Often these categories overlapped, probably due to the inherent multiplicity of emotions and expressions within sexual relationships and independent experiences.

The first category that I would like to explore is gender. Gender is important in relation to sexuality, because gender performances are highly normalized in our society. Gender comes with a multiplicity of expected roles, behaviors, outward expressions and sometimes even physical characteristics that are related or unrelated to a person's biological sex. Thus, it is possible for these norms to carry over to sexual experiences, which can lead to less satisfying experiences. Two women that I interviewed used gender to describe sexuality. Interviewee 1 simply described sexuality as "what gender you



prefer,” while Interviewee 2 said sexuality was a role you perform based on your gender. One woman said sexuality was the “portrayal of whether or not you have sex,” which in part acknowledges the performance piece of sexuality that is often linked with female gender. One participant defined sexuality as the comfort she has with her body, and while her body has to do with sex and not gender, it is interesting to consider how sex influences the expression of gender in our society and how our body is the site or embodiment of sexuality and gender expression. When linking gender with sexuality, one can see that gender expectations may inhibit or perpetuate expected sexual roles, behaviors and expressions.

Because sexuality often encompasses actions and expressions with other people, the next group of definitions of sexuality has to do with relations to others. This is important, because often we observe in our heteronormative society how sexual relationships model a dichotomy of roles and often the woman’s role is marginalized, and she may potentially be more passive to her own sexual appetites. Additionally, attractions or desires in relation to another person could also be based on social norms. Some women said sexuality is based on who you were attracted to, who you desired or, simply put, your sexual orientation. Three women talked about sexuality in terms of the relations that they have with another person saying it was about “giving pleasure to another person,” or “being comfortable around other people” or “how you fit with another person.” In these instances, female sexuality can either be about personal desire for a partner or how a woman pleases, feels or fits with her partner. In the latter, especially for a woman, personal sexual appetites or expressions may be marginalized.

Some women discussed how sexuality is an independent entity of their identity. Three women described sexuality as an intangible, abstract identity form, which seems to reveal a lack of control. Examples of the terminology to describe sexuality in such cases are “being” or “aura.” This reveals how sexuality for these particular women is almost ethereal or spiritual. An identity separate from or within themselves, sexuality for these women is hard to make sense of in relation to the self.

Most relevant to my research, four women discussed pleasure when defining sexuality. For example, Interviewee 4 commenced her definition of sexuality with pleasure; she said sexuality is “expressing and finding physical pleasure. And the choice to give physical pleasure to another person.” Interviewee 5 described it as what you do to turn yourself on, and Interviewee 8 said sexuality is how she gets sexual pleasure. Because of the ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure as shown in Chapter 1, to have female sexuality be integrally linked with these particular women’s sexual pleasure is subversive to cultural and gender norms.

Many norms of female sexuality in particular are evident in the responses outlined above such as being the object of desire, giving pleasure, or the lack of agency or control, but the effects of the societal expectations and normative understanding of female sexuality were most explicit during Interview 6. Her discussion highlights the many norms of our society that would influence how a female may define sexuality, mainly due to oppression based on her identity or being a sexual object instead of a sexual subject. Furthermore, this conversation displays a more traditional or possibly even a stereotyped version of female of sexuality, because it relates sexuality to reproduction. Interviewee 6

believed she was first attracted to girls, but then realized she wanted a family. Seeing that women could not reproduce with other women, and also realizing she was desirable to men once she reached high school, her definition of sexuality changed to be what she wanted for her future, which was a family:

**What does the term sexuality mean to you?**

[Long pause] It means to me the moment that in all of your influences in your life and the experiences, how you feel you would be best fit in a certain scenario with another person.

**Can you say more about that? How do you mean with another person? Can you elaborate?**

I guess in middle school, I wasn't really into boys, because I felt like girls were friendlier to me, and they were nice people, so I felt more attracted to them. I wouldn't mind being in a relationship with them then, but now as a college student, I want to start a family, so I want to have a boyfriend and have kids. I don't want to be with a woman and not have my own kids.

**So it's more the relationship, I am just trying to clarify, relationships with other people?**

Yeah

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

I feel like it's been changing, and I feel like now it's stable. In the past, I would have been into dating girls, but I didn't, and also with society, I didn't want to be mocked even more, because I was Asian already and people would mock me because of that. Then the girls that I liked, they got pregnant, so I didn't like them at all. Starting high school, that's when I started saying that I want a kid too, and I don't want a girl to give me that.

Analyzing the forces behind Interviewee 6's description of sexuality, one can see that gender and race as well as the ideas of shame come into play. Interviewee 6 later acknowledged that sex does not play an integral role in her relationship with her boyfriend, because she enjoys the emotional pleasure more than the physical. For her, sexuality is not about sex but about creating relationships that provide connections that fit best with her desired future. This fits into a larger understanding that Interviewee 6's sexuality affects her perception of pleasure. Because of her definition of sexuality, her

sexual appetite and her own pursuit of physical pleasure with her partner does not play an essential role in her relationship, even though she masturbates.

Another unique understanding of sexuality that was expressed in my research was one that confirmed the idea that female sexuality and sexual appetites should be regulated or kept in control. Interviewee 8 had a hard time defining sexuality but personally saw it as part of her life's activities:

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

Balanced [laughs]. I try to be respectful of my own body and also of my partners' bodies, but also keeping a balance in normal life, like I'm not crazy, and I am not a prude.

**So, just to clarify, are you talking more sexual acts here, like your balancing sexual acts that you do and don't do?**

Yeah, trying to maintain a level head about what I am doing with my body and also being respectful of my partner, each time. And also keeping a balance between my sexual life, my work life, my school life and that kind of thing.

**And how do you measure that balance? How do you keep the balance and what do you consider a balance? How do you decide "Oh this is a good balance"?**

I guess because the relationships that I keep feel healthy. By that I mean, my sexual relationships feel healthy and I am devoting enough time to myself for that, and then also, my work life and my school life are balanced. They just feel like nothing is cutting into that time. You know you can kind of tell by performance in work and also you can get direct feedback from school and how well you are doing on that, too. So I guess just keeping everything going.

From this discussion, it is apparent that sexuality for this person is one facet of her life's general activities and is coordinated among all of her daily undertakings. She measures this coordination not only with her partner but also with other domains of her life based on her performances or successes. What is important to consider is the fact that she does not acknowledge the feedback she receives from her sex life; instead, she sees the importance in being aware of how sex is affecting *other* aspects of her life. This makes

me wonder if she would give up her sexual activity if one aspect of her life had to be sacrificed. No matter what, creating a harmonious relationship between her and her partner as well as her sexual self and non-sexual self is important, and this could alter her pursuit of sexual pleasure.

How did people come to the variant yet overlapping definitions, while some have completely unique understandings? Many of the women described using or relying on similar sources that were influential in coming to understand sexuality or construct their own sexuality. The differences could be accounted for in social location or individual experiences with family, peers, schooling, and values. For example, Interviewee 6 said she did not observe any sexual relationships besides the ones on TV, which would present stereotyped versions of sexual relationships, and Interviewee 8 said she grew up in a community where sexual abuse and domestic violence were prevalent, which may drive her to keep her sexual relationships healthy and balanced. No matter what the individual experience was, though, the majority of my research participants relied on the same means to gain knowledge about sexuality: the media and peers.

The media seemed to be a nearly universal source of knowledge about sexuality for all of the interviewees, and this was further recognized during the focus groups. Normative understandings of sexuality are often communicated indirectly through popular culture outlets, and these channels are frequently sexualized. The media praises or further marginalizes populations or understandings through assertions (or lack of), whether they are positive or negative. Regardless of the role the media plays in the construction of ignorance, it also socially constructs knowledge. Interviewee 6 was not

exposed to relationships outside the home so was able to learn about relationships through TV shows. Interviewee 1 thinks she came to understand her own sexuality due to the infiltration of images of guys without their shirts on. Other forms of media that were influential for my research participants' construction of knowledge about sexuality were magazines, especially *Cosmopolitan*, and books, whether they were erotic books, fantasy novels or "how to understand your body" books. These forms of media, although often socially skewed to represent hegemonic understandings of sexuality, were sources of knowledge.

While media is an obvious source for the creation of idealized sexuality and sexual partnership, social norms play out on a smaller scale within communities. Communities and peers were a huge influence in my research participants' construction of ideas about sexuality. It was most often during their adolescent years that my research participants were learning about sex from their friends or peers. Six of my interview participants discussed one way or another about how peer-pressure, their peer's sexual behavior or conversations with friends at school influenced their understanding of sexuality. For example, Interviewee 7 grew up in a "hypersexual" community where all of her friends were having sex and talking about sex, which made her participate in the same culture. Interviewee 9 describes how as her peers changed so did her understanding of sexuality:

Well a big part of it is where I grew up. By the end of middle school, I wouldn't have been surprised if one-third of my class had already had sex, so with that there was heavy expectation—the dances, people already grinding up all over each other. [pause] Some media, but not as much as the people I was around in general, and then high school was a weird continuation of middle school, because I went to a private school, so it

was a completely different setting, and it was suddenly—it was much fewer people who were openly sexually. And then the jump to Bucknell, where a lot of people seem to be openly sexual.

Here, one can see how environment plays a role in the construction of knowledge about sexuality. It shows how peers can be influential in how to make sense of sexuality, and the norms of a specific location can teach alternative understandings and experiences of sexuality. While some may argue that childhood exposure to sexuality is problematic, I think it is clear from my research that young people are encountering sexuality at a young age and then independently seeking out sources that help them make sense of it; therefore, the information that they find could perpetuate a normative construction of female sexuality—one that devalues the pursuit of female sexual pleasure.

Looking at the influential sources that help form my research participants' sexuality reveals how the knowledge about sexuality is socially constructed by the media and place. This is important to my discussion because sexual pleasure may play a role (or it may not) in these constructions. Additionally, the sources for understanding sexuality are slightly different from the sources that my research participants used to come to know about sexual pleasure. My research participants sought out more sources, besides just the media and peers in order to gain knowledge about their bodies as sites of pleasure, which shows pleasure is most often not encompassed in a general understanding of female sexuality.

The definition of sexual pleasure appeared to be almost universal for all of my interview participants with slight variations in the use of language. No matter how much ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure there is (as seen in Chapter 1), women

have used their own devices to discover and construct their sexual appetites that lead to pleasure; one can then assume that knowledge leads to more fulfilling experiences of pleasure. I originally was interested in how women come to know about physical sexual pleasure, but through conversations with my research subjects, it became clear that sexual pleasure for women is more than just a physical experience. In what follows, I will first outline the definitions of female sexual pleasure that resulted from my research and then how my research participants came to understand sexual pleasure in these ways.

Many participants discussed both physical and emotional pleasure, and a few did not specify which feelings they were referring to. Some participants equated sexual pleasure with an orgasm, even asking if I were talking in code, as in the case of two interviews. For this reason, it is evident that sexual pleasure for women is seen as a multidimensional experience either as ongoing feelings or as a climatic event. While some equated sexual pleasure with their own feelings, others said they relied on their partners to either achieve and experience pleasure. Because of these different understandings, pleasure can encompass orgasm, desirability, connection or emotions. This is especially interesting to think about when considering the instances in which my research participants described experiencing pleasure: whether they were alone or with a partner, masturbating or having sex, fantasizing or kissing, there were a variety of occasions mentioned. Emotional pleasure, though, seemed always to dominate my research participants' pursuit of pleasure. Seemingly every participant valued the pleasurable connections that result from intimacy, usually (but not always) during physical sexual acts with a partner.



Nearly everyone described sexual pleasure simply as feeling good from sexual acts. Specific words that the women used were orgasm, climax, bliss, being turned on, and a high point. During Focus Group 1, people agreed that it was “the tingling.” For many women, when I asked them the first time they remember experiencing sexual pleasure, they discussed acts that derived the physical connotations with sexual pleasure such as kissing, losing virginity, masturbating and fooling around. I did not want to assume that sexual pleasure was an orgasm, but for some women they interpreted my discussion of sexual pleasure as such, even if they described the first time they experienced sexual pleasure as something that did not result in orgasm. With the all of the discussions that took place, it is clear that sexual pleasure goes beyond just physically feeling good from sexual acts.

A unique perspective on sexual pleasure came from Interviewee 4 who gained pleasure from the hegemonic understanding of female sexuality and the female being an object of desire yet finding strength in this. For Interviewee 4, sexual pleasure is not necessarily just physical feelings but the confirmation of her identity as a woman:

I think that sexual pleasure for me is when I feel like my identity and value as a person is reinforced. Sometimes that is by my identity as a woman specifically, feeling feminine, feeling desirable and attractive but also feeling strong and powerful; I don't think it's necessarily a passive thing. I mean there is a physical aspect of course [laughs], but I think its more than just physical pleasure. I think it is also intellectual and emotional.

Here, Interviewee's 4 pleasure comes from her partner's attraction to her, but later she went on to say how sexual encounters are about mutual fulfillment of pleasure derived

from a connection. For her, her sexual pleasure is complemented with being the object of desire and the connection with her partner that comes along with it.

The role of a partner, especially the emotional component a partner provides, seemed to dominate the discussion of sexual pleasure. This idea was best exemplified when Focus Group Participant 7 said, “For me, sexual pleasure it’s like, it’s an expression. It’s a mutual expression and experience of this emotional connection that I find with someone.” The idea of connection and intimacy with a partner in relation to sexual pleasure and gaining knowledge about sexual pleasure is further exemplified for three women’s descriptions of their first times experiencing sexual pleasure. Even though these women were sexually active before, their first experiences of sexual pleasure were when they were involved in intimate and emotionally connected relationships. In these instances, sexual pleasure encompassed more than physical feelings, and their understandings of sexual pleasure were reevaluated, redefined or enhanced. Interviewee 7 described her first time experiencing sexual pleasure as when sex changed from “fucking” to “making love.” Interviewee 4 described the first time she remembers experiencing sexual pleasure when the “sex was more a reaction to the connection and the closeness [she and her partner] had, as opposed to having sex, trying to get that connection.” Finally, Interviewee 9 discussed how her and her boyfriend in high school had felt physical pleasure, but she associates her first experience of sexual pleasure to the time she was closest to the “main event;” she said, “It was just this moment of seeing [my current boyfriend] glowing, and I can’t think of the right words! [Smiles to herself with a long pause]. I don’t know; it was him being happy and us just being there together and

feeling at a weird same time that I could be in control of myself and us but protected at the same time and safe.” In the cases of these three women, they may have had an original knowledge of sexual pleasure or experienced something of the sorts, but it was not until these moments of intimacy that their understandings of sexual pleasure were more complete.

For some of my research participants it was not necessarily just the emotional pleasure that was enhanced, but the actual physical pleasure is seen to be a better experience when a partner is involved. For example, many women discuss how they enjoy their orgasms more when they do not have control over it, or they prefer to have their partner stimulate them over masturbating (and three research participants do not masturbate). Interviewee 5 said achieving physical pleasure with a partner makes it a “better all around experience.” Interviewee 2 described the benefit of a partner saying, “There is a really specific kind of pleasure that comes with being able to orgasm in the presence of someone else, because that is an intense openness that if you are alone then you are obviously open with yourself. It’s a different kind of relief and that breaking of boundary between two people.” The most obvious example of how physical pleasure is enhanced with a partner is with Interviewee 9. She doesn’t find masturbation pleasurable unless she does it in front of her boyfriend. In fact she said she finds it “unnerving” to masturbate alone, because “it is purely physical and there is no emotion.” In this example, an experience, masturbation, that is most often considered a purely physically pleasurable experience, is only pleasurable when a partner is around. From all of these accounts, one can see how many women rely on partners not only to enhance sexual

experiences but also to provide them. And even if a woman can provide physical sexual pleasure for herself, they prefer it when it is with a partner. The research participants usually supported this enhancement with the emotional connections that come with a partnered sexual experience.

On the other hand, it was discussed during Focus Group 2 that masturbation can be both emotionally and physically pleasurable, which shows that they do not necessarily need to result from a partnered sexual experience. This is represented in the following conversation:

**Participant 4:** ...I think that masturbating is very emotional, at least for me, because I feel like I don't need to rely on someone else. I know I can be comfortable with myself, and it puts me in good self-esteem. So I think its also an emotional process, just not with someone else.

**Participant 2:** Yeah I feel most connected to my body when I am like just with myself, because normally I am just all up in my head, but that's the time when I just enjoy my body and what it can do I guess.

From this exchange, one can see that some women experience emotional pleasure or heightened awareness about their bodies when masturbating, and that masturbation can be an emotional experience for some women. Thus, the emotional reliance of a partner does not necessarily need to be required for the achievement of a woman's sexual pleasure.

Some women can separate physical pleasure and emotional pleasure, and achieve pleasure from a purely physical experience. One example of this is Interviewee 6 who no longer has as frequent sexual urges with her boyfriend and only orgasms through masturbation. She sees different pleasures in each of the experiences; she said, "I feel like

the vibrator pleases me when I am stressed and when I feel like I just need a break, and it really calms me down. And then with my boyfriend, when I get emotionally pleased, it fulfills me that I can just be another person with someone.” This same separation of pleasures was discussed by Interviewee 8 who said that intercourse results in emotional pleasure, which gives her more sexual pleasure, but masturbation is a “sheer physical” experience. From these two examples, one can see how for some women sexual pleasure does not have to be linked with emotions or with a partner.

It is clear that sexual pleasure is understood in a variety of contexts. When discussing sexual pleasure with most of the research participants, I came to find that my research participants were not only referring to physical pleasure but also emotional pleasure. Some women recognized a kind of sexual pleasure that is purely physical and may or may not involve another person, but they usually indicated that a heightened and/or more complete understanding or experience of sexual pleasure involves an emotional component. For most participants this is when a partner is involved. Most often, rudimentary knowledge of how to achieve sexual pleasure or what sexual pleasure was were deepened through experimentation with partners with whom my research participants had developed an emotional connection.

According to these reports of deepened understandings, the participants learned about sexual pleasure through relationships with trusted sex partners with whom they already had a positive emotional connection. While they may have heard about some aspect of sexual pleasure from a variety of sources, they did not fully “know” sexual pleasure until they had experienced these connections and feelings simultaneously. Their

sexual appetites may not have been as understood or as highly valued until with another person. A few women had early experiences of sexual pleasure that occurred in the absence of emotionally connective relationships, but their definition of sexual pleasure was heightened once they gained more knowledge through experience and sharing this pleasure with a significant partner.

In what follows, I will outline the actual sources of knowledge about sexual pleasure that my research participants used and continue to use to construct and develop meanings of sexual pleasure and the possibility of fulfillment of their sexual appetites. I will conclude how they enhance basic knowledge of sexual pleasure through practice. Nevertheless, the personal value of the knowledge of sexual pleasure in comparison to other aspects of identity and life-courses changes from person to person, but they have all sought and continue to seek knowledge about sexual pleasure. When first learning about sexual pleasure or expanding their knowledge on sexual appetites that lead to pleasure, I can generalize the main sources that my research subjects used or continue to use.

The Internet, such as Google, Urban Dictionary, blogs or online porn, was mentioned by the majority of the participants as a source for sexual knowledge at one point or another. This is especially noteworthy because of the digital age and the access to information at our fingertips. Women do not need to come into contact with books nearly as often as women from previous generations did. the Internet seems to be one of the primary sources for knowledge about sexual pleasure. For example, one interviewee has recently been researching how to orgasm using the Internet, while another once looked up different techniques for masturbation. While porn is discussed in many

domains as phallogentric and potentially disruptive for female sexuality, this was not explicitly acknowledged during my research, which could be viewed as inherently problematic. Contrary to this belief or the possible construction of ignorance through watching porn, porn was cited by my research participants who have watched porn either as a source of knowledge or a way to enhance and explore sexual pleasure. It taught some women about vibrators and female orgasms, including squirting and in one case, it showed a participant the potential ways a man could pleasure a woman. While “how to” books may have been more popular in generations past, the Internet (keeping in mind that it often provides unreliable and potentially ignorant or even harmful sources) is one of the main epistemological tools for the construction of knowledge about sexual pleasure for this particular generational age group.

According to my research participants, other media forms (magazines, books, and film) served as epistemological devices for sexual pleasure, enhancing sexual pleasure or exploring sexual appetites. In many instances, magazines served as knowledgeable tools for understanding that females should be able to achieve sexual pleasure. They also provided my research participants with information on how to enhance sexual experiences through articles such as ones that promoted body image or pubic shaving styles, which my research participants believe boosts their self-esteem during a sexual encounter. Books, both fiction and non-fiction, taught some women about orgasms (both female and male) and pleasure. Finally, some of my research participants learned about sexual pleasure from movies and TV-shows where women were acting passionate in relationships or masturbating. For example, one woman learned about masturbation from

watching *Sex and the City*. From these examples, one can see how these sources either taught women about pleasure (as in the case of learning about the orgasm), shared ways to boost sexual pleasure or the exploration of sexual appetites through fantasizing while encountering these sources.

Although sexual education and a lack of conversations were criticized for the construction of ignorance in Chapter 1, many research participants acknowledged that despite these factors, they could serve as resources for knowledge. Some participants discussed how classes taught them about potential sites of pleasure (even if they did not go into great detail). One interview participant said that many college classes on sexuality finally helped her to understand her body as a site of sexual pleasure, another said in high school she had a comprehensive, all girls “how to” class where anyone could ask any question. Finally, friends, specifically “*closest*” friends, sisters and coworkers all played a role in telling some of the research participants about sexual pleasure or acts that lead to sexual pleasure. Some of these conversations were described as asking friends what they have tried and what they have found enjoyable. From education and conversations, primary understandings of sexual pleasure or sexual appetites could be developed.

A few women encountered physical pleasure, such as an orgasm, before they even knew what it was. In these cases, these women reverted back to the previously mentioned sources to make sense of it. While some of my participants actually received or continue to receive pleasure from these sources (such as porn or fantasy books) others are strictly used as epistemological tools in a society where female sexual pleasure is rarely openly discussed. Going back to the idea of ignorance, it is clear that the women have to rely on



suspect sources. These sources are often used to construct initial understandings of sexual pleasure or theoretical knowledge that eventually is explored and further discovered, if it had not been experienced already.

The knowledge gained from these epistemological devices about female sexual pleasure is seen to be most often enhanced by self-discovery, “trial and error” or “experimentation.” While a few women discussed how they learn from more casual encounters, or hook-ups (most often what they do not like), the majority of women agreed that besides talking with friends about behaviors, their knowledge came from actually experiencing pleasure, especially with partner with whom they had an established relationship. This is best seen in the following exchange during Focus Group

Session 1:

**Participant 5:** I know I learned the most about myself in a two-year relationship or a three-year relationship and like consistently.

**Someone:** Yeah, same.

[The rest of the group nods or says “mhhh”]

**Me:** So that’s a universal yes on that?

**Everyone:** Yeah

**Participant 2:** I think you get a lot better at sex when you are doing it with one person. You have that open communication. I mean it’s trial and error. It’s like, “Oh this didn’t work, let’s try something different next time.” There’s that repetition, which I think helps you get better. [People agree]

The women, here, agreed that these trusting relationships helped them know what pleasure was based on their personal sexual appetites or it taught them more about their sexual appetites. The knowledge from the sources mentioned in this chapter was embodied in behaviors that resulted in pleasure or dissatisfaction explored in these relationships; therefore, one could argue that more experiences leads to enhanced

knowledge of sexual pleasure or a more complete personal definition of sexual pleasure and understanding of sexual appetites.

Because all of my research participants can freely discuss the meaning of sexual pleasure, I was interested in the role sexual pleasure played in their life in or outside of a sexual relationship. In other words, how important is having sexual pleasure to the women at Bucknell? For Focus Group Participant 1, she finds that she does not need it as much as her boyfriend, so she would rather just give pleasure, which makes her happy, while for Interviewee 5 and Focus Group Participant 4, they respectively need sex every other week or an orgasm once a week. Focus Group Participant 2 said that achieving pleasure reminds her to connect to her body and not just remain in her head. In all of these examples, the knowledge of sexual pleasure has assigned value to pleasure in their lives. Overtime, for many of the research participants, they found that they put a more emphasis on their sexual pleasure in their relationships.

Even if original or current understandings of sexuality do not include sexual pleasure, all of my research participants were aware of something called “sexual pleasure.” The lack of clarity in their definitions of sexuality could be a result from the active constructions of knowledge and ignorance as well as the effects of social location on epistemology. While their specific wording or components or enactments varied in time or context, for most of the research participants, sexual pleasure can take both a physical and emotional form. In order to come to their definitions of sexual pleasure, my research participants relied on sources such as the Internet, books, the media, classes and conversations. These sources not only helped to circulate knowledge but also sometimes

enhanced or allowed the exploration of sexual appetites, as in the case of porn. The messages embedded in these sources could be aiding in the enactment of social norms surrounding female sexuality, one of which could be the emphasis or importance of emotional pleasure over physical pleasure. But with the lack of reliable sources and silences that do exist around sexual pleasure, these women appear to have to rely on these limited resources for knowledge. Eventually, this knowledge is applied and often enhanced with experimentation and often best understood or enjoyed when with trusted partner. Through the application of this knowledge and these experiences, my research participants have constructed confident assertions of their sexual knowledge leading to both embodied and emotional sexual appetites, resulting in pleasure.

### **Chapter 3: “It’s all about my pleasure!” or is it?**

When I started my research, Tuana was in the back of my mind; I expected ignorance surrounding female sexual pleasure. I thought that women might not know a lot about their bodies as potential sites of orgasm. But my research shows that sexual pleasure encompasses more than just the orgasm. There are different types of knowledge and definitions around sexual pleasure; all women had some sort of knowledge. Many women celebrated why they signed up for the interview, saying that they are aware of their sexual appetites and potential sites of sexual pleasure, just rarely talk about it with friends who seem less experienced, less comfortable or maybe even less knowledgeable. When asked what they were proud of, it was the fact that they could be open about what their sexuality, their personal knowledge surrounding their sexuality in terms of pleasure, and they seemed to know a lot.

Many participants discussed that sexual pleasure was important to them, especially when it included emotional pleasure; for example, many conveyed the fact that having sex for just physical pleasure was something in which they were not interested. The emotional component had to be there, and physical pleasure should be a part of sex, especially in a perfect world. The women who participated in my research were knowledgeable and that knowledge empowered them to seek pleasure independently or with a partner. It surprised me, then, that even though the participants are self-aware and know what they want in terms of sexual pleasure, so many ambivalences surrounding their responses exist.

In this chapter, I want to explore the theme of ambivalence that appears when women discuss sexual pleasure. In the responses, the following discursive pattern emerged: a woman says that her sexual pleasure is important to her, but she still has feelings of shame, embarrassment or uncertainty surrounding her knowledge and her assertion of that knowledge in a sexual experience. This contradiction results in suppressed discourse and inhibitions. Some of the consequences women experience that exemplify these ambivalences are dishonesty, foregoing her own pleasure for her partners', not receiving as much physical pleasure from a sexual interaction as she would from an independent sexual experience and settling for emotional pleasure over the physical. Ultimately, social norms surrounding female sexuality shine through; it is clear that there is good sex and bad sex, and women feel more intense pressure to adhere to the good, even if the pleasures they assuredly desire lie elsewhere.

### **I Know What I Want**

The females who participated in my research were knowledgeable about sexual pleasure. They could readily discuss female and male orgasms, female masturbation and their personal experiences of pleasure. I was actually pleasantly surprised by how confident all of my participants were in opening up about how much they did know and how much they have experienced in terms of sexual pleasure. It revealed that female sexuality, no matter how oppressed, has been freely explored by many independent young women at Bucknell—an example of female empowerment, so long as knowledge is power and power and knowledge give rise to pleasure. Even though it was expressed or

carried out in different forms, sexual pleasure seemed important for every one of my participants. Many seemed to communicate that they would not settle for anything less.

Examples of this knowledge and assertiveness can be seen in a variety of instances. One woman answered every question with matter-of-fact, direct ease. Another explicitly told me she knows what she likes. Two women discussed finding control and agency over their sexuality: Interviewee 8 said once she had sex and found intimacy with her current boyfriend, she felt like she no longer had to “*show* [she] was sexual; [she] could just *be* sexual.” Similarly, Interviewee 4 has realized that her sexuality is a part of her and based on her choices, not something separate of her identity or in the hands of her partner. These examples are important, because female agency and autonomy, especially over sexuality, reveals the ability to move past norms and place the female as the sexual subject.

The most obvious example of confidence in being a sexual subject and how that relates to the pursuit of pleasure was during Interview 5. To preface, Interviewee 5 believes her age has contributed to her knowledge and self-esteem when it applies to her sexuality. When discussing how she sees the importance and relationship between emotional pleasure and physical pleasure, she said:

There [are] different levels that I can enjoy. And I do enjoy it more when there is a strong emotional connection. It is more intimate and I enjoy that. I can go...this is definitely a personal interview isn't it?...say I meet someone at a bar, I can be comfortable doing whatever. I know that a guy I met at a bar that night, I pulled out my toys that night and I didn't care. “I am not that invested in you. I don't care if this isn't working for you. If it's not, then leave. I don't care about your feelings right now. I am doing this for me” I mean that hasn't been a problem with anyone. Most guys have thought that that was interesting, or cool or whatever that I was comfortable enough to do that.

This excerpt not only reveals how she is confident in pursuing her own sexual desires, regardless of her partner but also that her partners have in fact celebrated her confidence and refusal to settle for anything that is less than what she wants. Throughout her interview, she shared similar certainty saying that she has come to know that sex is about her and her own enjoyment and benefit; therefore, she is comfortable enough to be on this campus and hook-up with multiple people so long as it is enjoyable sex.

A discussion of my research subjects prioritizing their own sexual pleasure happened in Focus Group Session 4. This discussion exemplifies that many women who participated in the research know what they want and will not settle:

**Participant 4:** I think just comfortability with my sexuality has changed over time. In the last three years especially, it has been a huge dramatic increase in like now I am able to talk to them—about what I want, and I am not going to settle for something that's not sexually pleasurable for me, but I feel like I would have in the past for an emotional connection or just to make someone else happy, but now it's more about me.

**Participant 2:** That's how I feel too. I think I have made myself a priority rather than just kind of giving more.

**Participant 7:** It does have to be equal for me though. [Participant 2: yeah]. Like I have recognized that I am built very differently than a lot of people, so if the other person does not enjoy themselves, I will not have fun. Like my sexual pleasure is very dependent on the other person's and I actually don't think that is—I think that's genuinely me. I don't think that's a mark of culture or anything. With that being said, I am now much more about like—it also has to be me as well.

Through the knowledge that they have gained from experience, whether good or bad, these women have come to value their own sexual pleasure. They are confident in their knowledge and with their sexual appetites and have moved beyond societal norms associated with the devaluing of female sexual pleasure so far as to decide that their sexual pleasure is important, if not most important, in a sexual relationship.

But no matter how confident in their sexuality and pursuits of sexual pleasure, all my participants, whether they meant to or not, used discourse that would reveal that they were still unsure about their sexual knowledge or sexual expression in relation to stigmas surrounding female sexual expression. The transition from conviction in their sexual appetites to ambivalence is best seen in the following discussion with Interviewee 3:

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of regarding your sexual knowledge or practices?**

[laughs] I'm not sure. Do you have an example?

**What you know compared to someone else, does that make you proud? Or do you feel good that you can do this with someone else? Or that you can talk about it?**

Yeah I am proud of that. It is a little weird, but I am comfortable talking about it. I am happy that I can make myself orgasm. I know how my own body works, because it is a good stress tool. Tool [laughs] I think it's something every woman should know. She should know her own set of equipment. Just like guys do! We shouldn't be afraid to explore it, because it's ours, so I guess I am proud of that. I have no conquests. Or anything like that [laughs].

When asked what she was proud of, Interviewee 3 initially got uncomfortable and required more prompting. At this point, even though she is about to describe something about her sexuality and her knowledge of sexual pleasure, she still prefaces it with how her pride leaves her feeling "a little weird." This is seen in many cases, where even though women know a lot about sexual pleasure, there is still inhibition when expressing sexual appetites and that knowledge. This raises the question: are the sexual appetites of females on Bucknell's campus being fulfilled?



## **The Suppression of Discourse Leads to Consequences**

In what follows, I will outline the ambivalent responses that I received in terms of a woman who knows a lot about her body as a site of sexual pleasure but still feels negative feelings or shame, guilt, or the inability to express and ask for such pleasure during a sexual encounter. This discussion will further reveal the power-dynamics, gendered messages and politics involved in sexual expression that silences female sexual pleasure and prevent certain sexual appetites from being satisfied.

It is already understood that females cannot easily express their sexuality. Whether this difficulty of expression is due to the Madonna-whore complex or the expectation of female sexuality being associated with reproduction or sex usually having the female as the sexual object and the male as the sexual subject is still up for debate. The feeling of not being able to freely express their sexuality was confirmed by my focus group participants when a discussion arose about how females feel guilty about a hook-up, while males would usually do not feel that way. One participant said that “guys have too much pride.” I would like to take this debate one step further and explore how the suppression of discourse surrounding female sexuality affects the pursuit of female sexual pleasure for knowledgeable women.

All of my research participants expressed some sort of suppressed discourse whether they were referencing personal expression, with their friend group or with their partners. Because there is this idea that men have pride, and women feel shame about their sexuality, most women are not as able to freely express what is pleasurable and what is not during a sexual encounter. This was discussed during Focus Group 1 when one

woman said, “Guys are more expressive. They would do it—what they want—but the girls will be like ‘Let’s see what happens.’...And the main thing with the nature or the practice, that the guy would never know when she is done. [everyone laughs]. Even now! [Laughing she says] It will always be about him! I mean they don’t know! [People agree]. They will ask you all the time if you are there.” This declaration came after the discussion about whether or not men know how to physically pleasure a woman. It shows how this woman hypothesizes that women remain passive in a sexual encounter with a male, while males will express his appetites and experiences of pleasure. This is especially noteworthy in relation to society and my interviews, because all women seemed to know how achieve sexual pleasure. The knowledge exists, but there is a communicative disconnect between the partner and the woman. Thus, a suppression of discourse or lack of assertion of a woman’s sexual appetites can lead to her pleasure not being achieved.

This idea of suppressed discourse and females not asking for the pleasure that they seek is further exemplified during the narratives of my interviews. For example, Interviewee 4 acknowledges that whether or not she has sex is her choice, but she is embarrassed to ask for what she wants. Not only is she nervous of how her appetites will be received if they are out of the norms of “good” sex, but she is also scared of being rejected. These females are not expressive, even though they know about their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure, which prevents their appetites from being fulfilled.

Outside of relationships, some women are nervous expressing their appetites or experiences of pleasure because of labels or hurt reputations. Interviewee 9 is scared that

people will label her a slut if she talks about her sexuality, and Interviewee 10 thinks that the details of whether or not she enjoyed a sexual encounter are something that is not easy to talk about. Additionally, Interviewee 2 said that there are things she wants to try out but her reputation of “being intellectual” is cause for her keeping certain appetites “under wraps” in order to prevent people from thinking of her differently. It is clear that these women, no matter how confident they are in their sexual appetites, still have hesitations surrounding their sexuality and expressing it.

The reason for their self-censorship can result in falling victim to stigmas or peer-pressure. In terms of expressing pleasure with friend groups, two women talked about how they do not want to make other people, who are not as sexually open or as sexually knowledgeable, uncomfortable. On the other hand, Interviewee 6 said she has no reason to feel embarrassed, but it could be because she does not talk about sexuality with anyone. One feeling that feminists often examine is shame. Because women often internalize this shame, they may feel guilty or they may become passive in their sexual experiences, which may cause a woman to settle for experiences that are less than fulfilling. All of these emotions result from the suppressed discourses around pleasure, and this has consequences.

The consequences of the ambivalences of my research participants are seen in a variety of different sexual experiences. With my research, this is best seen in the instances of faking an orgasm, comparing the pleasures women receive from masturbation versus partnered sex and the complete sacrifice of certain pleasures. First, faking an orgasm is important, because it is a performance of pleasure without the

fulfillment. All but one of my interview participants have faked an orgasm. While some don't anymore, the main reasons for faking at the time were to end the sexual experience—to “get it over with.” Some women did find it fun to fake an orgasm, while others found it awful. Those who found it enjoyable said it was they got more in the mood or it made the emotional connection and pleasure “at the peak of what it should have been,” as in the case of Interview 6. Interviewee 7 actually found that going through the motions of faking increased her pleasure. But, she has faked an orgasm more than she has had one. On the other hand, Interviewee 2 said faking an orgasm “was terrible. It was actually kind of painful.” another common reasons for faking an orgasm was to make the man (or woman, as seen by Participant 7 in Focus Group 4) feel better. According to my research participants, this results from the women feeling guilty for having their partner try for so long or the desire to give their male partner a “sense of power,” which again shows my research participants’ ambivalence surrounding the assertion of their own sexual appetites. They feel guilty or forego pleasure, to benefit their partner.

From these responses, it is clear that faking an orgasm seems to be a common experience. There are many sex research studies that show that women frequently fake orgasms and infrequently experience orgasms during sex. My research appears to match up with these studies, which reveals that there still is a strong emphasis on sex as a performance of pleasure rather than a true pursuit of pleasure. As seen in Hyde and DeLamater (1997), whether pleasure for women should be measured in terms of orgasm frequency or should encompass something else is up for debate, mainly because of anatomical arguments and whether or not clitoral stimulation is possible during sex (as

cited in Fahs 49). Even though my research participants fake an orgasm, they could still be experiencing pleasure other ways.

Because of this, I thought it was important to discuss the topic of faking an orgasm in my focus groups, in order to see exactly what women think and want when they fake one. Many of the women had the same reasons for faking an orgasm, but they also acknowledged they do not do it anymore or no longer saw a point now that they know about what they want in terms of pleasure during a sexual experience. This again shows my research participants' assertions of their own pleasure in a sexual experience.

Originally, I inferred that faking an orgasm may be a powerful experience for a woman given the fact that it is an instance where she has control, because she can decide to end the sexual experience. I breached this topic with during a focus group:

**Me:** Is faking an orgasm a powerful experience?

...

**Me:** In what ways is it powerful? And is it not powerful?

**Participant 5:** Cause it's almost like you're taking control of the situation and it's powerful because you did deceive someone, so I don't know. It can go both ways. I just—I am not going to give you an award for something you didn't do.

**Participant 4:** Yeah

**Participant 7:** I feel the complete opposite. I feel like it's very weakening to fake an orgasm for me, just because I feel like what are you doing for yourself? You are selling yourself short. You're like essentially lying to somebody, and I think my perspective on lying is maybe not one that most people take. I think I consider a lot more things lies than most people would, but like I don't know. I just feel like I am disappointing my honest self [Others: Mhmm. Yeah, I'd agree with that.]

From this conversation, it is clear that a variety of stances are taken in terms of the empowerment of faking an orgasm. What is most noteworthy, though, is the general sacrifice of physical pleasure, or pressure from a partner or guilt that surrounds female

sexual expression as exemplified in the experiences of my research participants faking an orgasm.

Because faking an orgasm is a performance that takes place with a partner, I think it is interesting to compare the pleasures received from sex and the pleasures resulting from masturbation in order to look at how these experiences differ and what a woman changes, gains or even completely foregoes in a sexual experience with another person. This is important, because it not only shines light on the shame females have in expecting pleasure in a partnered relationship but also what may make up for it, what is fulfilled and what goes unfulfilled.

There was a general consensus that women enjoy their orgasms or the physical pleasure more during a partnered sexual experience (as shown in Chapter 2), but I found that even if this is the case, they may or may not be completely satisfied. For example, Interviewee 6 can achieve orgasm from masturbation and understands that sex is a natural thing and should not be frowned upon, but because the sex with her boyfriend does not produce orgasm, she has started to value the emotions. She said, “I know that for a guy [a female orgasm] is really hard to find, and I think I gave up on him—trying to have him find it, and I think it’s only something a girl can really find for themselves.” In fact she is “fine with [this],” because the emotional pleasure she receives is so great. Interviewee 7, who has faked an orgasm more than she has had one and who does not masturbate, had initial expectations of sex, which she described as high expectations, but her expectations have become more “realistic” with her boyfriend now that she sees the value in the emotional connection. This makes me wonder if her expectations are not being met

because of not knowing about physical pleasure. Interviewee 3 is confident in her knowledge about her body and masturbates but finds more pleasure when she is with another person, because she enjoys the lack of control she has over her own orgasm when she is with a partner. Even though she asserted all of this, she also said, “Sex is dictated by when the man orgasms, and that bothers me. It doesn’t bother me so much that I say something about it, I just wish it could be a two way street.” One can see that even though this participant enjoys her orgasms when they are with a partner, she feels as if her pleasure is not as highly valued. Her suppressed discourse may be preventing her from reaching her own goal of achieving orgasms during intercourse, as she later expressed to me. From these examples, one can see that often the emotional connections that the women have with their partners balances out the physical pleasures, or expression of sexual appetites, they may or may not have achieved in a sexual encounter.

Because women are often stereotyped with emotional pleasure and their sexuality is stigmatized, this creates categories of good sex and bad sex that particularly affect women. As Rubin points out, there is in fact a sexual value hierarchy. This affects males too, but in relation to my research, there were many instances in which the participants discussed feeling shame for the sex that they enjoyed, not necessarily because of their partner but because of social messages. Sometimes these negative effects went so far as to prevent the research participants’ pursuits of pleasure. For example, society’s suppressed discourse on the multiplicities of different types of sex, makes Interviewee 9 question whether or not she can enjoy her sexual appetites. She said:

Well I very recently discovered that in the correct context that having my boyfriend choke me, not choke me, but put enough pressure that it makes my breathing more shallow is something that in the moment does a lot. It makes me stop overthinking everything and makes it much more pleasurable, but at the same time afterwards and after I realized that, I just had a lot of these thoughts of “what does that mean about me? What does that make me as a person?”

**And why do you think you feel that way afterwards, even though it’s pleasurable at the time?**

Hm, because it’s [pause] such an aggressive act against me, and I know my boyfriend would never hurt me and he was actually the one who at one point loosened because he was afraid of leaving bruises or something...It’s just something few people admit to and talk about, and at the same time, I have this, it kind of hurts my pride, because it’s a very submissive thing. So that on top of it being something society doesn’t talk about that much and if they do it’s with a book like *Fifty Shades of Grey* where everyone is just cracking jokes or ignoring it. Between society and pride.

Here, it is clear that the total fulfillment of her sexual appetites is limited by cultural stigmas (and society’s construction of ignorance as seen in Chapter 1) with certain types of sex, and her self-reflection and self-awareness is important. Societal norms negatively affecting sexual appetites is also seen when Interviewee 6 decided she did not want to date girls, because she was afraid of being mocked by society for liking girls and for being Asian. The shame that resulted made her question her attraction. From these examples, one can see how society’s construction of ignorance and suppressed discourse lead to stigmas associated with certain appetites. Ultimately, norms construct ideas of what is “good” sex and what is “bad” sex and whether or not women agree with this is individually based.

During Focus Group 4, the ideas of good and bad sex were discussed. Bad could be considered synonymous with taboo, in the sense that society views it as unacceptable or inappropriate. Without coming to a consensus, people listed that bad sex for society is anal sex, finishing too soon, sex with multiple partners, nonconsensual sex, sex between



different age groups and fetishes. When asked how their personal experiences relate to this taboo list, some said they enjoyed anal or being tied up. From this brief discussion, one can see how because of this “bad” list, people who enjoy behaviors associated with these acts may not feel comfortable asserting their appetites in a society that does not accept them as normal. As seen in Rubin’s sexual value hierarchy, these ideas of “bad” sex are actual forces in suppressing discourse, and in some instances even practice. This prevents fulfillment of these appetites, so long as these acts bring the women pleasure.

### **Why is this happening?**

Why is there suppressed discourse between a woman and her partner, or among her friends or with others about the potential pleasures that she knows she can or would like to enjoy? What is causing this to occur? My focus group participants hypothesized the ideas of bad sex often come from the opinions of friends who were more experienced or the media that convey these messages. One interview participant said her conservative and religious background said that the missionary position was the only acceptable thing. Others said it is taboo for girls to talk about their sexuality, sexual experiences or sexual appetites, or there are just too many social norms to fight up against in terms of their own appetites and what is considered normal. Unique to these inferences, Interviewee 5 hypothesized that class plays a role; she said lower classes have nothing to lose and no reputation to uphold, so it is easier to discuss aspects of sex. Going along with Rubin’s politics of sexuality, this participant may feel as if the oppressive nature of classism is already such a force that discussing sexuality in an oppressed class is easier. With the

limitations of my research, this cannot be unpacked further, but my research does show that oppressed women have a harder time breaching the subject of sexual pleasure. In fact, the biggest fear of my research participants, though, seemed to be how friends would receive and respond to personal sexual appetites. Peer-pressure was the most inflicting force to suppress discourse. Often limiting the conversations that took place, my research participants felt like they could not talk about their experiences with friends for fear of being shamed.

Because of feelings of shame and guilt, no matter how much knowledge these women have, women inhibit their expression or practice of sexual appetites. The suppression of discourse may cause women to forego their own pleasure. Other times, emotional pleasure makes up for the lack of physical pleasure. My research participants said they may take control of their sexual pleasure by enhancing their sexual experience through props, toys, lingerie or shaving, and they do this for not only for their partners but mainly for themselves. But these acts could be attributed to the need to add to a sexual experience because of the ignorance or suppression of their own pleasure. The extent of fulfillment is personal and subjective, and I cannot speak for my participants, but it is clear that there are contradictions in the narratives of my research participants concerning assertion of their own sexual knowledge.

This discussion is important to my thesis, because it reveals the limits of communication. The suppression of discourse either leads to ignorance surrounding women's experiences of pleasure or the inability to express what is pleasurable and what is not. It shows that the lack of communication that takes place has consequences and

whether these consequences are minimal, such as just a general ambivalence, or bigger such as shame, guilt, or the complete foregoing of a certain type of pleasure, women's pursuit of pleasure seems remains devalued as a result of silence.

## **Chapter 4: The Pleasure of Communication**

Thus far, I have outlined the circumstances that cause an initial construction of ignorance concerning female sexual pleasure and that cause a perpetuation of ignorance on Bucknell's campus. I then discussed the ways in which females have come to know about their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure in spite of the lack of reliable conversations and education taking place with pleasure seeking females. I demonstrated the ways in which females, even though they assert this knowledge, exhibit ambivalence concerning their sexual appetites, especially with a partner. Neither females nor their partners are recognizing the power of women's knowledge about sexual pleasure, and this lack of recognition results in shame, guilt, inhibitions and uncertainty surrounding their women's sexual subjectivity.

I would like to discuss the power of discourse, communication and conversations for women who are navigating their pursuits of pleasure among gendered societal expectations and constructions of knowledge and ignorance about female sexual pleasure. Because of the conversations that took place during the interviews of focus groups that were positive experiences for the participants, often acknowledged by my research participants explicitly, I would like to argue (and so would many of my research participants) that communication is the key to change. More open conversations about female sexuality can bring women knowledge about sexual pleasure, concurrently evaluating sources and revaluing their sexual experiences and appetites. The empowering conversations should take place with parents, with other women, but most importantly

with partners who are aiding in the achievement of a woman's sexual pleasure. In this chapter, I will first present the desire for more communication as mentioned by my research participants. I will then use their arguments to support how conversations with parents, other women and eventually partners (especially at Bucknell) can help to enhance, assert and raise awareness about female sexual appetites that could lead to more knowledge and thus more sexual pleasure.

My research participants consistently expressed the desire to be able to discuss sexual pleasure more openly. This sentiment is best embodied in Interviewee 3's reason for volunteering to participate in my research:

One of the reasons I volunteered for this is because I think discussing human sexuality is awkward, but it's natural, and I think because we avoid talking about it so much, especially on a campus like this, this hook-up culture, people get so—it's sort of a stigma to even just talk about this openly. I volunteered for this, because I think we should talk about it more! And it would make it less awkward. I tend to be very open about that thing. My parents were very open with me, so, open to discussion, new experiences

Other women agreed saying that in general our society needs to instigate more communication about female sexuality or a stronger emphasis on female sexual pleasure when conversations do occur. Most of my research participants decided that these conversations would continue to enhance their own experiences and help to produce knowledge. Because they found the focus group discussions to be beneficial in such a way, they wished it had occurred earlier in their lives and wanted it to continue. They found the facilitation beneficial, so that they did not have to rely on themselves to make it happen. The research participants over time brought up various points of entry that this could have or should occur going forward.

The first point of entry into communication, as expressed by my research participants and explored by my analysis thus far is conversations with parents. The lack of communication between parents and their children can be considered a reason for ignorance and one reason that daughters research sexual pleasure often using disreputable sources. These sources are phallogentric or lower the expectation of female sexual pleasure in a sexual encounter. When brainstorming ways in which this initial ignorance could have been avoided, the focus group participants expressed that they wish that parents would provide an education that emphasized female pleasure for both sons and daughters, but especially for daughters. One participant said:

If a mom cares about her daughter, like she should be able to tell them "You need to demand, you need to demand pleasure out of a sexual relationship or you're wasting your time," because I think a lot of young people at that age don't know, and I was guilty that I didn't know I was supposed to expect that. I think if it's a safe environment, and they have that, and your mom being like "Look, this is what should happen. I've had sex before and now it's your time," I don't know. That kind of thing. I think it makes a huge difference for the pleasure aspect, just because.

Although another participant challenged this assertion because of the use of language, specifically the word "demand," but it was eventually reconciled that the "sex-talk" should comprehensively include a discussion of female pleasure and of potential sites of pleasure on a woman's body. This education should eventually be complemented with, not grounded in the assumption of, self-discovery. Resolving a male's ignorance about female sexual pleasure, another participant suggested that the "sex-talk" with her brother should include aspects that place more value on the woman's experience. Based on her own experience, she hopes that her parents (and others) will communicate that most sex

is phallogocentric, and sons need to be aware of the female's pleasure as well. Through this means of communication, certain ignorances could be prevented and more fulfilling sexual experiences for women could result from such transmission of knowledge.

Because my research participants now have this idea, they also briefly suggested what they could do as future mothers. Many realized how the lack of communication from their parents resulted in frustrating or less than pleasurable sexual experiences because of the lack of knowledge they had. For this reason, a few said that as mothers they hope to change and be more open to communication. One interviewee said that the narrow definition of female sexuality she received from her parents made her realize exactly what she wish *had* been communicated to her. She now believes as a parent she will include pleasure, agency and assertion into her discussions. Seeing that more open conversations about the pleasure aspect of female sexuality with children may take place reveals that there is the possibility for change surrounding the ignorance about female sexuality and more specifically, sexual pleasure. Through the conversations with other women, and realizing that they were not alone in their coming of age experiences, the research participants began to strategize for their own futures.

If society were to provide more open knowledge about female sexual pleasure, rather than stifle the knowledge and conversations, thus creating ignorance, more women may be open to the discussion. Many focus group participants acknowledged that they were having fun with the discussions, and it was the one thing in their weeks that they were looking forward to. They said that hearing other women's experiences made them feel better that they were not alone in their own confusion or negotiation towards

knowledge about sexual pleasure. This consciousness-raising helped to eliminate some of the feelings of shame that were discussed in Chapter 3. It is true that not every woman is comfortable talking about sex, but I have shown that this discomfort could be a result of the socialization of females and their sexuality, as well as the ignorances that surround female sexuality and sexual pleasure. Because of the self-selection bias of my research participants, they were already open to these discussions, but even still they said that communicating with other women was educational, empowering, and relieving.

When women talk with other women about sexual pleasure they exchange information and grow in awareness, contributing to change. First, women can learn from other women about acts, behaviors or desires that are sexually pleasurable (or unsatisfying) for other women. So long as the women do not construct a new set of norms from other's experiences, then they can learn about different ways to think about their own experiences and actions that lead to pleasure. For example, during my interviews, many women discussed how when they wanted to learn about new sexual behaviors or desires they turned to their sisters or female friends. But because not everyone was willing to talk about it, some had to hold back or remain silent, thus remaining ignorant. This theme was especially evident during the discussion of female masturbation. One interviewee pointed out that unlike adolescent boys, her friends never discussed female masturbation so much so that she didn't know it was "a thing." Another said that even though her older friends mentioned female masturbation, when she brought it up with her immediate peers, they brought her shame so much so that she stopped masturbating for a period in her life. If women told other women about masturbation more openly, maybe



this would not occur. If women educated other women about sexual pleasure from a younger age and on, then there might not be as much shame or peer-pressure surrounding the topic of female sexual pleasure. The open discussions could lead to women being aware of non-conforming desires or a variety of practices that lead to pleasure without the burden of shame or silence.

Many of these instances of education and awareness-raising about different sexual practices or ideas of sexual pleasure among women took place in the focus group discussions, which sometimes lead to a positive confirmation of personal sexual appetites. Focus Group Participant 4 expressed, “I think I didn’t realize how much there was for me to know. I didn’t know about myself and about other people. I learned a lot in this group. And I always feel a sense of high when I walk out of here,” and one participant agreed. Examples of these educational moments were when the women discussed the myth of the g-spot and different perspectives on internal and external orgasms. One woman discussed how shaving her vagina with different designs has enhanced her pleasure and went so far as to instruct how to shave a certain style. Two women did not know what lesbian sex consisted of, and one bisexual participant openly explained what she considers sex. During another conversation, a focus group participant explained how her sex toys work. As each focus group progressed, the women evidently felt more comfortable in sharing their knowledge with one another. I was able to take a more backseat approach to the discussions, as the participants lead each other through some questions and answers based on my prompts. By the last focus group, the participants had been asking each other questions about their experiences, sharing more

open stories, laughing, joking and alleviating any initial uncertainty they had about their own knowledge.

Open discussion about sexual pleasure can be a revaluing experience for women. For example one participant said, “Over the years I have made friends with people who have done some *unthinkable* sexual things and talking with—about it made me be like ‘Wow, even my craziest night now feels like very, very tame,’ which made me more comfortable in general with realizing like a lot of people like a lot of different things, and that is perfectly fine.” Another example of this revaluing was when Focus Group Participant 1 said that she learned through the focus group that a lot more people, besides her, are okay with their sexuality and talking about their sexuality, which makes her feel that she is not the only one. A conversation that extends this point of view was seen at the end of Focus Group 4:

**Participant 7:** I think it’s been very freeing in the sense that I have a lot of experiences and I am comfortable talking to my close friends about, but I almost feel like it is a twenty-first century version of the feminine mystique—do all of you know what that is? It’s like one of the very first feminist publications that spread like wildfire back in the beginning of the feminist movement and all of these women were starting to women and all these women were like “Oh my god. Every woman across the nation has been feeling this same.” So I feel like in a way—clearly because if I take all the people that came here, we are all different. We are different class years. We come from different places in the country. We are involved in different activities. Some of us are straight; some of us are not. Some of us are anywhere in between, yet we can all come together on these commonalities: both the good and the bad, so I feel like it’s been—I didn’t realize how much I had to share until I was actually asked.

...

**Participant 4:** I am not the only one. You know there are other people who feel this way and maybe there are a lot of other people who feel this way and it’s like there are only seven of us in the room who we got together, but there’s like potential like she said. So I like that.

From these accounts on the value of the focus group sessions, it is clear that by talking about female sexuality and sexual pleasure with other women brings a sense of relief for the women involved. They enjoy knowing that other women want to be more open to communication or are open to more diverse experiences.

Talking with other women, the focus group participants saw the potential for solidarity. Because the focus group participants felt like they all were able to connect through both their similarities and their differences, they found it to be an empowering experience. They said that these conversations could possibly lead to more assertiveness in what they wanted and did not want in a sexual experience, which might enhance their pleasure. Because of this empowerment, one participant said that she was able to bring up these topics with women on Bucknell's campus outside of the focus group. She said she saw the benefits of having the discussions on a larger scale. Others said they wish they had had these conversations as freshmen in order to prevent conforming sexual experiences, and the one freshman participant agreed. This shows that this group empowerment could steer women away from social-conformation and towards autonomy. The focus group participants expressed that they wish the conversations could continue to take place with different women, even those who were not comfortable, because they now realized how helpful it was.

Not only extending the discussion to other women, but also to men is something the focus participants imagined; they pictured coming together with a group of men who were having similar discussions in order to bring the awareness-raising about sexual pleasure, and in particular female sexual pleasure, full circle. They said that the unity

they felt in the focus group gave them confidence to assert their opinions in practically any context. The one limitation they expressed was the fact of lack of safe-spaces in the future, which the research context provided. Regardless, they all found strength in each other's stories, knowledge and experiences around sexual pleasure, so much so that they believed it could result in a cultural change.

Through this sense of empowerment and solidarity, women felt like they could also be more assertive with their sexual appetites, especially with their partners. In Chapter 1, I discussed how the hook-up culture perpetuates unfulfilling experiences for many women at Bucknell, and in Chapter 2, I discussed how many women learned from trusting, longer relationships. Combined, this shows that trust brings out communication between partners that lead to more pleasurable experiences. For this reason, what needs to take place in order to enhance a female's sexual pleasure is communication between partners.

Communication during a sexual encounter with a partner can help improve a sexual experience, as expressed by many research participants. For example, Interviewee 2 described an explicit example of how "a new understanding of pleasure" came from explicit communication between her and her partner:

**[What] are other ways you explore [your sexual desires, attractions, pleasures, etc.] yourself, with other people?**

Oh yeah, I guess I would try stuff out, like different ways of touching yourself. I guess that encounter with the woman was...I instigated it. "Have you ever thought about this? Would it be pleasurable?" and it was a mutual, "Well, lets find out." [laughs]

Eventually, she describes how this event lead to her to realize how she could be attracted to women and receive pleasure from this attraction. The communication allowed for an

exploration of a sexual appetite. Another interview participant said that even though she is unsure whether or not she has achieved an orgasm, her and her boyfriend openly communicate about possible ways to achieve it. In both of these instances, communication has led to sexual exploration and more knowledge.

A lack of communication can get in the way of exploring sexual appetites and achieving sexual pleasure. This is seen in Interviewee 3's narrative account:

When I wanted to talk about [having sex] he would just shut down. I think it's a thing that couples should talk about. You know people that are having sex should talk about. I don't think it should just be a "Hey, what are you doing?" text at the end of the night, and you end up in someone's room. I think it should just be discussed openly, and he never wanted to. It just became such an uncomfortable issue for me too, so I just sort of backed off and it fizzled out...They just sort of wanted to do it and not talk about.

From this example, one can see how a lack of communication prevented a sexual experience that had the potential for pleasure, and Interviewee 3 wanted to be able to openly talk about it in order to have her desires be fulfilled. In fact, a lack of communication can also result in both partners being unsatisfied, especially if they are both conforming to socialized ideas about sex. When discussing how this plays out on Bucknell's campus, Focus Group Participant 3 said:

I think the lack of the communication is really important and is perpetuated in the Greek system. I also think something else, which is a little more subtle, I've never seen such a strong desire of conforming as I do on this campus, and I think that has a lot to do with it, because then you got guys and girls who are doing things that are equally un-pleasurable, but they saw someone, or heard someone and thought it was cool and do it. I heard a story about, and it was told to me second hand; I don't even know who these people are, but a guy was complaining about *having* to cum on a girl's face, but "that's what you do, right?" then the girl was complaining too, because "that's what I am supposed to do." I find this

really funny because both sides are not wanting to do to that but that's what they are "supposed to do." So it's just that kind of conforming to whatever you think is normal.

From this example, one can see how if more communication occurred, fewer social expectations of sex and pleasure on Bucknell's campus would be socialized. It appears that these conversations about sexual pleasure are not always taking place on Bucknell's campus, which can result in dissatisfaction from at least one participant in a sexual encounter, minimizing the potential for fulfillment of sexual appetites.

Many women, though, discussed how they enjoyed being out of control during a sexual experience with a partner and that led to more pleasure; therefore, sometimes explicit communication about sexual pleasure may not be ideal. As a result, there are certain conversations that need to occur outside of a sexual experience that could result in knowledge for the self and for a partner that could construct more spontaneous sexually pleasurable experiences. This idea was mostly discussed in relation to Bucknell. Many women agreed on the fact that there needs to be more communication outside of the parties that would result in trust or more meaningful relationships. If there were more sober social spaces on campus that were not gender segregated, the focus group participants believed these interactions would eventually lead to more sexually pleasurable experiences that did not depend on the hook-up culture. Knowing someone on a personal level before a sexual encounter could lead to more spontaneous, emotionally pleasurable and fulfilling sexual experiences.

Yet this lack of explicit communication about sexual pleasure led to the idea that males on campus should "know what they are doing." Because of the construction of

ignorance that exists around female sexual pleasure already, this appears impossible. Thus, the conversations outside of parties could also help eliminate this ignorance as well as eliminate the ignorance that is perpetuated in the hook-up culture. These conversations could help raise awareness about female sexual pleasure with future partners. This would also give more agency to females who want to express their own desires and experiences with the hook-up culture. Discussions about female sexual pleasure with potential partners would result in new knowledge for both men and women and new perspectives about the sexual encounters already taking place on Bucknell's campus. It could potentially steer a sexual experience and its narrative account away from being a phallogocentric hook-up that results in, as one participant put it, a male's voice being heard the next day as he describes the experience to his teammate or frat brother. Instead, conversations about female sexual appetites with men would give voices to women who would be able to express their dissatisfaction (or satisfaction) with their sexual experiences, resulting in awareness raising for potential partners who might have a better idea of what they could be doing instead.

By circulating knowledge about female sexual pleasure, the social construction of both knowledge and ignorance as well as the perpetuation of ignorance might be avoided, resulting in more sexually pleasurable experiences for women. So long as parents communicated more openly about sexual pleasure to their sons and daughters, women educated each other more openly about their own experiences and built solidarity as a result, and finally, partners became more aware of female's bodies as sites of sexual pleasure and the variations of female sexual desires, then female sexual pleasure might

not be as taboo. Theorists have asked for a new politics of pleasure and for more conversations to take place. From my research it is clear that discussions and conversations need to take place, and in order to overcome the individualistic pressure to make change, facilitated discussions can be a point of entry into discussion of topics surrounding female sexual pleasure. Discourse provides the opportunity for critical reflection of oppressive forces, the circulation of valuable knowledge and the prevention of ignorance. It brings out the silences, giving women a voice and agency over her sexuality and her pleasure. By talking to parents, other women and partners about sexual pleasure, women can make informed choices and achieve more sexually pleasurable experiences that are normative or not, expected or different. The expression of individual desires would be less taboo and unexpected. Women would be able to do as they please, realizing that systems of oppression do exist. It is not about creating politics around pleasure; it is about eliminating the ignorance that results from hegemonic thinking about female sexual pleasure and women's sexual appetites.



## **Conclusion**

Using qualitative data, an understanding of standpoint theory and the voices of Bucknell women, I have shown that coming to know about sexual pleasure is a complex, contradictory yet still empowering experience for many women. Even though sites of ignorance and disempowerment exist, many women are able to overcome these obstacles and learn about sexual pleasure. Unfortunately, through, they often have to rely on the very sources that aid in the construction of ignorance. Through experimentation and practice, especially with trusted sex partners, women are able to enact their sexual appetites and learn even more about their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure. Some women enjoy expressions of mutual pleasure, while other prefer more submissive roles. Regardless of the universal messages about female sexuality, women at Bucknell have taken ownership of the knowledge and enacted it in personal experiences based on their individual tastes. But as this knowledge increases, it becomes even more challenging for women to assert it and feel confident in it in a society (or campus) that perpetuates contradictory ideals of female sexuality.

Because of the epistemology of female sexuality and in particular female sexual pleasure, women's knowledge about their sexual appetites is more challenging to produce, share and assert; therefore, a woman's experience of sexual pleasure is often devalued, misunderstood or even foregone. More conversations need to occur about female sexual pleasure in order to help eliminate the construction of ignorance, educate men and women about not only the social constructions that affect female sexuality, but

also the assortment of sexual appetites that could potentially bring women pleasure. Through these conversations, knowledge overcomes ignorance, and knowledge produces more sexual pleasure.

Theoretical knowledge about female sexuality in general is curated to benefit those in power (men as a class); therefore, sexual encounters predominantly are structured as phallogentric experiences. This relates to Tanesini's argument that theoretical knowledge (normally produced by males) constructs hegemonic experiences through assertions of knowledge and resulting practiced behavior. Women are not expected to be the pleasure seekers in sexual relationships. The messages that women receive about female sexuality, which are communicated directly or conveyed through silences, often shift a woman's sexual experience away from physical sexual pleasure and towards ideas of romanticism, intimacy, and emotional connection. Although most women in my research value both physical and emotional pleasure, it is true that they display the most ambivalence about their physical sexual appetites, especially when asserting the knowledge that they have gained about their bodies as sites of sexual pleasure. Women are not often the ones to create such assertions of theoretical knowledge; consequently, enacting and practicing behavior based on their theoretical knowledge is unfamiliar and is worsened by feelings of shame. The lack of assertion only perpetuates ignorance around female sexual appetites, and hegemonic understandings of female sexuality (such as passivity, objectification, intimacy and reproduction) continue to be practiced. Women not only have to navigate the contradictions associated with developing their sexuality but also the systems of oppression that affect their gender.

The ideas of theoretical and practical knowledge also apply to Rubin's argument that sexuality has its own systems of oppression. A sexual value hierarchy creates ideas of "good" and "bad" sexual behavior, which in particular affects women because of their gender. "Good" sex, which is taught to women using sex education class, the media, religion, familial values, peers etc., is constructed based on assertions of theoretical knowledge, which is socially constructed; thus, the "good" sexual behaviors that many women feel pressured to practice aid in the construction of ignorance. "Bad" sex, because of its oppressive nature, is either not practiced or rarely discussed or admitted to. The oppressive forces of "bad" sex are more extensive for women, because of female's sexual double standard, the Madonna-whore complex and the traditional suppression of discourse around female sexuality in general, and non-normative sexual behaviors in particular. For those who do practice such experiences that would be stigmatized as "bad" or just untraditional (especially practices that might enhance a woman's sexual pleasure), making sense of the encounters, finding linguistic tools to describe them and conceptualizing them against societal frameworks is more challenging. This leads to a suppression of discourse. Failing to recognize, express and educate women on the spectrum of sexual appetites that can be practiced, especially for women, preserves ignorance.

While political systems of knowledge affect the majority of women, each woman learns and embodies that knowledge in their sexual experiences differently not only because of the intersectionality of identities but also because of mere individual preferences. But we cannot simply let every woman practice what she pleases, because

that maintains ignorance around the oppressive systems that affect the construction of her sexual appetites and fails to recognize how these systems are already laden with socially constructed knowledge. We cannot say female sexuality in general looks like “this” or “that” either, because that perpetuates the constructions of norms and continues to oppress certain identities that go beyond being a woman.

Instead, women should enter into discussions with their parents, other women, and potential partners in order to become more aware of the social constructions of knowledge and ignorance that affect or marginalize their sexuality and sexual appetites. Through this awareness-raising, women can also learn more about different sexual behaviors that could lead to pleasure. These conversations should provide an overview of the potential experiences that could lead to women achieving more sexual pleasure and educate everyone one how these *could* be embodied. As LeMoncheck argues, “conversation and collaboration” needs to take place. Because every woman differs though, this awareness raising should be complemented with practice and self-discovery; while the mechanics and equipment of pleasure can easily be overviewed, the actual fulfillment of sexual appetites and sexual expression should not be policed. If more conversations were to place, the theoretical knowledge behind sexual experiences would not merely consist of hegemonic understandings that are eventually practiced, and non-normative preferences would not be challenged as much. These discussions would instead encompass a broader (but never complete) scope of pleasurable practices, which would be critiqued based on the sources from which they came. And women could then

make informed choices about whether or not they wanted to embody such knowledge in sexual experiences in order to pursue more sexual pleasure.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Consent Form**

Interview Consent Form  
Human Participants Research  
Bucknell University

Project Title: Women and the Epistemologies of Pleasure: An Analysis of Desire and Sexual Practice at Bucknell University

Purpose of Study: I understand that the purpose of this study is to analyze the sources of knowledge and information and embodied experiences of Bucknell women's sexual appetites and practices. I am aware that this study is concerned with sexual behaviors, sexual pleasure and the sources of such knowledge.

General Plan of Research: I understand that if I consent to participate in this study that I will participate in an interview that will ask me to discuss my sexuality, my understanding of sexual pleasure and my associated sexual behaviors. The answers to my questions will be digitally recorded and transcribed. My answers will remain completely confidential. None of the questions will ask me to reveal any information that could identify me as a participant in the study.

Estimated Duration of the Research: I understand that the interview should take no more than one hour to complete.

Estimated Total Number of Participants: I understand that the researcher expects to interview approximately 10 female students on Bucknell's campus.

Voluntary Participation: I understand that my participation in the interview is completely voluntary. At any point during the interview, I can refuse to answer a question or terminate the interview, no matter what the reason. During the interview, my responses will be digitally recorded. At any point, I can ask for the recorder to be turned off. If I decide to withdraw from the interview, my responses will not be saved.

Benefits of Participation: I understand that my participation will benefit the study of gender and sexuality as it relates to how female sexual behavior and knowledge is enacted and formed. It is possible that I may benefit from this interview by reflecting on the questions asked. I also understand that at the end of the interview, I will be notified of a focus group that will take place at a later date. I may benefit from the voluntary participation in this focus group through further reflection on the subject matter.

Risks of Participation: I understand that there is more than minimal risk by participating in this study. The possible risks that could incur are emotional distress from reflecting on sexual experiences not limited to traumatic, embarrassing or uncomfortable experiences. Furthermore, if my responses were to be somehow publically linked with my identity,

stigmatization or a hurt reputation may incur. I also understand that if I become upset or uncomfortable by any of the questions asked and feel the need to speak to someone about my reaction, I may contact Psychological Services at Bucknell (577-1604).

Confidentiality: I understand that all of my responses during the interview will remain completely confidential. No questions will be asked that will be able to identify me as a participant in this study. The only person who will hear the audio recording of my responses is the primary researcher. Once the recording of my interview has been transcribed, the digital recording will be destroyed. No identifying information or codes will be recorded during the transcription of the interview. The transcription of the interview will be saved on a password-protected computer and private server space that only the primary researcher has access to. Any public report of my responses will not include my name or individual information that could link me back to the study.

Questions: If I have questions regarding the study, I may contact the researcher, Heather Wakeman, at [hkw003@bucknell.edu](mailto:hkw003@bucknell.edu) or by phone at 603-707-0935. If I have general questions about the participation in human research, I may contact Abe Feuerstein, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Office of International Research at [afeuerstein@bucknell.edu](mailto:afeuerstein@bucknell.edu), 570-577-3293.

I understand that I will be given the option to receive more information about a voluntary peer-focus group at a later date, when I have finished the interview.

I have read the above description of the research, and I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research, and I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older:

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

## **Appendix B: Focus Group Consent Form**

Focus Group Consent Form  
Human Participants Research  
Bucknell University

Project Title: Women and the Epistemologies of Pleasure: An Analysis of Desire and Sexual Practice at Bucknell University

Purpose of Study: I understand that the purpose of this study is to analyze the sources of knowledge and information and embodied experiences of Bucknell women's sexual appetites and practices. I am aware that this study is concerned with sexual behaviors, sexual pleasure and the sources of such knowledge.

General Plan of Research: I understand that if I consent to participate in this study that I will participate in a focus group that will ask me to discuss sexuality and sexual behavior and my associated experiences in a group setting. The answers to my questions will be digitally recorded and transcribed. I understand that the researcher will try to maintain confidentiality at all times, but there is a possibility of breach of confidentiality, since others will be participating in the study. I understand that I must respect the privacy of the other participants and will not share any of the information discussed during the four sessions nor will I share the identities of the participants.

Estimated Duration of the Research: I understand that the focus groups will consist of four sessions: once a week for approximately 1 hour.

Estimated Total Number of Participants: I understand that the researcher expects approximately 10-15 female students on Bucknell's campus to participate in each of the focus group sessions.

Voluntary Participation: I understand that my participation in the focus groups is completely voluntary. At any point during the course of the month or during the discussion, I can refuse to participate, no matter what the reason. During the focus group, my responses will be digitally recorded. At any point, I can ask for the recorder to be turned off.

Benefits of Participation: I understand that my participation will benefit the study of gender and sexuality as it relates to how female sexual behavior and knowledge is enacted and formed. It is possible that I may benefit from this focus group by reflecting on the questions asked and raising awareness about female sexuality and learning from others' experiences.

Risks of Participation: I understand that there is more than minimal risk by participating in this study. The possible risks that could incur are emotional distress from reflecting on

sexual experiences not limited to traumatic, embarrassing or uncomfortable experiences I also understand that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, because of the nature of the focus group; therefore, there is the possible risk that another member of the focus group could share my responses, even if they have signed the non-disclosure statement. The non-disclosure statement is not legally binding. Risks associated with this breach of confidentiality include the sharing of possibly stigmatizing behavior that could affect me psychologically or socially.

I understand that if I become upset or uncomfortable by any of the questions asked or the discussions that take place and feel the need to speak to someone about my reaction, I may contact Psychological Services at Bucknell (577-1604).

*Confidentiality: Due to the nature of focus groups, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed nor is it legally binding; therefore, I understand that I am sharing information at my own risk. All participants will be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement, but this document is not legally binding; therefore, I understand that I am sharing information at my own risk.*

I understand that the focus group will be digitally recorded and then transcribed. The only person who will hear the audio recording of my session is the primary researcher. Once the recording of the focus group has been transcribed, the digital recording will be destroyed. The transcriptions of the focus group sessions will be confidential. My identity will be given a code, and my responses will be associated with a number. The code-identifying sheet will be kept in a locked cabinet, separate from the transcription of the focus group. The transcriptions of the focus groups will be saved on a password-protected computer and private server space that only the primary researcher has access to. Any report of my responses will not include my name or individual information that could link me back to the study.

Questions: If I have questions regarding the study, I may contact the researcher, Heather Wakeman, at hkw003@bucknell.edu or by phone at 603-707-0935. If I have general questions about the participation in human research, I may contact Abe Feuerstein, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Office of International Research at afeuerstein@bucknell.edu, 570-577-3293.

I have read the above description of the research, and I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research, and I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older:

---

Participant's Signature

Date

## **Appendix C: Focus Group Non-Disclosure Agreement**

Focus Group Non-Disclosure Agreement  
Human Participants Research  
Bucknell University

By consenting to participate, I understand that I must respect the privacy and identity of the responses and will not repeat or share any information discussed over the course of the next four sessions. I understand that 10 to 15 other students will be participating, and I will respect the privacy of all of these individuals including their identity and their responses.

Non-disclosure Statement:

*Please Initial*

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to maintain the confidentiality of the responses of the all of the other participants and researchers during this focus group.

I understand that if I cannot agree to the above statement, then I will be ineligible to participate in the study.

By signing this form, I agree to participate in this research, and I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix D: Transcriptions**

## **Interview Transcription 1**

**What is your class year at Bucknell?**

2016

**By what race and/or ethnicity to you define yourself?**

White

**What is your sexual orientation?**

Straight

**What does the term sexuality mean to you?**

What gender you prefer.

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

I prefer men.

**What were some key sources or experiences that were influential in coming to understand sexuality in the way you just described it?**

Mostly my peers. I learned a lot from my peers. [short pause] I probably learned from my parents at a younger age, but I don't really remember it very much. And school in general.

**What about school?**

Health class, and I am taking a social justice class right now, so we talk a lot about that kind of stuff.

**Were there any particular sources that were influential in forming your own sexuality such as people, texts, the media?**

I'd say probably the media a lot. You know, there is [sic] a lot of attractive guys without shirts on and stuff like that. Definitely peers too. There's a lot of pressure to be straight. I definitely am straight, but you know.

**Would your peers explicitly pressure you?**

I think it's more like indirect pressures, you know? Like, "Oh, which guy do you have a crush on?" never "Do you have a crush on a girl or a guy?" You know?

**What is sexual pleasure for you? What does that mean?**

I guess, like, climaxing, orgasming.

**How did you learn about sexual pleasure?**

By experience.

**When did you first learn about it?**

When did I lose my virginity, are you asking?

**Whatever that question means to you.**

I guess that's what it means to me. When I was a freshman in high school, so when I was fifteen.

**Have you ever experienced sexual pleasure?**

Yes.

**Can you describe the time you first remember experiencing sexual pleasure. How have your experiences of pleasure changed since then?**

I was a little—I don't know if frightening is the right word. It was a little scary at first, cause you had never felt that way before. It's obviously a good feeling, but I guess it was just something you had to get used to. And the more comfortable you feel with yourself feeling that way, the more fun it gets.

**And you feel that's how it's changed?**

Yeah

**Where do you go for information when you want to expand your knowledge about your sexuality or learn about different sexual practices?**

It's kind of embarrassing but Google, Urban Dictionary.

**Beyond those two sources, are there other ways you explore your sexual desires, attractions, pleasures etc.?**

I've watched porn before.

**What gets in the way of exploring your sexuality?**

Well, there is a stigma with girls watching porn and talking about their sexuality. Me and my friends talk about it sometimes, like it's not a cool thing to talk about if you masturbate or something. For guys, it's much easier.

**Can you give me an example of a time you wanted to explore sexual pleasure and you didn't? What got in the way?**

Yes. When I am in a situation with a guy—and I hold sex to a high standard. I only do it with a guy you really love and stuff—but when you are in the moment, you obviously want to do it anyway, so you got to resist temptation a little bit.

**So what got in the way there?**

My morals. [pause] And it's more about me judging me than other people, because you can hide it from other people, but just for me, it's what I prefer.

**How do you see the relationship between emotional and physical pleasure?**



A lot. I feel like if I am not attracted to the boy, or if I am not emotionally attracted to the boy and connected with him, it's a lot less fun, and I don't orgasm as much.

**Is one more important or are both equally as important?**

I feel like the correct answer is emotional, but I feel like it's equally important.

**And by correct do you mean for yourself?**

For society.

**We have been discussing in the abstract, now I want to ask about specific sexual practices.**

**How do you actually go about in fulfilling your sexual desires, attractions, cravings?**

Well, if I am not in a committed relationship, I usually masturbate, or I am comfortable with doing other things with boys besides having sex with them, which can also lead to pleasure.

**Do you feel like they are being fulfilled?**

Yeah, for the most part.

**What do you know about the male orgasm?**

What do you mean?

**Do you know anything about it? Have you experienced it?**

I've experienced it.

**How did you learn about it? Or the first time you learned about it?**

I guess the guy helped me out. You know he told me like, "Go faster," like "I'm coming." Kind of stuff like that.

**Did you learn about it in school?**

Not specifically

**Have you ever stimulated a man to orgasm?**

Yes.

**What do you know about the female orgasm?**

I've experienced it. [pause] Definitely did not learn about that in school.

**Did anyone teach you about it besides that/besides yourself?**

Not really.

**How did you learn this?**

I guess through trial and error—manipulation of myself to make myself know what I like and how I orgasm faster.

**Did you know you had the potential to orgasm before?**

Yes

**So how did you learn about that potential?**

I guess word of mouth from friends and peers.

**How old were you first learned that?**

14

**Have you ever stimulated another female to orgasm?**

No

**How do you, yourself, achieve an orgasm?**

I use an object. And I stimulate my clit too.

**Have you ever faked an orgasm?**

Yes.

**Why?**

I don't [pause] to make the boy feel better. They get really—I don't know what the word is—when they don't. Well some of them. At least the ones I've been with. I feel like it's a threat to their masculinity.

**So do you feel like you felt pressure or did you find pleasure in faking the orgasm?**

I did it for their emotional benefit. I don't know if that's the right word. There was no pressure. I feel like they would be mad at me if they knew I was faking it.

**What do you know about female masturbation?**

I know that there are different ways to do it. You can use objects and your hands and stuff.

**How did you learn about it the first time?**

I just kind of tried out.

**Was that word of mouth?**

Yeah, and I watched porn too, cause it's not something you can really talk about that much.

**Why did you feel like you couldn't really talk about it?**

I think a lot of my friends thought it was weird, or they weren't comfortable with their own body, so they didn't really want to talk about it if they did it.

**Did you ever talk about it with your family?**

No. Mainly peers I learned about it.

**In what contexts do you masturbate?**

Oh, when I am alone.

**Have you ever masturbated while you were with another partner?**

Yes, only if they ask me to though.

**Are these practices (female orgasm and masturbation) pleasurable for you?**

Yes

**Do those two pleasures (masturbation/orgasm) differ from one another or from other sexual pleasures or contexts?**

Yeah, I'd say definitely. I think it's more fun when you have someone else doing it for you. It is more intimate. But it's also kinda fulfilling when you do it yourself. You don't need anyone else to do it, so you can make yourself feel good, which I like.

**Do you feel like the same? Is the pleasure the same?**

I think it's different, because you can manipulate it yourself, so when it is someone doing it for you, they can go harder or faster. So if you're feeling it, and then they do something different, and it stops, it's different [from] when you're doing it cause you know how to control it.

**Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed about your sexuality, desires or attractions?**

Definitely, cause I lost my virginity at a young age, so a lot of my friends were still virgins at the time, and some of them still are. And it was before I was comfortable with it myself. I think I did before I was too ready, so I feel like that really affected how much I talked about it. Now I'm pretty comfortable about it, and I can talk about it whenever.

**Which of your desires, appetites, experiences etc., have you been embarrassed or ashamed about?**

Losing my virginity was my main one

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of regarding your sexual knowledge or practices?**

Well, [laughs] I am kind of the most experienced in my friend group, so now they have fun asking me all of these questions, so it's fun to be the one who knows it and who has had the experience before.

**So you feel proud that people come to you for that knowledge?**

Yeah, that I can help them feel more comfortable.

**And do you feel proud about your behaviors too, because you have experienced those things?**

Yeah, because for the most part I did them in contexts I was comfortable with, and I stuck with my morals, which is really important to me.

**And how were those morals shaped?**

I guess my family, and I am religious despite my sex before marriage, so I'd say I took religion into my own hands and kind of like interpreted it how I wanted to. So I feel like as long as I am being a good person and respecting myself, it's okay.

**Is there anything else that I haven't asked in this interview that you would like me to include in your response?**

I don't know, what are you looking for, cause I can tell you anything.

I guess I'd just like to say I wish it were it was more acceptable for girls to talk about and do these types of things, cause if a girl sleeps with a lot of guys, she's considered a slut or a whore, and if a guy does it, sometimes it's kind of cool. I don't really like that at all.

**By these things do you mean the stuff we have talked about like masturbation, sex, porn?**

Yeah all of that stuff, definitely.

## **Interview Transcription 2**

**What is your class year at Bucknell?**

Senior, class of 2013

**By what race and/or ethnicity to you define yourself?**

White

**What is your sexual orientation?**

I would say [pause] straight? But it's more open ended straight.

**What does the term sexuality mean to you?**

Sexuality. So I think how it goes is you are born with a gender. You either have the female body parts or male body parts. Sometimes even that is open ended, can be not as binary as we originally thought, but sexuality is more of how you associate yourself, what kind of roles do you prefer to perform. [Pause] Yeah, and who you are attracted to.

**Based on that definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

I would say mostly female sexuality.

**And just to clarify, because of the whole gender aspect of that definition? Or because of the attraction aspect?**

Both.

**What were some key sources or experiences that were influential in coming to understand sexuality in the way you just described it?**

Well, I guess I should clarify that the reason I am saying "mostly" is because I've had an encounter—encounters—with women that previous to that I would say, "Oh it's not going to be a pleasurable experience. I am just doing it for fun," but it turned out to be a pleasurable experience, and so then I reconsidered this idea of the binary, either you are attracted to men or you are attracted to women. And I think I've come to some understanding about myself that I *am* attracted to men, and I have been in relationships with men, but I could also envision having a relationship with a woman, although that has never happened, so I am not sure about that from just one encounter with a woman. I could say maybe.

**Are there any particular sources that were influential in forming your own sexuality such as people, texts, the media, classes, things that helped you form that understanding and who you are with that identity?**

Yeah, I guess I'm really involved in [identifier]. It is a really open community and we do a lot of physical exercises together. Just from studying the texts of theater artists, especially what we would call the avant-garde theater artists, who were pretty revolutionary and very politically revolutionary, again, it comes back to challenging this preconceived notion of a binary sexuality, so all these things....[fades away]

**What is sexual pleasure?**

Haha! What is sexual pleasure? Any feeling of [pause] bliss? And blurring of boundaries that comes from (says to self to self: I guess sexual pleasure would have to be associated with physical touch). I am not sure. I think you can have a sexually pleasurable moment without physical touch. I have had that! It is possible.

**How did you learn about sexual pleasure?**

[Laughs] I think in middle school. This is a really funny story. I was reading a book. I was lying on my stomach, and I had this weird twitchy thing, and I was bouncing on my stomach, and I started to feel a sensation on the clitoris. I was like, "I have no idea what is going on, but it feels great." And I would do that more often. I didn't know what I was doing. Then, I learned about the feminine body and realized what was happening [laughs].

**So no one had ever told you about it before that?**

Nooo, no no.

**And the book you were reading wasn't about sex or anything?**

Nope

**When did you first learn about it? Either when was that experience ,and when did you learn what it was? So that experience was in Middle school, and then when did someone tell you what it was?**

I guess it was around the same time. I don't remember [pause] because we had to learn about it in school [pause]. I don't remember if that conversation happened prior to that event or after that event, but it was all around the same time.

**And what you learned in school was specific to the body as a site of sexual pleasure?**

Uhh no. It was more just describing more about how sex happens. So really technically, so if you look at a body and be like, "So here is a place where sexual pleasure happens," but it wasn't really describing how the sensations would feel or how you would get that to happen. It was just here is where it happens.

**And did anyone ever describe that to you outside of school?**

Umm [pause]. Well, after I had already figured it out. My mom never brought it up before that, but then, when I got in my first relationship she just assumed, "So clearly she learned about it somehow, so now I can talk about it."

**Have you ever experienced sexual pleasure?**

Yes.

**And that was your first experience, the book?**

Yes

**How have your experiences of pleasure changed since then?**

Well, I realized I don't have to do it in such a round about way. I can do it manually with myself and hands, very directly and not through some other object and also, through encounters with other people.

**And have the feelings changed over time?**

Oh, yeah. It has only gotten better and more extensive, and I think also it comes with a psychological understanding of what is happening. For whatever reason integrating the mind with what's happening physically makes that experience longer, fuller and more complex.

**Where do you go for information when you want to expand your knowledge about your sexuality or learn about different sexual practices?**

The Internet! [laughs] Or bringing it up with my friends, *closest* friends.

**The Internet meaning Google or...?**

Yeah, I'd probably Google, or my sister, I would ask her a lot of questions.

**And is she older or younger?**

She is one year older.

**Beyond that, are there other ways you explore your sexual desires, attractions, pleasures etc.?**

You mean literally exploring it?

**Yeah, like when you are looking for information, other ways you explore it yourself, with other people?**

Oh yeah, I guess I would try stuff out, like different ways of touching yourself. I guess that encounter with the woman was—I instigated it: “Have you ever thought about this? Would it be pleasurable?” and it was a mutual, “Well, lets find out.” [laughs]

**What gets in the way of exploring your sexuality?**

The cultural negative association with things you might try out. That [pause] I guess also being [pause] I feel people look at me with a sense of: “She's an intellectual person whose interested in dah dah dah dah dah,” and so I have to keep certain things under wraps, otherwise people start to look at you in different ways, and that's really frustrating.

**Can you give me an example of a time you wanted to explore sexual pleasure and you didn't?**

[Long pause]

There is only one time that's coming to mind, and it was with a man who—we had been in a *kind of* relationship for a couple months, and I wanted to try some stuff, and he said no, which was fine, but so [fades out]

**So what got in the way, just because he did not want to? Did he give you a reason why?**

He did give me a reason, and it was because—this is actually great! He said because he was still emotionally attached to someone who he was dating before me, and so he didn't want to do that physical thing, unless he was completely also emotionally invested.

**How do you see the relationship between emotional and physical pleasure?**

I think they enhance each other, and if the emotion isn't there, it can still be a pleasurable experience. I have had that, but it doesn't create a lasting impression. I don't want to say I ever regretted doing any of those things, but it just wasn't as complex and rich of experience as when the emotion is there.

**Is one more important or are both equally as important?**

I think you got to have both.

**We have been discussing in the abstract, now I want to ask about specific sexual practices.**

**How do you go about in fulfilling your sexual desires, attractions, cravings, what do you do?**

Well, I am currently in a long distance relationship, so now, since the summer, we have only seen each other a couple times. When he is around, we are very sensitive to how the other person is feeling. We are very clear like, "I am in the mood to have sex right now. Let's have sex," but during the times when he is not there, I would just do manual masturbation on my own, not using—I usually—no, I don't own any sex toys, just manual.

**Do you feel like your desires are being fulfilled right now?**

90% of the time [laughs]

**Do you think it's because of the long distance relationship? Or what else?**

Yeah I think that's it. Yeah.

**What do you know about the male orgasm?**

Well, from conversations with my boyfriend, he said that contrary to my belief that every time he orgasms, he ejaculates, they *can* actually orgasm and not ejaculate, *or* they can ejaculate and not really feel the same intensity. The intensity varies. Sometimes they ejaculate and it doesn't feel that great, it's just a thing that happens.

**And did you not know this until you were in your current relationship?**



Yeah

**Have you ever stimulated a man to orgasm?**

Yeah

**What do you know about the female orgasm?**

From my own experience, it's different every time depending on what/how kind of stimulation you use. Different in that different parts of your body feel pleasure for different amounts of time, and you can have multiple orgasms in a short period of time, or not, sometimes it's whatever. Varying amounts of lubrication happen.

**Just to clarify do you mean stimulate different parts of the body or use different things to stimulate the body?**

Both, both.

**How did you learn the female orgasm?**

Well, back to that first encounter and just kind of exploring the different ways I can make that happen on my own. And then [pause] through the first relationship which I was in, and another person using their hands on me or using their mouth on me, and then through another person, and vaginal penetration.

**So for that, was it just through trial and error you learned about it, or did you have a source too that was telling you “Oh you should try different parts of the body?” Or was it “Oh that happened to feel good?”**

It was trial and error for a while, and then I started to get curious about maybe there is a more efficient way of doing what I am doing. So Google, talking to my sister—because I know she had been sexually active before I had been. I would ask her what she does to masturbate or what she does with her boyfriend, so I learned some stuff from her.

**Have you ever stimulated another female to orgasm?**

No

**How do you, yourself, achieve an orgasm?**

Vaginal penetration, manual

**Is there a certain state?**

I need to be in an imaginative state, so using fantasy if I am by myself. If I am with someone else, it's really a matter of relaxation. I found that I have to feel like the space is safe, meaning [laughs] I have been in places where the door isn't closed all the way, and I get really nervous that people can hear me, so if I don't feel comfortable using my voice, then I don't feel comfortable at all.

**Have you ever faked an orgasm?**

Yes.

**Why?**

This was I guess the first time I had sex with not my current boyfriend but the first boyfriend I had ever had, and I just thought that's what I should do! Because he was orgasming, so I should too! [Laughs]

**Was that pleasurable for you fake the orgasm?**

No, it was terrible. It was actually kind of painful.

**How did you learn about female masturbation, that it was an actual "thing"?**

It was like I was saying: it was trial and error for awhile, and then when I Googled it then I found a whole slew of information and videos and "how-to's"

**What do you know about it besides what you have already told me? Is there anything else you know about female masturbation?**

I know that a lot of people use props and vibrators and stuff, which I, uhh. [pause] Oh, I have tried a vibrator on my iPhone, which is not very effective [laughs].

**In what contexts do you masturbate?**

What do you mean?

**With people? Alone?**

Alone. Yeah. Although, I have masturbated in the presence of the person I am in a relationship with.

**Are these practices (female orgasm and masturbation) pleasurable for you?**

Yes

**Do those pleasures (masturbation/orgasm) differ from one another or from other sexual pleasures or contexts?**

Yeah, they are pleasurable in different ways. I think there is a really specific kind of pleasure that comes with being able to orgasm in the presence of someone else, because that is an intense openness that—if you are alone then you are obviously open with yourself—it's a different kind of relief and that breaking of a boundary between two people. But also, in terms of physically and technically, I can't achieve an orgasm through the penetrating, because I don't have any sex toys, so I can't do that without him [her boyfriend]. [pause] But it's not that that bothers me, because I just achieve a different kind of pleasure.

**Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed about your sexuality, desires or attractions, any, all, some not others, none?**

The only thing I am thinking about is that when I am at my house-house, like my mom's house, and I forget that our doors don't lock in that house, and she walked in, and I was masturbating. That was an awkward moment and really brief embarrassment, but other than that.

**Why were you embarrassed?**

[Laughs] Because my mom has never seen me do that! [Laughs]

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of regarding your sexual knowledge or practices?**

I actually am really proud that my female friend and I were open enough to have a sexual encounter—not really do that much—it was just a making out type of thing, but I was proud that we were open enough to do that, and it hasn't affected our friendship in any way. Although, both of us has come to a new understanding that that type of experience can be pleasurable, and there's nothing wrong with it. [laughs]

**And how about your sexual knowledge? Anything that you are proud of regarding your knowledge or understandings?**

Yeah, I have gotten—I am proud of myself for being more open and doing different sexual positions. First, I think it is a sign of trust that you can be in these crazy positions, and I know that when I first started becoming sexual active, I always thought no crazy positions *ever*, but really you can experience different kinds of pleasure depending on the position you are in.

**Is there anything else that I haven't asked in this interview that you would like me to include in your response?**

Hmm. I can't think of anything!

### **Transcription 3**

**What is your class year at Bucknell?**

I am a senior.

**By what race and/or ethnicity to you identify yourself?**

White, caucasian

**What is your sexual orientation?**

Heterosexual

**What does the term sexuality mean to you?**

To me it means how a person views their sexual being, like desires, pleasure, attraction and just everything linked with that, I guess.

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

I would say I am pretty open about it. One of the reasons I volunteered for this is because I think discussing human sexuality is awkward, but it's natural, and I think because we avoid talking about it so much, especially on a campus like this: this hook up culture, people get so—it's sort of a stigma to even just talk about this openly. I volunteered for this, because I think we should talk about it more! And it would make it less awkward. I tend to be very open about that thing. My parents were very open with me, so—open to discussion, new experiences. I would describe myself as a sexual person, but I wasn't sexualized at a young age or anything like that.

**What were some key sources or experiences that were influential in coming to understand your own definition?**

So when I was younger—I think it actually started when my [identifier] came out, when I was eleven. Well, he had come out before that, and I had started asking questions. [Identifier's] partner was around all of the time, and I was just like “Are they just best friends? They're always together!” [Laughs] And then they were like, “Well, actually” and they just explained everything. And I was just like, “Whoaaaa.” That was the first time I really questioned sexuality and how it is different for everyone. My parents were just really great about that. Even when you are a little kid, and stupid stuff happens at school: when boys and girls play doctor together, I would come home and be like “Oh my god! You would never guess what happened!” And my parents would be like, “Well that's normal. People exploring their sexuality.” And so I attribute most of that to them. I always had a healthy approach to it, and as I got older, I was able to explore it in a safe way. I had a high school boyfriend. I never felt like it was a touchy issue. It was just normal.

**And you said your parents explained “everything” to you. What do you mean by “everything?”**

So they explained to me how men can love men and be attracted to men, and women can love women and be attracted to women, and that's totally normal. If you are not sure who you are attracted to you that is totally normal. I think that was around the same time we had 6<sup>th</sup> grade growth and development, so I was learning about it at school, but I had *already* known, because my parent's had actually given me a book a few years earlier, so I had figured it out on my own. And they were so willing to talk to me about it. Obviously, I was a little shy at first and embarrassed, but eventually, I was like "It's just whatever!" and if my parents don't care, I shouldn't care.

**Are there any particular sources that were influential in forming your own sexuality such as other people, texts, the media?**

Well, I had this friend in junior high and high school. She had two older sisters and they had taught her *so* much stuff, and she was way to young. Well, I don't know, we were 12 and 13. There was just a lot of stuff she just knew: just all of the stuff she had accumulated. There were times when I would come home from her house and be like "Oh my gosh! I just learned so much today!" And my parents would be like "Woowww!!" I would just mention something—and our parents were really good friends, so we would all laugh about it—but she really-I would attribute a lot of my sexual knowledge to her, which is weird. She was always the experimental one and wanted to do everything early, and quickly and fast. I was more cautious, a little bit, but I don't know, probably to her.

**And that knowledge, was that behavior she was talking about?**

Like behavior like sexual acts. What a blow job is. I was like "What is that? Do you actually blow on it?" [Laughs] and she was like "What!? Noo." She was the first one in my friend group to have sex, do all of it. I was just like "Oh my god! You're so brave." And then I started to realize it wasn't that big of a deal. It didn't happen to me as early, but I was first introduced to it at a teenage level from her.

**What is sexual pleasure?**

I guess the pleasure you derive from sexual acts. That's what I would say, but I guess it doesn't necessarily have to be an act. I assume just watching an erotic film or reading erotica, people receive pleasure from that in a way even if they aren't like—yeah, does that make sense?

**Like using their bodies?**

Yeah! So even just taking it in passively, yeah.

**How did you learn about sexual pleasure? When did you first learn about it?**

I guess I learned about it second hand from her [the friend], but then experienced it on my own. Probably when I was 15 or 16, I started dating someone in high school and learned about it first hand

**And when did your friend start telling you about it?**

When I was 12 or 13

**You said when you were 15 or 16 when you started dating this person, that was your experience of it. Was it right away?**

Not right away, probably four or five months after we started dating. It was both of our first relationship. We didn't really know anything. We *knew* what to do, but we didn't *know* what to do, because we had never done it before. Just like anything! Like kissing: it was my first kiss. It was his. Holding hands, everything that follows from there.

**It was just learning together?**

Yeah!

**Can describe the time you first remember experiencing sexual pleasure.**

Yeah? I don't know; I'd have to assume it was before I was in a relationship. I don't know through masturbation, I guess. I would say that started when I was 13, 14. Yeah.

**How have your experiences of pleasure changed since then?**

Well they are certainly more diverse, so from there, kissing, making out. From there, I don't know, someone else touching you, having sex, oral sex. I guess in all of those ways.

**Just more acts? Can you say more about that.**

Not just more acts. So those acts have accumulated over time. At the beginning, not all of those were happening. It was an isolated incident, learning about my own body. Now, I would say, acts—I am trying to think. [pause] This is funny. I read *Fifty Shades of Grey* last year, because I was pretty curious, but I don't know if I derived sexual pleasure from that. I was kind of scared a lot of the times. I was like, "This is kinda intense." I mean, it was enthralling, and I kept reading. Yeah, if I had been truly unpleasurable, I would have stopped, so I guess reading that. My experience reading erotica is pretty limited, like I don't watch porn. I suppose just being with someone in a sexual way—being with another person is how I would describe it now, as opposed to then. [Pause, to self] God. *Fifty shades of grey!* [Laughs]

**Where do you go for information when you want to expand your knowledge about your sexuality or learn about different sexual practices?**

The Internet, but I guess that I talk to friends that I feel comfortable with. I don't think that everybody feels comfortable talking about sex with all of their friends. I have one friend that I will talk about it with, because I feel like it is just not a topic that other people are necessarily comfortable with, and I don't want to make them feel uncomfortable, so I just sort of wait to see if the topic will come up. I'll gauge it a little bit, and if I am curious about, I don't know, something, uhh well I might bring it up, but normally I tried to figure it out by my own via the Internet.

**Beyond that, are there other ways you explore your sexual desires, attractions, pleasures etc.?**

I guess attractions. Sometimes I—I don't know if that's necessarily exploring—but I'll just think about people in ways. I try and consider people attractiveness around me that I know. I'll just wonder about them: what they are interested in, what they like to do sexually. I don't know! I think that is a normal thing—to wonder about people. I guess I explore it in that way. I read a lot. I watch a lot of movies, so those themes are explored a lot through film and fiction and nonfiction, so I've explored it that way.

**And do you think the way that it's portrayed in books and movies, do you go along with those things or do you gauge your own feelings like “Oh that works.” Or “That doesn't work.”**

Maybe sometimes. Say I read a book and different types of a relationship and how it progresses in terms of sexuality and pleasure is discussed. I can sort of compare it to my own experiences, be like “Hm, that seems a little unrealistic, but maybe it's how it works for some other people.” I find that books and movies, there are some that are more realistic and closer to reality, but most of them skate over the awkwardness of sex and sexuality, which I have noticed a lot as I have gotten older. When I was younger and watched those movies, I'd be like “Wow! That looks so great, and passionate. I can't wait to have that!” And then you get older and are like “Oh my god! This is so awkward!” It's fine; it's normal, I guess. As it happens more and more, you're like this is totally normal, and those movies were so wrong.

**And what do you mean by awkwardness?**

Your first time—your first time doing everything! Every single sexual experience, the first time it's sort of weird, in my experience, not for everyone. Everytime, it was sort of weird and awkward and funny. It was never perfect—well maybe it is for some people! But it wasn't for me. And even though it wasn't perfect, it was still great, and I enjoyed it, and I wanted to keep trying it. I may have had a bad experience where it was just like “Mmmm weird. I don't want to experience that again with that person.” But, yeah!

**You said that the books and the movies skate over that awkwardness. Did anyone ever tell you about that awkwardness? Did you learn about it or did you experience first hand?**

I don't know, when we were in junior high, there was a group of girls that were more experienced than everyone else. My group of friends, we all played sports together, and my group of friends was always like, “Oh my gosh! They have it so great; they are popular; they have boyfriends! They must be experienced.” Their lives seemed perfect. Everyone wanted to be them. But I got to know some of those girls a lot better in high school, and one of them especially would be like, “Oh my gosh. That relationship was *so weird*. I can't even begin to tell you how many ridiculously awkward experiences I had!” On the outside it seemed totally normal. What people were projecting on to their

relationship versus what it actually was. She was like, “I don’t think people understand how awkward junior high relationships are and how weird we both were!” How relationships are really not, and discovering your sexuality when you are young is sort of strange, and you don’t actually know who you are yet and who the other person is. From learning about experiences later, and I guess people used to say, what you saw in movies is not actually what it is. Yeah you hear that, but you’re like “What if it is!?”

**What gets in the way of exploring your sexuality?**

I think social norms, definitely. The stigma, especially against women. If a woman wants to explore her sexuality by experiencing sex or sexual acts with a lot of people, she is ostracized as a slut and a whore, but if a guy does that and wants to explore his sexuality with a bunch of girls or with another guy, or like a woman with another woman--okay a woman with another woman might be deemed as hot, or sexy, even if she is just trying to figure out who she is it’s just good for her, she should be free to do that—but with a guy, if he is with a lot of woman, he is a stud, or his frat brothers think he’s awesome, and he is praised for that. However, if it’s with another guy, he’s ostracized in a way too. Depending on your sexual orientation, it’s harder for you to explore your sexuality, because what society’s expectations are of how you should explore your sexuality depending on what your gender is, what sexual orientation you identify with.

**Can you give me an example of a time you wanted to explore sexual pleasure and you didn’t? What got in the way?**

Yeah. Someone that I dated freshman year of college, into sophomore year, we were friends first, and it sort of became more. I don’t know if we actually dated. We never really talked about it. We started going down that road going from friends to more than friends. It’s a weird term. We slowly started exploring our sexuality together, like sex, but I was more comfortable with it at that point than he was. He had had pretty isolated experiences, and I dated someone for a long time in high school, and we were sexually active for awhile, so I wasn’t *incredibly* experienced, but I knew what I liked at that time and knew what I didn’t like, and I wanted to go a little further in this new relationship. But he wasn’t really comfortable. His inexperience made him uncomfortable, and that in turn made me feel like I was dominating, and I was like, “This is weird! I don’t want to pressure him.” Well, I didn’t want to pressure him to do anything he didn’t want to do, because I felt like it might have been going a little too fast, so I really backed off. Then, things were sort of uncomfortable between us. I could sense that he wanted to explore it, but he just was really insecure and uncomfortable. He had grown up in a really conservative household, where it was just never talked about. When I wanted to talk about it, he would just shut down. I think it’s a thing that couples should talk about. You know people that are having sex should talk about. I don’t think it should just be a “Hey what are you doing?” text at the end of the night, and you end up in someone’s room. I think it should just be discussed openly, and he never wanted to. It just became such an uncomfortable issue for me too, so I just sort of backed off, and it fizzled out. In that way, yeah, but it’s not like I felt like it *got in the way* of me exploring my sexuality. There was a time when I wanted to explore it with someone else, and that other person wasn’t



comfortable; they didn't want to explore it. They just sort of wanted to do it and not talk about.

**How do you see the relationship between emotional and physical pleasure?**

I think they can be intertwined, definitely. Emotional pleasure that could be everything from—I don't know, that's a really wide range! Getting an awesome grade on a test, to someone telling you they love you, being on drugs, that is a really wide range of things. But physical pleasure, I don't know, everything from stimulation to achieving orgasm. You can get physical pleasure from very simple things like holding hands, kissing to all the way to the end like having sex. I think that when they are intertwined, in a way, meaning—I guess when you are experiencing physical pleasure with someone you are really emotionally connected to, then it's a healthy thing. I think that's when it makes both better. So emotional pleasure and physical pleasure are both better when they are connected. I am not sure how to explain that.

**Is one more important or are both equally as important?**

They are equally important, I think.

**We have been discussing in the abstract, now I want to ask about specific sexual practices.**

**How do you actually go about in fulfilling your sexual desires, attractions, cravings?**

I guess it's more of: it happens when it happens. Okay, I'll go more into that. You sort of enter situations that there is a possibility that you might be having sex, hooking up, whatever. You sort of enter into a situation that it might happen, whether it's someone you know well, your boyfriend or girlfriend, or someone you don't know that well. Usually, I enter into a party at Bucknell—not so much anymore, I am such a hermit these days [laughs]. If you go out, you know, I think it is totally normal that girls might want to go out and hook up with a guy, just as guys want to hook up with a girl. I don't think that *needs* to happen all the time. I think that if someone wants it to happen, it should! And if they both want it to, great, whatever—but I don't know; I go out. I see someone I am attracted to. I might know them, not know them. If I have the chance to talk to them, engage them in conversation, I do. If I am intoxicated, then it obviously serves as social lubrication for the situation. It is so much easier to talk to someone. Sometimes you don't even talk, you just dance and then, sometimes you kiss someone without—or they kiss someone without you even realizing what is happening. In that way, I honestly don't remember the last time that happened to me; I am just thinking about it over the past four years. These days, you see someone out. You know something might happen. You create an opportunity for more to happen. You either ask them if they'd like to spend more time with you in that situation, in that night or at a later circumstance: create the option for something to blossom out of that. I guess I usually tend to—if I'm interested in engaging or sex or a sexual act with someone, I will just create the opportunity. I tend not to initiate. Not to say that I wouldn't. I just guess I have never really had the opportunity to in that situation. With a boyfriend, yes I have initiated, or just if I am in the mood, or he

is in the mood, or we're in the mood, and I am ready to go! I'll just start! I mean, yeah I think if you want to talk about it first, you can, or if you can sense from someone's body language I think that's fine too. Do you want me to elaborate on anything?

**No!**

**Do you feel like your desires, attractions, cravings right now are being fulfilled?**

Yeah

**What do you know about the male orgasm?**

It's really interesting, because most people are like, "What do you know about the female orgasm!?" I know that it starts to build, as it does with females. It can be very very quick; it can be quick to build, or it can be very slow, just as in female orgasms, I think. I know for myself, sometimes it takes really long, and sometimes it doesn't. I know the same for guys. It results in ejaculation. For females, it can. It's really rare; it's never happened to me [long pause]. As for sensation, I can't really tell you. I would assume it's great [laughs]. I don't know.

**How did you learn all that?**

I guess from talking with the person I was with at the time.

**Have you ever stimulated a man to orgasm?**

Mhmm [yes]

**What do you know about the female orgasm?**

It can be achieved in various ways. This has never happened to me, but I have heard of women achieving orgasm through not even touching themselves. It reminds me of this *Grey's Anatomy* episode. There was one where this woman was having them numerous times a day, and all of the guys were like "THAT'S AWESOME!" And she was like, "No, you don't understand! It's ruining my life." I just thought that was funny. [pause] So I think every woman is more sensitive to stimulation, whether it's nipples, neck, lips—I don't know other erogenous zones—the vagina, the clitoris. I think that every woman knows what works for her and from there—and of course orgasm achieved through sex. I don't know if that has an actual name. G-spot? Does that exist or is that a Cosmopolitan thing?—so it builds. Eventually, you reach a point where it just washes over you. Pleasure washes over you. It just becomes so sensitive; you can't do anything anymore. There is a lot of contracting and then you feel a release! After that you calm down; your body calms down a lot afterward, and you feel tired. Well, not tired, but relaxed and calm. That's what I know about it.

**How did you learn this?**

I guess from masturbation, first and then later, with someone else stimulating me.

**And before masturbation, did you know about the female orgasm? Did someone talk to you about it?**

I don't think anyone talked to me about it. I think I read about it, probably. I was very curious when I was younger, so I did a lot of my own research. As I started to explore that, explore my own body, I figured it out on my own. What I liked, what worked for me in terms of stimulation, fantasy, things like that.

**Have you ever stimulated another female to orgasm?**

No. It would probably be really interesting, because it's your own set of genitalia, but it would just be really interesting.

**How do you, yourself, achieve an orgasm?**

With someone else, usually—I am wondering what term I should use—them fingering me. That's easiest for me. Sex: I have achieved orgasm, but rarely through sex, and I wish I could more, but it's usually if I am having sex with them, his orgasm occurs always before mine. I think it takes me a lot longer, *that* method to have an orgasm. If I am by myself, I am touching myself. Same thing, clitoris. More recently—yeah, I would say these days it's more of me wanting to achieve orgasm through sex. That is my goal, which I have done, but I wish it could be an every time thing. I feel like sex is dictated by when the man orgasms, and that bothers me. It doesn't bother me so much that I say something about it, I just wish it could be a two way street. Obviously there are those situations where the guy will ask you, obviously I think it's normal to ask, and if I haven't—oh I totally forgot to say this! Through oral sex, which I think is a great option. A lot of my friends have discussed with me like, “Oh my boyfriend won't” or “He thinks it's weird,” or “My boyfriend loves it.” That's such a disconnect. I think it's great, on both ends [laughs].

**Have you ever faked an orgasm?**

Mhmm [yes]

**Why?**

I don't know! I don't anymore. When I was first starting to have sex, it was always over really quickly, not really quickly, but the first time maybe a minute, two minutes, but—this was in high school—as we started having sex more, it would feel good, and I would feel an orgasm starting to build, but then it would just be over. I started to be—cause he was always so disappointed afterwards, like, “I'm sorry! I wish that I could, whatever, last longer, make it better for you, I want you to enjoy it!” So maybe I felt guilty, but I don't anymore. What's the point? If you want me to orgasm, go down on me, whatever, finger me! I find that all orgasms feel good. It's not incredibly, incredibly important to me how I achieve one. Yeah, I would like to be able to achieve one while having sex; I think that's the ideal way, but I don't discriminate.

**What do you know about female masturbation?**

I guess only what I have experienced myself. I think that there is a range of techniques that people use: their own fingers, hands, outside instruments, vibrators, dildos [laughs], since I was younger, I thought this word was funny. I know that women don't really talk

about it. I have never really talked about it. Well, that's not true. I have talked about it with a friend before. It was more of a "Do you do that?" and I was like, "Yeah, sometimes." She was like "Yeah me too." And that was it. We didn't go into it, which I don't think people *need* to, but I think women should be a little more open about it. I think men are, especially during adolescence, and everybody knows that's what guys do! They watch porn, whatever, and with girls it's so taboo, and I wish it wasn't. I know that it's sort of stigmatized, at least it was for me.

**In what contexts do you masturbate?**

I masturbate when I am feeling horny, I guess I'll say [laughs]. Sometimes when I am really stressed and feel like I need to relax, because achieving an orgasm helps me relax. Sometimes when I can't sleep. I guess in those situations. These days, I have sex with someone pretty regularly, so there have been times when I have masturbated more in my life, but—so I guess those are the times.

**Are these practices (female orgasm and masturbation and what else we have talked about), do you find them all pleasurable for you?**

I find it more pleasurable when I'm with someone else. Not that I would rather not masturbate, but I find it feels better when I don't know when I am, I am not controlling my own orgasm. Feeling your own, it's just sort of predictable. You know exactly what's going to happen. There is a sense of it's nice knowing what is going to happen; you can control your own pleasure, but in a sense, I like it more when I am with someone else.

**Do you feel like your experiences and knowledge are common or uncommon with people you associate yourself with? Know more, know less?**

I think I know pretty much the same [pause]. Well actually I don't talk about it enough with people. I think I am more interested than most people, but then again I don't know, because they might be interested and not talk about it either. That's totally subjective. From my experiences, I might know a little more, because I've done a little more—this sounds dumb—but research on my own, or I have just been interested in it for a long time; I have just wanted to know about it. I have taken a few women's and gender studies classes. I don't know. It's something that has been on my mind, even before college, but in college, I explored it a little more through writing papers and stuff like that. I'm not sure. I would say based on my own subjective knowledge, I might know a little bit more, but I wouldn't base anything on that. I am interested. I like to talk about it with people that like to talk about it while some people are really uncomfortable,

**How do you feel they compare to Bucknell's campus?**

Yeah, people just really don't talk about it. I think people do know. I think people really are knowledgeable about sex and sexuality, but it's just this major taboo topic among, not so much women, but women and men together. I feel like there is an expectation and what should be known, and then there is what actually happens, and that is a major disconnect, especially with things like sexual assault. I think that if people talked about it more that wouldn't happen as much, especially when people are intoxicated or under the

influence of something. If people were more open about it, just about what they wanted out of a hookup, a relationship, anything, it would make me feel a lot more comfortable to talk about it, because I think people just go along being: “This is what I am supposed to do. This is what this culture is dictating” so they act like that.

**Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed about your sexuality, desires or attractions?**

There are times when I’ll be talking to someone—well that doesn’t really happen too much anymore. I guess first or second year of college, I was friends with someone who was a virgin and wanted to wait until marriage. Well, we were more acquaintances, and we got to know each other, and she was *really* open about it, like, “I know what I am doing. My husband will be the only one to know me in that way.” To me, it didn’t make sense, but to her, it made totally sense. So I engaged her a little bit. I would just ask her questions like, “What about this? What if you find that you aren’t compatible sexually? Or what if you don’t work logistically when you are having sex? Isn’t that important to you?” And she was like, “It shouldn’t be important to me.” Her reasoning did not make sense to me, but I totally support that view. Then, I felt a little bit, not embarrassed, not even ashamed, but I just felt really weird talking to her about it, because I was really experienced at that time. Not because I had had so many partners but just because I had experienced more with a pretty limited number of partners, but I had been more willing to talk about it, and she wasn’t at all really. She was just: “That is something that will never happen to me.” So that was a time when I felt sort of uncomfortable.

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of regarding your sexual knowledge of practices?**

[Laughs] I’m not sure. Do you have an example?

**What you know compared to someone else, does that make you proud? Or do you feel good that you can do this with someone else? Or that you can talk about it?**

Yeah, I am proud of that. It is a little weird, but I am comfortable talking about it. I am happy that I can make myself orgasm. I know how my own body works, because it is a good stress tool. Tool. [Laughs]. I think it’s something every woman should know. She should know her own set of equipment. Just like guys do! We shouldn’t be afraid to explore it, because it’s ours, so I guess I am proud of that. I have no conquests. Or anything like that [laughs].

**Is there anything else that I haven’t asked in this interview that you would like me to include in your response?**

Oh gosh, no we covered it all!

## **Transcription 4**

**What is your class year at Bucknell?**

Junior

**By what race and/or ethnicity to you identify yourself?**

Caucasian

**What is your sexual orientation?**

Heterosexual

**What does the term sexuality mean to you?**

Oh my. I think, for me, it's the way—oh brother, that's hard! I think [pause]. It is hard to define it without using the word. I think expressing and finding physical pleasure. And the choice to give physical pleasure to another person.

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

Oh my gosh! How would I describe my own sexuality? Empowering, confusing sometimes I guess. I don't know. A process that evolves, too. It's fluid; something that changes even day to day with stress levels and stuff. It doesn't have a rigid definition I think it can change based on different circumstances. Different times of my life it has been different.

**At first you said empowering, what aspects do you think are empowering? Can you say more about that?**

I think that a lot of my upbringing I thought that my sexuality was something that was—not done to me in a violent sense necessarily, but it *definitely* seemed to be separate from who I was. I have realized I think that sexuality is one facet of who I am now. It's not something apart from me. It's apart of who I am. And that's one thing that's empowering: realizing I have control over how it's expressed and who I allow to be sexual with me. It's apart of me instead of something separate.

**And what aspects are confusing, you used that adjective too?**

I think it's confusing from a society standpoint. The whole Madonna-whore complex has always been confusing. Is what I am looking for: is that mainstream, is it acceptable, is it not, how would other people view it? I think that sex is very—soooo subjective. I think that the minute you look for approval or pleasing anyone other than yourself it becomes super confusing.

**When did you realize you had control over it, how did that happen?**

Oh brother! Not until recently! I think I realized I had control over it, what year is this, like three years ago maybe?

**How did that happen?**

[Passage omitted for confidentiality] It wasn't until I started college, really, that I realized that I could possibly be the object of someone else's sexual desire. And realizing that, was kind of a—I don't want to say a self-esteem boost, but that was empowering in its own. I think I realized that I could choose whether or not I wanted to have sex. I could choose how to use my own sexuality. And that was really the first time that it was something that was my choice.

**What were some key sources or experiences that were influential in coming to understand sexuality in the way you described it? Your definition of sexuality? What were some experiences or sources that you went to?**

[Laughs] spring break a few years ago would be one of them! Well, I think that the way I view my sexuality has definitely changed. I grew up in a super religious conservative household and so sexuality was: "Only in marriage, and when your husband wants it," and it was really shitty. When I finally decided I was fed up with the way things had always been and took it in my own hands, that's when it changed. Although it kind of swung a little too far the other way: I definitely crammed in a lot of missed experience, so to speak, in a very short amount of time. I think that [pause] I had stop seeing myself as [identifier], and I started to realize I was seeing myself as a student, and I had my own voice. I think I found my own agency, so that empowered me to look at myself as a woman and as a sexual person. So I felt, "Hey, I have something to offer and something to give, and there might be other people who are interested in having that."

**So do you think your parents were first influential? You said that they said, "Oh sex is for marriage." Do you believe that your student experience changed your understanding of that? Would you say it's your parents and college? Do you have other ones?**

Well, I think also seeing how I was controlled sexually when I was [in a certain relationship]. I realized that is not for me. For some women, they are okay with a narrow definition of sexuality, and that is not who I was. Until I got to college, and I was exposed to just other ways of thinking, I don't think I was open to the idea. I realized that I had always been a feminist but never had the words for it. I realized I wanted equality for myself and for other people but never had the language to talk about it with. It wasn't until I got to college that I realized that people have been talking about it for a long time. It resonated with what I had kind of thought about but never really knew how to say. I wasn't really surrounded by people that were really liberal in *any* sense of the imagination until I got to college, and I realized not only that I agree with that but also that would listen when I would talk about it, and that was empowering too.

**Were there people, texts, the media that helped that process?**

I don't know if I can give you any specifics. Right now I am still discovering all of this. Everything I read—like Simone de Beauvoir. I read her and am like "Oh my god!" and it strikes me. bell hooks: it just hits me. And I think some of these foundational feminist writers, every time I read something by them, it's like a light bulb. So I don't know if

anything specific. I wouldn't say it was something like a movie, because I think the media sucks with sexuality. It totally distorts everything. [passage omitted for confidentiality]. Being able to communicate a healthy view of sexuality [identifier] and realizing that was never communicated to me, that has been something too that's helped form what I believe about sexuality and what's appropriate and what's not, and it's been a really neat experience giving that kind of freedom [identifier] because I certainly was never given that.

### **What is sexual pleasure?**

Oh my gosh, I have no idea what sexual *not* pleasure is! Sexual pleasure, I don't think it's necessarily physical all of the time. I think that sexual pleasure for me is when I feel like my identity and value as a person is reinforced. Sometimes that is by my identity as a woman specifically: feeling feminine, feeling desirable and attractive but also feeling strong and powerful. I don't think it's necessarily a passive thing. I mean there is a physical aspect of course [laughs], but I think it's more than just physical pleasure. I think it is also intellectual and emotional. [pause] I think there is a level of intimacy in sexual pleasure. I think you can be sexually pleased in casual encounters, but for me, I am more interested in a sexual encounter that goes beyond the sex and includes conversations and intimacy and all those kinds of things.

### **How did you learn about sexual pleasure?**

I had a lot of sex with a lot of different people [laughs].

### **When did you first learn about it?**

The way I know it now?

### **Either way, how did you come to know that your body or your emotions had the potential to feel those intimacies you just described? Can you think back to when you realized you were a sexual being? Or you can talk about it now, either way.**

Well, I think I knew the physical stuff way before I knew the relational and connective aspect of it. So physically [pause], I don't remember the first time, but I remember all of the sudden my friends and I would go from playing Barbies to playing house and husband and wife and pretend to kiss each other and stuff. At some point—and this was probably before 6<sup>th</sup> grade, well in 4<sup>th</sup> grade—is when the sex jokes start, but nobody has any idea what they're talking about. You just know penis is a funny word [laughs] and that that's all there is to it. But I think sometime in early middle school. [pause] I got my period right before fifth grade. I was nine. I was a year younger than everyone, so there were hormones and all kinds of weird stuff, but it probably took a few years before I realized stuff felt good. It wasn't until maybe 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade when I started realizing that people who were dating would kiss, I don't know, it was a little different [identifier]. [pause] I didn't date in High School, but I wanted to. It wasn't until after high school, like two years after I graduated, that I met the guy [who] was my first sexual encounter and so at that point it was, "Oh my gosh we're nineteen, and let's hope we don't get caught, and let's just have as much sex as we can." But it wasn't about each other, necessarily. I think



it was just about meeting our own needs, which was pretty dysfunctional, because he had his needs met in lots of other ways outside of the relationship. So there was all of that. From the time we separated, until my next sexual encounter was like four years. A really long time. And that's when I was ready to figure it out on my own. I think there was a transition period where it went from my own physical pleasure, and then I decided I wanted to look for the rest of it, the relationship, all of the stuff I didn't have, and the connection and stuff. [phrase omitted for confidentiality].

**And as you said earlier you feel like you are still in that process and still learning about it or does that only apply to the sexuality aspect?**

I think I am still certainly learning about it, but I have been in this relationship for a little over two years, and we weren't exclusive at first, so even at the beginning of the relationship we were both figuring out what we wanted. But I think as life changes and a relationship changes, you redefine sexuality, so I'd say that it is still changing.

**And the pleasure aspect is changing?**

Well, yeah. I mean I think when you are in a relationship, it's not as much as a gamble looking at sexual encounter, as giving pleasure to the other person as it is when you are just hooking-up. I think both people want to get something out of it. I think hook-ups are more selfish in a lot of aspects, but when you are in a committed relationship, it's okay to use a sexual encounter just to pleasure the other person. I don't feel like I'm sacrificing—or letting myself being taken advantage of the way I might have when I was not in a relationship.

**Have you ever experienced sexual pleasure?**

Yeah

**Can you describe the time you first remember experiencing sexual pleasure.**

I think the first time I experienced it was actually with my first [relationship], and my only time with him [laughs]. [Passage omitted for confidentiality] We had worked on our [relationship] long distance, and he came home and was very contrite and very honest about everything that had gone on. The second night we were home was the very first time, ever really, that I felt a connection other than just physical with someone, after sex. And it felt natural; it didn't feel [mockingly] “Yeah we just had sex.” It felt more than just a physical thing, and that was the first and only time with him. It was different, I don't know.

**Can you describe that a little more? Can you elaborate?**

The sex was more a reaction to the connection and the closeness we had, as opposed to having sex trying to get that connection.

**And do you feel like your experiences before then, when they were just physical, were not pleasurable?**

It was physically pleasurable, but it was definitely like, “Let’s have sex and hope that he still likes me when it’s over.” Using the sex to try to create a connection, and create intimacy and affection for one another, and this was the first time the sex actually came because of the feeling of connection and affection and things like that.

**How have your experiences of pleasure changed since then, since your first experience?**

Well, I think that I knew what I was missing. All of the other encounters with him afterwards, that really sucked; I knew what I was missing. That was the first time that I realized that there was bigger problems in that relationship than I had thought before. After that, all of the other people I was with before my [relationship] now, I could choose whether or not I wanted to have sex with them on a surface level or if I wanted the commitment, the connection and the relationship and the sex to come out of that.

**Where do you go for information when you want to expand your knowledge about your sexuality or learn about different sexual practices?**

Probably the Internet, like everyone else [laughs] certainly not my mother! [pause] “Not mom,” underline that shit.

**Why do you feel like you could never go to your mom?**

Oh because she’s olddddddd. No, because [pause] I don’t think that—it would be weird! I don’t want her in my sex life. We’ve never had that kind of relationship, so I think it would be just really uncomfortable.

**And do you feel that uncomfortability with other people or just with her?**

No, it’s more than just with her, but with my friends it’s totally different.

**Do you have conversations about it with your friends? Are they a source of that knowledge too?**

Sometimes. I guess there has been a time when someone has asked me or I have asked one of my friends: “Have you done this or tried this?” I don’t know, yeah. I guess it’s much more comfortable with a friend than it is with a relative. I think the generational thing makes it different, for some reason.

**Beyond that, are there other ways you explore your sexual desires, attractions, pleasures etc.?**

Not really, I don’t think. I am more boring now than I used to be, but it’s okay!

**What gets in the way of exploring your sexuality?**

Time, not having time. I think self-esteem. [Pause] I think, just a general—there is an aspect of not knowing how it would be received if I said, “This is something I have been thinking about, or this is something I want to try.” There is a little element of risk. Are you going to be rejected? Are you going to be like “That is super crazy”? Just not knowing how my partner would feel about it.

**Can you give me an example of a time you wanted to explore sexual pleasure and you didn't? What got in the way?**

I don't think there has been a time recently, necessarily, but I know when I was [in one of my previous relationships] it was *very boring*. I always wanted to try different things, but I thought that I would be ridiculed for that or that he would say "That's not right," or "I'm not comfortable with that." There was an understood—not that I would get in trouble necessarily, but it was kind of that feeling! When you're a kid and you don't even ask because the answer is going to be no, and you don't want to feel stupid. It was kind of like that feeling.

**You kind of said that earlier too, about how it would be received, can you say more about that or maybe why you feel like you can't be honest?**

I think, sex itself, it requires so much vulnerability, and that's like one more element of putting yourself out there, and the last thing you want to do is be rejected, especially sexually, because it's different than someone rejecting an idea you have, or saying those shoes are ugly, or I don't like what you made me for dinner. It's rejecting who you really are, and I think that's really, really risky.

**How do you see the relationship between emotional and physical pleasure? Is one more important or are both equally as important?**

I think that with the way I define sexuality, I think it's really difficult to have sexual pleasure if emotionally you are a hot mess or the relationship is a mess. There have been times when I've had sex just for the physical aspect of it, but now that I am older and looking for more than just that I think that, for me anyway, it's almost impossible to really feel like I am having a completely pleasurable experience if emotionally, we've been fighting. I don't know. I know that is a very common thing with women. Like things need to feel okay and be ordered to have sex in a lot of instances. For me, that definitely holds true, so I think that they are equally important.

**And you said for women the idea of "ordered." Is that a personal experience or were you taught that? Because you generalized "for women."**

I think some of both. I know it is for me, but I also know a lot of other women who, if the house is a mess, they just can't get in the mood. I don't know if it's just because—I don't know why it is. I could guess, but I think that it is a common theme that I have seen. Some of both.

**We have been discussing in the abstract, now I want to ask about specific sexual practices.**

**How do you actually go about in fulfilling your sexual desires, attractions, cravings?**  
I have sex [laughs as if it was an obvious question]. [Passage omitted for confidentiality]

**Are there other ways you seek pleasure beside sex?**

I don't understand the question.

**Are there acts, or things that you do, besides sex, that are sexually pleasurable for you, that fulfill your desires?**

Not really.

**Do you feel like everything is being fulfilled?**

I think for the most part. The things that I have asked for, yes [laughs].

**Can you say more about that? Does that go back to not saying things?**

I think so. My partner and I have tried different things, tried stuff with each other that we have thought about, that we have not even done with other people. I think there is definitely safety in that [pause]. I think we both give and get sexual pleasure within the relationship. Sometimes, giving him sexual pleasure is pleasurable for me, so it's not always necessarily all about what I am getting out of it, but sometimes being able to please him is the goal.

**What do you know about the male orgasm?**

[Laughs] That its messy [laughs]. Oh gosh, uhhh, I know I could probably label a drawing, because I have had anatomy classes. I don't know! It's weird saying I know a lot about it. I know that even if they say it's not the goal of the sexual encounter, it usually is [mocking, laughs]. I don't know.

**How did you learn about the male orgasm?**

Well, there is the stuff in school, that you learn about first, and that is strictly on a reproductive basis, of course. I don't think, when I learned about it in school, that anyone ever said, "Hey, it feels good." It was just, "This is a biological process that happens." No one ever connected the orgasm with another person. Well! It was never connected with masturbation, or a sexual encounter or anything like that. It was always, "This is something that happens." [pause] I don't know. My mom had a bunch of Harlequin romance novels when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. I remember hiding them and reading them. In romance novels it's really described really quite gross, if you ask me. I guess that was probably the first time that the orgasm was the goal; it wasn't just something that randomly happened. It was the *point*. I don't really think I knew that was how babies were made, specifically. We never had the sex talk. But I didn't know how much guys really wanted that, until I started having sex. I didn't know that that's what they were looking for, I guess.

**Have you ever stimulated a man to orgasm?**

Yes

**What do you know about the female orgasm?**

That it can be difficult to get to sometimes, and that women fake it a lot. I've faked it. I know that the whole idea of the female orgasm is a myth in *some* circles. And I know that it seems to scare a lot of people, because a lot of cultures do things to make sure it doesn't happen.

**Why do you think it's scary?**

I think that a lot of people, men and women, don't want to admit that women are sexual creatures in their own right; it just wants to be: "You are here for man's sexual pleasure." I think empowering women and their sexuality, people are afraid of that: afraid of what that might look like, afraid women might start withholding sex, because they don't want to have sex! I think that's a lot of why it's not talked about outside of magazines.

**How did you learn about the female orgasm?**

I think it just happened to me one time, and I didn't really know what it was. I was like, "Shit that needs to happen again!" I didn't even know. I don't think I even knew that women had orgasms! When I was dating, it just kind of happened. So I guess I had had some sex before that without having an orgasm. I didn't really know. I don't know. The first time was really funny! [Laughs] I think I was kind of scared at first like, "What the hell was that? Is something wrong with me?" I didn't really know that women were supposed to or could have an orgasm. I thought it was just a guy thing.

**And how did you learn that it was an orgasm? How did your knowledge of it change once you had that experience?**

I don't know. I don't know. I think that once I realized that it happens, you try to make it happen again. I don't know if I realized after awhile that that must be what that is. I don't know! I didn't like read a book, or look on the Internet to find out what it was. I just realized it one day. It probably, talking with someone, or over hearing it and just putting all of the pieces together on my own.

**Do you feel like you know how to orgasm?**

Mhmm [yes]

**How do you, yourself, achieve an orgasm?**

What do you mean? [Laughs]

**What do you do in order to reach an orgasm? You don't have to say specifics if you don't feel comfortable.**

I think there is definitely certain positions and area of stimulation that make it happen faster or make it happen, period. I don't masturbate, because, I don't want to say I don't need to, but I don't really need to. If that makes sense?

**So just through sex?**

Yeah

**Have you ever faked an orgasm?**

Yes

**Why did you fake an orgasm?**

Oh my god, to make the boring sex stop! There are some times you need to get it over with, and you fake it! And you can be done!

**And was that pleasurable for you?**

No!! It was pleasurable to be done having sex! Faking it is fun. I would like to do a project on that!! Oh my gosh, and sometimes you fake it just to flatter the other person, because they just aren't good at what they are doing, and you want to be like, "Oh my god! You're the best ever," so you fake it, get it over with and hope you never have to do it again. [whispers:] Oh that's terrible.

**What is terrible?**

I mean I would be pissed if someone faked it with me, but with guys it's a whole lot easier to know if they are faking it but whatever.

**And did the guys know you were faking it?**

Hell no! At least nobody ever said anything. You know they have the big "Yes-I-did-it!" grin that you pretty much tricked them.

**What do you know about female masturbation?**

I know that there are vibrators that look like iPods! They look like they are made by Apple. They are white, sleek and candy colors, and they are expensive too. [pause] I know that female masturbation was not something that was ever talked about when I was a kid. And that I realized way more women do it than I ever thought—once I realized it was something that happened. And that it's actually probably just as common as it is for women as it is for men, and that is never something I ever knew as a kid, or even as a young adult. I probably didn't realize that.

**How did you come to realize that?**

I think people just started talking about it, and I was like "Really? I didn't know you did that!" At first it was a taboo thing in my own head, because I had no idea. Again with the very conservative background, everything everyone talked about was that masturbation was a sin and that it's wrong. Well, they never even said that women could do it, but that the whole thing itself is wrong. It took awhile—I don't know if I ever made up my mind whether I thought it was wrong or not. I didn't really think about it—but it took awhile for the whole thing, the taboo aspect of it, for it to be normalized in my head.

**And do you think that taboo aspect links back to the fact you didn't know about the female orgasm too?**

Sure, I am sure it does. The fact that I didn't know anything about sex other than the jokes my friends made on the playground, because we didn't talk about it ever as a family, *ever* really.

**And you just came to learn about sex through the Internet and the erotica books?**

The books first, and then I learned just the stuff that kids in middle school know about. It wasn't necessarily true about sex, because no one really knows at that age. I mean everyone acts like they do, but they don't. I guess I learned the pop culture, middle school version of sex, but I didn't really learn about it, what it actually was, until I was sexually active. I mean the books aren't really accurate either, by any stretch of the imagination.

**Do you masturbate?**

Not really anymore.

**Why not?**

Because I have the opportunity to be sexually active when I need to or want to, so I don't need to supplement it with masturbation.

**In what contexts did you masturbate?**

Do you mean by myself or what were the circumstance?

**Yeah**

Well by myself. I don't know? When I was in the mood too, I guess. I don't know. Urges, yeah.

**Are these practices (female orgasm and masturbation) pleasurable for you?**

Mhmm, yeah.

**Do these pleasures differ from one another or differ in certain contexts, or is it universally the same?**

The female orgasm doesn't always feel the same.

**Can you describe differences, or the differences between masturbation and the pleasure you are getting now.**

I think with the female orgasm, sometimes it's way stronger than others. It's different when your drunk; it's different when you're not; its' different when you're tired. It's different all of the time; I think. It's always pleasurable, but it's just different. That is something that still surprises me, because before, I don't think I paid attention to the differences. [pause] If you want a sexual encounter, just to reach orgasm, masturbation is fine, but it seems kind of empty to me, I guess. If I had to choose between masturbation or a complete emotional, intimate sexual encounter, I definitely would choose that. The

physical pleasure aspect, of course, is nice at times, but often—because I think sex and emotions are so related—I don't want to just have physical pleasure and still feel lonely. I think that's part of the reason I stopped and looked for more physical encounters with people, because you are still laying in bed by yourself when its over. Physical pleasure wasn't the only goal.

**Do you feel like your sexual experiences and sexual knowledge are common or uncommon compared to the people you associate yourself with/network/people closest to you?**

I think the people closest to me, it's pretty common.

**Including your family?**

Uhhhhh! I don't know about that. [long pause] I think it wouldn't surprise me to learn that they have been more sexually adventurous than you would imagine it to be, but I don't know. We don't talk about it.

**And with your friends, do you talk about it?**

Yeah, it's common. We have definitely talked about it before.

**How do you feel like your experiences are common or uncommon compared to Bucknell campus?**

HAHAHA [cackle] I think I am prude to most Bucknell students. At least with the perception of what's going on. I've had my hook-up days, and there is a part of me that doesn't ever want to go back to that. I think it's sad—not the individual choices that men and women make here—but that it's sad that it's kind of expected of the traditional Bucknell student, because I know how destructive it can be. And I know how much it can distort your idea of what sexual pleasure should be or what it's supposed to be. I think that if it is only ever defined as a physical pleasure, or a drunken hook-up, or he was in this frat so I had to—*not had to*, but wanted to sleep with him. I think that people really miss out on how rich and multifaceted sex can be.

**Two things I just want have you to elaborate on. You said “Perception of what is going on.” What do you think is going on?**

I think sex is used as a stress reliever. I mean there are physiological evidence to prove that that works, but I think that there is a sense of entitlement: that the men feel entitled to sleep with whatever beautiful woman they want, and the women feel the same way. I don't think that it's wrong to feel like you can be in control of your own sexuality, but I think its wrong to feel like you deserve sexual encounters because of where you are, who you are, who your family is, or what you look like, how much money your family has or what you drive, and I feel like to some extent that there are some people who feel like, “Well, everyone should want to have sex with me because of who I am: rich and smart and cute.” It's just an entitlement, in a sense.



**You said you think its sad that what is happening on campus is not what it is “supposed to be like.” Can you elaborate on what you mean by “supposed to be”?**

I think that a sexual encounter should leave a person feeling better and not worse. You should feel like you gotten something, not given something away. I think you can have casual sex and feel that way about yourself, but I think a lot of times, if people are honest—and I feel as if there a lot of times if I had been honest, I definitely feel like I compromised something. It’s such a fine line. I think that you can feel like you accomplished and not something you really participated in and got more than just sexual pleasure out of. [pause] And I don’t think every Bucknell student wants that. And I don’t think that everyone who looks like the people who want that, want that. And I don’t think it’s exclusive to Bucknell, either. I think it’s something as college-aged students, we feel like we are supposed to do. And I don’t think there is a problem with exploration, but when it becomes exploitation, then it’s a problem.

**Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed about your sexuality, desires or attractions?**

Hmm [long pause] I think I probably have at times. It just depends on the group of people or person that you are talking to. There are some people that you can say whatever to, and they are okay with, but I think now the people that I would talk about that with wouldn’t make me feel that way, and I wouldn’t feel that way with.

**Why did you feel embarrassed or ashamed who did make you feel that way?**

Again, it goes back to the way I was brought up. Thinking that the missionary position was what you did and anything else was—you are deviant, anything else. And I think that has to do with a lack of sex education that I had both in the home and outside the home, so I think I almost expected them to view me that way. It’s like a self-fulfilling prophecy. I expected it, so whether or not they were actually shaming me or thinking those things, I perceived their reactions to be like that.

**Which of your desires, appetites, experiences etc., have you been embarrassed or ashamed about?**

I think just wanting to try toys and things like that. That was probably the first thing that I said that I remember having a “What’s up with that?” reaction. Again, no one that I had grown up with or had contact with at the time, that was taboo for them too, so the minute that I said “I had thought about this” or “What it would be like?” they were like “That’s wrong.”

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of regarding your sexual knowledge of practices?**

HAHA! *That’s* a weird question. Anything I am proud of? [Pause] I think I am proud that I feel empowered enough to speak up when something I don’t like is happening, or when I feel like my expectations or my communication about a sexual experience was totally misinterpreted, and before I definitely wouldn’t have said anything. I think that something that has taken a lot of practice and personal development to be able to achieve.

**Is there anything else that I haven't asked in this interview that you would like me to include in your response?**

I don't know!

I think it's interesting that we didn't talk about how, and maybe this is because I didn't answer it this way, it seems like the questions that every sexual encounter was consensual and I wonder if—and maybe this isn't apart of your research. Maybe, you are only look at what is consensual—but I think that looking at instances where you thought you were saying no, and they thought they were saying yes, or you went into a sexual encounter expecting one thing and something else took a left hand turn. For me, that definitely impacted my sexuality for a while. Again, I don't know if that has anything to do with your research.

**I think if those come up, that might be a natural thing that comes up when asking what was influential in forming your sexuality.**

I think all of the questions were framed about pleasure. If an experience wasn't pleasurable you aren't going to think about that.

## **Interview Transcription 5**

**What is your class year at Bucknell?**

2013

**By what race and/or ethnicity to you define yourself?**

White

**What is your sexual orientation?**

Heterosexual

**What does the term sexuality mean to you?**

I guess how comfortable you are with—that's hard to define actually. I guess how comfortable you are with your body and how comfortable you are with your body around other people. Sexuality—I guess that's fine for now.

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

Let me go back to that definition. I guess how comfortable you are with your own body but what you enjoy with other people, not just your body, what turns you on, what you are attracted to and what other people are attracted to in you.

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

Open. I don't know. I am comfortable with my body. I know that I am not the average body type at this school, generally. [identifier] I am comfortable with my body. I am heavier now than I was a couple years ago, and I still wanted to lose weight a couple years ago. I am okay with my body and what I look like. Sometimes, if I catch it in the wrong angle in the mirror I am like, "I am not liking that right now," but I am comfortable around other people, and I think that is one of the things that draws other people to me, because I am confident enough to be open.

**What were some key sources or experiences that were influential in coming to understand sexuality in the way you just described it?**

Actually, courses, classes. [Passage omitted for confidentiality] I am sure I had sex-ed in high school. I don't remember. Probably, "This is important, but I don't want to look herpes on the screen right now." And then probably stuff I didn't want to remember. And then it was brought to my attention. I got much older and was saying, "This is important. How do I not know this stuff? How come I don't know how this works?" And I guess I got more comfortable with my sexuality that way and understanding why people respond in certain ways to certain stimulus.

**And you learned those things in classes at college?**

Yeah

**What sorts of courses were those?**

Well one was a human sexuality class. And then I took a Psych of Gender here. I had a course with Nikki Young on religion—it was how race, gender and sexuality were constructed under religion, and some of that stuff related too.

**And did that help with your understanding of the body, cause you define it [sexuality] that it has to do with the body too?**

How people view the body, you know, what stereotypes they put with certain things.

**Are there any particular sources that were influential in forming your own sexuality such as people, texts, the media, classes, things that helped you form your understanding and who you are with that identity?**

Yeah definitely growing up: magazines. I used to be really, really into fashion. I am so over that now [laughs], but I used to look at a lot of magazines when I was younger, and I used to know every model's name, where they were from, what their credentials were, what agency they worked for. So I was very into that and I didn't—it wasn't that I didn't like my body. I was thin enough then, but I had bad acne and stuff, and that always made me really shy and uncomfortable. Then, when I got older I started gaining weight; my metabolism dropped when I was nineteen. I was then really uncomfortable with my body for a long time, because I was heavier then. [pause] Uh, I lost it. Can you read the question again?

**Are there any particular sources that were influential in forming your own sexuality?**

I think other than probably magazines and stuff, how I felt about my body [pause]. I can't think of anything other than magazines off the top of my head right now.

**Did anything help you form your understanding of attractions?**

You know what? I was probably influenced by movies. Yeah, I am sure. You can't really avoid those. It was pretty hard to avoid that. I guess you see stuff like *The Notebook*, for example. This is glamorized, and it is iconic, and you think this is how it's supposed to be. I am not saying specifically *The Notebook*, but movies in that category are influential in how things are supposed to be.

**And what do you think was influential in having your idea that you are very open and comfortable with your sexuality?**

I am not really sure, I think just when I got older. The older I get, I realize I get more comfortable with who I am sexually, so I don't think I can necessarily pinpoint any reason for that. As you get older and mature you enjoy sexual experiences more too. It is much easier now to have an orgasm now than five years ago. And I know in five more years it will be a lot easier too. I think it is much easier for me to have an orgasm because I am more comfortable with my body. When I was a teenager, I wasn't comfortable just because—it's not that I thought I was fat. I just wasn't comfortable with my body, and I didn't know what I was doing, and it's not enjoyable when you are doing these things and you don't know what you are doing. Is this right? And the older I got, I got more

comfortable with myself and realized what I liked, it made me more comfortable with who I am sexually.

**What is sexual pleasure?**

Okay, so I think that can be a range. It's obviously not just an orgasm, because I can feel sexually aroused from making out with a guy. [pause] I think sexual pleasure for me is just being aroused, being turned on. It doesn't even have to be physical. If I am looking at someone or talking to someone and I have an emotional response that makes them desirable to me, I think that can be considered sexually pleasurable.

**How did you learn about sexual pleasure?**

[Pause...laughs] [Passage omitted for confidentiality] [I had a job for [identifier], and everyone that worked there were these grumpy old women. I didn't have any friends. [passage omitted for confidentiality] They were all in their 30's and 40's. They would be like, "You don't like this? Oh, you haven't tried this? Oh, why don't you try this? Oh, you don't have toys!?" So I think a little bit of that experience [laughs].

**And was that the first time you learned about sexual pleasure?**

[Pauses] I don't remember it being specifically taught.

**You said you had a boyfriend at the time, did you not know about sexual pleasure, before you talked to these women?**

No, no, no. I think it made me more comfortable with myself and experimenting to find more sexual pleasure [pause]. Wait are you asking me my first experience?

**No, not yet, just how did you learn that your body and your emotions had these potentials? When did you learn that "Oh, I am (or am not) a sexual being?" When did you learn that these potentials existed, did you ever learn, or did it just happen?**

I mean, I think I might have learned, but I am not able to recall, because that would have been a young age. I remember having strong feelings for a boy when I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and wanting to touch him and kiss him when I was young.

**Can you recall the first time you learned about the physical body as a site of pleasure?**

Probably [long pause] not until I had my first kiss when I was thirteen or fourteen, or something like that.

**Have you ever experienced sexual pleasure?**

Yeah. Wait you weren't talking about orgasms were you?

**No no! These questions are supposed to be opened ended, and I am not looking for a specific answer. I am just curious to see how you came to learn these things and what you know about it. There is no right thing to know or wrong thing to know so it isn't necessarily about orgasms.**

**Can you describe the first time you remember experiencing sexual pleasure.**

I mean I don't know. Probably my first kiss, I guess. I was almost fourteen. But that probably would have been the first time that I felt other than: "Oh, he's cute"

**How have your experiences of pleasure changed since then?**

[Laughs] That is so vague! The pleasure thing is so vague! I mean I am not satisfied if I am just making out with someone.

**So it has to do with satisfaction?**

Yeah

**Where do you go for information when you want to expand your knowledge about your sexuality or learn about different sexual practices?**

Oh my god this is so embarrassing. Honestly, I do look at *Cosmo* and stuff like that [laughs].

**What other stuff?**

Like *Cosmo*, whatever, *Glamour* and trashy magazines.

**Beyond that, are there other ways you explore your sexual desires, attractions, pleasures etc.?**

I mean I talk about things with other girlfriends like, "What do you like? What have you tried?"

**What gets in the way of exploring your sexuality?**

Not knowing how open a guy is and what he is willing to try. I am seeing a guy right now [identifier], so I know [he has] different views [identifier]. And [his] sexual practices are much more sturgent [identifier]. So he—which is really annoying to me—if I want to use a toy or something, that is too outlandish for him. I don't know whether or not his masculinity is threatened or if he thinks that's slutty. I don't know what he thinks, and I think that's the only—there are things that I feel a little less open with trying with him.

**Can you give me an example of a time you wanted to explore sexual pleasure and you didn't? What got in the way?**

When I was younger I didn't know what I liked, so I don't know if I was ever afraid to do something new [pause]. See the thing is with the guy that I am with now—because I get more comfortable with myself every guy that I am with, every partner that I have had for the past two years, the sex is better and better—so he is the best sex I have ever had. It's some sort of continuum that is evolving and changing. I don't feel restricted or held back with him, because I am still getting everything—well almost everything. Follow up question for that—from him that I want: almost everything I want in that department, so it's not like I feel deprived or anything.

**What is getting in the way is the openness?**

Yeah, I am like “Fine, if you are going to be a baby, whatever,” but it’s not really a big deal right now.

**How do you see the relationship between emotional and physical pleasure?**

I used to think that I could only be intimate and enjoy it if it was with someone I really deeply cared about, and we had feelings for each other. Actually, until I got to this school [identifier] I had never gone home with anyone that I had met at a bar or anything like that, and I didn’t think I would enjoy it or be comfortable enough with him or with myself. I thought I had to have some sort of emotional tie in order to enjoy it, and I found out that is not necessarily true!

**Is one more important or are both equally as important?**

There is different levels that I can enjoy, and I do enjoy it more when there is a strong emotional connection. It is more intimate and I enjoy that. I can go—this is definitely a personal interview isn’t it?—Say I meet someone at a bar. I can be comfortable doing whatever. I know that a guy I met at a bar that night, I pulled out my toys that night, and I didn’t care. “I am not that invested in you. I don’t care if this isn’t working for you. If it’s not, then leave. I don’t care about your feelings right now. I am doing this for me.” I mean that hasn’t been a problem with anyone. Most guys have thought that that was interesting, or cool or whatever that I was comfortable enough to do that. What was the question?

**Is emotional pleasure or physical pleasure more important or are both equally as important?**

Can you tell me what you mean by emotional pleasure?

**So sometimes when people talk about sexual pleasure, it might be more about the attractions you felt that you were describing, that connection and that pleasure, emotional, or is it the pleasure you receive on your body?**

Are you meaning it’s an either or? Like what if we are emotionally connected but we aren’t having a physical pleasure, are we okay with this?

**We could talk about it that way to.**

No, no! That’s a no. No we have to be having good sex. I am not okay if it’s somewhere in between.

**So that does answer the question, because I was wondering if emotional pleasure is more important or is the physical or is it equal.**

I like both generally, because if I am attracted to your personality, and I am attracted to you, and you treat me well, then I am going to be more comfortable with you and willing to try different things and be more comfortable with you, because I like you as a person. I prefer that. But I can also have sexual pleasure with someone who I am not emotionally attached to.

**We have been discussing in the abstract, now I want to ask about specific sexual practices.**

**How do you actually go about in fulfilling your sexual desires, attractions, cravings?**

I don't like to go more than two weeks without having sex. I really don't. I dated a guy [identifier], and I had a very strong emotional attraction to him. He was a really nice guy. He had a really nice family; he treated me really well. We had the same tastes and things, but he was not—one of my friends had talked me into it. [Identifier] and I had just gotten out of a really bad relationship, and my friend knew that this guy liked me, and we had known each other for four years. And she was like, "I know this guy really likes you, why don't you give him a shot. Maybe you could use a nice guy. Blah, blah, blah," but I wasn't physically attracted to him at all. I was actually physically turned off by him! But I had dated other guys who I was physically attracted to, but the emotional stuff wasn't there, so I was "Alright, fine. I'll give it a shot." [Identifier] We got a long really well, and we are actually still really good friends, and everytime I go home I see him, so we are still actually close, but after that time together with him, I decided I wasn't going to be with someone who I wasn't having really good sex with. I mean one day I am not going to have that anymore, and I don't want to waste my time now. So if I am single—cause I am a serial monogamous. [identifier] A year here, two years there, a year here—so when I am single, I will be single for three months or something like that at a time. I usually will find a friend or someone to be intimate with—if I am single—because I enjoy it, and I don't want to waste it.

**Do you feel like they are being fulfilled right now?**

Well, the thing is the guy I have been dating, [passage omitted for confidentiality] We are trying to do this long distance thing right now, but I don't know how well that will last. I don't have any sexual desires for any other men right now. I don't need that. But I don't know how—I don't know if I can do long distance forever. I can satisfy myself, but it's not on the same level. I like to be intimate with a man.

**Do you think it's because of the long distance relationship? Or what else?**

Yeah I think that's it.

**What do you know about the male orgasm?**

What? I mean they have different levels of orgasms too. Different things bring out different intensities. Are you talking physiologically?

**The purpose of this question is to see if you know more about the male orgasm than the female orgasm. Do you feel like you know more about the male orgasm than the female orgasm?**

Probably not. I mean I probably know equally as much. I know there are different levels for both males and females to orgasm. I know that if the prostate is stimulated, then its



going to produce something different. I guess I probably know more about probably female.

**How did you learn about the male orgasm?**

Probably my human sexuality class, which was very comprehensive and talking with my partners.

**Have you ever stimulated a man to orgasm?**

Yes.

**What do you know about the female orgasm?**

Now I am actually not sure. Well, I know that there are internal and external orgasms, supposedly—oh I forgot a class I had with Joel Wade. It was Beauty and Attraction, it probably helped a lot actually. It's probably one of the most important classes.

**Why was it the most important?**

It's a really awesome class. It's beauty and attraction from an evolutionary, psych perspective. He [talks] about why we engage in certain sexual practices, and why we have certain sexual preferences based on an evolutionary need. We have developed these strategies to maintain our existence, so we have these certain preferences. So our ancestors decided that's what works. [passage omitted for confidentiality] So he was trying to say that [the internal and external orgasm are] stimulated the same way, but an orgasm for a women, there is usually an emotional element there. I have only had an internal orgasm once in my entire life. I was [identifier], and I was head over heels in love with this kid, and I have never been in love like that before. After that, my whole perception on love and relationships changed and I have never been able to fully commit myself like that. I thought we were going to get married, and I didn't care if we were poor, blah, blah, blah. And a year, six months, eight months, I didn't feel that way anymore. And after that, knowing my feelings could change so abruptly—I know I felt so strongly, and what I believed in was a mirage, basically. So I think I have blocked myself from reaching that point with anyone. And I don't know why that is, but I think that's the best I can contribute.

**How did you learn females had the potential to orgasm or how did you learn what you know about the different orgasm, like before that?**

Probably talking with friends or something.

**In sex education class?**

In high school!? I don't remember that at all. We did talk about it in the college level classes I have had here.

**But you knew about it before that.**

I have no idea. Do you remember!?!....

**[side conversation omitted for confidentiality]**

I definitely knew about it, because people would ask me, “Did you have one?” And I was like, “I don’t know!” Because you obviously don’t know until you have one. I lost my virginity when I was 16, and then I had sex for three years, and then when I was 19 I still hadn’t had one, and I dated a guy who was [identifier] older, and I thought “Oh, I just can’t. I am one of those people who just doesn’t have orgasms or whatever.” And now I am like no! Sixteen year old boys don’t know what they hell they are doing. I knew about them—I guess I talked to my sisters. My sisters are [identifier] older though. My mom is very open with me. When I was younger, I didn’t want her to be open with me and ask me things or share with me things. [Passage omitted for confidentiality] We are very open. I am fairly comfortable with her [mom] now. I still don’t ask her those things. I think it started—I wanted to make her uncomfortable. I was mad at her, but that doesn’t work. My sisters, though, I talk to them about most things. [Passage omitted for confidentiality]. When I got older, though, and I was able to drink, then I was able to open up with [my sister] a little more, but I knew, and I was really mad, I couldn’t have one. Now I am really mad I can’t have an internal one. That was what the follow up was. That is the one thing I would like to fulfill, but that’s not his fault.

**Have you ever stimulated another female to orgasm?**

No. [identifier]

**How do you, yourself, achieve an orgasm?**

Okay, so I can only achieve it with manual stimulation. I have toys that I use in that way, but normally when I am with a guy—this is funny. you are going to like this—he obviously works with his hand. Never in my life, [identifier] since I have been having sex, did I have an orgasm while a guy was going down on me until the guy I am with now. I don’t know if I attribute that to—I am just more comfortable with my body, and because when I was younger I wasn’t interested in guys having their face near there. Scary! [identifier] I don’t know if it’s me being more comfortable with that or the level of comfort and attraction and emotional connection. Because I do have an emotional connection. The only thing I know he doesn’t like is toys. Anything else is fair game, and I understand that [identifier]. I don’t feel restricted. I mean, I am still getting what I need out of it. It’s not like I am suffering. I don’t know if it’s the emotional thing or not. I am really crazy about him. He’s really great. I don’t think I have felt like that about anyone in a really long time, so it’s probably a combination, I assume.

**So for you achieving an orgasm manually, and then oral, and during sex as well?**

The only way I can have an orgasm during sex is if I am using a vibrator as well. It’s hard too, because there is other stimulus as well, and you’re moving around. It doesn’t work as well as if you just let me do it on my own.

**Have you ever faked an orgasm?**

Yeah.

**Why?**

Because I wasn't into having sex anymore, and I wanted it to be over. It wasn't a lie, because normally I am like "Ok, well if you didn't do your job, that's not my problem." Once or twice to make a guy feel better, but mostly because I was done, too.

**Was that pleasurable for you fake the orgasm?**

No.

**What do you know about female masturbation?**

I know that you can extend an orgasm so that it can last longer. I have only achieved an orgasm without using any toys, once. It just takes too long: shower head, vibrator whatever. And I know there are way different levels. You can have a very baby orgasm, or you can have a mind blowing, outrageous one that you are numb from, just from manual stimulation.

**And how did you learn about female masturbation?**

I don't know, probably movies and talking. I don't know. It was something that I have known for as long as I can remember at least. You know what? My mom or my sister, when I was 12 and just getting my period, they gave the "What's happening to my body book." I know that there was an illustration of a man and a woman doing missionary, and I opened it up, closed it, and threw the book. I know there was stuff about that in there. The whole magazine thing. I wasn't reading *Teen Vogue*. I was reading *Vogue*, and I was reading *Glamour*. I would get my hands on those magazines, so there was probably stuff in there.

**In what contexts do you masturbate?**

Do I use porn? Not usually. I don't. I only recently started watching porn, because I was scared of viruses on my computer. But I don't need it. I usually don't.

**With people? Alone?**

Usually alone, if I am with a guy, and I know we don't have time, because it takes longer for a guy to manually stimulate me than just us[ing a toy]. Sometimes that's the case.

**Do you feel like you learn stuff from watching porn too?**

You know I really don't watch anymore, like it really doesn't turn me on that much. I am not into it. I learn things about women's bodies that aren't real life that shouldn't be on there for people to see. Other than that, not really. I would watch really really soft core.

**Is masturbation and the female orgasm, are those things pleasurable for you?**

Yes

**Do those two pleasures (masturbation/orgasm) differ from one another or from other sexual pleasures or contexts?**

Yeah, I can usually have a more intense orgasm by myself, because I know what I like now—like if I am using a battery operated equipment—it is just more intense. It just is, but if I am with a partner, I would rather have him stimulate me and have one that way, because it is more enjoyable for us. There is no guy that doesn't like doing that—or there shouldn't be. They will usually get some sort of pleasure out of you achieving an orgasm, so it is just a better all around experience.

**And do you feel like your experiences, your sexuality and knowledge and what you know about the female body is common or uncommon with you associate yourself with? And your acts too, for example using toys.**

With the people I associate myself with, it's different. The people I hang out with here are different then the people I hang out with at home. So I worked [identifier], and I worked in a department where there was a group of eight girls who were around my age. And all day, yes that is what we would talk about: all day, everyday. What position did you do last night? Like my boss would be talking about anal. Oh my god, what was the question?

**Questioned repeated**

So that group, everybody talked about everything all of the time. I don't know how we got together, but that was the best group of people I could ever worked with. We were very similar in those ways, and we could joke around about those things [laughs]. But the group [at Bucknell] [passage omitted for confidentiality]. I have another friend, and we're very close, and she is [identifier], and she's into a lot of porn though [laughs]. There's two other people I talk to about sex, and one is a lot more open then the other one. The other girl, who is not as open, she is [identifier]. She's doing a lot of things that she didn't think she would ever be comfortable with. [identifier]. She has a boyfriend. They've been dating for a year, and she is doing things she didn't know about, so we will talk about those things too. She is not as willing to try certain things as I might be.

**Do you feel like you have more people in your network that you can talk about it with or can't talk about it with?**

Can't. In comparison to the past. I mean I talk about it with lesbian girls [identifier] and the lesbian jokes—you know they call me a breeder and stuff. I am really close with them. [passage omitted for confidentiality] So I actually talk about sex with a lot of them. And there are several of them that has had sexual encounters with males. I was probably wrong. There is probably more people that I can talk with/to. [passage omitted for confidentiality].

**And how do you feel your behaviors/knowledge compares to Bucknell's campus?**

I can't answer that because I don't have a lot of interactions with the traditional Bucknellian. [Identifier] There is not a group of girls that I am comfortable with or developed friendships with here to answer that well. I hear stories, overhear people saying things, in the library on Monday morning, and I have heard stories. I've heard that there are girls who will have threesomes for weed and coke—I've never had a threesome.

I wouldn't do that—but I wouldn't know. I don't know what the girls do here. I hear the girls here give a lot of BJ's, but I would only do that if it's a guy I am dating. BJ's. Who says that? [Laughs] I don't know.

**[Conversation omitted for confidentiality]**

**Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed about your sexuality, desires or attractions?**

Yeah. I mean because I think the social stigma that comes with a woman being sexually open is. I was actually just thinking about it earlier today. I was thinking about how the males treat the women here, and it's not real life. This is not real life: how the men interact with girls on this campus. I have not seen anything like it. It's embarrassing and repulsive. [passage omitted for confidentiality] The whole Greek life system: males and females are so divided. Just the stupid meal plan system that the guys have to get, that just segregates them, except in class, where there is no interaction or the bar or at frat parties. There is no middle ground. I don't see a lot of male/female friendships here, except with international students, with them it's common. It's not just typical for males and females to be just friends, which I find troubling on so many levels. From a sexual perspective, definitely, definitely. I know that what goes on at frat parties. [passage omitted for confidentiality].

**Why were you embarrassed?**

Just the social stigma, that people have, other women have. Sometimes it's even more of the social stigmas that other women have than what males have, because even if a guy thinks you are slutty, that doesn't necessarily mean he won't be interested in you; that actually probably pushes it more in your favor. When I was having sex, when I was younger was for different reasons than the reasons I am having sex now. I was having sex, because I thought it would help a guy like me, or I just thought that's what people were doing, what I was supposed to be doing. I thought, "Oh, I am an adult now, and this is what people do, and I can handle this." I was having sex to reassure myself of other things, and I wasn't in the best place. Now, I can be in just a sexual relationship with someone on and off, or if I do go home with someone, I am doing it for different reasons. I do it because I am benefitting from it, because I know I am enjoying it. As I get older I can enjoy myself in that way. Being on campus, it's hard to be in a relationship. There are just so many distractions. If I am in a relationship, I want to spend way too much time with that person, and that's just not beneficial for me to be here. [identifier] I am here for a very specific purpose for a very limited time. I need to get it done, so I am actually comfortable being here and hooking up with one or two or three guys on a rotation, and that works out well for me. That keeps me from getting attached to them. It works out for me. It's just enjoyable sex or whatever—that's still not answering the question—anyway, I've had anal with one of these guys, and I was just thinking, who knows what these freaking frat guys say. They are probably thinking, "Oh that girl's a freak or something." Again, I don't actually know what girls do and what they are willing to do, so I was just imagining if he were telling his friends, how he would describe it, and these are the types

of guys who would ask too, and I am leaning way more to yes. I just feel like that's a stigma. Instead of saying "Oh she's really cool. She is really sexually open," it's: "Oh she's a freak" that would lead to be the conversation. I think being labeled as a freak definitely has a negative connotation to it. And there is times where I don't want to share. I would never want to share how many partners I have had with the guy I am seeing now, because I know that he has had wayyy less than me.

**And do you think that's society stigma in general?**

So give me a number that you think is too many man for a woman to sleep with [identifier]. What do you think is a high number?

**I have no idea, because I have friends who are both, because I am so nonjudgmental...**

Okay, I know how to answer that. I had a societal stigma when I was 16—we weren't even religious I don't know why I thought this—but I thought I am only going to have sex with the person I marry. I don't know why. Why? I never went to church. Disney princesses that's their fault! My mom was open. I was never brainwashed by my mom. I don't know where I got that message other than media and literally stupid Disney movies, the worst. *Little Mermaid* is still one of my favorite movies. It's the best, but if I were having children, I wouldn't let them watch Disney, because understanding how detrimental it is—I love Minney Mouse! It's just cute. Its memories and stuff: its nostalgia—so! I did have a much more conservative outlook on sexuality when I was younger. I think when I was at six guys I was like "Ohh nooo! What have I done?" The older I get and the more I understand my sexuality and the more I feel comfortable—once, my boyfriend's sister and I had a conversation and she asked "Do you know how many guys you've slept with?" and I said "Yes! Do you not!?" She was like "I don't know, twenty something." and I was like, "GASP!!!!" and now five or six years after that, my number is around there. And I am not ashamed of it personally. I don't feel comfortable about sharing it with everybody. I am okay with that number. I am okay with the sexual experiences that I have had. I know when I was younger I wasn't having sex for the right reasons. I know that. That was silly. I am comfortable. I am safe. I use protection. I am not entering into anything that is emotionally damaging for me. I know what I want out of it. I am not expecting to go home with the bar with you and then you fall in love with me. I don't expect that. I don't feel like I am jeopardizing myself. If I am attracted to you, and I am kissing you, and I want to take it further, we're adults. Let's be safe, and it's fine. I don't feel bad about the relationships I've had, but I know that there are people who maybe haven't gotten to that level. Or maybe they are going to get married right out of college and maybe never feel that and still have that stigma.

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of regarding your sexual knowledge or practices?**

[Laughs] I am sorry. I just thought of a weird position. I am proud that I am comfortable being naked. I have a friend who is gorgeous, and she's five two and weighs 98 pounds and is naturally skinny. She can eat a whole pizza any day of the week, and she won't

gain a pound. I have been on vacation with her, and she won't throw up or anything. She just naturally has that metabolism. Her mom is really small, too. She says that she is not comfortable being naked. She would rather be in her bra and underwear. I am comfortable naked. If I sleep with you one time, I am going to get up and walk around naked. I am perfectly okay with that. I think a lot of people maybe aren't okay with that, and I am happy. Especially, because I don't have the perfect body type. I don't have the ideal body, but I am comfortable with it, and I am happy about that.

**Is there anything else that I haven't asked in this interview that you would like me to include in your response?**

Not necessarily. I just am surprised you are not asking age you lost your virginity or what age.

**I think it more has to do with sexual pleasure, and losing your virginity may or may not have been a pleasurable experience. I don't know. Why do you think that?**

Because I think the more experience you do have and the older you get you are more comfortable with some things, so I think if you lose your virginity at 16, you aren't going to have good experiences for awhile. That's how old I was when I lost my virginity. I don't know the difference, maybe someone lost their virginity when they were 19, and they are already more comfortable, or maybe they are thinking, "Oh I am already too old," so they are uncomfortable. And I may have lost my virginity when I was 19, so it doesn't mean I was having those experiences, so it may not necessarily be relevant.

**I think when I was formulating these questions, its person by person, people may have never lost their virginity. If it's a formative experience for you, I would love to hear about it.**

[Conversation omitted for confidentiality].

**I saw an issue, and that's what inspired my thesis. I think a lot of people at Bucknell don't talk about this. Orgasms are not taught about and female sexual pleasure is a taboo topic, little is known, so I am curious to see how people at Bucknell come to understand pleasure. How women experience pleasure.**

I think it could be a class thing. I have noticed that some of the women I talk to— [identifier] I don't come from the typical Bucknellian background. [identifier]. You are going to find in lower classes that people are more loose lipped, because they don't have anything to be ashamed of. They don't have a reputation to be tarnished. They aren't going to care what people in society think, because they already aren't viewed at a level that matters. One of the first things I noticed when I got to Bucknell is all you girls dress up like you are going to a wedding. Everyday, everyone is looking so nice going to classes in dresses and their hair done. I want to wear sweatpants, because that's where I came from. There isn't a reason for me to look nice. I don't have anything to uphold. I

don't have any reputation or any family background that I would be reflecting bad on if I don't look or act a certain way.

**And you think that translates to your understanding of sexuality?**

Among friends, maybe, and peers. While there is a social stigma, it may be lesser. I don't know. It could be a little bit, because all the girls. [identifier] when we were just talking about it all the time—what toys they had—were working class.

**[Conversation omitted for confidentiality]**

**Where is the pleasure on this campus?**

In this environment, dates aren't pragmatic. You need to work so hard on this campus. There isn't necessarily time to have relationships, but I think that if there were sorority houses, if women had sorority houses, the party scene would be different. You would be letting in only who you wanted to let in and if things got out of hand that might facilitate things differently. The girls on campus want to get drunk, where are you going to get beer? Frat parties. If sororities had their own funding there would be different incentives. If you are at a sorority house, and you are living with all of you sisters and all your sisters know you and see you in your room with a guy someone is going to intervene, because they know you.



## **Interview Transcription 6**

**What is your class year at Bucknell?**

I am a sophomore

**By what race and/or ethnicity to you define yourself?**

Asian

**What is your sexual orientation?**

Straight

**What does the term sexuality mean to you?**

[Long pause] It means to me the moment that your in all of your influences in your life and the experiences, how you feel you would be best fit in a certain scenario with another person.

**Can you say more about that? How do you mean with another person? Can you elaborate?**

I guess in middle school, I wasn't really into boys, because I felt like girls were friendlier to me, and they were nice people, so I felt more attracted to them. I wouldn't mind being in a relationship with them then, but now as a college student, I want to start a family, so I want to have a boyfriend and have kids. I don't want to be with a woman and not have my own kids.

**So it's more the relationship, I am just trying to clarify, relationships with other people?**

Yeah

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

I feel like it's been changing, and I feel like now it's stable. In the past, I would have been into dating girls, but I didn't, and also with society, I didn't want to be mocked even more, because I was Asian already, and people would mock me because of that. Then the girls that I liked, they got pregnant, so I didn't like them at all. Starting high school, that's when I started saying that I want a kid too, and I don't want a girl to give me that.

**So does sexuality relate to pregnancy for you?**

Yeah, it relates to your future and what you want for your future.

**What were some key sources or experiences that were influential in coming to understand sexuality in the way you just described it?**

In middle school, some girls would always give kisses and hugs just to show friendship, but I thought of it really more than that. Some girls would say "Oh, sit on my lap let's read!" I knew it was innocent, but I just pretended in my mind that it wasn't.

**And what made it shift for you? What sources made you start thinking of it as what you want in your future, as you said earlier?**

In 8<sup>th</sup> grade, a girl got pregnant, and then in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, when I went to high school, I saw a lot of other girls become pregnant. I was not respectable to girls then, because they just disrespected themselves. I didn't want a girlfriend or anything affection with girls. I saw guys thought I was cute! In middle school, not a lot of guys would pursue me or anything, but in high school maybe one or two, and I thought that was enough! I thought "Wow, I can be pretty to them, and I don't have to pursue girls."

**Are there any particular sources that were influential in forming your own sexuality such as people, texts, the media, books?**

Yeah, when I watched TV shows they would have, most of them, straight relationships, and I thought they were very romantic and cute. I think that really influenced me, because my parents, they didn't really let me outside of the house, except to go to school, so I didn't really know other relationships.

**What is sexual pleasure?**

To get that great feeling that you can get instantaneously, and you know you are going to reach that high point, and then once you reach there, and you're going to be satisfied, and you'll wait another time, and you'll reach it again.

**How did you learn about sexual pleasure?**

In middle school, I started to watch porn, and I started using—it wasn't supposed to be a vibrator, but it was a massager thing, so I experimented with that. Then there was this one point when it felt great; it was so amazing. That's when I really thought maybe a guy would give me this feeling, so that's why my relation to pursue guys.

**And you didn't think a girl could?**

Right! No, not at all.

**How did you learn to use the massager or watch porn? How did you learn about the potential that your body could produce those feelings?**

I don't really remember how I started to watch porn. Maybe a friend showed me a link, and it was supposed to be for a joke, and I looked more into it. It made me feel interested. It made me feel good in a way. And I saw people were using vibrators, and I was like, "Okay, if they can get, that maybe I can too," so I just experimented, then I found the spot, then I started go on with that.

**Can you describe the time you first remember experiencing sexual pleasure.**

Probably 7<sup>th</sup> grade, because I remember when I went to school during 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I felt really antsy towards guys. I just was nervous because I knew that they had potential to do things, and it made me very nervous to go to school.

**And when you say potential to do things...**

Like sexual acts and the power they have.

**And that nervousness was the first time you remember experiencing pleasure at the same time?**

Yeah

**How have your experiences of pleasure changed since then?**

Now when I—yeah I do sort of watch porn now, but I don't get antsy at all, because it's nothing to me. I feel like everyone else does it—well most people, so I don't mind it. And I have a boyfriend now, so I don't really feel nervous at all, because I understand that sex is a natural thing, and it shouldn't be frowned upon.

**Where do you go for information when you want to expand your knowledge about your sexuality or learn about different sexual practices?**

I just go online.

**Beyond that, are there other ways you explore your sexual desires, attractions, pleasures etc.?**

Yeah, my boyfriend and I are very adventurous, so we try new things, and we are open to anything.

**What gets in the way of exploring your sexuality?**

My boyfriend is very, hmm, sensitive, and sometimes, even the words I say, even when we try to have sex, even if I say the wrong word, it would just screw everything up, and he wouldn't be able to do anything, and we would have to stop, and we have to do nothing for the whole night. I feel like he's not understanding himself; he's not ignoring the stuff I am saying. He should ignore the stuff I am saying. I just think that he is too sensitive.

**Can you give me specific example of a time you wanted to explore sexual pleasure and you didn't? What got in the way?**

Okay, I'll go into it. So he's trying to get it up. Okay, we are having sex, and I say, "You *better* come in me." And when I say "better" it made him sound like he had to do it, and he felt under pressure, then he couldn't come at all. It made him very devastated, and he thought I was disappointed and he just got really sad and emotional.

**How do you see the relationship between emotional and physical pleasure?**

I really enjoy emotional pleasure than physical, because the first time I had sex I was like "This not really what I expected." It was less than what I expected, but then as the relationship went on, I saw the emotional side, and I felt like it was better than the physical side that I wanted.

**Do you feel like you have to have both, or can you have one without the other?**

I feel like it has to be  $\frac{3}{4}$  emotional and  $\frac{1}{4}$  physical.

**We have been discussing in the abstract, now I want to ask about specific sexual practices.**

**How do you actually go about in fulfilling your sexual desires, attractions, cravings?**

Now, since I am dating my boyfriend, I just love him, and I love all of the things we do. Usually, he is the one who starts it. He would say “Hey,” and say all of these words that imply “Oh, I want to have sex with you.” And then I agree, and then we do it. I don’t really have an urge at all. I don’t have cravings. If it is going to happen, I am fine with it, and I’ll like it.

**Do you feel like your sexual—I know you don’t have cravings, but your sexual side of yourself is being fulfilled?**

I think so. I think so as of now. At this moment, because maybe before it might not have been, but I feel like now I don’t really need that much. Just a little bit is fine with me.

**And what do you think has changed? When and what has changed from “before”?**

I guess with the emotional side. I really enjoy the emotional side, so I don’t really care for the physical side.

**What do you know about the male orgasm?**

I know that he has to keep on trying to reach that climax and then once he reaches it he’ll have an orgasm. It will not last not that long and then he’ll feel good. I just feel like if I had that little of an orgasm, I feel like it wouldn’t please me, but it surprises me that it just pleases a guy a lot.

**How did you learn the male orgasm?**

With my boyfriend.

**Did you not know about it until you were with him?**

Yeah, it was really abstract to me. When I would watch porn, I didn’t really get it.

**Have you ever stimulated a man to orgasm?**

I try, but for him it doesn’t work like that.

**When you say “like that” what do you mean?**

When I would try to pleasure him either with my hand or my mouth, he would say it just doesn’t feel right, you have to do it the other way. And when he jacks off himself, he doesn’t use his hand at all; he says it doesn’t work. He says he just grinds on the bed and that works for him.

**What do you know about the female orgasm?**

I know that for a guy it is really hard to find, and I think I gave up on him trying to have him find it, and I think it's only a something a girl can really find for themselves.

**How did you learn about the female orgasm?**

When using the vibrator and watching porn.

**Have you ever stimulated another female to orgasm?**

No

**Have you ever orgasmed?**

Yeee—can you give me the definition of an orgasm?

**It's whatever you think that is.**

Yeah I have. I feel like it happens a lot more times. It can happen consecutively. It can happen a lot more times than a guy can in the same time.

**I am just curious why you asked for the definition of orgasm. Can you say a little bit more about why you asked?**

Because, for me, orgasm means the climax, the feeling you get, and when I watch porn, other girls would squirt or something, and I don't know how that would happen.

**Do you know how to orgasm?**

I think so.

**How do you, yourself, achieve an orgasm?**

With a vibrator.

**Have you ever faked an orgasm?**

Yeah.

**Why?**

Cause I wanted my boyfriend to feel like he's pleasuring me without having him asking me "Are you pleased?" or all of those questions.

**And was it pleasurable for you to fake the orgasm?**

It was. It made the mood and the emotions really at the peak of what it should have been.

**What do you know about female masturbation?**

I feel like it's a little bit synonymous to an orgasm.

**How did you learn about it?**

The same before, the orgasm, with the vibrator in middle school.

**And does that go back to the story with the link? How did you learn? Can you think way back and when did you first learn that you could first masturbate?**

It didn't happen the same day, but as days go on, and as I researched more, there then came a day that I found out through my own research.

**Do you still masturbate?**

Yeah

**In what contexts do you masturbate?**

With the vibrator.

**Are you alone in that case?**

Half the times, the other half my boyfriend and I, we would Skype, and sometimes, [identifier], and I would use the vibrator the same time as he is.

**Are these practices (female orgasm and masturbation) pleasurable for you?**

Yes

**Do these pleasures differ from one another or from other sexual pleasures or from other sexual pleasures or contexts?**

I feel like the vibrator pleases me when I am stressed and when I feel like I just need a break, and it really calms me down. And then with my boyfriend, when I get emotionally pleased, it fulfills me that I can just be another person with someone.

**So they fulfill you in different ways?**

Yes

**Do you feel like your experiences and knowledge and knowledge of your own sexuality are common or uncommon with people you associate yourself with?**

I feel like they are common with the people back home, but at Bucknell I have a lot of international friends, and people of different cultures, so I really have no clue on what they do.

**How do you feel they compare to Bucknell's campus? You talk about your network, but how do you think it compares to a generalized statement about Bucknell?**

Bucknell in general, they are adventurous, and I feel like they are pleased more with human interaction and the emotional side than with the pleasing with the vibrator.

**Why do you think that?**

Just because how Bucknell is a party school and all of the parties and people hooking up all of the time.

**And you think that is more human than the physical pleasure?**

Yeah

**Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed about your sexuality, desires or attractions?**

No

**Why not?**

I feel like I have kept it to myself so no body would have known or no body would have made me feel embarrassed.

**Can you say more about that. Why did you keep it to yourself at the end of the day?**

I feel like I kept it more to myself in middle school and high school, because I was made fun of and the whole population was white majority, and the littlest thing that they knew about me would cause even more havoc.

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of regarding your sexual behaviors, knowledge or experiences?**

It's great that I finally found someone that I love. I feel like not many people have achieved that yet.

**Is there anything else that I haven't asked in this interview that you would like me to include in your response?**

I think I'm good.

## **Transcription 7**

**What is your class year at Bucknell?**

2016

**By what race and/or ethnicity to you identify yourself?**

White

**What is your sexual orientation?**

Straight

**What does the term sexuality mean to you?**

I guess now whenever I think of sexuality people refer to sexuality as your sexual orientation, so that's what I associate "What's your sexuality?" It's what your sexual orientation would be.

**And you said now, did you think of it differently before that?**

Probably not, I think that's just how it's occurred in my life. It's "What's your sexuality?" and that's always meaning: what's your preference.

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

I am straight and probably conservative. Or! Compared to where I grew up I would say I am conservative, even though I have talked to many people at Bucknell, and they say "You're crazy!" so to me, I am conservative. I consider myself conservative, but maybe to others I am not.

**Can you elaborate on that?**

I grew up in a place with a lot of money, which often comes with drugs and alcohol and that stuff at a young age. To me, I lost my virginity when I was 16, and that was on the later side of a lot of my friends. I think of myself as conservative, but I mean I have met so many people here that are virgins and that have never kissed a boy, so it's my own view.

**What were some key sources or experiences that were influential in coming to understand sexuality in the way you described it?**

I think I just grew up in a hypersexual community, where it probably wasn't valued as it should have been. I didn't grow up religiously, none of my friends grew up in religious households, that was our community, so it wasn't a sacred act. Our sources came from the media, which is also very hypersexual.

**And you said, "should have been," what do you mean?**



As many people hope it was. People look to religion to see how they should act, and what's appropriate, and I didn't have any guidelines for that. So it just when it happened. I don't know. By having sex, I wasn't breaking my religion or belief system.

**Are there any particular sources that were influential in forming your own sexuality such as other people, texts, books?**

I think my friends were probably the most influential, just because they were having sex right entering high school, very end of middle school. I guess I was just impacted by them. By my friends having sex—I don't like to say I was peer pressured, but I am sure there was a sense of that. [long pause] Yeah, I think it was just where I grew up which was the source of it. I know if I had grown up somewhere else, maybe things would have turned out differently.

**What is sexual pleasure?**

I guess sexual pleasure is a sexual act where you receive pleasure from it, so something where you feel good about yourself and your body feels good. [Pause] And its pleasure! So it's meant to be good; it's not a negative thing at all.

**How did you learn about sexual pleasure?**

Trial and error [laughs]

**Can you tell me a little bit more about that?**

I think everyone likes to think that they're all that right out of the chute, so I probably didn't think much of it right away, but then I have had a boyfriend for over a year now, so that's a long time. Looking back to three years ago I had *no* idea what I was doing, so I think I just learned through practice, I guess [laughs].

**When did you first learn about it?**

What do you mean?

**Sexual pleasure, when did you first realize there was such thing?**

I probably just heard about it. I mean everyone makes such a big deal out of sex, in movies, the media. You can see its all hyped up in movies! So you are always supposed to know it is a good thing and something to make you feel happy and empowered or whatever you want to choose to call it, so I would probably say from that.

**Have you ever experienced sexual pleasure?**

Yes

**Can you describe the time you first remember experiencing sexual pleasure.**

I guess sex to me was always an act until I became more emotionally attached to it, where it became more pleasuring, because before it was just "working out." You are working out, but once you get into it, you realize you are benefiting yourself for it. To me, once it

stopped being just an act, it became more of an intuition. It just happened. You were with the right person and your emotions were into it. It went from having sex to making love.

**Do you remember any specific anecdote of the first time you really experienced that sense of pleasure?**

I think it's just the first time I felt safe. I never had a fantastic relationship with my dad, so I just felt safe and cared for, so that probably helped.

**How have your experiences of pleasure changed since the first time you experienced it?**

Oh! So much! I think my expectations were really high going into the first time, so I think I was disappointed for a while. Then my expectations started to become more realistic, and as I figured out what was happening, what was feeling good, my expectations changed and—I don't know [fades out]

**And you said expectations going into it, meaning the first time you had sex?**

Yeah

**So was the first time you had sex pleasurable?**

No. I don't think back on it as it being pleasurable. I think back on it as being like an act. It wasn't with someone I loved. It wasn't with a boyfriend. It was with a friend of mine, so there were friendly feelings, but it was very platonic, and it was like exchanging. There was no connection. And it wasn't magical, by any means!

**It's changed in the sense that those things are there now?**

Yeah

**Where do you go for information when you want to expand your knowledge about your sexuality or learn about different sexual practices?**

I don't think I do that that much. I guess if I do—well, my boyfriend is [identifier]. He is more experienced, so I would probably go to him. I don't *ever* watch porn. I would never watch porn. But guys are guys, and they do a lot, so I guess you learn from that. I guess that's probably where—if you are looking to find new ways of going about it.

**Just relying on your boyfriend?**

Yeah or you can go to the Internet.

**Do you go to the Internet?**

I think I did when I was younger, when I was really curious to what was supposed to happen, what was going on. I haven't recently.

**And is there anything you wish you ask that you can't find the answer to either through your boyfriend or through the Internet?**

I don't think there is anything I would ask. [Pause] No, I can't think of anything, I am sorry.

**No don't be sorry. It's honest!**

**Beyond that, are there other ways you explore your sexual desires, cravings, attractions etc.?**

I don't watch porn or masturbate; I'd never. I'd feel so uncomfortable doing it, but that would be a way you explore your body, to find whatever pleasures you. [pause] What was the question?

**Beyond seeking out sources for information, how else do you explore your sexuality and desires?**

Just inner thoughts. You have to think through what you want and what your body is craving. And your body will crave things. I don't think being gay is a mental disorder. I think—you know, I think it's a natural thing—so whatever your body is craving.

**Why do you not feel comfortable with porn or with masturbation?**

I am comfortable with other people doing it. I know my boyfriend does, because I am in school, and he's back home! Maybe it's a self-confidence or a—I just don't think I am comfortable with my own self to do something like that. That's my problem. That's not the acts' problem. I don't have the self-confidence or self-esteem to do that.

**What gets in the way of exploring your sexuality?**

Expectations. People expect you to be something or to act a certain way or to do certain things, so that's going to prevent people, I guess everyone, from being who they want to be and willing to do what they want to do.

**And do you feel like you experience those feelings?**

I mean, I don't think any parent wants their child to start having sex. I think it's scary for them, probably, so there is obviously is resistance to explore in that sense—of any form of sexual exploration. My parents were not for it, but they knew it was going to happen, so they put me on birth control. They protected me. But so that would be the only [fades out]

**So your parents got in the way, is that what you are saying?**

Yeah I guess so, because they wanted to shield me from hurt, as any parent would, because they know that sex can come with disappointments, and guys taking advantage of girls, or whatever, so they didn't want me to get hurt.

**Can you give me an example of a time you wanted to explore sexual pleasure and you didn't?**

[long pause] No, I can't think of anything. [Whispers:] I am sorry.

**No you don't have to apologize!**

**How do you see the relationship between emotional and physical pleasure?**

Oh, I think it's really connected! Or at least it is for me, because when I was first having sex, it was just a physical thing; there was no emotion there; there was no love, so sex went from I guess like "*fucking*" [emphasis] to making love. Sex with emotions is so important, because it's something totally different; at least it is for me. And my boyfriend and I have always said that. I wish he was my first. And sex with him is the best I've had, because there is love and care behind it.

**Is one more important or are both equally as important?**

[laughs] I think I'd rather have someone that has—I think I'd rather have emotion over physical.

**We have been discussing in the abstract, now I want to ask about specific sexual practices.**

**How do you actually go about in fulfilling your sexual desires?**

I guess I am kind of lucky, because I have a boyfriend. I don't need to go out and search for it like my friends would have to. And guys are pretty much willing to have sex whenever [laughs], so that's never really been a problem if I want to.

**Do you feel like your sexual desires, attractions and cravings are being fulfilled?**

Yeah, minus the fact that we are [identifier] away now that I am in school, so that's difficult, of course, but that's where the emotion comes in. Our relationship is a lot more than a physical relationship.

**What do you know about the male orgasm?**

I feel like I know a lot, but I probably know nothing [laughs].

**Why do you say that?**

I feel like I've seen it enough [laughs], so I kinda know something, but I have never studied it, never looked up anything. I guess I wouldn't know that much now that I think about it.

**Were you taught about it in sex ed class?**

No. No! We didn't learn about sex in sex-ed. I don't know why, now that I think about it. We didn't have sex-ed in high school. We were in middle school when we learned about—we only learned about the organs, and it was so uncomfortable, because we were little, so they didn't talk to any of us about that.

**So, how did you learn about the male orgasm, then?**

Practice, seeing it happen, seeing it occur. A lot of my friends were also guys, so I definitely heard a lot of boy talk.

**Have you ever stimulated a man to orgasm?**

Yeah

**What do you know about the female orgasm?**

Probably a bit more than the male orgasm [laughs]

**Can you elaborate on what you know?**

I am assuming it's different for everybody. Yeah, I think it's different for everybody. Everyone responds to things differently. I think different parts of the body for different girls are going to stimulate a reaction. To me, I feel like I have two different types: one when I am having sex, and one where penetration isn't necessary, and the one with no penetration is necessary is the one that's the most extreme for me. So that's probably what I know about it.

**How did you learn about the female orgasm?**

Definitely trial and error.

**How did you learn that females had the potential to orgasm?**

Probably the media, you just watch it in movies and hear about it.

**Have you ever stimulated another female to orgasm?**

No

**Have you ever orgasmed?**

Mhmm [yes]

**How do you, yourself, achieve an orgasm?**

A lot of help from my boyfriend [laughs].

**Only in certain contexts can you achieve an orgasm?**

No. As long as he is doing what he needs to do, it's fine! [laughs]

**Have you ever faked an orgasm?**

Yeah, so we can be done [laughs]. Yeah! I mean! Yes, I've faked it. I have probably faked it more than I have had one. Out of all the times—I don't know [gets bashful].

**Why do you fake an orgasm?**

Because I know that he likes it. He likes to hear—likes to feel like it's happening, like he's succeeding. I know it gives him a sense of power. Probably gives almost any guy a sense of success, and I know it can speed up the process at times too.

**Meaning you want to be done?**

Yeah, faster than he would probably want to be.

**And does he know you're faking it?**

No

**And is faking an orgasm pleasurable for you?**

I haven't really thought about it. I guess if I am not into it, and I start to fake it then I get more into it, so that can help make it more pleasurable.

**What do you know about female masturbation?**

I don't know that much about it.

**How did you find out that some females do masturbate?**

Friends have told me they masturbate, and I don't know, vibrators I guess.

**Are these practices (female orgasm and certain sexual practices) pleasurable for you?**

I enjoy sex, but I don't necessarily enjoy — well I have never actually masturbated, so I am not sure if I would enjoy it or not, so that's enjoyable!

**Do your pleasures differ? The pleasures you receive, you talked a little bit about this, about the two orgasms that you have or do certain pleasures differ in certain contexts or do you feel like you receive only one type of pleasure?**

I personally think I have two, cause I just do!

**Talking about your two orgasms, can you describe the differences?**

I guess when we have sex, it's not as electrifying as an orgasm. The other one, I can't stop moving; it's almost scary. I feel like it's almost like a seizure in a way.

**And the other one, how do you achieve that orgasm?**

The one that is electrifying?

**Yeah**

By the clit, which doesn't always get stimulated during sex

**And is that through oral sex or through...?**

Yeah

**Do you feel like your experiences and sexual knowledge are common or uncommon with people you associate yourself with?**

Very common at home. Very uncommon at school.

**How do you feel like they compare to Bucknell's campus, in general?**

I think I have had a difficult time finding my way so far at Bucknell, I am [passage omitted for confidentiality]. I almost feel like I was put into a sober hall, where no one

drinks, no one does drugs, no one has sex, so I have to make friends, and I am not the most outgoing person; I am not going to throw myself on somebody, so my friends have come from that hall. They don't have any experience with any of this stuff, so I feel uncomfortable talking about it. They almost make me feel like I could be a bad person. I almost feel guilty, sometimes. When I am at home, it's very common and normal. [Realization] But I think if I had been placed in a different hall, or once I find new friends or [identifier] next semester I will find people more similar to me.

**And do you tell the truth about your sexual experiences?**

Yeah

**And what is easy to tell the truth about?**

I don't know. I am kind of an open book. My friends here will come to me for guy advice, because I have had more experience than they have, so I am open. I am here to help people to talk about it. I think it's a healthy thing to do. I don't think it's healthy to keep it in or not talk about it.

**What do you withhold or feel not comfortable telling the truth about? And it could even be with your boyfriend of people you have had sex with in the past.**

Probably feel the most uncomfortable talking about the people I have had sex with more than the actual acts.

**Why's that?**

Cause I didn't care. I was rebelling from my family and stuff, so it didn't matter to me. I guess I was just looking for someone to *love* me or pretend they did for that amount of time.

**Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed about your sexuality, desires or attractions?**

I don't think I've been ashamed of that. I've been more ashamed of what I have done than how I feel, I guess.

**Why are you ashamed of what you done?**

Because I have hurt people in the process of it, in the past, and I was probably pretty careless with my actions.

**Sexual actions or specific sex practices?**

Yeah, just having sex with certain people, probably.

**Are there others, which of your desires, behaviors or attractions have you been ashamed about?**

I mean I am not ashamed when I am home, until I get back to school, because my friends are so conservative here. Sex to me is really normal thing; my boyfriend wakes up with a boner every morning so we have sex! I mean it's a common thing, two times a day.

Twice on average is a normal thing, if not more as it was over winter break, so that's what I feel most ashamed about when I am back here is the frequency.

**And do you feel ashamed before you tell people, or not telling people, or just being in this environment do you feel ashamed?**

Yeah, I think its more just being in my particular environment, because I don't think that my dorm or my hall is a good reflection of the Bucknell student campus.

**So you will feel ashamed even without telling them what you did over break?**

Or if they ask me, I'll feel uncomfortable telling them. [passage omitted for confidentiality] [My boyfriend and I] slept in the same bed. People aren't—I don't know. They aren't necessarily happy—again not, happy! But they aren't going to support it. They probably wouldn't let their own daughter do that. [passage omitted for confidentiality]

**When they ask you, are they looking to shame you?**

No, I think they ask just to ask a question, and I might be too honest, and they aren't expecting for that. I've learned to tell them almost what they want to hear, by dulling down a story or by making it more PG.

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of regarding your sexual experiences or knowledge?**

I think I am a good person to come to if you have questions. I think I'm a good girlfriend. I have never done anything dishonest. I have never hurt him. I have never done anything bad in that sense. And I practice careful sex, or safe sex, so I think that's something to be proud of. I would never tell someone to have sex with someone and not wear a condom unless they really, really know them and are comfortable.

**Is there anything else that I haven't asked in this interview that you would like me to include in your response?**

I am not sure, but if you have any question I can answer. I almost thought that this was going to be more about sexual assault, in a weird way and experiences of it.

**More of it had to do with experiences of pleasure and sex positive things.**

Yeah well this was a lot easier to talk about.

**But understanding that there are a lot of things to do with sexual assault and that can shape people's ideas of pleasure. I never specifically ask people about it.**

Because you can't

**I could, but that's not what my thesis is specifically on. People can bring it up if that was a formative experience in coming to understand pleasure then it can come up. But I am not specifically researching it. There are a lot of other professors and researchers on campus who do that.**



## **Interview Transcription 8**

**What is your class year at Bucknell?**

2014

**By what race and/or ethnicity to you identify yourself?**

Caucasian

**What is your sexual orientation?**

Straight

**What does the term sexuality mean to you?**

Oh goodness. I think its just [pause]. That's actually a really hard question to answer. Sexuality is how I identify how I get sexual pleasure? I guess, or I guess whenever it's concerning me. Sexuality can mean different things for different people. [whispers:] I don't know.

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

Balanced. [laughs]. I try to be respectful of my own body and also of my partners' bodies but also keeping a balance in normal life, like I'm not crazy, and I am not a prude.

**So, just to clarify, are you talking more sexual acts here, like your balancing sexual acts that you do and don't do?**

Yeah, trying to maintain a level head about what I am doing with my body and also being respectful of my partner, each time. And also keeping a balance between my sexual life, my work life, my school life and that kind of thing.

**And how do you measure that balance? How do you keep the balance and what do you consider a balance? How do you decide "Oh this is a good balance"?**

I guess because the relationships that I keep feel healthy. By that I mean, my sexual relationships feel healthy, and I am devoting enough time to myself for that, and then also, my work life and my school life are balanced. They just feel like nothing is cutting into that time. You know you can kind of tell by performance in work and also you can get direct feedback from school and how well you are doing on that, too. So I guess just keeping everything going.

**What were some key sources or experiences that were influential in coming to understand sexuality in the way you described it?**

Oh goodness. I guess I come from a town that a lot of people get pregnant very young, and also one of the only crimes that we really have there is domestic violence and sexual abuse and things along those lines. It's a pretty small town so just always being taught that *that* would stop me from being successful in other parts of my life. I guess directly

witnessing what not to do taught me to figure out what I wanted to do. That would be the main source of how I felt that way to begin with.

**Are there any particular sources that were influential in forming your own sexuality such as certain people, texts, the media?**

Yeah actually, as I mentioned earlier, I am straight, and [laughs] two of my family members when I was rather young, like early middle school, came out as both being lesbians, and I came from a very, very right wing republican like “You should only be straight!” And so I was waiting for that upheaval, but at the same time they were [identifiers] that I found really close to me and really influential who were coming out, so I started to question myself whether I was. I thought about how I reacted to both men and women and what my actual feelings were on that and again, concluded that I am actually straight.

**What is sexual pleasure?**

Feeling good in a sexual way after a sexual act. That is the only way I can describe it [laughs].

**And is that more emotional or physical or both?**

Both.

**How did you learn about sexual pleasure?**

How did I learn about it?? [Pause] I guess just by trying things out! Both physically and emotionally, so coming to realize that there were two aspects of it. I feel like both of them are pretty natural, so it is hard to say what initially influenced me.

**When you started to try things out did you realize that there was this “thing” that was caused sexual pleasure and you wanted to experience it, or did it just happen, or...?**

I feel like it is pretty typical, and the only way I can describe it is that I started to have romantic feelings towards guys. There has never been a time in my life that I didn’t recognize like a kiss was something for romantic affection, so it’s really hard to pinpoint that point. But I mean between seeing my parents, my aunts and uncles kiss—they were couples, and I obviously knew they loved each other, so that’s what boys and girls did! I guess whenever I started to have the romantic feelings, I wanted to kiss the boy and then taking the next step, whenever I had those feelings.

**And what do you mean by steps?**

In that particular instance, I would say steps between physical, sexual pleasure, so it first started out when I was younger that I wanted to kiss them, and then I got older, and I got hornier [laughs], and I guess taking everything between: just making out all of the way to intercourse and the steps in between there.

**And the steps in between there meaning manual stimulation and oral sex?**

Yeah

**When did you first learn about sexual pleasure?**

I'd say sometime in elementary school was when I first started to hear about it. I didn't experience anything until late middle school. 7<sup>th</sup> grade, dead center middle school, was the first time I had ever kissed a boy, so that is when it really started physically, but *knowing* about it, I was really young.

**Can you describe the time you first remember experiencing sexual pleasure?**

Well I guess I physically reacted to my first kiss, so I guess that's a form of sexual pleasure. I mean you get the endorphin rush, and it feels good.

**How have your experiences of pleasure changed since then?**

Obviously, I have gone a lot farther than that [laughs], as I mentioned. I guess just figuring out multiple ways to get pleasure, so I can still get pleasure out of a kiss, and I obviously get pleasure when I orgasm. Just expanding beyond just kissing.

**Where do you go for information when you want to expand your knowledge about your sexuality or learn about different sexual practices?**

I would say most of it comes from speaking to close friends. I'd say that's probably the most influential for me.

**Anywhere else that you can think of?**

I mean I guess magazines, online articles, like girly magazines, you know how they always have articles in there? Television, you see different things on TV.

**Beyond that, are there other ways you explore your sexual desires, attractions, pleasures etc.?**

Oh goodness. I masturbate? I don't know if that's what you are looking for!

**I am not looking for anything in particular!!**

Okay, yeah. I mean I have a steady boyfriend right now, so we are sexually involved but I still masturbate, and I guess I focus on my own body sometimes too.

**What gets in the way of exploring your sexuality?**

I don't think there is anything. I am pretty comfortable and satisfied [laughs]. I am in a good place I guess!

**Is there a time when you wanted to explore sexual pleasure and you didn't**

Yeah, whenever I was younger I had two different two groups of friends that didn't really talk that much. One was a little bit older, and one was my year. The older group was talking about masturbation and stuff, just girl talk and going along those lines. I tried to bring it up with my other friends, and they were so weirded out by female masturbation, I

was like, “Okay, maybe I shouldn’t be doing this!” So I just didn’t! I felt like I would be stigmatized for and everybody would know [laughs during whole story.].

**So did you actually stop masturbating at that point?**

No I had never actually—well I guess I had started exploring—yeah, I guess I did stop for a little bit!

**How do you see the relationship between emotional and physical pleasure?**

I’d say they build off of each other, so even if I start something that’s just physical pleasure there is usually some sort of emotional attachment, and I am specifically speaking with boys for me. Even if I had just started out as physical, the emotional feelings eventually do kick in. I have had times where I have had just an emotional connection and not physical, and it ended up that I developed the physical feelings, so I feel like they go hand in hand.

**And is one more important or are they both equally important?**

I’d say emotional is definitely more important, *but* at the same time, if it was only emotional pleasure without the physical pleasure at all, there can definitely be some problems caused [laughs].

**You said the emotional is definitely more important but there would be problems if there wasn’t the physical, but before that you talked about the physical developed, could you sense those problems were developing?**

After you spend an extended period of time with somebody and you still aren’t getting that physical component—I mean I’ve been with a guy who, on paper and first meeting him, an amazing person and could have been perfectly designed for me. I just didn’t ever develop physical feelings for him at all, so it is hard to bring it past the emotional feelings where he would want it, but I didn’t quite. Do you get where I am coming from?

**I understand!**

**We have been discussing in the abstract, now I want to ask about specific sexual practices.**

**How do you actually go about in fulfilling your sexual desires, attractions, cravings?**

Well currently, I spent at least a little bit of time everyday with my boyfriend. Whenever I feel like I have a desire, then I—I guess we kiss each other all of the time, even if you aren’t going farther than that, but I guess if I want to pursue something further then that there is body language between us. But we actually still verbally ask each other if we want to have sex, because he is really really respectful of my body too. Open communication between me and my boyfriend.

**And is it just sex that you fulfill those things?**

No, manual stimulation, oral stimulation, sometimes just even making out with him [laughs].

**Do you feel like those things are being fulfilled?**

Yeah

**What do you know about the male orgasm?**

From what I hear, it's very quick, and it feels good [laughs]. I have heard it described similar to a female orgasm, but I guess it's just over faster and not as intense as how we describe it. Yeah, I'd say a less intense version of the female orgasm.

**How did you learn about the male orgasm?**

I actually have no idea! [laughs]

**Who or what was the source of the knowledge of what you were just talking about?**

Male platonic friends, and male sexual partners. Boyfriends, when I was little bit younger.

**Have you ever stimulated a man to orgasm?**

Yeah

**What do you know about the female orgasm?**

It's great! [laughs]. Well I mean, the other things or modes that I hear women talking about orgasms are television, magazines, a couple of my close friends, but personally I guess its just from my own experiences. I feel like I have gotten to know my body pretty well, so that helps.

**How did you learn about the female orgasm?**

[Long pause] I am actually not sure either. I know that I definitely learned about it after the male orgasm, because I remember thinking to myself that I didn't realize that woman could orgasm the same way that men did, but I am really not sure.

**Do you know around what time that was in your life?**

I'd say late middle school.

**When you were masturbating in late middle school, did you realize that that could lead to an orgasm?**

I think I started masturbating before I learned about the female orgasm, so I realized that it felt good, but I had never actually reached climax. I didn't know how to get myself off until high school. I didn't quite have myself even figured out.

**How do you achieve an orgasm?**

Just by masturbation? Or just by sex? Is that what you are asking?

**What do you do to reach that point?**

I have been able to reach orgasm by masturbation, manual stimulation and intercourse, but not oral.

**Have you ever you faked an orgasm?**

Yes [laughs]

**Why?**

Confidence boosters for the guy. I guess if I felt like it was going on, and I wasn't going to reach orgasm, and I was tired or there was some sort of reason that I wanted to stop, but not in a *bad* way that I wanted to stop but like generally, a guy will let himself go ahead and finish if he thinks the girl has already gotten off before, so he is not working toward that point. Just on days that I don't think I could ever get there.

**And was that pleasurable for you?**

I mean it wasn't displeasurable.

**What do you know about female masturbation?**

You can do it using your own hands or you could use different sexual toys to do it.

**How did you learn about female masturbation?**

I think by a friend.

**Back in middle school?**

Yeah

**Do you masturbate?**

Yes

**In what contexts did you masturbate?**

In what *contexts* do you masturbate? Oh goodness!

**What time or place or mindset or with people, without people, when do you decide to masturbate?**

I am generally alone. Generally in my own room. More often than not, when I haven't been able to orgasm with my boyfriend or if we hadn't been able to interact sexually in awhile, both of us are pretty busy sometimes.

**If you hadn't been able to achieve orgasm with your boyfriend do you masturbate with him afterwards?**

I think I have a couple times. Usually, he will manual stimulate me so it's more of a me and him thing instead of just me masturbating in front of him.

**Are these practices (female orgasm and masturbation) pleasurable for you?**

Mhmm [yes]

**Do these pleasures between masturbation and the other ways you reach orgasm differ from one another or from other sexual practices?**

Yeah. I'd definitely say the act of intercourse definitely has more of an emotional component to it. I guess for me, I feel more sexual pleasure when I am more emotionally attached to my partner, so definitely instead of just having a sheer physical component, whenever it is when its with myself. It's a lot more when the emotional is involved.

**Do you feel like your sexual experiences and sexual knowledge are common or uncommon with the people you associate yourself with?**

I'd say a little bit uncommon. I think I might have started earlier than some. I might have a little bit more experience. With some of them I am a lot more open, so more open to speak with my friends or more open to speak with my partner and knowing what I want.

**Do you think knowing what you want stems from starting earlier?**

Potentially. I mean I am not sure if it would be from starting earlier. I don't know if that made me mature earlier, so now I know what I want where as if people started later they might not. So maybe!

**Just cause the length of time I was wondering.**

Yeah, so I am not sure if it was that or just different life events that would have happened anyway that made me know what I want, so I am really not sure!

**That's okay! I was just curious.**

**And how do you feel like your sexual experiences and sexual knowledge compare to Bucknell's campus?**

I'd say sexual knowledge, I think it's pretty equal opportunity. They pretty much know as much as I do. Experiences? I really feel like I've been really fortunate and have had better quality experiences sometimes because I have been fortunate enough to have really caring partners here at Bucknell, which multiple women have told me that they have not, so I guess I have been really lucky, because I have been able to find those people with an emotional attachment.

**Do you tell the truth about your sexual experiences?**

Yeah when it matters. I am not going to generally—I guess if someone was talking about their first time, I am not as comfortable with that because it was pretty—hopefully different—experience than most people, so I guess not a hundred percent honest all the time so it doesn't make people uncomfortable. So honest when it counts. [pause] To my emotional and sexual partner, I am very open about that.

**Honest when it counts: because of how they will react or because you yourself will feel disclosing certain things.**

Probably both. I guess for me “when it counts” is whenever I am very close to a person whether it’s a female friend, or a male friend or a boyfriend. I am a lot more open with people who will get to know me better. Part of the reason is you don’t always tell your deepest secrets that you are not all that close to.

**What is easy to tell the truth about?**

What I like, what I don’t like. I guess just talking about most experiences, but probably not in detail.

**What do you withhold or not feel comfortable not telling the truth about?**

Generally details or private moments or moments that could be potentially embarrassing for my partner or myself.

**And what do you mean by details?**

Well, exactly how they did something or, for an embarrassing moment, if they orgasmed very quickly. I guess I feel like it’s not arbitrary, but the only way to describe it is arbitrary or details of a story that I feel would be too personal.

**Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed about your sexuality, desires or attractions?**

Yes, high school is generally not so forgiving.

**Which of your desires, appetites, experiences etc., have you been embarrassed or ashamed about?**

Probably everything past kissing. Because I had started a little bit earlier, I was ready to move on a little bit early. It seemed that everytime I took a step it would be a little bit longer until the girls my same age would take a step—just kind of like I would be embarrassed or cautious to tell them about that, because I didn’t want to be the first. It’s one of those things where as a female it isn’t good to be the first to do it, where as for a male there’s different social rules, and that would be an accomplishment for them.

**Do you still feel that embarrassment of everything past kissing?**

Not at all

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of regarding your sexual knowledge of practices?**

I guess knowing how to make myself orgasm and being able to climax during sex. I feel like a lot of girls don’t actually masturbate to orgasm, and they are not able to during sex or other acts with their partners, so I am pretty proud of that one!

**Is there anything else that I haven’t asked in this interview that you would like me to include in your response?**

I don’t think so!



## **Interview Transcription 9**

**What is your class year at Bucknell?**

2015

**By what race and/or ethnicity to you identify yourself?**

Caucasian

**What is your sexual orientation?**

Bisexual

**What does the term sexuality mean to you?**

Hmm. [pause]. It means more to me than just how often or whether you have sex. More so the idea of how you portray, whether its something you show or not.

**You say, portray, show or not. Can you elaborate on what you are portraying or what you are showing?**

Yes. Let's see, what does sexuality mean to me? It's the difference between someone who may or may not have sex but no one really calls them sexual or would guess or would even think about that in relation to them and someone who is overly physical, flirty and so people would associate a higher sexuality.

**So it doesn't have to do with...**

Whether they actually have sex or not.

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

I would consider myself fairly sexual. I have become less so, I think, but I think I still am more than other people I see.

**What were some key sources or experiences that were influential in coming to understand sexuality in the way you described it?**

Well a big part of it is where I grew up. By the end of middle school, I wouldn't have been surprised if one-third of my class had already had sex, so with that, there was heavy expectation—the dances people already grinding up all over each other. [pause] Some media, but not as much as the people I was around in general, and then high school was a weird continuation of middle school, because I went to a private school, so it was a completely different setting, and it was suddenly—it was much fewer people who were openly sexually. And then the jump to Bucknell, where a lot of people seem to be openly sexual. Yeah, I think that that would be most of my sources.

**And seeing how some people are openly sexual and some people are not openly sexual, is what made you see sexuality as whether or not your portray it? Is that the link of that understanding?**

I am now trying to think. I guess for me the main idea behind it was this one incident in middle school. I had a farther sexual experience than I wanted—not wanted to, but was ready for at the time. And people in the school found out about it, and from then on people dubbed me as sexual. Then high school—because that is something people didn't know about me, and that wasn't something I showed or told them—I suddenly realized people weren't seeing me that way anymore, and so no one thought of me that way, and I wasn't acting it either. Then I got here. And everyone seemed very open and very sexual between Greek life and dancing at Uptown, and people trying out new college life! So I guess the experience of seeing how people look at me in terms of sexuality based on what they know and how I act as opposed to what I have actually done.

**Because it is more of how other people view you, how do you view you then?**

That changes everyday! Yes, that is something that is very much in flux, and in general, jeez that is a difficult question.

**You don't have to answer it either way!**

No it is a *good* question! I am just trying to think. There are certain things that I look back on and see as being too sexual, but then I'll look back on other events and go, "No, that was pretty innocent!" So it really depends on the day!

**Are there any particular sources that were influential in forming your own sexuality such as certain people, texts, the media?**

What do you mean?

**For example some people respond to this question as looking at boys in magazines with their clothes off I found that I was attracted to boys, or watching movies I found I wanted romance, or someone might say experimentation, trial and error with a boyfriend or a girlfriend.**

Okay. Well there was definitely book influence. I have read a lot of fantasy novels, and they always end up with some big romantic scene at the end. Apart from that, the thing I mentioned earlier, in middle school, was a big experimentation, and it was the first thing that got me thinking that I may be interested in girls, which I re-looked at in high school and realized, yes. Aside from that, there have been two people in my life who have really help me define who I am in terms of sexuality: an ex-boyfriend and my current boyfriend. Mostly my current boyfriend: he is the first person I have ever had sex with. I kind of discovered a different side of me. I didn't have to *show* I was sexual; I could just be sexual, if that makes sense.

**What is sexual pleasure?**

For me, it's actually a dual part. A lot of sexual pleasure for me is based on the person I am with and whether or not they are also—I don't know what the right phrase is—enjoying themselves, getting pleasure from we are doing. A lot of it is also based on emotion. If I were to tune out emotion completely, it's not pleasurable. It's just feeling but feeling in the purely tactile, not in the emotion at all.

**And talking about the other person's pleasure, is that physical or emotional pleasure?**

Both.

**How did you learn about sexual pleasure?**

Mostly through my current boyfriend.

**When did you first learn about it?**

About a year ago.

**Have you ever experienced sexual pleasure?**

That's a question of debate right now, actually. In terms of the big word "orgasm," I have no idea, but I do get pleasure out of having sex and doing sexual acts, so I would actually say yes!

**Can you describe the time you first remember experiencing sexual pleasure?**

I am kind of torn between the first time I had sex and something that actually happened very recently. Well the first time I had sex was just a completely new experience and was a new pleasure related to sexuality. My ex-boyfriend and I had done things aside from sex before, so I had experienced physical pleasure, but in terms of the closest I ever think and the main event, I think of was actually a few weeks ago. It was just this moment of seeing him just glowing—and I can't think of the right words! [smiles to self and long pause]. I don't know. It was it him being happy and us just being there together and feeling at a weird same time that I could be in control of myself and us but protected at the same time and safe.

**And when was the first time you had sex?**

It was actually pretty close to a year ago. There was an event on campus and afterwards we went back to his room, and he was very sweet about it and knew I was kind of nervous. Yeah!

**And was the sex the time you learned about sexual pleasure, like the potential of sexual pleasure? I asked you how you learned about sexual pleasure and you said from your current boyfriend, and I asked you the first time you experienced sexual pleasure and you said a year ago. When did you first know you had the potential or when you knew sexual pleasure existed.**

Okay the strictly knowing of it's existence aspect, my mother used to work in a medical field so I had the talk when I was really little, and I kind of knew that existed. She showed me big textbooks with lots of pictures, really clinical pictures. At my high school, we had something called [identifier] [a sex talk] and that was extremely opened, and we talked about pretty much anything.

**So more pleasure aspects or was it still sex and anatomy?**

I mean a lot of it was sex and anatomy, but it was completely open to questions, and one of the questions that came up was “is it”—I can’t remember how it was phrased. Essentially it was the question of “how to?” Then, aside from that with my current boyfriend we’d talked about it a lot and tried to figure out how I could attain sexual pleasure. Both of us on our own without really asking each other about it, but just curious, looked it up on the internet and looked up reasons why that might not happen, or how to.

**So the learning had more to do with the experience of it?**

Yeah, before it was just “Okay that’s a thing.” But in terms of really starting to understand it as opposed to knowing that it exists. Yeah in terms of understanding it, it is current boyfriend within the last year.

**Where do you go for information when you want to expand your knowledge about your sexuality or learn about different sexual practices?**

I’ve gone on the internet a lot.

**Anywhere else that you can think of?**

People actually. Girls. I’ve only ever talked about that with girls or my boyfriend. Never my sister! Mostly the internet or experimentation with my boyfriend.

**Is there anything you wish you could ask that you can’t find the answer to on the internet?**

Not really, the internet is pretty broad. And my questions were pretty much always about orgasm and sexual pleasure.

**Beyond that, are there other ways you explore your sexual desires, attractions, pleasures etc.?**

[long pause] Not really. I mean [long pause] we are both still kind of learning about ourselves as we go. He knew more about himself than I knew about myself, and so for awhile it’s been me learning what I like, so a lot of it is actually with him and discovering that together.

**What gets in the way of exploring your sexuality?**

Long distance relationship! Fear sometimes of what it is I might enjoy cause there are some weird quirks in the world, and there is that slight fear of being abnormal.

**Can you say more about that, to what made you think that way.**

Hm. [long pause] Well I, as a person, tend to—and this is something I am still learning, very much introspective within the last couple months—I very much base myself on the people that I am around. The biggest thing is the event that happened in middle school. Because of the problems it had caused when the school found out, I had shoved it away in a little corner in my mind when I went away to high school. Because I shoved it away and never dealt with it, it became this huge big issue, and I started viewing it the wrong

way. For awhile, let myself slip into thinking about it as being taken advantage of as opposed to experimenting more than I was ready for. Because of that, I've sometimes wondered if I've reprogrammed myself to need that "taken-advantage-of" feeling. So that would be the fear that I am talking of.

**Is there a time when you wanted to explore sexual pleasure and you didn't**

[long pause] I mean there are times where, at a dance or something, where everyone's just giving into physically, where yes, the physical side of me is going "Yeah let's keep going," and I mean there have been times with me and my boyfriend where we have wanted to but the situation hasn't let us.

**So what gets in the way of those situations or at the dance?**

In terms of the dance, it's I don't want to with that person. In terms of with my boyfriend, sometimes it's his parents are home and that's disrespectful, just things like where there are other people, and we just can't.

**How do you see the relationship between emotional and physical pleasure?**

There is a very big link, but at the same time you can have one without the other. I am trying to think the best way to describe this [pause]. You can get so much more pleasure from a mix of the both, but at least personally—although I don't know this in terms of sex itself—but you can still get pleasure from purely physical without emotion base.

**And is one more important or are they both equally important?**

It depends on what you're after! I have had purely physical relationships with people that were pleasurable at the time, but looking back I don't regret, but I am not proud of, [short pause] I mean at the same time looking back, it's not actually that much if it's "make out session in a room!" but at that time you think that's so much. I don't know. I've come to learn that the feeling of emotion and the physical connected is *so much better* that I don't see why I would ever go back to shutting down the emotional and just having the physical.

**We have been discussing in the abstract, now I want to ask about specific sexual practices.**

**How do you actually go about in fulfilling your sexual desires, attractions, cravings?**

See my boyfriend? Um, I mean in terms of when he is not around, I don't really. In terms of a very, very small amount of the physically, I get rid of by going to a dance or strangely enough back rubs, but that's not nearly enough and is just the barest amount of physical with no emotional. And so really it's my boyfriend and when we see each other we just have sex.

**Do you feel like everything you desire is being fulfilled?**

Yes and no. I mean if I could have what I wanted, I wouldn't have to have that waiting period, and sometimes I think that because of that we sometimes jump or forget some of

the emotional, because we have been craving the physical for so long. I miss the ease with which a normal relationship, a non-long distance relationship, let's you always connect the emotional and the physical instead of just having them become such minima and maxima because of the distance.

**What do you know about the male orgasm?**

Probably not as much as I should. I know it's easier to achieve than a woman's. I guess I don't know what you are really asking.

**I am just curious to see, I am not trying to deceive you, I am just curious to see because a later question is what do you know about the female orgasm, so I am just trying to see since you are a woman what you know about men and what you know about yourself.**

In that case, anatomy is pretty much the same. I probably know my anatomy better than his. Yeah, I mean it's easier to achieve and like usually there is only one. Usually men only orgasm once and then have a period of time. Strangely enough I have found out that men can actually orgasm without ejaculating which is a random internet fact.

**How did you learn about the male orgasm?**

Current boyfriend and internet.

**Have you ever stimulated a man to orgasm?**

Yes

**What do you know about the female orgasm?**

I know it's much more difficult. I know from various sites on the internet—and I am not sure how accurate they are—but I have seen it multiple times that it's actually—most women don't orgasm until they are in their mid-twenties or later. I know that usually once you have orgasmed the first time ever, it becomes easier because you know the feeling and how to get it. I think it varies more for women in terms of how to achieve it than it does for men. [long pause] And then women can orgasm multiple times within a short span of time.

**How did you learn about the female orgasm?**

Talking to friends, internet, sex ed

**And internet, is it Google? Is it porn? What websites?**

Well I don't trust porn to tell me anything true [laughs]. Usually I Google and skim and see if it's some blog or if it looks like a possible medical website.

**And sex ed was that the "sex talk" that you talked about?**

A little bit.

**Have you ever stimulated another female to orgasm?**

No

**Have you ever orgasmed?**

I would like to think so. I know some people say if you are not sure, then no, but I don't know. I had a really pleasurable experience and was extremely happy and just wanted to go to sleep, so I would say yes.

**Do you know how to orgasm?**

No

**Have you ever you faked an orgasm?**

No

**What do you know about female masturbation?**

I know probably more women do it than men think, or that they will openly admit. It seems to be something that women are way more secretive about. Surprisingly enough, I actually don't know that much about it. I have tried it with no success. I find it kind of unnerving actually because it is the purely physical, and there is no emotion, because it is just you.

**How did you learn about female masturbation?**

[Laughs] This is going to be a funny story! When I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade I went to the living room, and my mom and my sister were watching *Sex and the City*, and I happen to walk in on the scene where one of them was masturbating, and they shooed me out of the room. But with that, even at a young age, boys talk about it a lot. I did, when I was little, look up porn, and I didn't think about it as masturbating, but I did realize, "Hey, if I push here at a certain spot, it feels really good!" Aside from that, in the last year or two, I've actually looked online for methods, because I had that big question. I wonder if I can get myself off, because along with all of the random internet research, a lot of it said it's actually, *supposedly*, easier to achieve an orgasm through masturbation as it is with a partner.

**Would you say you do masturbate?**

I have and I will occasionally, but not often and yeah.

**What are the contexts then that you do masturbate in?**

I mean aside from the needing to make sure my roommates are not going to be back in the room for awhile and all that kind of thing, I do have a dildo, so sometimes it will be if my boyfriend and I have decided to be sort of mean to each other via Skype or texting. We are just talking and remembering past events, so we both get kind of turned on. Usually, I won't do anything, but sometimes I'll say, "Well maybe it will work this time," so I try it.

**Is masturbation pleasurable for you?**

No

**Is the female orgasm, what you know of it, or what you may or may not have experienced, was that pleasurable?**

Yes

**Do these pleasures differ from each other? Like the pleasures, actually scratch that question because you said masturbation was not pleasurable.**

Let me clarify something. There have been a few occasions where when we were with each other, my boyfriend has asked me to masturbate in front of him, and those times have been pleasurable. A little bit.

**So that is a difference in being a lone versus with him?**

Yes

**So do you think the pleasure you receive from that is different from the pleasure you receive from sex or another sexual activity?**

Yes

**Can you describe the differences?**

It's very much a frame of mind kind of thing. When masturbating is part of a foreplay between me and my boyfriend, it's not me thinking about: How do I get myself off? How do I make myself achieve an orgasm? It's just, we are playing; we're playing off of each other. It's just the situation at hand, in the moment, whatever. But even within that, the reason I think that I get pleasure then, as opposed to on my own, is because I know that after that I will get something. Even to have it be pleasurable with him around, we will have had to be doing things before and after.

**Do you feel like your sexual experiences and sexual knowledge are common or uncommon with the people you associate yourself with?**

It's really varied. I know some people who I go to as "Hey, I have a question. Can you help me?" And some people who I actually don't talk to any about this with, because I would kind of feel like a slut, because they strike me as such an innocent and almost naïve approach to it.

**And how do you feel like your sexual experiences and sexual knowledge compare to Bucknell's campus?**

Oh, I was talking about people at Bucknell.

**And what about the idea of rumors you hear or can you say anything about that, like traditional experience of outside your own network, the campus in general?**

I generally tend to think that everyone knows more than I do and the people I know who are kind of naïve and innocent are the exceptions on campus.



**Why do you think that people know more than you do?**

Probably because of [identifier] school. It was single sex, all girls, so it kind of halted for awhile. I mean I did learn I was bisexual, but I never acted on it. I don't know. You see girls walking around on the weekend in very tight fitting, heavily skin showing outfits to go to some party and I hope and assume that they know more about sexuality.

**And have a follow up question for your all girls high school and knowing your bisexual and never acting on it. Do you feel like that part of your sexuality has been fulfilled? Those attractions to women.**

No. I had people at my high school who I would have liked to have relationships with and either they didn't feel the same way or I never got up the courage to tell them. Yeah, I mean I don't know it's hard to explain. My boyfriend once asked me—just because he was genuinely curious about sexual orientations in general—he once asked me if in order for me to be satisfied would I need a man and a woman together, which is untrue. For me it's not the physicality, even though I am physically attracted to both genders. It's at one time I will be attracted to either a man or a woman.

**Do you tell the truth about your sexual experiences?**

Depends on who I am talking to.

**Can you elaborate?**

I guess the easiest way to say that is, like lying through not saying anything, because at least within the last year or so, I am more comfortable with it, but I don't feel a need to express that side of myself and let people know "Hey, I am sexually active." And make that apart of how I show myself. I did, in the past. I lied about that middle school event for a while, which part of the reason why it became a big thing. And my parent's, I kind of evaded for awhile, but not my mom and my sister know and I let my dad assume that I am waiting to have that talk.

**What do you withhold or not feel comfortable not telling the truth about concerning your sexuality?**

[long pause]. Hm. Well it's just interesting because some of these came up with my boyfriend during this break. The question of faking a orgasm, for awhile I wasn't faking per se; I never faked *an* orgasm, but at times I would see his direction of play and wouldn't really want that but would be okay with it and over exaggerate it, which is another way of lying, I guess. But in terms of things being withheld, there isn't really anything withheld between my boyfriend and I, and also with one of my good friends on campus., we also share everything with each other. Aside from that, it's not really something I just share with everyone.

**What is easy to tell the truth about concerning your sexuality?**

Anything that would fit the normal expectations of society.

**Can you give me some examples of that?**

I don't know just "boyfriend and I have been dating for over a year, so we have sex," like I am not sure. [pause] I guess it's easier to come up with a counter example. Like. [pause] Society kind of expects you to do [pause]. I don't know how to talk about this! [laughs]. So one example I guess would be bondage of sorts. It's something that recently has become more of an acceptable thing, but it's still not something people openly talk about in relation to themselves, and so that is something I wouldn't feel as comfortable about, even though it's something I enjoy, like role playing, or bondage or any of those things.

**Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed about your sexuality, desires or attractions?**

I mean I've been kind of embarrassed about people I have been attracted to. It was, I don't know if embarrassed is the right word, but disconcerting when I kind of made the realization of enjoying a slightly more submissive—I guess the biggest one, and I don't know if this is too much detail...

**No such thing!!**

Okay!! Well I very recently discovered that in the correct context that having my boyfriend choke me, not choke me, but put enough pressure that it makes my breathing more shallow is something that, in the moment, does a lot. It makes me stop overthinking everything and makes it much more pleasurable, but at the same time afterwards and after I realized that, I just had a lot of these thoughts of "What does that mean about me? What does that make me as a person?"

**And why do you think you feel that way afterwards, even though it's pleasurable at the time?**

Hm, because it's [pause] such an aggressive act against me, and I know my boyfriend would never hurt me, and he was actually the one who, at one point, loosened because he was afraid of leaving bruises or something. It's just something few people admit to and talk about, and at the same time, I have this—it kind of hurts my pride, because it's a very submissive thing. So that on top of it being something society doesn't talk about that much and if they do it's with a book like *Fifty Shades of Grey* where everyone is just cracking jokes or ignoring it. Between society and pride.

**Do you think if more people talked about it and were open with it, you'd be okay with it?**

Probably. As I said, I kind of base more of my confidences on other people than I know I should, and it's something I am working on, but I do.

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of regarding your sexual knowledge of practices?**

Yeah. I guess the biggest thing would be the sheer surprise of my boyfriend when it came to just like having sex and doing new things and also my sexual appetite. He sometimes still gets surprised that I was a virgin, because I do have a pretty heavy sexual appetite,

especially compared to people he had been with before. And then also flexibility, but that's also kind of a random leaf thing.

**Is there anything else that I haven't asked in this interview that you would like me to include in your response?**

I am not really sure. Like it what contexts?

**Well some people come in here expecting me to ask certain questions and say "Why didn't you ask that?" or "I wanted to tell you this!" So I leave it open ended if there is anything else you wanted to include or think of that you thought of between the beginning of the interview and now.**

Yeah, I don't have anything really specific. I mean part of my brain is going "oral sex" is something you should talk about.

**Do you find oral sex to be pleasurable?**

I do! I've never done oral sex on a girl, and I actually also—words. I actually enjoy giving oral sex to my boyfriend, as well as receiving, and that is something that I learned recently.

**What aspect did you learn recently?**

That I actually enjoy giving him oral sex, as opposed to being happy that he was happy. I realized "Yeah! This isn't a thing I am doing just for him."

**Would you say you found pleasure in giving him oral sex?**

A little yeah. It's back to kind of a sense of pride. It's knowing, "I can make him feel this way!"

**It's interesting then because you have two dynamics happening that sometimes you feel proud but other times that pride is negative. It is both positive and negative, that pride.**

Definitely, yeah definitely

**Anything else you would like included in your response?**

I guess another thing that might be relevant is the uh. I—let's I see here, now my brain is coming up with a bunch of different things.

**I am here and all ears!**

I have experienced two sorts of threesomes. No one actually had sex. One of them, it was me, a girl and a guy, and it's happened twice. Once when I was in high school and once last year, completely different set of people. And I've learned that's something I am hesitant about and don't see myself getting as much pleasure from that as I would from a one-on-one with someone. While it's *an experience and* an experiment, the emotion and

the emotional conflicts would negate some of the physicality and have in the two past experiences. Yeah that's probably about it!

## **Interview Transcription 10**

**What is your class year at Bucknell?**

2013

**By what race and/or ethnicity to you identify yourself?**

White

**What is your sexual orientation?**

Straight

**What does the term sexuality mean to you?**

Umm, uhh. I don't know. I guess it's like a way of being, more than just actual sex or orientation, but I feel like its almost something certain people exude, like an aura.

**Based on your own definition, how do you describe your own sexuality?**

I don't know. I guess like young! Older woman would have—I don't feel like a woman woman. Almost immature. I don't feel like I am a cougar woman.

**What do you mean by immature?**

Sexuality: I think it definitely changes a lot over time, and my would be on the newer, younger end of it. I think a lot of girls my age still are discovering what their sexuality sort of is.

**Do you feel like your still discovering?**

Yeah I think so!

**What were some key sources or experiences that were influential in coming to understand sexuality in the way you described it?**

I think your friends growing up,. You sort of learn from other people, and they learn from you and they influence each other. And then guys that I have dated. [pause] I would definitely say guys that I was in relationships with. Not random people.

**Are there any particular sources that were influential in forming your own sexuality such as certain people, texts, the media?**

I would say *Cosmo* magazine! I feel like it is a main source of sexual knowledge for a lot of people, and me, because when I was younger, I would read it and be like, "Oh my god! What is this?" I don't know so much about TV, but yeah I feel like as far as media goes probably *Cosmo*, *Glamour* magazine, all of those.

**In the previous question you said you learned from guys you were in relationships with, are there specific instances about that?**

Yeah, I would say the boyfriend I was with for two years. I didn't really know what I liked in sex, until there was someone I was having sex with for two years. I think that was a huge time where my sexuality changed, because that is when it became more of an inward thing rather than an "Oh I want to look sexy." It was being sexy for one person, kind of.

**What is sexual pleasure?**

I guess feeling good from sexuality. Yeah, that's pretty much exactly what it is.

**How did you learn about sexual pleasure?**

Probably *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

**When did you first learn about it?**

I don't know, maybe when I was 13 or 14, early high school.

**What did Cosmo tell you?**

I guess *Cosmo* set the expectation that sex should be pleasurable. I think a lot of girls, and me too, were having sex in high school in these random situations. It's not like you were going to people's houses, where it's their own space, and it was just very uncomfortable and inconvenient. The expectation of what it should be isn't really there yet, but then you read *Cosmo*, and it is the perspective of older women, and you are like, "Oh my gosh! Yes, it should always be there. Why would you do it if not?"

**Have you ever experienced sexual pleasure?**

Mhmm [yes]

**Can you describe the time you first remember experiencing sexual pleasure?**

Is sexual pleasure code for orgasm?

**It is whatever you take it to be. If you want to equate it you are welcome to do that but if you want to talk about it more generally, that's fine too.**

I think in high school it was little bits and pieces just because—I don't know—in the back of some guy's truck, when it's cold outside is just kind of weird. I would say the first time would have been in a truck, because I was with a guy that I had kind of gone out with a few times, and I really liked him. I did a lot of cocaine, so it was awesome [laughs].

**How have your experiences of pleasure changed since then?**

I would say they have become much more a priority. It used to be like "Oh, I am having sex with a guy," or "We're hooking up!" But now it's like I *need* to get something out of this.

**And that time in the truck, were you equating to pleasure to orgasm or were you just talking about the general feeling?**

No, that was the first time I was like, “Wow I really like this.”

**And how old were you when the truck story happened?**

I’d say probably 17, but then I didn’t ever know what an orgasm was until I was in college, like 18 or 19, and I was in a relationship and could figure out how to make that happen.

**Where do you go for information when you want to expand your knowledge about your sexuality or learn about different sexual practices?**

Probably *Cosmopolitan*.

**Anywhere else that you can think of?**

I’d say my friends

**Is there anything you wish you could ask that you can’t find the answer to from Cosmo or from your friends?**

Not anything I can think of now.

**Beyond that, are there other ways you explore your sexual desires, attractions, pleasures etc.?**

What does that mean?

**Like do you try things out, do you watch porn, do you fantasize, those types of things?**

Yeah, I would definitely say when I am in class, like zoning out, my thoughts can get dirty, but yeah that’s pretty much—I don’t necessarily do it for pleasure, but it’s nice to think about.

**Do you learn stuff from friends, like you talk to them and learn new things?**

Yeah it’s not so much a “Oh, I need to know this about this,” but you learn certain things.

**What gets in the way of exploring your sexuality?**

Um [pause] I don’t know. Nothing, I guess. I can’t really think of anything.[pause] Lack of a consistent partner!

**Is there a time when you wanted to explore sexual pleasure and you didn’t?**

Um [pause] no? [Whispers:] I don’t know what that means.

**Like you wanted to have sex with a guy because you wanted to experience pleasure, and it didn’t happen. Or you were about to reach orgasm and something happened that prevented it.**

Oh yeah, that’s happened plenty of times.

**It could be something just like you're at this campus and you want to do something but you feel like you don't have the opportunity to.**

Oh! Well there are definitely opportunities. I'd say most of the time, I am the barrier to that. There has to be moral judgments made to balance pleasure seeking, but then other times, when you just can't get there—either your tired, or you can hear someone outside the door, and you're creeped out.

**Distractions?**

Yeah

**How do you see the relationship between emotional and physical pleasure?**

I would say a positive linear slope! We can graph it.

**And is one more important or are they both equally important?**

I would say probably emotional is more important just because for a lot of stuff, at least in my life, it's been sort of a prerequisite for physical. There's only so much physical pleasure you can get without the emotional part being there, I think.

**We have been discussing in the abstract, now I want to ask about specific sexual practices.**

**How do you actually go about in fulfilling your sexual desires, attractions, cravings?**

Um, well I have sex. Well then I don't fulfill them! A lot of times—well there are months at a time where I don't have sex, but it doesn't irk me in a way that it would a guy.

**Do you feel like everything is being fulfilled?**

Noo.

**Can you think of other ways you go about fulfilling sexual desires?**

That is really all I got!

**What do you know about the male orgasm?**

That it happens a lot [laughs]. It's easier, I guess, for them.

**How did you learn about the male orgasm?**

First hand experience!

**And did you know about it before that experience?**

Yeah, I mean it is always surprising the first time it happens.

**Have you ever stimulated a man to orgasm?**

Yes? I think so. The technical terms making simple things seem like, "Wait! Did I ever 'stimulate'?" Yes. Yes I have.



**What do you know about the female orgasm?**

That it can occur a lot. It is very elusive. Even now, I talk to most of my friends, and they rarely get off during sex, and I feel like at 20, 21, and 22 that should start to be happening.

**How did you learn about the female orgasm?**

Probably *Cosmo* and seeing movies and TV shows or whatever.

**But earlier you said you didn't really know about it until college?**

I had never had one until college. Yeah! Before, at your nativist point about sex you know that it's supposed to feel good, but I never necessarily thought about there being a beginning and an end, but now I definitely think of it as there being a finite end.

**And do you think that same thought for men as for women in heterosexual sex?**

No, because it is a little more obvious when a man finishes than a woman. I think I always knew that that was there.

**Have you ever orgasmed?**

Yes

**Do you know how to orgasm?**

Mhm [yes]

**How do you yourself achieve an orgasm?**

By having sex.

**Are there any other ways you orgasm besides having sex?**

No

**Have you ever you faked an orgasm?**

Oh yeah!

**Why?**

Cause sometimes, the guy he just really wants—he's just trying so hard, and he really wants you to feel good, and it's just starting to not feel good, because it's been forever. You know it's not going to happen, so you just gotta end it [laughs].

**And was faking the orgasm pleasurable for you?**

I mean it would have been *more* pleasurable to not fake it, but it was the quickest way to what I wanted [laughs]: to stop.

**What do you know about female masturbation?**

Well, I have been considering buying a vibrator, but I don't know much about it.

**How did you learn about female masturbation?**

Probably the same place as everything else, like movies, seeing allusions to it in movies and *Cosmo*. *Cosmo* makes it seem like every single person does it all the time, so.

**Do you masturbate?**

No, I've tried it, but I could never really figure it out [laughs].

**And are these practices, the female orgasm and the way you achieve the female orgasm, pleasurable for you?**

Mhm [yes]

**Do you have different sexual pleasures that differ from one another or in different contexts?**

What does that mean?

**For example, for those who do masturbate, the pleasure they receive from masturbation is totally different than the pleasure they receive from having sex with someone else. Is there are any different times where you feel different things?**

Yeah, I think there is definitely—like having sex, there are times when it just happens without really trying, and that's just awesome, but then other times, yeah, you get there, but you have to try so hard. It's almost forced. It does happen, but it's not as nice when it just happens on it's own, sort of.

**Do you feel like your sexual experiences and sexual knowledge are common or uncommon with the people you associate yourself with?**

I would say maybe uncommon? Like I have said, a lot of my friends have never had an orgasm, and they've had boyfriends and have had sex with tons of people. Or they've had it once, and they can remember that one specific time, but it's never happened again.

**And how do you feel like your sexual experiences and sexual knowledge compare to Bucknell's campus?**

I would say probably average, just right there. I think most girls here have had at least one serious relationship, maybe while at Bucknell and have had a string of partners. I don't see many girls here being too prude.

**Do you tell the truth about your sexual experiences?**

Yeah

**What is easy to tell the truth about?**

Horrifically funny stories like if something awful happens [laughs]. Like one time I was taking my pants off, and I kicked the guy in the balls so hard when I was trying to get my jeans off that he couldn't have sex, and I had to go home. I'm just like "Alright! So I'll leave!"

**What do you withhold or not feel comfortable not telling the truth about ?**

I would say my own—I am happy to tell about the guy or everything else—but my own feelings about it and whether or not I enjoyed it, I probably wouldn't. That is not the first thing I would share.

**Why is that do you think?**

Cause it's one thing to talk about another person, and it's another thing to talk about yourself.

**Have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed about your sexuality, desires or attractions?**

Um [pause] I guess so, yeah, because there is always that time when a guy is your type but not your friends', and you feel embarrassed for thinking, "Uh he's hot" but my friends don't! Yeah, that is probably the only thing I can think of.

**Why do you think you feel that way? Is that what other's think?**

I forget what the first question was.

**I asked you have you ever felt embarrassed or ashamed about your sexuality, desires or attractions and you said "Yes, by a type of guy because they might not be your friends' type of guy." You're embarrassed because it doesn't align.**

Yeah. You want your friends' approval of someone. You know? It's a prize! You feel confident and better about yourself when you have someone who has been stamped of approval by people who you care about their opinions.

**Is there anything you are particularly proud of regarding your sexual knowledge of practices?**

No [laughs]. I guess maybe I know what I need, so I can get off usually, so I don't have to be in a serious relationship to be having good sex.

**Is there anything else that I haven't asked in this interview that you would like me to include in your response?**

I don't think so! What is an epistemology?

**It is how do you come to know, what was the source of you knowledge, so that's why I ask you about your sources. That's the philosophical term for how we learn what we know and what we don't know around female sexual pleasure. It's like what you were talking about how a lot of women don't know, so I am trying to see how people find out about and why some people know and other's don't.**

No I probably just say being in a relationship and just magazines.

**Do you think experience at all, does that go along with the relationship?**

Yeah because when you are having sex with someone all the time, you can try different things. You can let them know what you like and don't like. There's not that weird thing

that they are doing. Sometimes when you are with someone new that totally throws you off or just like ruins it. Just keeping going. Also, you take your time more when you are in a relationship. Making out is something fun when you really like someone. When you are having a one night stand, the point is to just have sex, but if you can fool around and learn, and take your time, it's a lot easier, but most people wouldn't have that opportunity if they weren't with someone.

## Focus Group Transcription Session 1

**Me:** So the first thing, just to get us all “in the mood,” no pun intended. I really didn’t mean to do that! I just wanted to start with a reflection. I know this might sound a little cheesy, but I think it will help get us in the mindset of talking about sex and understanding where you are coming from. [pause] So I want you all to close your eyes, and I want you to go deep inside your mind for about a minute or so and really think about the first time you have or the earliest memory or the earliest moment of becoming aware of your sexuality. And I want you to think about that moment and maybe think about how old you were. What were your surroundings? And what were you doing? [pause] Who was there or not there? What were you thinking and really what you were feeling?

[Long pause]

**Me:** Whenever you feel like you have that moment in mind you can open your eyes and we can go around and share a little bit.

[Long pause]

**Me:** Does anyone feel like they want to share first?

**Participant 3:** I was in kindergarten. I remember being in the cafeteria and I saw a blonde Backstreet-looking boy named Kyle, and I thought he was cute. I wanted to spend some time with him, but in my elementary school mind he looked so far away, so I never did. That was the first time I ever remember being attracted to another person. In that way.

**Participant 6:** I guess mine is kind of similar. In kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I had a boyfriend. Obviously, we never did anything [everyone laughs]. He would write me these love letters, would give me gold dollar coins and stuff. I remember him chasing me around the playground and trying to kiss me, and I was freaked out, but it was the first time—kind of the same way—like I was attracted to someone. I was very young, obviously, but same kind of thing.

**Participant 5:** Mine is a little different, like I had those experiences, but I was thinking—like I kissed a boy in kindergarten, but I didn’t *feel* anything; I didn’t have any response. But I remember in 4<sup>th</sup> grade there was a boy that I liked—it was either third or fourth grade. We were in the same class for both those years—and I was in bed at night, trying to sleep or something. I don’t know. I don’t want to say it was instinctual, or I was probably imitating something I saw on TV or something, but I remember wanting to

touch him and stuff. I think I was rubbing up against one of my stuffed animals. [People giggle].

**Participant 4:** I kinda—similar to the first two. In first grade, I had a boyfriend, and I remember I wanted to kiss him, but not really knowing why, like I didn't have a reason. I just thought that's what people did and I should do it too. It didn't really feel like anything at the time, but, you know, later on it feels good.

**Participant 2:** I think, I was very much a tomboy growing up, so I think having a lot of guy friends, and I always wanted to have sleepovers, and my parents always limited my sleepovers to only having my girlfriends, who I didn't really know or like necessarily. And when I would ask why, my mom would always hint that stuff was going to happen, and it wasn't going to be okay. When in reality, that probably wasn't going to be the case, [giggles] but that prevented the sleepovers with boys.

**Participant 1:** My case was a little bit different. I mean my first experience was much more with a hatred kind of thing. I was a little age as your guys' [sic], maybe four or five, but we had a neighbor. We were living in an apartment, so I would always go to their house. Their dad was kind of freaky, I remember. He would touch me in a way that I was feeling uncomfortable, so then I had a friend in kindergarten, and he would also in the way touch me, so it was kind of like I always remember it in a hate—like he was my best friend. I remember it as a kind of bad feeling, like I don't want it, because I would always associate him with that bad, that big person. Like he would always kiss me! I mean I was five years old; you kiss baby, but not five years old kids. So he would just kiss me and hug me, and I did not like that. Because he had a daughter also! He was not kissing her, so why me? Yeah, that was my experience. Not happy experience [laughs].

**Me:** Can you guys think of other instances after hearing from each other, or similarities that have come up while other people were sharing?

**Participant 6:** I thought about something. I can't remember what grade I was in. I must have been really young, like second grade, but I had a best guy friend from preschool, and my parents and his parents were really close. And I remember going over to his house, and he pulled me behind a bush and was like "I'm not going to be your friend unless you kiss me." Like he gave me his hand, his cheek or his lips. I honestly think we were in second grade [kinda laughs]. It was a very scarring moment! I remember standing behind this bush and not knowing what to do. And finally—I was so against it—and finally, I agreed to kiss him on his hand, I think. But it was just something so weird where he had been one of my friends. We did everything together as really young kids. For him to all of the sudden make this change, I was like, "Whoa, what's going on?!" I think we were in second grade. Somewhere around there.

**Me:** I think the first time I remember, I was at a Kiddie Camp and a boy was braiding my hair and I felt all tingly, so I went back to my house and wrote a song—his name was

Will Smith, which I don't know if that was true. I think he might have just told me that that was his name—so I went home, and I was skipping around my garden singing about Will Smith braiding my hair [everyone laughs]. It was the first time I actually—or I remember at least—physically feeling attraction. But again, I had seen my parents' bodies and stuff, and I knew there was something there, but that was my first time I remember me ever *feeling* something. Do you guys feel like you were aware of your sexuality or of relationships when you had those moments?

**Participant 1:** My experiences may have been a bit different, but I don't know. [Identifier], it's taboo that not even kids—until you get into a relationship, like you're an adult after 18—it's taboo for women to know about, to even think about their bodies! They are made to feel like it is bad. It's bad! [identifier] You have to not talk to somebody or something. From childhood you [are] not supposed to know about anything. We are not taught in school about sexuality and stuff like that. So my experiences are quite different. I was a big girl; I didn't know anything. When I got my first period [laughs], I was so stupid! I mean I was young. I was like 9 years old. Girls [in my country] get it when they are 13 or 14, but I was 9. I didn't have any other sister. My mom was so protective, like I never see anything! Her being in period [sic] or something, so I was so, I was thinking this is only me; this is something bad I have done, or this is some sort of sickness or something. For so long, I was going to this mental pressure that something is wrong with me, or I am a bad person, or something like that. So sexual thing is also like that. I was really old! I did not know to touch myself or something, because you were always made feel like if you feel sexual, that's something bad. So you always don't want to know.

**Me:** Do any of you have that experience...where as a woman you didn't know about sexuality or you weren't taught about it?

**Participant 2:** Probably compared to the guys, yes

**Participants 6 and others:** Yeah completely!

**Participant 6:** I think not probably to the same extent, but to a certain point, the thought of like—this is not necessarily young, but girls masturbating versus guys masturbating is *so* different. Girls *can't* talk about it. You know what I mean? It just seems so weird if girls talk about it, but guys, it's part of their daily conversations, you know? It does seem like it's taboo, when it shouldn't be. I mean you think about sex-ed classes. They don't talk about it at all. They don't talk about women's pleasure really. I don't know it's just weird thinking about it that way.

**Me:** Anyone else have a response to that? [pause] No? Okay. My next question then is did you have any sexual role models growing up? In other words, did you model practices and ideas about sexuality on someone in particular, like someone you can remember specifically, and what were they like as sexual people, and what did you

emulate? So, maybe first, who were your sexual role models or did you have a sexual role model growing up?

**Participant 5:** I have a much [identifier] older siblings. [Passage omitted for confidentiality]. I remember when I was young, 4, 5, 6, me and my friend's little brother, we would play house, and we were like pretending to be my brother and his girlfriend. And we would kiss and stuff, but I didn't feel anything then, but yeah, we were pretending to be them [Everyone laughs]. I don't know why! I think it's just cause they babysat me a lot, so I saw them together, so I think we were just playing house on them.

**Participant 1:** I think I was young at that time also. My parent's I never see—I don't know [identifer] I have never seen [them] romantic kissing each other in front of children or stuff—so you always think, your parents are there, a couple of guys in your house. You don't know from where they come, because when my younger brother was born, I ask my mom “From where did he came from?” She said “I bought him!” [Everyone laughs] or something. I don't know from where! We had these neighbors, this young couple. They were very cute, and I was always going to their house, and in the morning, and they had little sister and brother—I don't know who they were, but I don't remember—but I would always remember this young guy, the husband, would be with the girl or something. And they would be doing flirting! And I was like “What is this!?” I was so attracted to this thing. Like she would make him—like to wake up you have to do all this and stuff, and I would always be staring [laughs]. What is this!? If it is a husband and wife, my mom and dad are also the same, why is not happening there? [laughs] Yeah, for me, it was really ideal. I was always was sometime imagining myself in state of that woman [sic]. I don't know. I was ten or something, but I was always thinking there is something special about that woman. Sometime I was thinking I was more [attracted] to that woman, because she was so beautiful, could make that beautiful scene up, so I don't know! Yeah.

**Participant 4:** Well, I am the oldest of my family, so hugging and kissing and touching is very normal for us, so when my parents would kiss, I would never see it as sexual. I had au pairs. I don't know if you guys know what those are. They would live with you and stuff, and they would only stay a year each, but we had a lot of them, cause, you know, we needed child support [identifier]. And I would ask them all of my questions, because they had nothing to lose because they were leaving in a year, and they would actually answer all of my questions. And they came from different cultures so it was cool to see their perspectives.

**Me:** And would you emulate their behaviors, too? Or was there one that stood out in particular where you were like, “oh I want to be her or him?”

**Participant 4:** There was one that I had when I was 12, and I had my first boyfriend when I was 14, and she told me that it doesn't really matter the age you lose your virginity, and stuff like that, as long as it is with someone you care about. [People laugh].



Probably not the best advice! So I lost my virginity when I was 15, and I think that's a large reason why I was okay with it, because someone that I looked up to told me it was okay.

**Me:** And I noticed you all laughed when she said that. So why do you think that we all laughed when the au pair said it was okay to lose it at any age?

**Participant 5:** I was laughing because she said she was 12 when she heard this, and I didn't get to the rest of the story.

**Participant 1:** One of the reasons is [passage omitted for confidentiality] we have an official age in the United States and some years before we're even 12 years old, and in so many countries it is the same thing, but in our mind if you are younger, if you lose your virginity, it is bad because of what we are told or because we have seen what happened to the twelve year old girls because of that stereotyping.

**Participant 6:** I think a lot of people think you can't lose your virginity at a young age, because you don't know what sex is [lots of people agree]. You don't understand the consequences that could happen if you are not careful. I think, also, a lot of people's religious backgrounds play into it as well. They control when you should or shouldn't lose your virginity—your mental stability, if you're going to be okay after. I kinda agree with what she's saying that it shouldn't really matter. There shouldn't be an age when you should lose it or not. It should be about if you care, but how much do you know? How much—like I look back to the boyfriend that I lost my virginity to, and I was an idiot. I thought I cared about him, and he was the biggest loser ever, you know? So, it's like, at what point do you *know* you care about someone?

**Participant 1:** But, I don't know if it's related to this discussion or not, even the losing of this "virginity" or whatever it is, that's something that we are told because we should *have* it, because that would purify it. Who cares to whom you lose that virginity thing, or if it exists or not. [Passage omitted for confidentiality] when you don't have hymen and if they don't break it first sex they say, "Okay, you have had sex, then you are not a pure virgin." [Identifier] Some girls when they are born—they don't have that virginity thing, so that's just a concept in our mind that virginity really measures for women to be pure. [Someone agrees].

**Me:** Participant 2 or Participant 3 do you have anything you wanted to add to that or talk about who your sexual role model was?

**Participant 2:** That's what I was still thinking about. I was obsessed with *Grease* when I was little! I think Sandy was—as messed up as that is, because, you know, she just sexualizes herself, and she was a role model for me.

**Me:** As soon as you said that, I would say that was one for me too!

**Participant 2:** Yeah!

**Participant 3:** I was mad at the end of that movie...[inaudible about why]

**Participant 2:** Good for you! I wasn't.

**Me:** Do you have a sexual role model [to participant 3].

**Participant 3:** I can't say I ever have. No.

**Me:** Then not having a specific role model, do you feel like you emulate certain behaviors?

**Participant 3:** Yeah, if I emulated anything I would say it would be specific behaviors, not necessarily people. I remember at one point—and I didn't model my sexuality or my sexual practices after my sister, which is a good thing—but I remember there would be something small, like the way she put her chapstick on. She would always do it with her middle finger, which do it sometime in the mirror! It looks much more sexy than if you do it with your pointer finger [people laugh].

**Participant 5:** I just want to go back to the virginity thing, about losing it at certain age or whatever. I mean we do have the concept that it should be with someone that you care about or someone that you love or whatever, but there are cultures, like in a lot of Western European cultures that's not a thing. You don't have to care about the person. It's just whenever you feel like you're ready, but you don't have to have that sense of love or whatever, which I don't know, is just interesting to contrast and to think about in that way.

**Participant 6:** I think it also depends on what you want out of it too [someone agrees]. The problem with people having it at a young age is guys have no idea how to pleasure a girl [two people agree with "yeah"], so it's basically just for them.

**Me:** do you feel like you know how to pleasure yourself though?

**Participant 6:** At this point! Not when I was fifteen! [lots of people laugh].

**Me:** Did you know how to pleasure a guy then? That's the flip side of it.

**Participant 6:** No, that's true. I guess by fifteen probably not, but as I was getting older.

**Participant 1:** But in my case, guys are more expressive. They would do it—what they want it, but the girls will be like, "Let's see what happens."

**Someone:** They will kind of tell you what to do.

**Participant 1:** They will do it! [Slams her hand on the table, and a bunch of people say “yes” in agreement].

**Participant 6:** Plus I think guys start masturbating at a younger age, so they kind of have an idea of what they want to do. I don’t know.

**Participant 1:** [Laughing] sorry

**Participant 2:** Maybe I am a little bit naïve, but I think it’s more straightforward too.

[People agree. Someone says “Whoa.” Participant 1 says, “What’s happening!?” people are laughing]

**Me:** We will definitely get to more of these topics at later dates.

**Someone:** Too strong for the first session?

**Me:** No no!

**Participant 1:** And the main thing with the nature or the practice, that the guy would never know when she is done. [Everyone laughs] Even now! [Laughing says:] It will always be about him! I mean they don’t know! [People agree.] They will ask you all the time if you are there.

**Participant 2:** That’s awful!

[Laughing from everyone].

**Me:** I think you were the only person who didn’t share about sexual role models [to Participant 6].

**Participant 6:** I guess, yeah I can’t really think of one. The only thing I can think of was right before my grandma passed away she wrote me out this whole—well it was right before I went to college—but then she passed away, when I was a freshmen—but she wrote me out this three page letter about me growing up and like going to college and stuff. And she wrote me this whole part about when I was little; [identifier] I used to want to always going to the library and read all about the baby books and the sex books. I don’t know what was wrong with me. I was like really young! But I was *so* intrigued by it, and I went to my grandma of all people, and at this point, I would probably never do that. That’s just uncomfortable. But I went to my grandma, and she was really the one who helped me learn, like sex and how a baby is born and how a baby is conceived and

that kind of stuff, and I obviously had forgotten that, and she told me again. It's an interesting thing.

**Participant 5:** I think it's interesting that you just said, "I don't know what was wrong with me," when you said you were talking about being interested in that.

**Participant 6:** Yeah! Well you think about it, I don't really remember it. I remember going to the library. I remember looking at, like, fetuses in the baby books, but I was so young. Not that there was something wrong with me.

**Participant 1:** But you were more curious!

**Participant 6:** I was curious!

**Participant 1:** You were the most normal child I think!

**Participant 6:** Yeah, but I was much more curious than any of my friends. I guess that makes me think that nothing was wrong, but I was much more curious than other people were at such a young age.

**Participant 1:** Yeah

**Participant 2:** That's what happens when nobody will give you a straight answer.

**Participant 6:** Yeah I know, so now I'm going to grandma's!

**Me:** So let's talk about the meaning about sex for a little bit. This can be totally free flowing, and we are already starting to free flow, which I am psyched about [Everyone laughs]. But feel free to respond to each other and ask each other questions, because I think sex—we will probably find that sex is subjective experience anyway. So how would you define sex. What is "sex"?

**Participant 3:** I would say what the judge said in the whole porn—I guess you know it when you see it. You know it when you have it. [People laugh].

**Me:** What is it, then for you, or what is it not?

**Participant 1:** For me, it's like, I am born [non-christian]. I don't identify anymore, but like, we don't have sex until you are a certain age, when you are married or something like that. So for a really long time I did not know about it. I was always curious, but you are always sure in your mind that you cannot have it. And you are also so sure you don't want to have it with anybody, because you don't know how it is, so you don't want to take a risk. I was like quite enough old when I experienced it [sic], and I experienced it with a person who I was really in love with. My first attraction was not towards him as

sexual; it was love or more kind of emotional attachment. For me, it is always like love. I would never do it for the sake of pleasure. I don't think it's bad if you do it for the sake of pleasure, but I have not experienced it as a thing just starting as a pleasure. Mine come after I was in love with somebody. [pause] and when I was old enough. [Identifier]

**Participant 4:** I guess I categorize sex in two categories. One as a symbol of a strong emotional connection, and that's personally my favorite kind, and the other kind is just kinda for physical pleasure and needs and everything like that. Here, that's happened to me twice, and I didn't like it at all. At home, it was more kind of emotional, so I've learned this is what I value, and it's not going to change, cause even though I've had sex before with different people, the meaning hasn't changed, like I still hold it to a high standard.

**Participant 3:** It's interesting you said you it happened twice here, but you did it at home. One you were sort of an actor and the other one it just sort of occurred.

**Participant 4:** Yeah. I don't know. I definitely regretted both times here, because I was drunk, and it was kind of a thing that happened, but I realized it doesn't make me a bad person, because I still hold esteem to it.

**Participant 1:** I just wonder—I just don't know—always when girls have sex, they think something bad has happened. I wonder whether men feel that way ever, like “I feel bad. I made love with her. I should have not.” [People laugh]. I cannot say I know, but I don't know.

**Participant 2:** Yeah I don't know....(inaudible)

**Participant 1:** Cause they never talk about it!

**Someone:** They would never admit...they have to much pride

**Me:** So are you saying these feelings of shame have to go with sex sometimes?

**Participant 1:** I am just saying girls have this more feeling of guilt. Even sometimes studying abroad, you see girls that they have their friends' boyfriends will be there and in the morning they will talk like, “Oh my god! I feel so bad, his girlfriend is my friend back at school” and stuff like that. But guys! They don't—I have lots of guy friends, and I have never heard them say “I feel bad I did that.”

**Participant 4:** It doesn't mean they don't, though, just cause they don't say it [some people agree].

**Participant 6:** But I don't think shame has to—or I don't think it should by any means, but I think sometimes it does when you are drunk or something, and you have sex when

you didn't want to. But I think as a culture we should work towards less shameful sexual encounters, because I know I've been there too, you know? We just, as a culture, it just happens and I think it should happen less [people agree].

**Participant 5:** Write me down for penetration.

**Me:** Okay! Yeah my follow up question was going to be "What is sex?" like what behaviors are associated. What are you doing?

**Participant 2:** I wouldn't try to define it because I don't want to exclude anybody.

**Participant 3:** Yeah so lesbians can't have sex?

**Participant 2:** I think it's a personal.

**Me:** No for you! We don't have to come to a consensus, bottom line.

**Participant 2:** Yeah I would say hopefully everyone defines it for themselves. I wouldn't want to put my definition of sex on anyone, you know?

**Me:** And I should have really prefaced it.

**Participant 5:** That was just for me. I meant that individually.

**Me:** Yeah it's totally individual. I want this conversation to be free flowing, because what is sex for you. What is that? What behaviors?

**Participant 5 interjects:** penetration

**Me:** And what is associated? We don't by all means have to come to a consensus.

**Participant 1:** Penetration just means the last stage?

**Participant 5:** No that's ejaculation.

[people laughing]

**Participant 3:** That's sex.

**Participant 5:** That's insertion, well sometimes I don't count it unless one of us finishes. [Participants laugh]. Yeah, actually orgasm. [laughs] Somebody has to finish.

**Participant 6:** I agree. I agree with that.

**Participant 3:** What is it then up until that point?

**Participant 5:** A waste of time! [people laugh].

**Participant 1:** That's the only thing I want before that time. I want everything, but that is just an extra thing.

**Participant 6:** [passage omitted for confidentiality].

**Participant 2:** But I guess you're still having sex, it's just not successful. [people laugh, someone says that's true].

**Me:** What's under the umbrella of sex? Let's talk about specifics. It doesn't have to be universal, but what's under that idea of sex for you?

**Participant 5:** Like oral?

**Me:** Yeah, when you say you have sex with someone?

**Multiple people respond:** I wouldn't say...no..

**Me:** Is sex synonymous with intercourse?

**Participant 5:** For me it is yes.

**Participant 6:** Yes.

**Participant 1:** For me, it is more like touching of body. I mean I enjoy that more.

**Me:** So bodies touching, intercourse, is oral?

**Someone:** I wouldn't count that at all.

**Participant 6:** I don't think oral, because only one person enjoys it.

**Participant 3:** That's not necessarily the case!

[People laugh]

**Participant 6:** 69, that's true.

**Participant 5:** I wouldn't consider that sex.

**Participant 2:** I wouldn't either. I wouldn't consider that either. I think it depends who the partner is. If I was with a guy, I would say sex is penetration, but if you're with a girl I don't know how I would define it.

**Participant 3:** I try not to box it, to be fair. I have only ever kissed one person, who I haven't gone the whole way with. Does that make sense? So either we have done *everything* or we have done nothing. So for me, it's all sex.

**Participant 1:** Yeah I would also say that. For one thing it would be—like in the movies, how they show it, I don't know how that happens. That never happens to me. They just see each other, and they just grab and that's just finished in two seconds. [People laughing]. That can never happen to me. I can never turn on like that.

**Participant 2:** No, no it's not.

**Participant 1:** I don't know how it's possible with anybody. I just couldn't.

**Someone :** Movies just kill all expectations. Reality is just so distorted.

**Me:** So do you feel like we have a general idea of what sex is then? What I have heard from you guys is intercourse, orgasm, everything from kissing until the end and the in between, and touching of bodies and more emotional [people laugh after some descriptions]. Anyone want to add anything? This does not have to be a consensus; this is not “our” definition for the focus group. This is just what we are talking about.

**Participant 1:** What would you call verbal sex when people just talk about it?

**Participant 4:** Phone sex?

**Participant 1:** Yeah they talk. They just speak about it!

**Me:** Is sexting sex?

**Participant 2 and 5:** I wouldn't call that sex.

**Someone:** I think you have to have physical contact.

**Participants 2, 6, and someone:** Yeah.

**Me:** Well then, what is sexual pleasure? Again, we don't have to come to a consensus.

**Participant 6:** That is a difficult question.

**Participant 2:** I don't think I have an answer for myself.



**Participant 6:** Yeah I thought of something and then was like wait that doesn't [fades out, people laugh]

**Participant 5:** I mean I can have sex and enjoy it without climaxing [pause]. That's all I got. [people laugh].

**Me:** In other words you are experiencing sexual pleasure, without a climax?

**Participants 6 and 2:** Yeah, yes.

**Me:** What are some acts that you get sexual pleasure from.

**Participant 4:** Masturbating, definitely.

**Someone:** Intercourse

**Participant 6:** I would say you could put oral down too.

**Participant 3:** I am trying to decide if having dirty thoughts count.

**Participant 2:** Yeah that's what I was thinking of!

**Participant 1:** Yeah!! I do that.

**Participant 3:** Do you get pleasure? Or is it the anticipation of pleasure?

**Conversation among people:** It's like approaching pleasure. The tingle!

**Participant 1:** I mean I've told you once, when you see somebody, and you really like someone, you've never talked to them, but you really enjoy it! [Everyone laughs] I mean you just look! You don't have to go up and talk, but you *enjoy* looking at that person.

**Me:** So is attraction a form of sexual pleasure?

**Participant 1:** I mean attraction—everyone here is beautiful, but that one particular person really do something.

**Participant 6:** I'd vote the tingling.

**Participant 2:** Yeah, the tingling.

[conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** So we can go back to this question for a second. What forms has sexual pleasure taken in your life? We have talked about attraction, masturbation, intercourse can you think of others? Kissing?

**Participant 5:** Dry humping

**Three people:** Yeah! Dry humping! Dry humping is great.

**Participant 1:** I love cuddling!

**Me:** What do you wish sexual pleasure would look like more in your life? Or you *wish*? Instead of what has happened, what do you wish has happened for experiencing sexual pleasure? It sounds like everyone has experienced sexual pleasure, but are there things that have never happened that you wish has happened?

**Participant 2:** I think in general there just needs to be more communication. [people agree]. More open, honest talk about what's good, what's bad. I don't know. It's so awkward and a lot of it's just, I don't know. Maybe that's just my life, but I want to be more open!

**Me:** With sexual partners or in general?

**Participant 2:** With sexual partners, so you could be like, "that didn't work"

**Participant 1:** "I don't like it stop it!" I was for so long. I was not feeling it. I was mentally sick, because I wanted to talk about it, and that was my mistake that I was not talking about it. When I started talking about it and realizing I don't like this thing, I don't want this thing, I started enjoying it, because you have to just talk about it and say that. This thing is just so awkward.

**Participant 5:** If it's not going well for me, I will consistently break out the vibrator. I'll be like "Listen, I'm going to take a five minute break. Go get some popcorn" [people laugh and respond with "that's awesome." "that's funny" "that's cool."]

**Participant 2:** So is this what we wish we had more of?

**Me:** Yeah in terms of sexual pleasure.

**Participant 2:** Foreplay! [people agree]

**Participant 4:** Dirty talk!

**Participant 2:** Okay, alright!! [people laugh]

**Participant 1:** I don't want dirty talk!!

**Participant 6:** Internal orgasm

**Me:** What do you mean by that?

**Participant 3:** Vaginal as opposed to the clitoral.

**Participant 2:** I thought that didn't exist.

**Participant 6:** It does!

**Participant 3:** They just did a study—they could have asked a woman, but they did a study and now they know.

**Participant 1:** So what are you talking about?

**Someone:** G-spot

**Participant 3:** All right so there is the vaginal stimulation, which is typically ejaculation, but it tends to be less intense. And then there is the clitoral stimulation, where obviously the clitoris needs to be stimulated in some way, and it's supposed to be more intense. It's supposed to be [interrupted]

**Participant 5:** The internal?

**Participant 3:** the most sexually charged. What are you saying?

**Participant 5:** The internal one is more intense.

**Participant 3:** Let's talk about that.

**Participant 5:** Internal one is 100 times more intense. The g-spot.

**Participant 3:** I disagree.

**Me:** Do you think, then, that women have...

[side conversations]

**Participant 2:** Yeah, it's probably different for everyone. You like what you like. Whatever works. I'm confused about this vaginal orgasm, because I thought that it was just—okay, I thought that the nerves of the clitoris could be stimulated from like the inside of the vagina and it's the same thing, but it's just hitting a different side of it.

**Participant 5:** Did you take Joel Wade's Evolutionary Psych class?

**Participant 2:** No, but I've done a lot of reading.

**Me:** Isn't it interesting that we're all kind of confused.

**Participant 2:** We should know!

**Me:** We are all confused!

**Participant 5:** That makes sense though.

**Participant 6:** It's amazing how we don't know our bodies.

**Me:** Is pleasure a right—sexual pleasure a right?

**Participant 1:** Yeah, it is.

**Participant 6:** Yeah, I agree.

**Participant 2:** I don't know. I don't know if it is a right. I feel like a right is such a strong word. Like to be guaranteed by law? Sexual pleasure? That's what a right is to me. I don't want to say no, but I don't know. I am all over the place.

**Participant 5:** Do you mean in a sexual encounter you should expect it?

**Me:** I don't know. It's open ended.

**Participant 4:** I guess everyone should have the right to it. I guess slavery is an example, even though they are very different. I feel like it was not right, but it was a right by a law. Just because there is a law doesn't mean I necessarily agree with it. So I don't think there needs to be a law about it, but everyone should be aware of it.

**Participant 3:** I'm not really sure, so I have no thoughts.

**Participant 5:** I was taking it as if you are in a situation, a sexual situation, a sexual situation, you should expect pleasure, cause otherwise you are doing it for the wrong reasons.

**Participant 6:** Maybe not a right, but an expectation.

**Someone:** Yeah I agree with that.

**Me:** Do you all agree with that? Does anyone disagree?

**Participant 1:** Why would you want to do something if you don't have a right to that?

[conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** Let me put it in a different way, is sexual pleasure inherent to sex?

**Participant 2:** I don't think so. There is a lot of sex that does not involve pleasure.

**Two people:** Mhmm. I agree

**Participant 2:** I wish. In a perfect world, yes.

**Me:** Then, is sexual pleasure different for men and woman?

**Participant 1:** How [do] we know? We are just women.

**Me:** Well what are your thoughts on that then? Maybe in terms of the inherence or the right.

**Participant 5:** No. There have been times when I am having sex, and I am like "Mmm no," like I don't let them finish. I am just going to stop. If it doesn't work for me, then it doesn't need to be for you, bye. So no, it does not need to be inherent for anyone I guess.

**Participant 4:** I kind of look at it from the opposite perspective. If I'm not having fun, someone might as well. [People laugh].

**Participant 1:** That's funny.

**Participant 6:** Going off that, it depends on who I am with. If it's someone I really care about, and I am not getting off, I want to please my boyfriend.

**Participant 1:** Yeah that's what I mean.

**Participant 6.** Yeah, I think it depends on the situation. But I also think that it should be more equal [two people agree]. Or the guy should understand more that the girls aren't only doing this for them.

**Participant 1:** And I think the one that really care[s] about you, like love you, they will really care and make sure that it's about you.

**Participant 4:** All the boyfriends that I have had, that I have had sex with, they all feel bad if I didn't orgasm. That's how I know they care. Like I had to lie to them sometimes, because they acutally would be so upset.

**Me:** Well then going back to the previous conversation, do you think sexual pleasure is subject to instruction.

**Participant 3:** Can you clarify?

**Me:** Do you think then people should be taught how to be pleased and how to get pleasure? In general? In society? Should someone teach you, or is it cultivated in experience?

**Participant 6:** I think it should be both. I think there should be more emphasis on sexual pleasure, because, but the problem is they are so—like I have a friend. She is catholic, and her only idea of sex is for reproduction. There is no other reason for it! I'm like "Why would God give us a clitoris or a g-spot if we are not supposed to have any other reason to have sex?" So I am afraid that in order to expand it into society, it would be really hard because of other people's spiritual and religious beliefs, that they would stop the idea of making it more of a public thing, because it is such a private idea. I don't know

**Participant 2:** As incentive to procreate?

Participant 6: yeah

**Participant 2:** I don't believe in god, but it seems like a legitimate answer to your question.

**Participant 6:** yeah, but she's like---I cant relate to it obviously.

**Participant 5:** To play devil's advocate for her, there are a lot of studies that have been done that a woman orgasming enhances her likelihood of conceiving.

**Participant 2:** Hasn't a lot of this been debunked actually?

**Participant 5:** Because the muscles suck. [identifier]The contraction of the muscles sucks up the sperm.

**Participant 2:** Yeah it's called up suck. I saw a *Ted Talk* on it

**Participant 3:** Yeah! The "Ten things you didn't know about sex"

**Me:** Again, isn't it interesting that we are all like "I don't know, maybe??"

**Someone:** Exaclty

**Participant 5:** I don't know, but I can't wait to tell Joel Wade. He's a professor here.  
[side conversation]

**Participant 1:** There is a documentary about the same thing, that if a woman enjoy it, it is more possible. So if she does not enjoy it or if it is forced, then it less likely she will get pregnant, so I don't know.

[conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** Speaking of campus, do you think it is easy or hard to find sexually pleasurable experiences on Bucknell's campus?

**Someone:** Hard

**Participant 4:** I'd say sexual experiences easy, pleasurable ones hard. [pretty much everyone says yes or "that's so true!"]

**Participant 5:** K, I'm not going to lie. I've hooked up with some drunk boys. That's the one that is like "Okay time out. Popcorn. And we will resume normal programming in about three minutes" [people laugh]

**Participant 2:** I think it's hard! It's like, I don't know. It's hard to meet people who are also looking for relationships or like meaningful interactions, I find. Maybe I don't travel in the right circles, I struggle with that.

**Me:** Are you saying that sex and sexual pleasure are meaningful interactions?

**Participant 2:** Yeah.

**Participant 5:** I think that a guy is more likely to try to pleasure you if he cares about you, but if its just a hook-up, and he's doesn't think he's going to see you again, and he's drunk; he's probably only going to worry about himself.

**Participant 6:** I am surprised with how many guys that I have hooked up with that literally have no idea what they are doing [a bunch of people laugh]. They are juniors in college, seniors in college, and I'm like, "You are so going to struggle when you get out of here." Like the only real sexual experience that I have had here was a guy that I was hooking up with my freshman year, and he was four years older than me. It was the only time that I have had an experience that was remotely mutual, and everyone else has been like—here, not at home—a lot of people I have been with just don't get it. I don't know if its just the guys that are here at Bucknell. I don't know how there could be such a disconnect with them.

**Participant 5:** you know there is a transfer that I had really really good sex with but he was a transfer [laughs].

**Participant 6:** Exactly!

**Me:** So are you just comparing that to experiences you've had yourself? So you know about your own body, but these other people don't?

**Participant 6:** Right yeah, yeah. I was just going to say something, but I forgot. [pause] Oh! I think it might be the subculture here on campus that leads to that, because people will just have sex, and then they don't get any idea of how to pleasure girls. Then they go on to the next person, and they don't learn anything, because they are just having sex with more and more people [two people say "yeah"] but there's not communication. There's no discussion about anything, so the next girl is just as screwed as the one before. [laughs] No pun intended. This whole hook up culture is leading to that.

**Participant 3:** I think that goes on both ends though.

**Participant 6:** I agree.

**Me:** I am curious what made you think of that [to Participant 3].

**Participant 3:** Just everything like "Well the guy's screwing up. He doesn't know what he's doing," but I think it's the same way. Because I don't think the girls know what they are doing other.

**Participant 6:** I completely agree.

**Participant 2:** Some girls don't know what they are doing themselves, so when they go with a partner, then they don't know what they what.

**Participant 6:** Yeah. I completely agree.

**Participant 5:** I know I learned the most about myself in a two year relationship or a three year relationship and like consistently.

**Someone:** Yeah, same.

**Me:** So that's a universal yes on that?

**Everyone:** Yeah! Yeah!

**Participant 2:** I think you get a lot better at sex when you are doing it with one person. You have that open communication. I mean it's trial and error. It's like "Oh, this didn't



work, let's try something different next time." There's that repetition which I think helps you get better. [people agree]

**Me:** And in terms of "better" what does "better" mean?

**Participant 1:** Like both sides enjoy. Both sides think that. [yeah's]

**Participant 2:** Mutual enjoyment.

[conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** Well then do you think age has to do with sex?

**Participant 5:** I do, because the older I get the more I enjoy sex, because I think it is because I am more comfortable with my body. [identifier]. It was okay at some times, and I've had consistently very good sex since then, because I know what I want. I know how to get it, and if I am not getting it, I can fix it myself! But most of the time I respond, because I know what I want [identifier].

**Participant 1:** Also, along the same lines. You just know yourself. You get the security that you don't need to impress someone

**Participant 5:** Mhmm, because you are comfortable with yourself!

**Participant 1:** Like I don't need to impress you. When you are young, you say "Okay if he does not like me, when I do this stupid thing," but when you become older, you say "I don't care. I know myself. I am good."

**Me:** This will also be another topic at another session, so keep that in mind and on hold for a second, because that's something I want to talk about—if experience or age has something to do with it, but that will be another session. Going back to Bucknell's campus, what are some of the ways we can make it easier to find sexually satisfying or sexually pleasurable experiences on campus?

**Participant 3:** Communication. I don't think communication in the bedroom is going to happen, unless it is happening outside, and in a frat party, which isn't the case.

**Participant 5:** And I don't know if that's going to happen. I don't know what that side of slut-shaming is, but I guess like girls talking shit about guys that are terrible in bed! [laughs] Wait what was that thing about Duke University where that girl made that intense PowerPoint presentation about the whole lacrosse team that she hooked up with? She made bar graphs. She rated them on a scale of 9.5, so it was like 2.3, like a whole, fifty slide PowerPoint presentation [oh my gosh!], and she sent it to her friends, but it got leaked, but it became a big public thing. It's out in the news now.

**Participant 6:** I did not hear about that!

**Someone:** That's so embarrassing for the guys!

**Participant 5:** Exactly!

**Participant 3:** Is she getting sued?

**Participant 5:** Yes. That's the point! It's embarrassing. If people find out you're bad in bed and you try to [gets interrupted]

**Participant 2:** Because slut-shaming is really healthy (sarcastic)

**Participant 5:** I am not saying it's a good thing. I am just saying on this campus, it might work.

**Participant 6:** Well, I think it's hard specifically here, because we don't really do that much with guys. I know I am [identifier], and I never, rarely, eat with guys in frats, because they are always eating at their fraternities, so we eat at the bison. I'll eat with my other friends in the caf, but you never really interact with guys outside of frat parties or downtown houses, and then it's just people are drunk, and you don't know really how to interact with each other. And even if we might talk out of there, but that is just the way it's manifested itself on this campus, so it's just kinda hard to have communication when those are the only times you are seeing them. Or in class, but they are with their friends, and you're not going to want to talk. I don't know. I just think the society and the way the culture has formed itself at Bucknell just leads to hook-up culture, because you don't have any other communication with them.

**Participant 2:** Bucknell's social life is all so gendered. It's so Greek, and it's automatically separated. Even you walk in the bison, and it's all like guys are watching TV, and the girls are over here, wearing their letters and that sort of thing. And I feel like there are very few opportunities to have coed social [gets interrupted]

**Participant 6:** sober social

**Participant 2:** Sober, yeah

**Me:** So you think creating these social spaces.

**Participant 2:** I guess you could extracurriculars and stuff.

**Participant 6:** I think the eating, personally, I think the eating thing is the biggest problem.

**Participant 2:** I think so too.

**Participant 6:** Because you think about freshman year, you meet so many people at the caf, and everyone is eating together. Everyone is interacting in different places around the caf eating, like your halls, but as soon as sophomore year happens, and everyone gets split, it's like I don't see any of my guy friends from freshman year! You just don't.

**Me:** So are you saying that this communication is not necessarily about sex, but it's just about general communication that would lead to more communication "in the bedroom"?

**Participant 2:** Yeah

**Participant 6:** Yeah I completely agree. I think it starts outside of the bedroom.

**Participant 5:** Yeah, they say if you don't know how to talk to each other outside

**Someone:** It's a getting level of comfrot

**Participant 3:** Yeah. Are they getting rid of frat meal plans?

**Me:** I don't know I heard that, but it's weird because then they build three new frat houses with great kitchens. I don't know maybe they didn't build the kitchens!

**Someone:** Maybe they eliminated it [inaudible]

**Participant 2:** Maybe if it was limited, like three times a week or something.

**Participant 6:** Yeah and then everyone ate together the rest of the time. I think that would it would make a huge difference. [yeah's]

**Participant 3:** Yeah, because I still think it's important for frat bonding.

**Participant 6:** Yeah, I completely agree.

**Participant 1:** [passage omitted for confidentiality]

**Participant 2:** Yeah, it goes both ways.

**Participant 6:** I think it goes both with the Greek life and then also with the international, cause [identifier] [there] is a girl [identifier], and I know that all of her friends are international students. All of her friends. Like she has rarely talked to many people that are American. I think it is not only Greek life, it goes both.

**Participant 1:** [passage omitted for confidentiality] Everybody will know you by face, but there is no social gathering place where we will sit and talk. [Where I live] we will sit together, and we will watch movies together. It's kind of gender mixed.

**Me:** Anyone else have ideas of how to make it better?

**Participant 4:** I guess I am only a freshman so right now. It's pretty mixed in my opinion. There are a lot of boys on my hall. I am friends with a lot of them. I don't know if I am going to join a sorority yet. I go back and forth everyday, but I don't—my guy friends aren't sure either. I feel like it's not a decision you make until further along in spring semester.

**Participant 1:** most of the people also say they feel so isolated when they don't join, but that's not the case.

**Me:** Then I am curious, as freshman you feel like you don't have that sense of segregation. Do you feel like you are having sexually pleasurable experiences on campus? What do you then think would cause for better ones?

**Participant 4:** Well it sounds bad, but I kind of expected them to get better with time. You know I figured they are just freshmen boys; they don't know what they are doing. And I've hooked up with other boys who are older, and freshman boys, and there is not really much difference. [people laugh].

**Me:** Can you think of anything that would make it better then?

**Participant 4:** I guess for me, the emotional connection is really important for sexual pleasure [people agree]. Finding someone that I feel comfortable dating and having sex with and then guiding them and stuff. Yeah, but I haven't really found a boy that I want to date yet. Hopefully there will be one, but there's not a lot of dating on this campus, which is a bummer [people agree].

**Me:** Do you think the dating goes along with what we have been talking about, or do you think there are other reasons behind that?

**Participant 3:** I think the lack of the communication is really important and is perpetuated in the Greek system. I also think something else, which is a little more subtle, I've never seen such a strong desire of conforming as I do on this campus, and I think that has a lot to do with it, because then you got guys and girls who are doing things that are equally unpleasurable, but they saw someone, or heard someone and thought it was cool and do it. I heard a story about—and it was told to me second hand. I don't even know who these people are—but a guy was complaining about *having* to cum on a girl's face, but “That's what you do, right?” Then the girl was complaining too, because “that's what I am supposed to do.” I find this really funny because both sides are not wanting to

do to that but that's what they are "supposed to do." So it's just that kind of conforming to whatever you think is normal.

**Participant 2:** I wonder if without the Greek system you would still have so much of that, because you will still have social groups. Bucknell has a very specific type that it attracts and those people would still be here.

**Participant 5:** But if you think about it this way, frats control the social space.

**Participant 2:** Oh yeah.

**Participant 5:** So they have the power. Even if you're an older, a sophomore, a junior, a senior girl, and you're over the hook up scene and want to date someone, well why would a frat guy want to date you when there are ten freshmen throwing themselves at him for beer. He is not going to waste time with you when he's going to hook up with five other girls without any effort.

**Participant 6:** I have this specific story that goes exactly with that. When I was a freshman, I had a really good guy friend, and he lived underneath me, and he really liked me, but I was with someone else, and as soon as sophomore year, we hooked up right at the beginning of the year, and he was like "I don't want to do this. I am in the frat scene now, and I want to be able to do whatever I want". Basically that is what happened. He had actually really liked me and wanted to date freshman year, but as soon as sophomore year happened, and that's what I wanted, he was like, "No I am done. I want to be able to do whatever I want, because now I have girls throwing themselves at me all of the time."

**Participant 1:** What is it about them? What happened? I just don't know.

**Participant 2:** Sophomore year. Everything changes.

**Participant 1:** What happens?

**Participant 3:** The letters. You mean what changes to make girls throw themselves on guys? The letters.

**Participant 5:** Beer!

**Participant 1:** They will be the same people!

**Participant 2:** I think we idolize these—as a freshman you learn to idolize these fraternities. They have all this power. That's the place to be on a Friday or Saturday night. And so, once you get there and someone's interested in you, you're like "Oh my god!" And you do whatever it is to get what you think you want, even if it is just constructed. This little Bucknell is getting into my mine scene.

**Participant 1:** Frat parties, can you not go to their parties if somebody does not like you?

**Participant 2:** You can go.

**Participant 1:** So what would that be a problem?

**Participant 3:** Just wear minimal clothing!

**Participant 1:** I know you can get there, I just say, I am curious why that would be a problem.

**Participant 3:** Why you would want to go ?

**Participant 1:** Do you think somebody should like you in that place if you can go there every other Friday? Without somebody liking you.

**Participant 3:** Oh I see what you are saying. The idealization! It's because it's what you think you want.

**Participant 2:** Yeah!

**Me:** And you end up having these sexual experiences with someone, like you idolized someone and maybe had a sexual experience and it was pleasurable or not?

[pause]

Because we are all talking about at Bucknell's campus, this is the issue, this is problem. So can you think of an anecdote or a time that happened to you? Or is it just through word of mouth that you feel like that's the way?

[long pause]

**Participant 1:** Most of the time I think it's word of mouth. Everybody say because it's "so cool." That's why.

**Me:** What can we do to make them know what to do? We will leave at that note.

## Focus Group Session 2 Transcription

**Me:** Okay, we are going to start with another ice breaker and get us in the mood of thinking about sex. I want everyone to close their eyes again, and really try to think of a time when you felt unsure, or confused or ignorant an aspect of your sexuality or sexual pleasure, your desires or the way something quote unquote worked.

[pause]

And once you have an instance of that in mind, you can open your eyes just to show that you are ready to talk about it.

[pause]

Okay, does anyone want to describe that time first or would be willing to describe that time first?

**P4:** I can go first! Since I lost my virginity at such a young age, at fifteen, me and my boyfriend didn't really know how anything worked, and when he penetrated me and we started having sex, I started to bleed! And we didn't really know why. We thought I got my period during it, and we started freaking out. Then we Googled it, and then we found out! It was just kinda a cute story [laughs], because it shows us how we weren't ready for it. We didn't really know like how to do it.

**P5:** Just a cute story about how your vagina started bleeding [lots of people laugh].

**Me:** I think you just did a really good job, because some of my follow-up questions were going to be, like if you describe that time we can also talk about how you reconciled those feelings or what sources you turned to or if you still feel that way.

**P4:** Well now I know how it works, which is good, but Google is definitely a good resource.

**P5:** I remember when I was like, I don't know twelve or thirteen or something, I had heard what an orgasm was but I had *no* idea, not anywhere close to trying to figure it out, and then when I got older and started having sex I was like, "Oh, this feels really, really good. I guess I had an orgasm." No, no I didn't! So that was a time where I was kinda confused and didn't know how it worked, and you listen to other people describe it and stuff and would be like, "Yeah, okay. I guess I did, kinda, maybe that happened, sometimes." But you don't know until it happens. And I started dating an older guy so it happened. [People laugh].

**P1:** For me it was—as I mentioned last week, [identifier] the system is like that, that you are not allowed to think, so until really older age you don't think. But in my case it was even more that case, because I was the [identifier], but I was the only one until I was fifteen. I was so stupid. I didn't know anything—like almost anything. But then there was a guy in my class, we might have had crush. We were best friends, but I always had this idea, like watching TV and stuff, that kissing is really beautiful. It's so good, everything! But once we didn't even tell each other that we like each other, but we were sitting in library, and once he started kissing my cheek, and for me everything just broke down! [Everyone laughs] I got really bad shock, and I didn't let him kiss me, because whatever I had in my mind: what the kiss will be, what the first touch will be, it was not the same way, so I was really mentally disturbed for a long time [laughs]. It was so bad. I am not going to marry any man, because his mouth smells bad.

**P7:** Yeah, for me I always dated older. So when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I dated an 8<sup>th</sup> grade guy. When I was a freshman in high school, I dated a senior, and so they were always more experienced than I was, and I always felt like, “This is stuff that I should be comfortable doing already,” so I remember when I was dating that guy when I was a freshman, he was really—the reason we actually broke up was because he could not have a relationship without sex, and I was not ready to do that yet. And I just remember feeling like something was not right, because I loved him, and I trusted him, but it just wasn't really there yet, so I remember feeling like I was going through the motions going up to it, which was making me not want to do it more.

**Me:** And how do you feel like you reconciled that feeling like “Oh it is okay to have a relationship without sex.”

**P7:** I actually have always said that the smartest decision I have ever made in love was when I was a freshman, because I broke up with him. and I just said we want different things. I don't know why.

**Me:** Self awareness?

**P7:** Yeah. It was very clear to me then. And I can say now that in relationships things don't really seem that clear.

**P2:** I didn't really know that women were supposed to have orgasms during sex. I kinda thought it was a guy thing, like if you do that's great, but that's not the main goal. So I think after the first asshole boyfriend, I kind of learned life gets better in terms of how that goes, but I think I was pretty ignorant about having sex for myself, not just him.

**Me:** And when did you finally learn that a woman could orgasm during sex?

**P2:** The next boyfriend was all about that so I was like “okay!” [everyone laughs].



**P6:** I pretty much was going to say the exact same thing. When I lost my virginity, I was dating a guy that was a year older, but he really could care less about me, so it was all about him and that never really changed until I met someone that there was a much more equal thing.

**P3:** Mine would probably be—I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I think, and I had a crush on a girl, and I thought that maybe it was just a friend thing, but I just remember thinking she was cute and wanting to be near her and wanting to kiss her. And remember thinking it was silly, because she was just a girl and my friend, and I liked her. And not really being comfortable with that, because either she didn't know or hadn't come out yet that she was into girls. Although after high school she did, which is kinda funny. Anyway, so I never really saw that as my first female crush, until I had my first female sexual experience.

**Me:** So some of the sources we talked about were Google. A lot that came up was older—dating older people with more experience or getting older and more self-aware. So what do you think about these sources and the places we turn, such as the internet. Do you think they are reliable? Do you think that's the way it should be or shouldn't be? I don't know! What can we say about these places to the go to like Google or older people?

**P3:** For what specifically?

**Me:** For ideas when we are confused about something or when we want to learn about sexual pleasure or our sexuality.

**P7:** For me, the first time, I started dating this girl my junior year of high school, and that was the first girl I dated, the first girl I had sex with. I wasn't really sure what I was doing, and I Googled to honestly get an idea of biology, but not to get an idea of like how to make a girl orgasm. I think what actually made that happen was total and complete comfort around each other. I just—we had a lot of sex, a lot of different ways, and we weren't shy about trying new things and messing up and having it be awkward, because sex is really awkward sometimes [People say “yes!” and laugh]. Especially when you are having new experiences with someone or with someone new [P2: yeah!]. So like now, I've had girls tell me that I am really good at it, and they ask me why that is, because if you are with someone that you fully trust and that's where you have no boundaries then that is where you can learn the most. [People agree].

**P5:** I think it should be taught in comprehensive sex-ed. Not necessarily *how* to stimulate a woman to orgasm, but that it exists, that it happens. I think we should have more open relationships with our parents [Yeah's], because we live in a culture where we are weirded out by it. We don't want to hear our parent's say sex; we don't want to see sex scene in the movie, when we are in the same room as them. I think there are a lot of ways that those things could improve if we change that. [Identifier] Austria has one of the most comprehensive sex-ed programs in the world. When kids are in elementary school, they take them to a maternity ward, so they are like “Hey look babies don't come from

storks!” Then they take them—I don’t know if anyone has been to the Franklin Institute or anything like that where you walk inside a giant heart, and you walk through and you’re like walking through the arteries and stuff. and it’s like a play space for kids? They have that for kids, but you enter in the vagina like the sperm and you travel through. [People laugh] How old are we today? You travel through the system and stuff. And then when they get older they take them to a gynecologist and stuff—all the kids: the boys and the girls, and they all sit on the seat, and they put their feet in the stirrups. They are clothed! They are not having the examination! And then it gets more comprehensive as they go through, and Austria has the lowest teen pregnancy rates, the lowest abortion rates and the lowest STD rates in the world, I think.

**P6:** I completely agree with what you have to say. I think about so many of my friends that were scared to go to the gynecologist, scared to ask their parents to go, because they didn’t want their mom knowing that they were having sex, when they could be putting themselves in danger, not being put on the pill because they don’t know like—I know when I firsts started the pill, I went to Planned Parenthood, where I could do it with complete confidentiality, where my parent’s didn’t know, but looking back on it, I wish I had just talked to them and been like “This is something I want to do.” I don’t know. I think there needs to be much better communication about it. My parent’s are really open about it now—not like we like, not like that, but they are much more open to it than I think a lot of parent’s are and I think if there was much better communication between that, I think it would make the biggest difference.

**P1:** Yeah for me it was like the same even that now that we are old enough, we can talk about orgasm, but at that time when we feel something, all of us, we don’t want to share it with somebody, because we are told that woman should not feel something, or if they feel it, they should—even I remember, I was hiding from myself, like “What’s happening? I should not be expressing that I am enjoying or something.” It’s something for men. Like the communication, we should be taught at a early age what we are doing, otherwise there are so many things that you don’t want to talk about, and you don’t know whether you are doing mistake or you’re the only one.

**Me:** In terms of doing, do you mean like acts of pleasure, or sex in general?

**P1:** I mean everything. For example, there might be so many types of sex that we don’t know, which could be pleasurable, but I mean in so many countries, there [is] only way—like the missionary position! They are doing, and woman might be hurt from that position, but they don’t talk about it, because if they talk about it, she is considered flirt. Her pleasure is not important toobut if she knows from the beginning that you should have it—so I mean there is no sex education at all. I mean in this part of the world, a little bit, people can talk about it openly, but yeah. Totally something alien in that part of the world.

**P7:** I was going to say that I think there is almost this denial of kind of our parent's generation and society in general of young teenagers and kids knowing about sex, so I think it's really important as we are going to be the parental generation in the next ten to twenty years to know that kids are going to, if they want to do it, they are going to find a place to do it, and I think it's better to provide safe ways for your kids to do it. I'll never forget, one of my boyfriends in high school, as soon as we started dating, his mom was like, "I don't know if you are going to have sex, but here are condoms, because if you are going to do it, you are going to do it in a house, in a bed, instead of in a car somewhere in an unsafe parking lot." And so, I think it's really important to have that understanding that kids, especially with the internet, are going to find that information one way or the other, we might as well be providing them with safe ways to do it.

**P6:** Yeah I still think about—I know our parent's obviously had sex to have us, and I know my parent's still have sex now. If a mom cares about her daughter, like she should be able to tell them "You need to demand—you need to demand pleasure out of a sexual relationship, or you're wasting your time," because I think a lot of young people at that age don't know, and I was guilty that I didn't know I was supposed to expect that. I think if it's safe environment, and they have that, and your mom being like "Look, this is what should happen. I've had sex before and now it's your time," I don't know. That kind of thing. I think it makes a huge difference for the pleasure aspect, just because.

**P3:** I want to make a comment, just because I feel—I agree with a lot of what you say, but I feel at odds a lot of the times with the language that you use particularly when you say demand, because I think that it's really important to realize that your pleasure in a sexual experience has a lot to do with you. And it has to do with your partner, as well, but it has a lot to do with your communication [Yeah, I agree], so I don't know that demanding is necessarily the proper way to think about it or to put it. I don't know if that's a minor point either

**P5:** Well like foreplay! If a guy just want to jump in and not have foreplay, you can be like no, you have to put some effort in.

**P3:** You're going to demand it? Let me know how that goes [laughs].

**P5:** that's not..

**Me:** Well I think I see both sides of it. It kind of goes back to our conversation last week: is pleasure a right in a sexual experiences? I think that's what may or may not have been what you have been saying [P6: yeah], but also exactly what you were saying [P3: mhmm] that conflict between pleasure, I don't know. What do you guys think. And your comment, and yours going off—it leads me into another question. Is our sexuality and our experiences of sexual pleasure, are they supposed to be self-discovered or are we supposed to learn from other sources about the mechanics and equipment along the way. Going off of these sex-ed ideas, and your mom telling you—you wish she said to expect

it or demand it, should we be learning well this is how you give sexual pleasure. This is how you find it yourself, or should it be this kind of discovery that we all kind of experienced or not experienced. Did anyone have a outline where someone told you, well this is how it works?

**P5:** A book, like what's happening with my body book. [People laugh]. I think, yeah, you should be taught biologically what the parts are. You don't have to say, "You have to push this much pressure, for this many seconds." You don't have to say that, but to say "This is where this stimuli comes from, this is where that stimulus comes from." I think you should know [identifier] I was like, "How come I didn't know that it works that way and this is my body? How come I didn't know that this system works or that or whatever." It's inside of me everyday. It's something I should be aware of.

**P2:** I think it would be helpful to have a factual, lay it out, this is what goes on and then have self discovery after that and tweak it and find out what works for you I guess, because I think there's a lot you can't—you can find stuff out for yourself, but it's a big world, and I don't think you will get all of the information just by [interrupted]

**P1:** Nut I think for me it sound funny if we become mothers, and we are behaving the same way our mothers are behaving. We have all of our experiences, how we learn it and then we expect our daughters, especially our daughters, that they should not have sex. I mean [interrupted]

**P4:** Well do you expect that? Because I'm going to expect my kids to have sex.

**P1:** I mean like how she explain it. Do you want to be that kind of mom to talk to your little daughter that this is the way to do it. Because if you say that a government, or a policy or educational program should be there, it's a long term thinking, but starting from yourself, would you be willing to talk to your daughter about "This is how it's going to happen. People are going to approach you like that."

**P4:** I would definitely say yes, and it's kind of the converse in my family. My dad is the more open one about this. He sends me condoms every month, and it's awkward sometimes, but I think it's a cool thing to do! It's made me comfortable with who I am and my sexual experiences. I think it starts at the home and it branches out from there [Yeah's]. I think it would be very hypocritical for me if I didn't do something.

**P2:** I know I didn't get much of a talk at all from my parents. I know I got one in like 4<sup>th</sup> grade about babies, but nothing about sexual pleasure at all, and right now my brother—I have a little brother, and it's time for him to get the sex talk, and neither of them will do it! They are just like too nervous about it, so I got in a big argument the other day saying, you know I have had too many experiences being with guys who have no idea what's going on, and it's all about them and that sort of thing, so I think if you guys taught him or just mentioned that there is more to the story, I think that would go a long way.

**P5:** How did that conversation end?

**P2:** Me storming off, because my mom said no [laughs].

**P4:** Would you consider talking to him yourself?

**P2:** Yeah, I would totally talk to him.

**P6:** I think the stigma in our culture—no one wants to talk about sex, and everyone feels so uncomfortable about the parent child relationship about when it comes to sex that I think that's what we need to get past to be any headway in this light. I don't know how much you can do besides your own home, like how much you can have an impact.

**P7:** Cause we also—a lot of the times we think about talking to kids about sex—we also then think about talking about sex as this very pornographic, obscene thing. It's not like were saying sit down with your 9 year old and tell them, just this very

**P5:** Like show them on a doll!

**P7:** Yeah, it would be like a very respectful way, and I think when people hear teaching kids about sex, that's what they think of. They think were going to put on a porno and be like [**Someone:** taking away their innocence] "That's what sex is!" Yeah, it's not about taking away their innocence; it's more about biology itself and understanding your body.

**Me:** What do you think people had told you more of? Or what conversations you wish had had or are you satisfied with your experience of how you discovered your sexuality or your sexual pleasure or your bodies as sites of sexual pleasure?

**P2:** I wish I had had more other woman to talk to you and had it been okay to talk about it [P1: yeah yeah], because I was embarrassed. I thought I was the only one who [Lots of people: me too] who ever had orgasms or masturbated. I was so embarrassed it.

**P1:** Yeah the same thing! Because in my family there was only my mom, and there was an age difference between me and my mom. [identifier] I never had a girlfriend; it was all boys around me, so whatever was happening in my life with my body, sexually or physically, I thought I was the only one in the world and really horrible person, these things happening [laughs]. So I wish there were more people around that I could discuss—now when I see my younger sister with her friends and everybody, they know everything! And sometimes they even teach me, because they have friends; they have cousins to be around. They talk about, and even my mom is more open about these kind of issues. She talks about. But about sexual, talking about that is totally—like I don't know why it is considered wrong. It is considered for reproductive purposes but still that's still a big reality. Now I am experiencing, from what you guys are saying, that is

considered a *bad* thing, like to talk about, like a *dirty* thing. I just think why it should be considered a dirty thing to talk about, because this exists in every individual life, and still we deny it.

**P7:** This skews more towards sexuality, but I really wish we were taught more to discover our sexualities instead of “You’re probably straight unless you feel otherwise” [lot’s of yeah’s]. Because I identify, very openly, as bisexual, and I have been with a lot of girls who have been like “I had no idea that I liked girls!! Because I just assumed I was straight.” Because that’s really hard. It’s first of all, it’s great; it’s awesome that they have a place and a time in their lives that they can discover that, but it’s just obvious how much heterosexuality is assumed and then we grow up with that assumption. And I know there are a lot of people in the LGBT community that are like “I remember in like 6<sup>th</sup> grade, all of the sudden I realized.” But I knew since I was four years old, like I liked men and women, and that is because when I was younger my mom never being like, “So is there a boy that you like in your class?” She said is there *anybody*, and even that subtle difference in the use of pronouns meant that when my mom asked is there anybody that you liked, I could say yes and not have to lie. I wish that would occur, and I wish that same-sex sexuality, you could discover your own sexuality [two people say yeah].

**P3:** It’s a really important point to make it. It does become more mainstream. It is taught in school. There is greater communication between parent’s and elders and youth that it’s probably going to be very heteronormative, even if you bridge this discussion gap, then you have another hurdle to cross, which I think is going to be even more difficult [yeah’s].

**P7:** Yeah, I mean people talk about—like people link HIV and AIDS all the time. Why do you think that is? Because there is *no* comprehensive sex-ed for same-sex couples. For so long, we had no idea that STDs could be transmitted that way. So I think same-sex comprehensive sex-ed needs to be built in too.

**Me:** So then which aspects of our sexuality are self-discovered? [question omitted for confidentiality] How does age and gender and experience affect our self-discovery?

**P4:** Can I ask a question?

**Me:** Yeah!

**P4:** Okay when you guys were 18, how did you feel about sexuality? Did you know a lot of stuff?

**P7:** By sexuality do you mean sexual orientation?

**P4:** Sexual orientation, sexual pleasure that kind of thing

**P7:** I thought I knew!

[conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**P1:** For me it was what you say, at each moment in your life, you think you know, the more you know. But with what P5 said, that with age thing really become sure with what you want. But I also think if you constantly believe in one thing, it is very difficult to change it. It was easy for P7 to discover at a young age what she wanted, but I always believed—I was made to believe to want men. I would never be able to, at this age, to think whether I could be lesbian or bisexual, because I have channeled myself and like at this age, changing for me—sometimes I really don't like—there are some things about men that I don't like it, but I just don't see myself changing. So I think with age, one thing you decide once you are into something for longer time, coming out is like [interrupted]

**P5:** There are so many people that come out when they are in their fifties!

**P1:** I mean for me!

**P5:** There are guys married with kids ,and they are like “Oh by the way I am gay.” It happens a lot [Yeah it does happen a lot].

**P7:** I think it's sad that we foster a culture that stunts that discovery.

**P3:** What was the question again?

**Me:** It was: what aspects of our sexuality are self-discovered and how does age, gender and experience play a role in that? Like being a female, or being older or being younger.

**P5:** I think I touched on that last week. The older I get the more comfortable I am with my body, and the more comfortable I am with expressing myself to other people, so I have gotten more comfortable that way. I mean your body changes. Women don't reach their sexual peak until they are in their mid to late thirties! So your body is changing continuously up until that point.

**Me:** Do you have something to respond to that?

**P7:** I didn't know that actually.

**P4:** Yeah that's cool

**P5:** Yeah mid to late thirties! Men's sexual peak: 18-20.

**P7:** Wow, really?

**P5:** That's why I am not getting married!

**P1:** Until thirty?

**P5:** Like mid to late thirties: 35, 36, 37, 38

**P1:** So we have

**P5:** A lot of time yes!

**P3:** What do you mean by sexual peak though?

**P5:** Like where they are

**P1:** super hot!

**P5:** Where they have the best sexual experiences in their life, because their body changes. It's their sexual peak. Men are horniest and hormonal and they have the most stamina at a young age. Women have that at a much later age.

**P4:** Something to look forward too.

**P5:** So it is supposed to be more intense orgasms and more frequent orgasms and stuff like that.

**P6:** I think it's most important to be comfortable with your own body. I have a few friends that won't even look at themselves in the mirror. It's like how are you supposed to have any sort of sexual relationships and expect anything if you can't look at yourself in the mirror?

**P5:** I used to be like that, you know? But then I got older. [identifier]

**P6:** I think that just makes the biggest difference, just being comfortable with yourself, knowing what masturbation is. There are so many people that are our year, our age that won't, refuse. They think it's so bad! They think it's so horrible! It's like how are you supposed to expect other guys what to do, if you don't know yourself!? You need to be comfortable with yourself in order to be—to self discover your own pleasure.

**Me:** Do people agree with that or disagree?

**P1:** One hundred percent.

**P5:** That's exactly what I meant.



**P1:** [Identifier] Here at Bucknell I am not looking for anything, so most of the time—like I am always dress up so people say like, “Why are you trying that?” I just say, “I love my body! I just love looking at myself.” It’s one-hundred percent that once you feel like you like yourself you can enjoy with being anyone and anyone you are.

**Me:** Does anyone disagree with that?

**P7:** I have never masturbated, and I have never had the inclination to, and I feel like that has never inhibited my pleasure, but I also think that has to do with that I have been with people who very like “I *want* you to enjoy this,” and I find that much more true with being with women, than with men. That is one of the reasons why I like being with women more than men, because I have found that it is a much more egalitarian approach to sex.

**P5:** Everybody knows that lesbians have better sex.

**P3:** You have never masturbated?

**P5:** Yeah define masturbation!

**P7:** No

**P5:** Toys?

**P7:** no

**P5:** Really!?

**P7:** No! Because the pay off for me in sex, is not always—okay, orgasm are great. They are awesome, but like one of the reasons I enjoy that is because someone else is having one too, so like with me and my girlfriend now it almost always happens at exactly the same time. It’s also because have been together [identifier], so like we know each other’s bodies by now, but I have never really had the like desire to make that happen to myself. Because I feel like I would sit there and be like, well now I don’t have anyone to cuddle with. [Someone: body pillows!]

**Me:** For you, do you think sexual pleasure is not only knowing your own body, but also knowing your partners? What do you all think?

**P7:** For me, sexual pleasure, it’s like, it’s an expression. It’s a mutual expression and experience of this emotional connection that I find with someone, but I also think that a lot of my sexual pleasure and my sex drive than I think it is with a lot of people.

**Me:** I didn't mean to single you out, is just because we had this discussion a little bit last week. I don't know if we want to talk about that a little more.

**P4:** Kind of what she was saying, I think that masturbating is very emotional, at least for me, because I feel like I don't need to rely on someone else. I know I can be comfortable with myself, and it puts me in good self-esteem, so I think its also an emotional process, just not with someone else.

**P2:** Yeah I feel most connected to my body, when I am like just with myself, because normally I am just all up in my head, but that's the time when I just enjoy my body and what it can do I guess.

**Me:** We have about ten more minutes, so do you guys want to talk about Bucknell or things more in general?

**P3:** We haven't hit on Bucknell at all so.

**Me:** Bucknell: What do you think people you encounter sexually were more open to on Bucknell's campus?

**P6:** I think we kind of touched on this last week, but the communication, I think that's the most important. Just being willing and being able to be comfortable with someone, but then again it's hard in a hook-up culture when you hook-up with them once. How are you supposed to be comfortable with them? How are you supposed to communicate? You never what they are going to go say to their frat brothers or their teammates.

**P2:** I wish there was more hooking up sober in general [Lots of agreement].

**Me:** We keep talking about this idea of comfortability, but let's get more into specific acts. Like what do you wish you could do with someone at Bucknell that you need to feel like you are comfortable with them in order to get to. Like whether that is S&M or oral sex right off the bat or intercourse or doggy style. What do you think people you encounter sexually were more open to? Specific sexual practices.

**P7:** [Identifier] Being...a very outspoken feminist, and also being with a lot of women, I really wish I could ask a girl to slam me up against a wall and not have them feel like it was violent towards me in a antifeminist way. I am not into BDSM, but I don't always just want to be laid down nicely into a bed. Like no! No! And I said that to my girlfriend once, and she was like "but I don't want to hurt you!"

**P3:** So don't!

**P7:** Yeah I am not asking you to like *hurt* me, but I wish there was a way to talk about pleasure in a way that separates it from feminism, which is bizarre.

**P3:** I don't think that's anti-feminist though.

**P7:** I don't think it is either!

**P3:** Nut I completely agree with what you are saying.

**P7:** Nut people do

**P6:** But people think it's the rape culture

**P7:** Yeah like the rape fantasy

**P6:** Even though it's not

**P7:** Yeah

**P6:** If you are asking you are not. I would say foreplay more. I feel like guys just try to go straight to it. My experiences at least. [people laugh].

**P4/P7:** I agree

**P5:** Doesn't count [thinking about someone] he was a transfer [people laugh]

**P7:** I wish there was more of a notion, just where—it's not like you have to have a sit down and be like "This is what I am comfortable with in the next hour and this is what I am not." But like I often feel the assumption of what I have to do. If we get to sex, then that's great, but there is a minimum and that would, at least in my experiences, that would include fingering and sometimes oral sex.

**Me:** And you wish that there was that minimum or that there wasn't?

**P7:** No, I wish that there wasn't that minimum, because the first guy that I actually ended up having sex with at Bucknell—the first night all he did was kiss me. No tongue! And after that I was like you can do whatever you want, because you showed me you didn't need that in the first time [people laugh].

**Me:** So experiences that didn't require those acts, just more kissing.

**P7:** Yeah just not having this bear minimum.

**P2:** In addition, I feel like if you're with someone repeatedly, you have to keep progressing and sometimes, I just want to back off and not keep going on this linear path of progressing sexually.

**P1:** Ueah

**Me:** I find that too. You maybe want to have sex, but maybe you want to back track or maybe you don't. Skip steps [Everyone laughs].

**P6:** I feel like we shouldn't even have to think that way. If I gonna want to have sex, I shouldn't think about "Well if I do this, maybe he's not going to call me, because I didn't go by the steps, and he's not going to think I'm trying to make him work for it too much." I feel like there's so much thought going into it, that if you want to have sex, you should be able to have sex and not worry about if you're taking the right steps or how he's gonna—I don't know. I have this friend, she has the best luck, because she will just make out with them for weeks, and they will keep coming back for her [everyone laughs]. What luck! She has no problem. I'm like, "You don't want to have sex? What are you doing!?" I'm not like that. I couldn't just make out with someone for weeks and be totally fine with it. That's just not who I am, but we shouldn't have to worry about that, and guys should still want..

**P5:** So she just takes them home, makes out with them?

**P6:** And then she'll kick them out!

**P5:** And then they leave? Then they come back?

**P6:** Then they come back! Every single time. I am not kidding. It's the weirdest thing.

**P5:** Why don't you invite her here? [Everyone laughs].

**Me:** What do you wish *you* were more open to on Bucknell's campus?

**P3:** Not currently relevant, because I am in a relationship, but hook-ups. I have never hooked up with anyone on Bucknell's campus. I don't know, when you are not in a relationship it kind of sucks! So I guess in a way I kinda wish I was more comfortable in that way, because I am conceptually okay with it, but it's just not—it doesn't work for me physically, emotionally or mental, which I guess would be conceptually.

**P5:** You don't know cause you've never did it.

**P3:** Yeah I did

**P5:** You just said you didn't!

**P3:** Not here

**P5:** Okay.

**P2:** I always feel kind of embarrassed or just guilty, because [identifier] I would like—I think everyone should love who they want to regardless of gender. It's so much harder to act on that and you know—once I made out with the coolest girl! And we hung out the entire night, and it was great! But then the next morning, I freaked out. I had the biggest panic attack, because I just, I—and then I felt so guilty about it, because it was so perfect. It just was so perfect. I just have had this years of people telling me that it's wrong, like working against me.

**P5:** Wait I agree with that! [Everyone laughs] No because sometimes I don't know if I am not attracted to women, because I have been told over and over and over again that I shouldn't be attracted to women, because like, honestly when I watch porn? I watch girl on girl porn. I don't want to see a guy ramming—it's just not nice. I am not into watching that.

**P3:** They are also not really attractive so there's that [everyone laughs].

**P5:** But at the same time, girls are pretty to look at, but I don't know if I want to touch them. I am like eh hh nooo, but I don't know if that's just because I have been told no.

**P1:** I think that is much of the reason. You are told no. It's just bad. For me, for your question, I don't know. I just think people should be allowed to flirt openly and that should not go to the last point: the sex. If I am flirting with somebody that should not mean I want to go to the sex. [Everyone laughs]. People should not perceive it—like I flirt a lot, and people say “Okay you're in a relationship!” I say “So what!?” I mean then they say like “So what? You want me?” I say, “No I don't want you. I am just telling you you are sexy or something like that.” I just wish people don't judge you, that you are looking for something extra.

**P3:** I completely agree. I think you brought up a couple really good points. One is going from point A to Z is [interrupted]

**P1:** I don't want Z sometimes! I just want to lay down with the person. They always think you want more! I don't want more. I have always this problem with communication, or maybe that they don't understand that it's stupid. Sometimes I want to lay down only. I don't want anything else.

**P5:** Cuddle!

**P1:** Yeah. And they say, “No! Are you sick? Are you lesbian?” No! But that's what I want right now.

**P3:** I think you brought up another really good point. You can't compliment someone of the opposite sex without these sort of standard assumptions that you are into them [yeah's]. I'll compliment women, even though I am into men and women, it's assumed that it's just [interrupted].

[side conversations and laughter]

**P3:** It's just assumed that if you say something to the opposite sex, and it's something nice, then you are into them.

**P1:** I mean I always [say] look at this guy, look at this girl, she is so sexy. I hope that he or she [understands] that I do not want to go to bed with that person. I just want to flirt with them.

**P7:** I wish we had a culture where it was okay for me to go up to a girl and ask her out to dinner, because it is *really* tough as someone who is into girls to have to rely on this bizarre, like, game of body language until you basically know that she is into you before you can have the confidence to ask her out. There should be nothing wrong with me going up to a girl who I think is cute and being like, "Would you like to go to dinner with me?" Without her being like "Oh my god!!! You want to sleep with me, and now I can't talk to you anymore!" Because unfortunately, that is the reality of what I have seen happened with friends, and sometimes it's like "Don't flatter yourself. I am not saying I want to sleep with you. I am saying I want to get to know you."

**P1:** And some people like me, people really get that wrong, because in my culture there is no way a girl and a girl will make [out]. So we are really close, I am always offering food and asking my friends, and there was a girl she was like "Why are you so good to me?" She was thinking...I was expecting—[identifier] I would always offer her food, and I would give her gifts and I said "No. This is my culture. We give things. It's not like I want something. I am not lesbian! I am straight, so don't worry." So people really—even if you are—for me it was really difficult to find out how much limit I should keep with people, because she will get that I am expecting something from her.

**Me:** Let's wrap up there.

## **Focus Group Session 3 Transcription**

**Me:** Okay, so we are going to start with another ice breaker, personal reflection moment. I want you guys to think about things that make you feel sexy or appeal sexy or attract the idea of sexy or you do to attract others. Another way to think about it is things you do on your body to actively construct sexually pleasurable experiences or attractions or things you use. So there's tons of different ways to think about that, but just think about something that you do or use or you don't use for the idea of attraction or sex appeal or to enhance a sexual experience. Does that make sense? It is totally open to start with and we will narrow it down later on.

**P7:** Because you said a bunch of different things, is it anything ranging from makeup to sex toys, like that?

**Me:** Yeah, right now it's that broad, just to getting to thinking about that, and then I will break it down, so does anyone want to share something they do or use?

**P3:** I will, just because I think it's kind of funny. When you first said it, my instinct reaction, before I thought about what the constraints of the question sort of were, was a shower. Nothing makes me feel sexier than a fresh shower.

**Me:** Does that go with feeling clean or being in the shower?

**P3:** Wow, that's a separate thing all together. But I meant just like the fresh, soft feeling, and your body is usually really warm, because I take really hot showers. So just that whole fresh, clean feelings.

**P5:** Is that why you just asked me if I took a shower?

**P3:** Oh yeah. [laughter]

**P4:** When you first asked the question, I thought about what you wear to make you feel sexy, so usually low cut shirts, because I have good size boobs. Then I wear a thong if I am feeling like in the mood or something like that. And just wearing it makes me feel like "Okay I am confident enough to go do something about this."

**P3:** Funny story. My boyfriend just told me he doesn't like thongs [People laugh]. I was like "What?" I played it off. I was like, "Alright!" [laughter and "huh!"] That's going to be awkward, have to throw away half my underwear. [Laughter] I'm kidding.

**P6:** When you first said that I thought of not necessarily chapstick, but lip gloss. Like I know whether it's going to class or going out, I always have chapstick or lip gloss. I think that having your lipstick on is sexy.

**P7:** Shaving [two mhmm's]. I don't mind hair on other people, but like I hate hair on myself.

**P3:** Oh my god me too! That's so funny.

**P7:** Seah, so I—yeah, shaving.

**Me:** Including like? What parts of your body for shaving?

**P7:** I mean like arms, legs, like and nothing else really, but I don't know. I just feel way more confident about myself when I have just gotten out of the shower and just shaved versus like letting it go for like a week [laughs]. Especially in the winter months when it's like catching on two weeks.

**P3:** Can we talk about hair? [Lots of Yes's!!]

**Me:** That's next! This is what is getting us thinking about it.

**P2:** I think definitely being clean is a big one for me, but I also, I like love funny underwear. I am like giggling to myself, because I know what I am wearing underneath or something like that. I think that kind of makes me feel sexy, because I am the only one who knows about it or it's kinda like [interrupted]

**P3:** Can you, not your own if you don't want, but can you describe funny underwear?

**P2:** I have like ones that just dollar bills all over it. Or like ones that just say weird things, you know?

**P5:** I have those too

**P2:** Keep it interesting!

**P7:** I like lace and leather.

**Me:** Lace and leather?

**P3:** Leather panties?

**P7:** Not necessarily

**P3:** Oh I'm sorry. I thought that was more funny underwear! I was like "Are those comfortable" [laughter from group]



**P7:** I have not tried leather panties, but lace for sure. And just like leather in general. I don't know why, maybe it's just a thing.

**P5:** Anything that shows off my butt I think.

**P6:** I feel like going off that, any kind of clothing that shows off what you are most proud of. [Lots of "mhmms"]. Like what you are most comfortable wanting other people to see.

**P3:** I am apparently most proud of my hygiene [People laugh].

**Me:** So then we talked a lot about looks, so let's thing about things you enhance or actively construct sexually pleasurable experiences either with your body or things that you bring in. I guess some of them kind of apply like underwear, or shaving, but can we brainstorm other things that you do?

**P2:** Winking! [laughs]

[long pause]

**P3:** I am not really sure what you are looking for.

**P4:** Yeah me neither!

**Me:** Okay that's fine, because maybe none of us have those ideas . I know for example toys in your experiences or like props of any sorts.

**P7:** Handcuffs. I have used handcuffs, and I have liked tied somebody else up.

**P5:** But was that for you or for them

**P7:** Both, I think we both like—it wasn't like, "I am doing this because I want you want me too."

**P5:** See I have done that.

**P7:** And it wasn't like I am doing this because I want to.

**P3:** On what end?

**P5:** Oh I don't like being tied up! I would tie up the other person, but I'm [interrupted]

**P7:** I don't like being tied up either

**P5:** It's kind of like "All right if that's what your into we can do that." But it doesn't really do anything for me

**P7:** I had someone blind fold me once, that wasn't much fun for me.

**P5:** I was blindfolded and tied up. It was terrible.

**P4:** Oh my god!

**P6:** I would freak out I think.

**P7:** The blindfolding made me kind of uncomfortable. I know that some people are into it, it just wasn't really for me.

**P5:** I freaked out. I freaked out. I'd be like "Let me go! Let me go!"

**P3:** Well I'll be a contrary opinion and say I am into it. [laughs] So maybe they just weren't doing it right.

**P7:** Yeah

**Me:** Blindfolding?

**P3:** Yeah

[short pause]

**P3:** I probably shouldn't have said that [Everyone laughs].

**P4:** I've tried role playing once. It didn't work very well. I was just kind of embarrassed. [laughter]. I was just like "I don't know how to do this!" [laughter].

**P5:** I just remember a really funny role playing story. I don't know if you know it, but there was like uhhh. I don't know role playing. Just write that down.

**P7:** I can never get into it enough to like believe it myself, so I just end up not being that into it.

**P3:** Same! I dated a guy for two years who really liked role playing, and we did it a few times. We were really comfortable with each other, but that's why I can't larp! I can't suspend my imagination that much [everyone laughs].

**P7:** See I could larp! I could totally larp. I just couldn't—I just couldn't role play. [short pause]. I have tried a strap on and have hated it, personally. It was really weird for me,

and I think that's because I've slept with—I did not wear it—but I think it's because I have slept with guys and girls. It was just a very confusing experience [everyone laughs]. Cause I was like “You're my girlfriend! We have a penis.” [laughter] “It's like purple and sparkly and rubbery, so nothing about this feels real.”

**P5:** I hear wearing strap on's is really alien too, because like your legs are together, and it's just like different.

**P7:** It didn't really do anything for her either, so it felt very one sided except the direction in which it was going was not even enjoyable [some giggles], but I know a lot of lesbians that love them!

**P5:** Um, lingerie.

**P7:** Yeah

**P5:** I have a lot of outfits like that.

**P2:** Vibrator

**Me:** Sex for yourself or sex with another person?

**P2:** Usually with people [pause] need a little something extra.

**P3:** See I, and I have tried some freaky stuff, but I can't do that vibrator unless I am alone, because I am like “Why would I want?”

**P2:** I guess I like it during sex, because sometimes I like, its like, I just feel like I need a little something else because it's just like.

**P3:** That bad!?! [laughter from group]

**P2:** No, it's just like I think it's hard. It's hard to have an orgasm sometimes during sex and I think that.

**P5:** Yeah, especially if I have been drinking. Then I know it is going to take a lot longer than I have the patience for.

**P3:** Five minutes!

**P5:** So we are going to do this.

**P6:** Go eat popcorn.

**P7:** I have always been much more of a down-to-the-basics kind of person. In the sense that I will try a lot of things in a “You don’t knock it until you try it” kind of mindset, but I’ve always been the most happy with just basic stuff, because I think a huge part of having sex is just connecting emotionally as well. I don’t feel like that when it is plastic or rubber or whatever.

**Me:** Everyone is nodding their heads, so does anyone want to respond to that?

**P6:** No I agree with that. I’ve never really used anything else during sex, so I can’t really relate to anything just because it has always been like that. But maybe it’s just because I haven’t been with someone long enough to try something else, but I don’t know.

**P5:** I feel like I need to clarify that when I say vibrator, I really just mean the part of the vibrator that stimulates the outside. Like when I am doing it with another person, I am not using the dildo part.

**P3/P4:** Right

**P3:** Same concept

**P5:** You know like the [vibrator], and then it has the big thing here [uses her hands] that moves and all kinds of things?

**P7:** I am not really sure, but yeah.

[passage omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** So then not necessarily these toys or these other things but lingerie, or piercings, or shaving, and pubic shaving or body shaving. Let’s talk about that.

**P5:** Like with the other person? [pause] No?

**P3:** What!?!

**P5:** I went too far. I went to far [universal laughter]

**Me:** No such thing as too far!

**Me:** Well somethings that are more common. Well, not common necessarily, because who knows what common and uncommon but like you guys all said can we talk about shaving, so how does that enhance our sexual pleasure or our sexual experiences or how does it take away from it. What do people have to say about that? Shaving.

**P5:** Nobody asked to shave you? [giggles]

**P4:** I guess for pubic hair, I feel more comfortable with myself, so I can enjoy it more [P7: yeah] and not worry what they are thinking about like “Oh my god why didn’t she shave!?”

**P7:** Yeah I feel more confident

**P2:** Yeah I feel completely different

**P5:** Wait, this is the worst story ever. I didn’t know you were supposed to really shave [identifier].

**P4:** Really?

**P3:** Yeah, because you obviously weren’t with people who told you that you needed to.

**P4/P7:** Yeah!

**P7:** I was with mostly virgins, but! [laughs]

**P3:** Oh so they didn’t know any better [laughs]

**P5:** So it wasn’t until I was like—like I knew that it happened, that people did it, but it wasn’t until I went to a porn place.

**P3:** What does that mean?

**P5:** A store. An adult store. I like saw all the girls everywhere were shaved. And I was with my friends and was like “Is that normal??” [laughs] And they’re like, “You don’t shave?” I was like extremely ashamed, cause one of those friends had been with me, and I had bought see-through underwear [laughs], and they were with me and were like “But you bought that underwear! You wear that underwear, and you don’t shave?” [laughing entire time]. It was really terrible, so then I started shaving.

**Me:** Do you think that story—maybe you all can respond to that. Do you shave for yourself or do you shave for partner?

**P7:** I shave for me. I feel much more like—if I—I feel much more confident and if I did not feel confident, there would be no orgasms happening.

**P3:** But why do you feel more confident?

**P5:** Because I felt confident before I knew everyone else in the world shaved.

**P7:** Um [laughs].

**P3:** [to P5] And you feel confident now, shaved?

**P5:** Well now I like it better, just because like when it's growing in too far its like "Oh it's too much—I need"

**P7:** For me, body hair has always been an insecurity of mine like even when I was like really really little, far before I was even old enough to start shaving my legs, I hated it, so I think as soon as I got a razor, I just cleared it all out! So it's always definitely been for me; however, I do wish more of the guys I had been with had shaved, just because it was a lot.

**P5:** Do you mean shaved clean or manscaped?

**P7:** No just man scaped, but then again I have been with like some pretty hairy guys. It was too much.

**P5:** Made a guy shave his nipples once [laughter].

**P7:** Interesting that's [interrupted]

**P5:** Well not once. Always.

**Me:** Does anyone have experience who doesn't feel the need to shave?

**P2:** It will get there. I feel like right now there is a lot of pressure, like eventually, I will just get lazy and stop. I don't know.

**P6:** I like doing it for myself, because I get uncomfortable [mhm's] after a few days if it's like—it's just extremely uncomfortable. I would rather do this for myself than anyone else [lots of yeah's]

**P3:** But if you let it, and I shave, and you let it grow in, then it's not uncomfortable [p6: It's not uncomfortable.] it's only the growing in phase!

**P6:** Yeah.

**P5:** But I also shave on certain days. [laughs].

**P6:** Yeah that's true.

**P5:** Wednesday's and Saturdays or Wednesdays and Friday's.

**P4:** Yeah [people laugh].

**Me:** Because you are going out those days? Is that what you are implying?

**P5:** Yeah

**P6:** I think it is for—I know that I do it for comfort for myself, but at the same time I also do it for the sake of the guy. I am not doing it only for myself, like I really feel more comfortable when I am shaved when I am hooking up with someone.

**P4:** Yeah

**P7:** I am more comfortable like letting it go a few days longer than I normally would when I am with girls though than when I am with guys, just because I feel like they understand [laughter]. Especially, not that I have been in this relationship for awhile, like we still shave! But neither one of us are going to judge each other. We're like, "Yeah. Been there. Know what happens when you do it one too many times that week. Then it really sucks." So like—but with guys I always felt much more pressure to.

**Me:** Where do you think—like you [p5] told the story of how you learned you were supposed to shave. Where do you think you learned that females should shave their body hair?

**P2:** I got so embarrassed, because I was with a guy that I was dating, and he was finally like going down there or something, and then like I didn't know I was supposed to shave. And he pulls his hand out and is like "Seriously?? You didn't shave?" [Oh my god's! Gasps! Awws!] And then I went home and that was that. I just shaved. [Someone: That is horrible]. Yeah it was totally awful, so I think I am just totally embarrassed for life if I like—I don't know, if I wasn't going to shave I would probably just like hide.

**P5:** That happened to me too, but I just didn't talk to that guy anymore.

**P3:** You just thought he was a jerk?

**P5:** Yeah.

**P3:** He was.

**P7:** I accidentally found a porn site when I was younger. You know the band A-Teens? Does anyone know them [Yeah]. Well I was trying to get to their website, and I went to Ateens.com [someone laughing really hard] and it directed—it redirected [P2: that's not ateens?] No the correct site was A asterisks teens or a dash teens dot com and ateens redirects you to teen farm dot com [oh my god!]. And all the girls were shaved. [laughter] On horseback. [more laughter]. Riding through the meadow. I was like yeah! If I learned

one thing from this experience, instead of googling the band, that I took in is that I should shave. [Holy Crap! That's funny!].

**P6:** I don't remember when I figured it out.

**P4:** Mine was through porn, but not accidentally. I was like "Everyone here has shaven." I was like "Alright I guess this is a normal thing, so I just started to do it."

**P3:** Yeah I don't remember either.

**P6:** Yeah I can't remember for the life of me.

**P3:** It always seemed like the thing to do.

**P6:** The thing to do, yeah.

**Me:** My friends told me.

**P3:** Yeah through my friends.

**P5:** Really? But it's like a recent phenomenon though. [mhmm] So it's weird that

**P3:** We would just know? I mean it happened somewhere, I just don't remember. Something told me that that was the thing to do.

**P6:** I think I had friends that were waxing. They were getting waxed. I did that a few times [whoa!] and I was like "I am not just doing that for myself." [How old were you?] Brazilian yeah [ooooo, ow, oh my god!!] In high school.

**P7:** I tried waxing that once, and I did home wax kit too [Oh my god!]. I can't tell you how much pain I was in.

**P5:** I used to do bikini line!

**P7:** I was bruised. My vagina was literally bruised for like two weeks. I have a friend that goes in with tweezers [P2: Ooo! Oh my god]. Just puts on the TV and goes away.

**Me:** What do you think about shaving styles? What do you think about that for women, or for men?

**P3:** Alright, I like to try different styles. [laughs].

**P5:** Landing strip



**P3:** Thank you! I think it is a happy balance between being shaved and being completely—I don't know, puffy and red and sore if you do it wrong. I don't know. I like the upside down triangle, because it is more so kind of the natural landscape but a little more mended. So it's just like this [holds up fingers in triangle]. So you just shave the ends where anyone's mouths going to be, which is preferred, maybe going to be [laughs] but my favorite aesthetically is the landing strip, which is just like a straight strip down.

**P5:** I ain't got time for that.

**P3:** But it's so easy! You just don't shave that part. Well, the triangle's complicated [laughter]. It is! I had to use like a fucking cutout. [laughter] I am not kidding. But the landing strip is really easy.

**P5:** She did a heart for valentine's day.

**P3:** Yeah my boyfriend found it. It was really awkward uh. He was like "Is this from...?" [laughter]

**P5:** Like a cookie cutter!

**P3:** But the landing strip is really easy. You just put—all you have to do is use your finger for the landing strip [holds up index finger]. One if you want it thin. Two if you want it thick.

**P5:** Thank you.

**P3:** Now you know! It's so easy.

**P7:** I prefer to just take it all away [P2, P4: Yeah. P4: Me too. ] Personally.

**P3:** The area right on top. 'Scuse me while I point at my vagina but! The area right on top in the center is so sensitive. I can't do it without getting sore or something, so that's why I leave it.

**P7:** Mine is okay.

**P3:** Really?

**P7:** Yeah!

**P6:** What does your boyfriend think of it? I am just curious what other people think of landing strips. Like why [interrupted]

**P3:** It's funny you should ask, because

**P5:** He told you he doesn't like thongs, next he's going to tell you..

**P2:** Ohhhhh, watch out!!

**P3:** No, it's true! He saw the vagina monologues, and he turned to me and goes "I feel really bad!" Because I shave. And somehow he thought it was because of him [laughter] He was like, "You know you don't have to shave if you don't want to! [oh my god!]

**P2:** I think you should turn the landing strip into an exclamation point [everyone cracks up].

**P3:** I saw that once online! I thought about doing that!!

**P6:** Oh my god!

**P3:** I was looking for styles, looking for something new—there aren't really many other options, that are feasible. No but it's—none of them really looked good. They all looked kinda funky. You would have to get a curved blade.

**P2:** It would be weird.

**Me:** Do you think shaving enhances the physical pleasure?

**P6:** Yeah that's what I am wondering about.

**Me:** Or do you think that it's just comfort.

**P7:** I think if it's between shaving and not fully grown out, then yeah. I think it feels a lot better to have been shaved. When it's fully grown out, I don't really know.

**P5:** I hear Brazilian makes a difference though.

**P7:** What's Brazilian again?

**P5:** Everything waxed. Everything goes.

**P6:** It hurts like a bitch. So not worth it.

[passage omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** What do you think about lingerie and underwear and how that affects a sexual experience and pleasure.

**P7:** If it's just bras and underwear, it's coming off anyway—and this is just speaking about a girl who has sex and a girl who has sex with girls—personally, if it's coming off anyway I don't really care, but if it's like a corset type deal, I can dig that.

**P3:** Something that would stay on during you mean?

**P7:** Or something that is just like different, cause like most girls that I have been with wear a bra and underwear everyday, so having one that is like particularly patterned, isn't different enough to do anything for me. But if it's a corset-deal, I dig.

**P5:** There is this garter belt—I was shopping at Victoria's Secret semi-annual really cheap sale, digging through the bins, and I needed a garter belt for an outfit that I had, and I found this one with my friend who is crazy into all kinds of stuff that I don't even get, and it was all kinds of patterns. It had flower pattern and animal pattern and it was all this different colors. And it was cheap! So I was like “Oh I'll get that one,” cause I just needed it for an outfit, and I am like “Oh I am supposed to go away [identifier] with my boyfriend, oh I could do that too.” Then, I turn to my friend and go “What do I wear this with?” And she goes, “*Nothing.*” [laughs] “What do I wear under it!?” So I literally just had the black, lace, thigh-high stockings and garter belt, crazy thing, and then, I don't know some see through bra or something, like my boyfriend was getting into the shower [laughter] and I quick put it on. [P3: That's the best! Surprise attack. P4: that's awesome]. And then had a robe, and that went over pretty well.

**Me:** Did you feel received pleasure from doing that?

**P5:** I um uh, I enjoyed that he was more excited? Than normal? I guess? I mean I don't know if I received a different kind of pleasure or something, but I felt sexy.

**P6:** I know it helps put you in the mood, like if you are wearing something different you feel sexier. I think it helps make you feel hornier. It really puts you in the mood instead of if you were just wearing something, like, yeah. [laughter].

**P5:** There is this French maid outfit too, that's really funny. I like it. I like getting dressed up. I have a couple things that I like to rotate.

**Me:** Does anyone have experience of sex and piercings?

**P5:** No.

**P7:** Yeah. With a guy that had, whatever that's called, Prince Albert. I was really scared it was going to get stuck on me, so it was very not enjoyable.

**P3:** No. No. Just No.

**P7:** Yeah just no. And personally, I would always be way to scared to pierce *that*.

**P6:** Yeah.

**Me:** And we talked a little bit about this in terms of shaving, but where do you think our sources are that these things will enhance a sexual experience?

**P7:** Magazines. I know a lot of girls in my school, when we were just like a little too old for little, Teen People and stuff like that, girls would start getting into *Cosmo* and stuff. I think that's where a lot of these implicit messages about like—so it would say “Which wax do you want: Brazilian or this or this?” So it automatically tells you like, this is the norm. It is what you are going to choose from, from the norm options.

**P5:** For some stuff you don't even have to go out! You just walk through the mall and there are huge posters in front of Victoria's Secret of women in thongs and all kinds of lingerie.

**P3:** You can tell from that [yeah, yeah for sure]

**P6:** And they don't have *any* hair. You can never see any hair on them [no!].

**P3:** You can have it permanently removed!

**P5:** [identifier]

**P3:** Laser surgery?

**P6:** Yeah I had a friend who did that too.

**P4:** And it never comes back?

**P3:** Nope.

**P6:** You have to do it like three times

**P3:** Over the course of a year. It's like three-7 times you have to go [P6: It's really super expensive] I think it's really affordable considering. It's only like three thousand, four maybe up to five thousand to never have to shave again!?! Yeah I think I'd buy that [laughter].

**Me:** Can anyone think of other sources?

**P2:** Girlfriends.

**P6:** Older siblings or something like that.

**P7:** And like, experience [two people say yeah] Like a lot of—think about people I know, a lot of their sexual practices are based off of their very first experiences. And those experiences are based off of who they were with—*their* experiences.

**Me:** And you said porn as one?

**P4:** Mhmm, and just boys in general when they are like “Oh yeah I like that” or talking to their friend you’ll hear and you’ll be like “Oh I guess that’s what boys like.”

**P5:** I don’t think I looked at porn until [identifier]

**P7:** You don’t think you what?

**P5:** I don’t think I looked at porn until [identifier].

**P3:** You had never viewed porn?

**P5:** Yeah

**P3:** Not even accidentally?

**P5:** No

**P7:** I’ve viewed porn accidentally but I have never like watched it for enjoyment. People tell me that I am missing out [Someone: no you’re not] I just don’t really..

**Me:** I am going to switch gears a little bit, just because of time, but what are your experiences of same sex sexuality? And if you don’t have any experiences, what do you know about same-sex pleasure? And that also could include both genders.

**P4:** For I guess for me, it would be better—I don’t really know *anything* about same-sex pleasure.

**P5:** I know lesbians are supposed to have way more fulfilling sex life than straight women.

**P7:** Yeah I—this is not even me campaigning [laughter] for the lesbian train, but like I have—I have known *many* straight women who have had one experience with a girl, and they are like “Yeah it was better than anything I have ever experience that I have had with a guy.” And I don’t know if that says something about girls knowing their bodies and therefore, knowing eachother’s bodies and knowing how listen to listen to the other

person's body, because they know how it's like to not have someone listen to their body type thing.

**Me:** And why do you think that is? That girls feel that way especially?

**P7:** I don't really know, but I was telling someone, I forget who, that during vagina monologues—did everyone hear “Go?” [yeah, some no's] Well there was one part that someone was talking about things my vagina said, and one thing was “Slowww down.” And the entire crowd laughed, and I was like “It's funny, because it's *true*.” But that like it's sad because every single girl in here is laughing, because it's true [yeah's]. So I think that a lot of girls when they sleep with girls listen to each other's bodies more, because they know what it's like to not be listened to.

**P3:** I think it has to do with power dynamics, but I also think it has to do with the basic biology of it. When girl on girl is happening, it just so happens that one, going fast isn't really going to cut it most of the time and two, there is more clitoral stimulation, which is typically, more pleasurable. We can argue about it later. But I think a lot of it has to do with the act itself.

**P7:** Yeah and personally, I am of the campaign that fingers can do a lot more than a penis, like girl-on-girl, where a penis is not an option, I think people count out fingers way to fast! Like the best way to give a girl pleasure.

**P4:** What do you consider sex between girls?

**P7:** [softly] Yeah I get that question a lot. Um

**P4:** Sorry!

**P7:** No it's fine. Oral sex, I would consider that sex, but if a girl has an orgasm, even if she's not penetrated, even if it's just clit stimulation, I would consider that sex.

**P3:** What if she sneezes and she has an orgasm?

**P5:** Stop it!

**P3:** I am being serious! If an orgasm is sex, what about an orgasm with your pants on. Is that still sex?

[P5 leaves early]

**P7:** I don't know!

**P6:** Is it usually just rubbing against each other [uses hands] on top? I really don't know anything so I just [fades out]

**P4:** Yeah same.

**P6:** I just am curious

**P2:** Logistical questions

**P7:** Is this like how do girls have sex kind of thing?

**P4/P6:** Yeah.

**P7:** Yeah there's oral; there's fingering; there's clit stimulation; there's toys, I guess. Like

**P6:** Like clit stimulation, that's on top of each other?

**P7:** No it can be like with fingers. What you are talking about is scissoring [laughter] which I feel like there are three levels of understanding same sex relations, which is like one is you assume that lesbians scissor. Two, it's like no, I am a lesbian, and I don't scissor, and the third level is like I am a lesbian, and I have tried it, and it works.

**P4:** Does it work?

**P7:** Yes. [pause] But I consider all of those sex, but I think it depends on how you define it. I have come to believe that like defining sex is way much more like a personal definition than a universal definition, especially when it comes to same sex

**P3:** Which is interesting when it comes in conflict then. When two people do the same thing [P7 and you don't call it sex] and one person does and one person doesn't

**P7:** Cause that's happened to me! Differences in experience levels. There was a girl that I was with, and I did not consider it sex at all, and she did.

**P3:** I guess it doesn't really matter, like you did what you did!

**P7:** Yeah!

**Someone:** Defining it doesn't change what actually happened [yeah's]

**P7:** So I feel like that has become a more progressive view.

**P3:** Why is scissoring the only thing? As far of actual contact. That's not the only option. I am not thinking about just fingering or tongue or anything or that stuff

**P7:** No it's not!

**P5:** I had to teach [someone] that term.

**P3:** She didn't know what it was?

**P6:** I had a friend who didn't either, until recently.

**P4:** I just assumed you all used strap on's which was probably bad to assume.

**P7:** Yeah I would not even say most do. I think a lot of people try it but I had been with girls for like—I have been like---I have had sex with girls since I was like 17 and it wasn't until last year till I tried scissoring, because I think a lot of people are “No that's just the myth. That's not what we *actually* do.” That kind of thing.

**Me:** It's funny to think about in terms of dry-humping, I don't know if that's the same as scissoring with guys and girls, how people—it's not talked about. People don't talk about. It's not talked about. I don't know if that's the same, I might be comparing oranges and bananas.

**P3:** I don't know what you mean.

**Me:** Like scissoring. I don't know what I am trying to say.

**P7:** I wouldn't compare scissoring to dry-humping.

**Me:** Not dry humping! But like, sex without penetration.

**P2:** Yeah!

**Me:** Not like clothes on drying humping, but sex without penetration is what I am trying to say, even in heterosexual pleasure. [pause] I don't know mean to single you out P2, but just because everyone responded saying I don't know anything, but do you have anything to say in terms of what are your experiences of same-sex sexuality, or about what you know. It can also be about two guys. This conversation is not limited to women.

**P2:** I don't know much about guys. The only thing I have done with girls is make out, so I haven't really been with a girl, at all. But I think my knowledge is—I don't know. I guess it's limited having been with a girl, but I think knowing your body would help, I guess, I don't know.



**Me:** And what do you guys—now back to everyone, thinking about how you learned or how you don't learn about same sex pleasure: how do you think people in our society, or us in experience, learn about same sex pleasure? Also remembering it can include male on male too.

**P6:** I think it's about experimenting more just because there's not as much—I might be wrong. I don't know about it, but I feel like there's not as much knowledge out there that is open to people to learn, so they—then it turns to more just trying it with each other. I don't know I could be very wrong.

**P7:** I think a lot of notions of lesbian sex from people who don't have it themselves, come from this like the male fantasy of two lesbians, in that very pornographic kind of way. For me, I learned a lot about it just by doing.

**P3:** [laughs] “Just by doing!”

**P4:** I remember the other week when we talked about sex ed and just the flaws of it, I think one of the biggest flaws is they didn't talk about this stuff at all, so that's where I learned about heterosexual sex, there was just nothing about that.

**Me:** I think the only source that I have learned about same sex pleasure would be porn.

**P7:** Or like Google it, but who knows what you are going to find.

**P3:** Just Google “same sex pleasure?” [laughter].

**P7:** Cause yeah! If you Google lesbian sex, you are going to find porn. Actually.

**P3:** But if you Google heterosexual sex, you're going to find porn probably too.

**P6:** Quick story [laughter's and uh ohs!] [omitted for confidentiality]

**P4:** You sound a little traumatized too!

**P6:** Yeah I was traumatized from the little box on the side. I didn't know *what* was going on [laughter].

**P7:** I've seen—cause I have a friend that is very into porn, so I have seen depictions of like scissoring in porn. I don't know how accurate it is [pause] but [pause how much of it is like trying to look hot versus actually pleasure [P6: exactly]].

**Me:** We only have about ten minutes left so I am going to ask what you guys want to talk about. Do you want to talk about Bucknell's campus, and campus climate and sex and resources to learn about sex and sexuality on campus? Do you want to talk about the

stereotype that women value emotional pleasure over physical pleasure or do you want to talk about faking an orgasm?

**P3:** Are we going to hit on these next time if we don't...

**Me:** So that's what I am a little nervous about, just cause I have—next week, my goal was to talk about negative associations with sex and negative experiences of sex, but I think we will be able to hit on some of these too. So, hopefully.

**P6:** I think you could put negative associations with faking an orgasm [lots of yeah's and laughs] Just because it's definitely negative.

**Me:** I will put that for next week and the stereotype, because if a woman only has a physical experience, is that considered bad? Okay! Let's talk about Bucknell then. Going off a question that you [P7] inspired last week: Bucknell's environment—what role does it play on our sexuality and seeking out sexual pleasure?

**P4:** Well this didn't happen to me personally, but one of my friends, she had a really bad first time experience here with sex, and she went to psych services to go talk to them about it, and they told her like something really ridiculous. Like it was "Oh well you shouldn't get drunk and loose control like that. You know better for next time." It didn't make her feel better at all. It just made her feel really shitty. So I feel like the way they handled the situation was really bad especially since it's supposed to be a coping place to go and talk about whatever you need to talk about and it just made her feel even worse, so.

**P3:** Well depending how she described the experience, they might have been trying to save face and making sure they didn't have her feel like she needed to take some sort of action and things that I have heard, not just from students, but from people who actually work for the campus like staff, not faculty, that's a trend that Bucknell does a lot of the times.

**Me:** Like try not to take action.

**P3:** Trying to save face and take precautions that are not necessarily in the best interest of the person, but in the best interest in the college and their reputation. I am not going to make this statement that they are telling people not to do things. I don't think that's fair.

**Me:** Yeah.

**P7:** I think it's a pretty heteronormative campus, and I am always careful to criticize Greek life, because I know it gets a lot of criticism, but like my girlfriend last year was in a sorority and to bring me to date parties, we had to jump through hoops to get that approved, and they had like this mixer that at the last minute turned into a bring a date

type thing, and I couldn't come, because I was technically still eligible to be in a sorority myself. So I think it's kind of a heteronormative fostering environment. [slight pause] And I don't think that's entirely because of the Greek system. It's just because my experiences have been that. Also with the ten to one girl to guy ratio to get into a frat party, so stuff like that is all very—the dynamics of social life are all really, all driven around the idea of heterosexuality.

**P6:** [Identifier] I totally agree. It's such a patriarchal society, even in our own culture, where we are going to the guys house. They are inviting us; they are controlling whose getting in. You know, they are the ones that are supplying the alcohol. I think that they have a lot of control, especially in the Greek system in many ways and I think that that can contribute to women not feeling like they have as much power as you might in another case if you are not apart of the Greek system.

**Me:** And do you think the power leads to sexual pleasure?

**P6:** Sexual pleasure: yeah, because I feel like if the guys feel like they have more power, they are not necessarily—in some cases they are not caring about what the girls want. I don't know just in my personal experience, I feel like it has been that way.

**Me:** P2, do you have anything?

**P2:** Can you repeat that?

**Me:** Yeah the environment at Bucknell, what role does it play on sexuality and sexually pleasurable experiences in general or for you?

**P2:** I think it totally makes me want to be straight, because this is such a—like you said—a heteronormative place. I guess as far as other roles it plays on sexuality it kind of, I mean, establishes the tone of how sexual you're supposed to be or what you are expected to do when you meet a guy at a part or something.

**P6:** I think also, going off that, because our school is so small, like you can't really try new things or try different things, because people are bound to hear about it. You are bound to know someone who knows someone [p2: yeah!] and it's like "Oh well she made out with a girl the other day" and it just spreads like wildfire. When I think if you were at a bigger school, that might be different, you know? You might be able to try new things and expand your sexuality more than you could at a small school.

**Me:** And then going off that, what do you think Bucknell's environment promotes, again we don't have to come to a consensus, but the type of sex you are supposed to have on this campus? Or what type sexual experiences are you supposed to have? *Supposed* to have: biggest quotes ever.

**P2:** I feel like in college you are supposed to be having sex period. [P7: yeah]. I feel like that's a lot of pressure I get.

**P3:** That's a really good point to make. We haven't talked about it at all, just once you are having sex. If you're not, then you are just really out there.

**P7:** I feel like there is a pretty big expectation, for women especially, that you are having—not necessarily one night stand type deals, but I feel like a lot of guys, like the one or two guys that I have been with here, and the ones that my friends have been with, have all expected the women to be very unattached [DTF]. And DTF. [P6: yeah, that's so true] Like unattached, ready whenever, wanting to be a consistent thing, but you do not ask me to have sex, I'll ask you have to have sex type of thing.

**P2:** Yeah!

**P6:** I can't agree more.

**P2:** Sometimes I feel like if I meet a cute guy at a party, if anything happens it's just going to go nowhere. No matter what

**P6:** It's like "I am good for that much."

**P2:** Even if something happens, I feel like it's such a temporary thing. It's just a one night thing. I just hate that assumption, because I feel like "What's the point?"

**P6:** I feel like—and I know for myself—being here I have tried to train myself to not be attached to people, and I feel like its so going to screw me over as soon as I leave here. Like not being able to be in a relationship, where I can be attached. I don't know.

**P2:** Yeah there is nothing wrong with being attached. It makes all the sexual pleasure stuff that much more worth it [P6: Yeah] Yet we shy away from it here [p6: right].

**P3:** Professor Wade actually has a theory, because apparently 30% of Bucknellians marry Bucknellians. He is actually a psychology professor. He is the head of the department. And he teaches a class on beauty and attraction; it sounds incredible. And his students were like "That doesn't make sense! I don't understand! From everything we have talked about and the culture, why are Bucknellians marrying Bucknellians?" And I kid you not; this is his theory: that there is such a culture here, in the way that you were describing, just a hook-up culture where there is no sort of courtship or no sort of trying to impress anybody or no sort of attempt to establish any sort of relationship that once Bucknell, and he sort of made it very heteronormative, but once Bucknell guys get out in the real world, they try those tactics with women! And they don't work! So they have to resort back to Bucknell women who already understand this [people laugh].

**P6:** I actually don't doubt that.

**P7:** I don't doubt that either!

**P2:** That's a funny thing! That's our culture.

**P3:** That makes complete sense!

[P2 leaves]

**P7:** Because this is like a time when our sexuality, both as a sexual person and a relationship person, are being shaped. And a lot of us, especially I think in the heterose—in the hook up culture in terms of LGBT, I mean particularly when girls sleep with girls is *very* different than the hook up culture here. So for people pursuing heterosexual things, that's tough! You are learning to be unattached in a world where you are going to want to be attached after.

**P6:** I've had this conversation, cause I was hooking up with an older—I have talked about him before—but when I was a freshman, and for like six months. and you know, I tried to convince myself—because I thought he was a reach for me—I tried to convince myself that this doesn't matter. This doesn't matter. But after six months of sleeping together the entire time and being with each other every single weekend, there is no way you cannot be attached, and it's fucked me over for the past to years! I am so messed up by it and I can't understand why I can't have a normal relationship. And my mom doesn't understand it, cause my parents have a very healthy marriage, and she's like “You're around people that have very healthy relationships.” Like my best friend from home has had three extremely healthy relationships, and I can't figure out why I can't. I don't know if it's here, because I feel like my friends are successful at other schools. Why *here*? You know. I don't know. I think it's just so sad trying to think about what's going to happen after. How are we going to be able to handle other relationships. I don't know.

**P7:** I just think it's hard when you—cause that was kind of similar. I had this guy freshman year and him and I had both gotten out of really difficult, unhealthy relationships, and we just kind of found a lot of comfort in each other's friendship and more, and after like two months, he was just kind of like, “This is starting to feel a little too much for me.” And I am like “Okay, that's fine,” and I wasn't heartbroken over it, but you spend two months or six months or whatever you spend giving, literally giving, your body to somebody else and then to have that be something that the other person can give away in a very “eh.” I think that does something to you and you don't really realize that right away.

**P6:** yeah

**Me:** As a freshman, do you feel like there were certain messages being thrown at you coming into this school in terms of sex and sexuality?

**P4:** Well I didn't know about the culture until I got here, so it was a big shell shock kind of thing. I guess older boys are usually the ones I get with here, cause it's based on the parties here and the frats, and you go to the frat parties. And I feel like they are always expecting sex. And I have had sex with two people here, but I have said no to like fifteen. You know? It's annoying having to say no all of the time, because it's frustrating! It takes away from the experience itself, because why can't we just have fun doing what we are doing. Why do you have to keep pushing?

**P3:** And that's a large part of the reason why initially I said the first day that I have only ever kissed on person without going all of the way with. Like I am not interested in doing anything, unless I am interested in doing everything, because I am not trying to play that game.

**P6:** I am not about games at all. I think that a lot of people play games here, you know what I mean? It's like if I want to have sex, I am going to have sex! But don't try and—I don't know I feel like guys go out of their way to try and play games. Or you will have sex them, and they will never speak to you again. And it's like how can you be so heartless? How can you have no emotions that you can't speak to me—you know what I mean? Not even that I think sex is such a sacred thing but [fades out]

**P3:** If you went to the movies with someone, like would you just not talk to them?

**P6:** Yeah exactly!

**P3:** I am not asking you to marry me! [laughter] You are going to look away really?

**P6:** You are going to walk and then turn?

**Me:** That is a really good point that that happens with sex and not like—that was a really good analogy.

**P7:** Really I agree with what you say when you say you aren't going to want anything if you aren't going to want everything, especially because I have experiences with girls, in a heterosexual dynamic, that wouldn't be defined as sex, but with two girls it is kinda sex. And I feel like those two things then are the same for me. Where it's like, however we define sex with a guy, or however we define sex with a girl, either way, I am giving you my body, and I am giving you a piece of my heart as well, because that's how I am when it comes to sex. That's why with a lot of guys, I don't want to have worry about saying no to sex and having it be awkward and then, which really sucks, because I like sex!

**P6:** I completely agree with you.

**P4:** I agree with you too.

**P7:** Half of me, not always being ready is not trusting the guy to like—when I say, take care of me, I mean like take care with me.

**P6:** Yeah. I think I have an issue of trusting too much. Thinking that—not necessarily like I can change people, but like, oh if I feel this time it's going to work this time, and then it never does, so like the fact of being too trusting when you can't change the system, when I should know by now that it's not going to change!

**P3:** Oh no, I am an asshole. I have complete zero-tolerance. I don't put up with any bullshit.

**P6:** See that's what I need to be like more.

**P4:** That's awesome though

**P7:** That's hard though for real.

**P6:** Yeah

**P3:** Well I don't. Eh. I have certain—okay, sorry it's kind of hard to articulate [laughs]. There is a certain point once you get passed like, you have already passed the different levels of things you could have fucked up on that could have been really serious, and it's not until I get to that point, where I am going to become—it's going to get to that point where I should be worried, because I am not going to get attached until you have already—I am not going to say pass the test, but it's kind of what it is. That's my no bullshit policy.

**Me:** Do people have five more minutes? One thing we haven't talked about on this campus and with this hook up culture are STDs and birth control and health services and psych services. So how do you think all of those things relate on this campus? And do they relate? How do you think the resources are in creating—or how do you think they play a role in your sexual experiences on this campus?

**P6:** I know I have never been to psych services. I think it probably—I don't know if it would necessarily help in certain cases that I have been in. I don't think I would really use—I get birth control from my gynecologist from back home. I know people who get birth control here. I am not sure. I don't know. I don't think I would really go there to be honest. And I think STDs are a lot—I think that they are kept secret a lot more than people are aware of. And you know the most common HPV, I know people who have gotten it who have only been with two people and they are like “What the hell!? How did I get this? I was so careful! How is this possible?” There is such a stigma around STDs

when HPV, nothing happens to the guy. He is just a carrier and most girls, their body fights it off. In some cases you get cervical cancer, but it's like for how common it is now, it's—I think people say, “Oh, you have HPV. You have obviously been sleeping around.” When it's not—its just not true.

**P3:** Remind me why this is so prevalent. I am just trying to remember.

**Me:** HPV is just like the common cold.

**P7:** It's just very contagious.

**P6:** One in two people have it

**Me:** It's just like the common cold in the vagina and you can get it even without condoms. I mean with condoms! It's literally germs in your vagina that can lead to cervical cancer, but not for like ten years. So if you test positive for it, there is *nothing* to worry about, because you will just continue to be monitored for it, and your body usually fights it off. And if it doesn't there are things they can do to get rid of it before ten years down the line.

**P3:** That's really bizarre. Isn't there a shot?

**Me:** Yeah there is a shot for like three strains. There is technically one hundred strains, but the three strains that it covers are the ones that account for 90% of genital warts.

**P3:** So it can cause genital warts and cervical cancer?

**P7:** Yeah it basically causes mutations in the cells.

**P6:** It would be an abnormal pap is how it comes back.

**P3:** That's so weird.

**P6:** Yeah I had a friend who got one. She had serious boyfriends. She was *freaking* out. There is such a stigma around STDs, and I was like, “You are going to be fine. Your body is going to fight it off. It's not a big deal.”

**Me:** Do you think there is that stigma on this campus?

**P3:** Around STDs?

**P4:** I have never heard anyone talk about it!

**P6:** It's so secret.



**P7:** No one ever talks about it, but when you tell someone you got tested, a lot of it is like, “Well you probably got tested for a reason”

**P6:** Yeah, yeah!

**P7:** Not just like you are taking care of your body.

**P3:** That is so messed up. That’s true though.

**P7:** Cause like I got tested after I slept with someone, and it was not consensual, and I had no idea where he had been. I was coming out of health services, and someone was like “Oh, what are you doing?” and I was like “Oh, I was just getting tested.” And she was like “*Why?* Like, do you have stds. Did you sleep of someone who might?” and I was like “Or you could just be taking care of yourself.”

**P6:** Everyone should be getting daily check ups—I mean! Not daily [laughter]. Semi annual!

**P3:** I don’t think it’s necessarily daily, weekly, monthly, semiannually, I think it’s

**P6:** Depending on who you have been with.

**P3:** Right! After each partner. After hook ups! Maybe that’s not an option

**P6:** every weekend! [laughs]

**Me:** And do you think Bucknell provides the environment conducive to that sort of thing?

**P6:** No!

**P3:** Social culture no, but I think the resources are there.

**P6:** I know I just felt super uncomfortable making an appointment to go to the health cen—I got tested here last year. I felt *super* uncomfortable going there to get tested. I mean it’s there! The resources are just like—you never know who you are going to see in there.

**P3:** You have to go in and they are like “What are you doing here? The reason behind your visit” Always call beforehand [lot’s of yeah’s] because then they know.

**P7:** Because then you have people sitting there being like “heyyyyy”

**P3:** I remember the first time they asked me, I was like “uhhhh.”

[conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** Like that's why I asked this question, because I am curious if other people at Bucknell feel like they provide services that if you had a question, you could go talk to.

**P7:** Oh hell no!

**P6:** I don't think so.

**P7:** That's not where I would go

**P3:** If you had a question?

**Me:** Question about your body? Anything!

**P7:** Like if you wanted a professional opinion

**Me:** in terms of sex and sexuality

**P7:** I would probably seek the internet before I would seek health services, which is terrible.

**Me:** I wasn't trying to lead people to say that. I am actually just curious.

**P4:** No it's definitely true!

**P6:** I don't think I would ever feel comfortable, because I feel like they would be judging the culture here. I feel like faculty and staff really don't like the way Bucknell is going, like the hook up culture and all of the drinking, and I just feel like if you tried to ask a question about that, they would just, I don't know, wouldn't be helpful.

**P7:** As if, like, being sexually active on this campus *means* you are apart of the hook up culture that is problematic.

**P6:** Yeah, because there are plenty of people who are in serious relationship sand are having sex that way, and I feel like if even that is still judged.

**P3:** I feel like even it shouldn't be judged—like if you want to hook up, that's on you! I don't think there's anything wrong with that [P6: yeah], so I think it's the perception that what you are doing—if you know what you are doing and are being safe, then I don't think that's a problem [yeah's and same's]

**Me:** And how do birth control and STDs and other things related to health and sex and pleasure play a role in your sexual experiences, before going into them? Do they play a role and how do they play a role?

**P3:** Oh I see what you are asking now. I guess I should answer, since I opened my mouth. I have an IUD. It's basically surgically implanted in you. It hurts like a mofo, but it's totally worth it. There is a five year with hormones, I didn't want to be on birth control, I was 19, so I did the 12 year?

[passage omitted for confidentiality]

**P3:** It doesn't have hormones but it's basically just like a physical barrier. As far as getting pregnant is concerned, that's not really an issue. And I actually told a doctor I was with—I had been dating a guy for several years at the time—I said “I think we are still going to use a condom, just to be safe.” And we weren't worried about STDs, because we were both each other's first sexual partners, but as far as pregnancy was concerned she was like “No! You really don't have to.” The nurse told me that; the doctor told me that. Finally, I was like I guess I don't have to use a condom. Jesus. It is really just that certain.

**P7:** Yeah, I am on birth control for cramps, but when I wasn't on birth control, ironically, the last time I was with men, and it scared the living shit out of me. Last time I was with a guy, we were drunk, and we were not in a bed, so there were some complications with the condom, like we don't really know where it went. We don't know where it went, when it left.

**P3:** what!?! Did you find it?

**P7:** no! Because [laughter] k. [Passage omitted for confidentiality] it made me realize that I personally would not be comfortable like having sex with men and not being on birth control. And that is the biggest, biggest advantage with sleeping with women. I can't imagine having to worry about pregnancy now that I have been with women. And I have been with a girl [identifier]/

**P6:** I have been on birth control since I was fifteen. So, I don't really remember life without birth control, so I know have friends who have been in situations and been like “Well I am on birth control, so I don't need to use a condom.” When it depends on who you are with and being smart about knowing where the other person has been, but I think people who are on birth control—not all people, but like some people who are on birth control feel more confident in having more sexual partners, just from friends that I know. I don't know.

**P4:** I tried it. It made me feel really bipolar and I cried all the time, and I was like this isn't worth it, so I just didn't continue it.

**Me:** And do you feel like not being on it plays any role in your sexual experiences?

**P4:** Well, I try not to have sex with people that I am not in a relationship with. I mean it happens sometimes, but when I am in that committed relationship, they are going to take the time if anything bad happens. Say I do get pregnant, or I could take the morning after pill, which isn't an easy solution. I wouldn't do it all of the time, I would just be careful using a condom, because it's not supposed to be like poppin' candy.

**P7:** One thing that has happened—the first birth control that I went on absolutely destroyed my sex drive. Like no things [P3: that's kind of ironic]. It was not like one of the like brands you would hear advertised though, so that really sucked. A lot. It made me feel terribly, because I was in a relationship too, and she was like “Did I do something? Are you just bored of this?” And I was like “No I am not!” It was just sad. That was tough. Now I am on a different one, and it's better, but it's still not where it was before.

**P3:** Did you just say you were in a relationship at the time you went on it and *she* was asking? Why were you on it?

**P7:** For cramps. My cramps were horrible. I spent the first day of my period like throwing up.

**P3:** The first day of your period ever?

**P7:** Always. Every month, I spend the first day [that's horrible] yeah. It's really bad. So if I think it's better now that I am on a different one, but it's still not where it used to be. It really sucks.

**Me:** How about barriers instead of pills? Like condoms or female condoms or other barriers? Do those influence your experiences of pleasure?

**P6:** I know, this was a great experience, this guy was considerable smaller than usual and the condom was just too big on him, so it was just really—not that it was uncomfortable, but you could just feel the extra [that sounds awful]. It was just sad! I just felt bad for him, because he obviously felt very self-conscious about it, and it was just—in that way I was turned off by it, and it was just very uncomfortable, and he was just way too into it. I feel like in that case—I don't know it was bad. In that case, it was a bad thing because it didn't fit—I know in some cases you don't feel it so like that makes a difference. There you could really feel the difference so it was just awkward.

**P7:** I've tried a dental dam once [people giggle]. It was just really not sexy, at all.

**P6:** How does that work? Do you put it in your mouth?

**P7:** So it's like a piece of like cellophane-y type of material, that's just the consistency it obviously doesn't look like it. They usually are flavored, but like you kind of spread it on and go [shows a motion with her hands]. It is just really awkward. Not fun

**P3:** So what's the point of using that?

**P7:** [passage omitted for confidentiality] It just really changes the *entire* experience.

**P3:** I think any sort of barrier does, but it does bring up the issue of girl on girl sex is I think on large is unprotected sex, because it's just not practical!

**P7:** We've talked *a lot* about that within the LGBT community: how a lot of people forget: "Oh so we don't have to worry about pregnancy? We don't have to worry about condoms?" but you still do, but most girls, because they are very trusting of their partner they are like, "Oh since we can't get pregnant, we don't need to use protection," so yeah. Girl on girl sex is mostly unprotected.

**Me:** What about barriers enhancing a pleasurable experience?

**P3:** Like ribbed or warm?

**P7:** I have used the fire and ice condoms.

**P4:** I like those!

**P7:** I liked them.

**P4:** I like those too, no one agrees with me though.

**P7:** I liked those too. My freshman year roommate loved them.

**P6:** I have never tried those.

[Passage omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** So that's the last question for this session. Is there anything for next week that you definitely want to cover?

[long pause]

**P4:** I like your topics.

**P7:** I like your topics. I think we should try and think about how to make these conversations that can continue beyond you having a need to do this for something you are working on.

**Me:** I am totally all for that.

**P3:** There is a guy coming up here who wants to start an open forum to talk about sex. [passaged omitted because of confidentiality]

**P6:** I think it's so hard. It's great being in this situation, because we know each other; it's confidential and are free to say whatever we want, but I feel like in so many cases, people will hold things back because of fear of people are going to judge what they are saying, or it's not the norm, or you feel like it's not what everyone is doing. I feel like that's just so sad. I think more conversations should be said like this. I think people should feel free to talk about it, and there should be no issues with it.

**P3:** What's been an effective—so they have done a few book discussions before speakers come in. There are have been a few. What's really effective that they have done is that [the groups] were separated. [identifier] They had some all female and all male, but what I think would be a really effective progression from that would be have an all female and all male and then all merge. So like the guys have sort of have decided on their honest decisions together. The women have already been honest with one another, which I think is more likely than if there were men in the room. But still, I think it would be still slightly constrained, but I think having them come together would be really effective.

**Me:** That would be so cool, because it would build solidarity too. If we, us of this group, were all of the sudden to talk to a group of men [p3: I would!] To know, “Oh she felt the same way as I do.” That would be really cool.

**P4:** That would be really cool.

## **Focs Group**

### **Discussion 4 Transcription**

**Me:** So for this week's icebreaker, we are going to talk about the idea of quote unquote, losing our virginity. So, often our society talks about losing your virginity and what does that mean to you? And what values are associated with that? And who taught you those values? And how did that shape that experience, if you have had that experience of "losing your virginity?"

**P5:** Okay. The first part: uh, I consider male-female penetration: vaginal intercourse, I guess for me. What's the next part?

**Me:** What does that mean to you? And what values are associated with it?

**P5:** I don't know what that means to me. Values associated—I know the next part is how did that shape the experience, right? The values part?

**Me:** Yeah that will come later, but yeah you can talk about those. How did that shape that experience can go along with it.

**P5:** We weren't religious or anything growing up. Like my mom took me to church a couple of times, and I didn't like it, so she was like "Okay, so we aren't going back." And, but so we weren't religious, but I grew up thinking that I needed to be a virgin when I got married. And then when I became a teenager, I am like "Ehh I don't know if I really want to get married." And then I am like, "But I want to have sex. But if I do get married I want to know what the sex is like before I get married. I think." So I had all of these conflicting emotions. And then when I was 16, I had a boyfriend and we were dating for like five months, or something, and we wound up having sex, and I remember afterwards for like two hours I just like cried, cause I was like—I felt like I disappointed myself and like my family and like what would my grandma do if my grandma found out! And like I am not really sure. [pause] I don't remember anyone explicitly ever telling me that you had to be a virgin until you got married, like I don't remember those conversations at all, but yeah I don't know I am over that so.

**Me:** And how old were you when you had that first experience.

**P5:** 16.

**P4:** Well, to me, losing my virginity was letting someone in physically and figuratively, so, you know, you let someone into your body, and then they are crossing a boundary that you have never let anyone see before and have gone before, but you are also letting them in emotionally, because it is a big emotional step, at least for me. So it's like showing them that you fully trust them, and you are willing to take the next step with them.

**Me:** And what part of their body do you consider letting in that idea of virginity.

**P4:** I guess their penis. Um, yeah.

**Me:** And how old were you when you lost your virginity?

**P4:** Fifteen

**Me:** And who taught you those values? Or how did you come to realize those values?

**P4:** Well I guess as she was saying, my parents were always like “Oh, wait until marriage!” and my grandma was like “You’re not going to have sex until you’re married” and I was like, “Yeah grandma!” But like, I don’t know. When I was fifteen, I felt like I was old enough to make my own decisions about it. I started to think about it when I was fifteen, but then I was just like, “You know what? I am just not going to let them know.” So like if I didn’t let them know it wasn’t real to them, but I could still do what I wanted to do.

**P2:** I consider myself losing my virginity as penetration, and when I was seventeen, I lost my virginity to my boyfriend at the time, and we had dated—at that point we had sex after a month and a half, and what I had learned about sex from my parents, and from a lot of people around me, is you didn’t have to necessarily be married. You know, there had to be love and commitment and that came with *time*. So I was very ashamed that I had only waited as much as I did to have—to have sex, cause I felt like—they didn’t expect me to wait till marriage! They had just expected waiting longer than I had waited.

**P5:** I remember thinking that too. I remember thinking, “Oh I should have waited a year! Why didn’t we wait a year?” There had to be a specific time on it.

**P4:** Did I answer most of them, hopefully?

**Me:** Yeah! I think definitely.

**P7:** I would guess consider the first time I lost it, because I like guys and girls, I think my definition of sex is different for both of them. So with a girl, it was penetration, just obviously not with a penis, or a toy. Had it been with a guy, then I think I would have defined it as penetration with a penis. But in terms of physically what happened to you, inside, anatomically when you lost your virginity *that* happened, so I like, like completely considered it losing my virginity. There weren’t absolutely no religious values instilled on sex. I think my parents probably expected me to wait a little longer; I was 17, but it was with my first girlfriend, not my first relationship, and I felt like because with my first boyfriend I *knew* I was too young, I kinda felt like I had proven to myself that I was a good judge of whether or not it was too soon or the right time, and so I felt like it was the



right time. I mean, we both loved each other; we both trusted each other; we were both each other's first experiences with girls, which I think was *very* important in building that kind of like trusting relationship.

**Me:** So do you think love and trust go a long with virginity or was that just a product of your relationship?

**P7:** I don't think love necessarily does, I think trust does. I remember at a certain point before that relationship—I might be making this—but I attributed very little attachment to virginity. For me, I didn't have to necessarily *be* with the person. There is a period of time when I thought that my first might actually be my boyfriend, but two years later when he came home from college that summer, things were heading that way, before I started dating this girl, but we wouldn't have been together, but I would have trusted him so for me it was more about that.

**P1:** For me, I don't know, like I come from a background where religious is surely influential but more culturally, like there is no way a girl can have sex before marriage. It is not acceptable. People don't even talk about religion, but it is the way it has to be. My parent's, none of them were religious people. [identifier]. For me, growing up there was no even question that you can have sex before getting married and when I—my [partner] when I first met him, before him, I had a couple of relationship[s], but when I was fully ready, [identifier]. For you guys, it was more of a guilt I am young or why I did this, but for me it was a guilt of why I waited that much, why I was so stupid to buying into the culture things, which don't even belong to my own personality. Like my parent's, they are not religious people, but still when you are somewhere, so you are apart of that community. You cannot even think of something outside. So for me, my first experience was, even though he was two years younger than me, I was feeling so stupid being so uneducated about everything. And also, being bought into that virginity kind of.

**Me:** And leading off of that, what do you guys all think of this idea of “losing your virginity” in our society and what that means for a female?

**P7:** [whispers] I think it's sexist.

**Me:** Would you say that a little louder? [laughter]

**P7:** I think it's sexist. Like guys can lose their virginity too.

**P1:** Nut nobody would know about it.

**P7:** It's not framed the same way. It's not framed like this [mockingly:] flower that you are giving somebody, and if you do look at religious values on it, at least to my knowledge—unless you get very orthodox in religion, it's not quite treated the same way

as women. I think treating women's virginity the way that it is in contrast to men's is a way of caging women's sexuality [yeah's].

**P1:** And also I don't know. I broke up with two of my boyfriends because I asked them to go and have HIV test and they disagreed. I said, "You can see I am virgin, but how would I know? Like that's the only way—that's the only way to find out! Not even just find out, but to be safe!" Because for men you would never know whether they have had sex before or not. But for women, they could tell.

**P5:** How?

**P1:** Because your hymen would be broken if you are born with a hymen!

**P7:** Ahhhhh ehhhhhhh.

**P5:** But if you are born with one, but your hymen could be broken when you put a tampon in.

**P1:** Yeah still if you don't—[passage omitted for confidentiality] So it's like you have to bleed. Like there are so many cases that the girls, they might have been virgin, but they are beaten up on their wedding night because they didn't bleed.

**P7:** But you can break it with fingers. Your hymen. You can break with fingers.

**P1:** You can—you can—you like don't want to do that. Like I don't know, there was the other week, this movie from Lebanon, it showed that even the girls in all of these countries, they have sex before wedding, but when they are getting married they go to France or somewhere, they make their hymen back to show they are virgin [sic].

[Conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** Let's think then of some values that our society puts on this idea or expectations for femininity and virginity in the states. Brainstorm. This doesn't have to be actually what you believe.

**P7:** I think it's expected for women to be *a lot* more conservative than men. A lot more protected of their sexuality as a *thing* as part of their body, as it is for men.

**P1:** And also this idea I thinking because women are the carrier of the reproductive, so then they will not know who the father of the child is. So that was the beginning of the idea in all religion.

**P5:** There is parental investment theory.

**P1:** Yeah.

**Me:** And we talked about love and trust, do you think those are stereotyped too?

[Mhmm's]

**P7:** For virginity for sure. Maybe not for all sex.

**P2:** Ueah

**Me:** Not for all sex, just for virginity.

**P2/P4:** Yeah!

**P5:** I always wanted to lose my virginity to another virgin, because I thought it would be special.

**P7/P2:** Yeah!

**P5:** I did, but then I was like, wait? That was what I was waiting for? [laughter]. Then I cried [laughter].

**Me:** So thinking of this idea then, what values were you raised with, and how do you think that affects your perceptions of sexual pleasure? And who taught you these values? These can be values associated with religion, spirituality, ideas of love, etc., anything you can think of in terms of values and what you think of sexual pleasure.

**P2:** I don't think I was really taught anything about how I should feel about sexual pleasure from my parents at all, just because we didn't talk about it, which I get—I don't know.

**Me:** Or it can be values that you acquired from personal or exploration too. Things that you see yourself or that you grew up with or developed over time. It doesn't have to be just from your parents though.

**P2:** Yeah.

**P5:** I really don't know.

**P4:** I think it's more indirect, without them actually saying it, but it's based on their responses to certain things. Like I don't know, I always feel a sense of shame when I have sex with someone, even if I think it's a good decision, and I feel comfortable with it, cause I have to hide it from people. Especially, like with losing your virginity, I didn't want to tell anyone about that, because I didn't want to be judged in any realm [yeah].

**P1:** I just think for most of here what I hear is here it's about age. If not me, or you, if any of us told our parent's that we are having sex, that wouldn't be a big shock when you are young, so it's more of a age rather than a value exactly on women, which I could be wrong. [identifier]

**P5:** Yeah! There is something wrong with you. Yeah. That's a value! That's a value. Like if you—yeah, yeah, if you are over twenty-five and you're a virgin, that's weird. That's something weird. Well, I actually do kind of think that too. I feel like it would be why?

**P2:** There would be something wrong it seems like.

**P5:** Yeah, yeah! It's terrible, but

**P1:** But that should not be the case! [P5: yeah!] Maybe somebody is perfectly normal, but has some personal values not to do it or not to do it until she or he meets a perfect—or the person that they are waiting for! But we always try to bring them into a category.

**P5:** I don't know. There are two people that I know that waited until they waited until they were in their late twenties [passage omitted for confidentiality].

**Me:** What do you think then our society—what are our cultural norms or our cultural values that say you should have sex before you are 25 or you should wait until a certain age. What do you think is behind that?

**P7:** Religion.

**Me:** Can you say more?

**P7:** I think I take a really strong opinion on this, which I think sometimes can offend very religious people, but I think catholic religion has influenced our societal and cultural views more than I think people realize at first, because we are never taught to question why we believe these things. But if you compare cultures where it's associated with a religion that does not place such restrictions around sexuality, the cultures itself don't hold those views. And so heavy influence is a religious ideal of chastity, and it's something that has now been engrained for so long, because marriage itself is a religious institution. Even though we now define it as a state institution, it is still *completely* infiltrated by religious perspectives, but they have been there for so long, that we don't really question them.

**P1:** Yeah [identifier] [One] culture. These women—I mean it's a different side of religion, these women were really powerful. They could have sex at a really young age and still be unmarried and still be respectful and stuff like that, but when the colonization happened and the British people went there, they were like “Oh my god! That's not what

I believe in. Change it!” So yeah I would agree that it is more religious. Religious but a kind of religious value which is now a worldwide spread.

**P2:** I also think we have these ideals about when—when it’s like, you’re at the state to be in relationship and start being committed to people and start looking for a monogamous relationship I guess. And I think in middle school, high school, teenage years, I don’t think your—your relationships aren’t necessarily taken seriously at the time, but then in your like early twenties, late teens, when people expect you to lose your virginity, I think it’s also the time when people are expecting you to start pairing up with people.

**Me:** Do you have anything to say (to p4)?

**P4:** No I don’t think so.

[Conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** Now on the flip side, how *valuable* is sexual pleasure beyond the feelings of pleasure during your sexual experiences to you in your own life?

**P7:** Can I ask to clarify? [lot’s of yeah’s]

**Me:** What role does sex and pleasure or sexual pleasure play in your life beyond just getting pleasure during sex?

**P7:** Like how important is sexual pleasure as a part of sex, besides just feeling good?

**Me:** Yeah that or “I need to have sex once a week,” or “I need to make sure I have pleasure in my life,” or “I don’t need to have pleasure in my life.” Just beyond getting pleasure during sex, what is the value of sexual pleasure, in your *overall* life?

**P2:** Oh that accompanies that physical pleasure, what other things you are getting from it?

**P5:** So like would you rather have an unlimited supply of fulfilling orgasms by yourself for the rest of your life and never have sex with another person?

**P1:** No! Let me clarify

**P5:** I know but cause you are saying separating it from

**Me:** So obviously we have all discussed that sexual pleasure is valuable during a sexual experience. What role does pleasure play in your life beyond just the pleasure you get during sex?

**P7:** As in does it make you want to have sex once a week or once a month? Once a day

**Me:** Yeah or like “Oh it’s important for me to have pleasure, because it relieves stress!” Or “It’s important to gain pleasure, because I can think more clearly,” or “I like to make sure I balance my sexual life with this,” or “I don’t really need it, I just do it because I feel like I have to do it.”

**P2:** Okay, I get it. I get it.

**P1:** Yeah, before I also I got it. For me, it’s like, I don’t know, maybe people are different. I am not much into like—I enjoy it, when I have it. When I don’t have it, it’s fine. Like I think I can live without it. When you are in relationships, you are not only thinking about yourself, so for me, the value is like if I am under supply [laughs!] it’s like kind of—not responsibility—I feel like I might be not the perfect person for my partner, so it’s like always think to give one-hundred percent, to be on the same level of supply and demand curve [laughter, P5: you are cracking me up right now]. Sometime—okay for me, it’s like how the life would have been if you are with a partner of the same level of expectation. For me, the value is, if I had been the same level as my boyfriend is, because he is super *hot* and always ready for it, it would have been more fun, cause for me it’s like “Yeahhh, whatever” [laugh]. “Sometimes it’s okay! Whatever.”

**Me:** So it doesn’t hold that much of your own personal value?

**P1:** For me, it’s like I want to *give* more. I just think I am behind. So that’s a value. I want to be more of sexual person, more expressive, so yeah.

**P4:** I think I’d go with the opposite. I think it’s pretty important in my life. If I don’t orgasm by someone else or by myself at least once a week, then I start to get stressed out. I don’t necessarily attribute it just to that, but it’s a nice relieving of stress. Helps me go to sleep sometimes. It’s got lots of good benefits.

**P2:** It wakes me up! Like I am always ready to go afterwards [people laugh]. But I think for me, I find that I am so much in my head all of the time that I sometimes forget that I have a body and I am just—especially when you are at school. You are doing everything in your head—so I feel really connected to my body whenever I have an orgasm. It kind of reminds me to let go.

**P7:** [Identifier] I get used to her not being here for awhile, I am like “Eh. I am fine. I can deal.” And the emotional connection is absolutely enough, but then when I do see her, I am just like “I forget how good this makes me feel about *myself*.” It’s like a high. If I have a couple days of a lot of it, I am on a high for the next [people laugh]

[Passage omitted for confidentiality]

**P5:** Ummmm, so I did a relationship where I was really emotionally invested for a long time, and we got a long really well, and we were friends, and we were really compatible, but the sex wasn't that great and I decided after [identifier] that [identifier] I didn't want that again. I knew when we were together that I wasn't having the kind of sex that I wanted, but I hadn't really had great sex before that either, but I just was like I know that it could be better, and I want it to be different, and I don't—I felt like maybe it wasn't just physically it was lacking, it was maybe I am not having great sex, because we aren't emotionally in tuned, or maybe I am not as invested in him as I was before, and that's why I want to have sex with other people. Or I didn't know if I just wanted to sew my own oats or whatever, but I decided when we broke up that I was never going to be in a relationship again where we weren't having great sex, because sex is important to me. [pause] And I have had generally, really really good sex since then, but again I think it's because [identifier] the older I get I know what I want or whatever. But it's not necessarily about the orgasm, but I like that connection and the interaction with another person and like I like to make out. [lots of mhmm's]. I really like to make out, and that turns me on more than just about anything else, and so if I go more than—after two weeks I am like—I start to get antsy. So even I have been masturbating, it's not the same. I want to have sex and have that other human interaction.

**Me:** And how have these ideas for all of you changed over time?

**P5:** Well I just told you mine.

**Me:** For everyone else though?

**P7:** I have put a greater value on sexual pleasure. On getting sexual pl—I was with someone who like—the emotional connection was unreal. The sex was awful. Like I would have rather have an asexual relationship than have sex with this person. And like

**P5:** But you did?

**P7:** but I did. Way too many times. That whole experience evolved me towards: if there is going to be a sexual relationship, it needs to be a lot more enjoyable for me. Maybe it pushed me to the other extreme, but I now look at it as a take no bullshit kind of thing. But I have also become more vocal about what I like [P2: yeah] and need [P4: yeah] and get pleasure from, cause I think in my first relationship in high school—he was a senior, and he was experienced so I was like, “Well he must *know*. He must know how to make a girl orgasm, so if I am not doing it that's not his fault, that's not his fault, something is just wrong with me.” But after I started having sex with girls, I realized how different each girl is; therefore, cause you know your way around one, doesn't mean you know your way around all of them, which means just cause somebody has been with a girl doesn't mean they are going to know me and what I like, so I have also kind of started helping people out a little bit more and being like “This is what I like. Let me help you help me,” and then it's better for everyone.

**P2:** Yeah.

**P4:** I think just comfortability with my sexuality has changed over time. In the last three years especially, it has been a huge dramatic increase in now I am able to talk to them about what I want, and I am not going to settle for something that's not sexually pleasurable for me, but I feel like I would have in the past for an emotional connection or just to make someone else happy, but now, it's more about me.

**P2:** That's how I feel too. I think I have made myself a priority rather than just kind of giving more.

**P7:** It does have to be equal for me though. [P2: yeah]. Like I have recognized that I am built very differently than a lot of people, so if the other person does not enjoy themselves, I will not have fun. Like my sexual pleasure is very dependent on the other person's, and I actually don't think that is—I think that's genuinely me, I don't think that's a mark of culture or anything. With that being said, I am now much more about like—it also has to be me as well.

**P5:** I am going to tell you a really quick, quick funny story that happened to me the other night.

[Conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**P7:** That's one thing that I have noticed with the guys that I have been with. They have been sometime's where, beforehand, I have been like "I am just going to be really blunt. We are not doing this." And yet they try anyway! [P4: I know! Oh my god!]. Like one time, a guy like—we were in the middle of hooking up, and I was like "Do you have a condom?" and he was like no. "Okay well then we are not; we are not doing that." And he was like "Yeah, no I know." And then! He like tried to put it in, and I was like "No! I am not on birth control, and you are not wearing a condom. This is not about STDs, it's about pregnancy, because I know his history." And he was like "I will just take it out right before." And I was like "Absolutely not!" [oh my god!]. I was like

**P2:** Famous last words right there

**P7:** "You think I wasn't going to notice?" Like "Oh! There is something inside me now!"

[Conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** We got to take it back for a second, so we started talking about this a little bit, but what level of importance has pleasure—that's what we were just talking about and people said over time pleasure has become more valuable and P1, you are the only person who



hasn't responded to that. Do you feel like—but you kind of talked about it in the sense that it used to not matter.

**P1:** Yeah, for me it's like obviously I have evolved [identifier]. It's different, but still when I compare my pleasure to my boyfriend's pleasure, he is way ahead. Like he really enjoys that and for me, it's okay.

**Me:** Yeah and that's what you were saying before.

[pause]

Okay so now we are going to switch gears for a second, and this could possibly be a harder conversation, so at anytime, if people want for the tape recorder to be turned off or step outside of the room or need to pause that is totally fine. I am not going to ask anyone to directly share their own experiences, we are going to talk generally, but if you feel comfortable that's great too. Bottom line, feel comfortable with what you feel like sharing. Be honest and open, and we can turn this thing off at any point and you are welcome to step out, but it's just one or two questions about ideas of quote, unquote “bad sex.”

**P2:** So that was a good Segway!

**Me:** Yeah exactly, because that could be a definition of “bad sex” too. So I am going to group a lot of adjectives into one question right now, just because—not to undervalue anything, just because it will open up our discussion. How do you think negative, awkward, embarrassing, traumatic or stressful experiences and messages shape ideas of sexual pleasure?

**P1:** Can you repeat that?

**Me:** So how do you think negative, awkward, embarrassing, traumatic or stressful experiences and messages—and maybe, because we haven't had these experiences, and maybe they are just messages we have received—shape ideas and experiences of sexual pleasure?

**P1:** Oh of course! The first time—[identifier] there is a myth that the first time, it really hurts. So there are lots of girls—because that is so famous! They say “It *really* hurts. Sex is so bad. It's so painful for women.” So for me, it was like “Yeah. Do I want to try it? Why should I go through that pain?” So that is something that really make people hold it on to that. And second, for me, when I am really, really happy and I have sex, it becomes so good, and when I am stress[ed], like most people do it when they are stressful. Ot never [is] good! So after that, when we are done, I am even more stressed. I am so angry like I fight. Like I say, “It was not enjoyable. What you did [pounds fist]. I hate you!” [people laugh]. Like I feel so stressed even when it's not good, so that's why I say

experiencing a bad thing is good, not experiencing. For me, bad sex after experiencing it for a day I am stressed.

**P5:** Yeah that is kind of what happened the other day. It was bad, and I was mad, and it was starting to get kind of good, and then he just finished. All over my stuff, so then I was angry! I was angry! “Like I wasn’t even ready for you to go! You didn’t even consider me [laughs]” God dammit.

**P1:** Yeah I am really like—I don’t even like talk. It’s...

**P5:** How else do you mean that when you say images?

**Me:** Messages—like ideas of sexual pleasure, like, does anyone else have anything to say, because I don’t want to prompt anything?

**P4:** Well I had a stressful sex experience here, and it was with a boy that I was regularly hooking up with, like we were doing other things all of last semester, and some of this semester, and he kept pressuring me to have sex, and I would keep telling him *no*, and it would just ruin the experiences that we were going to have. And then we wound up having sex when we were both drunk, which I was really upset with the next day, cause I had told him I didn’t want to do it, and he knew that all along, but I wound up saying yes, because I wasn’t in the right state of mind. So that like—even though I orgasmed, it took away all of the fun of that experience, because he wasn’t respecting what I had wanted and how I felt about it.

**Me:** So do you feel like—you just used the word “respect”—do you feel like that experience that pleasure has to go along with respect?

**P4:** Yeah, I think it trumps it. You can have the best orgasm of the world, but if they treat you like shit afterwards, they aren’t respecting your boundaries and then it doesn’t matter to me.

**P7:** Yeah and like I—freshman year—had a nonconsensual sexual experience, with a guy, and that has completely altered the way that I am physically with guys in the sense that I need to know that I can say, “No,” and that you, being the guy, will be completely okay with it and still want to hang out with me. I don’t feel that same—it almost feels like I feel the need to test them, as silly as it sounds. With girls, I don’t worry about that at all. And I don’t worry about them, you know, pretending they don’t know me the next day, but with the last guy that I was with I think—I don’t remember if I have said this before—but I had had this terrible experience, and then a couple months later I was with this guy, and the first night we hung out, he didn’t even really try to kiss me at all. And the fact that he still wanted to hang out again after that, I was like, “Okay! Now you can have whatever you want, because you showed me that if sex isn’t on the table, you are

still showing up.” So I think that experience shaped the need to establish a level of friendship with guys that I didn’t previously need.

**Me:** In order to get pleasure?

**P7:** Yeah. Because in order to get pleasure, I need to have trust. In order to have trust, I need a level of friendship with guys that I don’t necessarily need with girls. I am pretty sure I could do a one night stand with a girl that I don’t know and have all of the pleasure in the world.

**P1:** And what’s the reason? Do you mind?

**P7:** What’s the reason behind the disparity between men and women? I don’t feel threatened at all by women, and I don’t know if that’s because of the experience or if it’s because women physically, I am not scared of a woman trying to restrain me. Most women are not significantly larger than me and do not have the physical power to restrain me.

**P1:** I don’t know. I have experience—that lots of women have asked me—but my first experience was very scary, like I was scared of that girl when she asked me—it’s really funny you say you are not afraid of what they could do, but for me it was the other way around. Like you hear stupid things from men, and you just expect that he could say—if I am standing in an elevator with a guy and he could say anything—but I was in the same situation with a girl [identifier], and she just asked me, “You have really beautiful lips. Can I kiss you?” And I was scared! I was dying. I had never felt that way with a man. You should be afraid of men, for me—but now I know lots of girls and my friends and stuff, and I am not that way now. I know I make fun of them, whatever they ask, whatever they say, but at that time for me it was so scary, maybe I was not open to that idea or something

**P7:** For me I think it’s mostly based on one, experience. Two, physical differences in terms of like how much—in almost like a primal sense—how much do I perceive this person as a threat versus this five foot two skinny white girl as a threat, which is very stereotypical. Like I am sure there is a five foot two skinny white girl that could beat the crap out of me if she really wanted to .

**P5:** I am a little bigger and broader and probably have about fifty pounds on you, and I usually go after guys that I have—I think it’s a subconscious thing—but I usually date guys that are skinnier than me.

**P1:** That happen to me also! I don’t know why.

**P5:** That I know I could take them in a fight if I had to. I dated one guy, and it was the guy [identifier]. He was the nicest guy, a big teddy bear, [identifier], but generally I am

attracted to skinny, scrawny, I-can-beat-you-probably-arm-wrestling kind of guys. I don't know. I think it's a subconscious thing, because nothing ever happened to me that would make me. I think it was just maybe images and messages in culture, because I never had experienced anything that would make me afraid of guys that way [pause]. I don't know. I think that's what it is. I have no confirmation, but I think that's what it is. I think I am attracted to those guys that I know I could defend myself from.

**P7:** Also at this age—and this might not be true five to ten years from now—but at this age, the girls that I am with, I am usually the more experienced one, so I think that often, if a set of power relations were to be applied to that, I would probably be higher up, because of the experience. And it's not that way with guys.

**Me:** P2, do you have anything you want to say?

**P2:** Can you repeat the question one more time. I have been trying to compose a response.

**Me:** Yeah! It was how do you think negative, awkward, embarrassing, traumatic or stressful sexual experiences and/or messages shape ideas and experiences of sexual pleasure?

**P2:** I think a lot of it—we have just been talking about trust and being comfortable—I think that that is key. That's been the downfall in my bad sexual experiences. It's just not having that, or it's just like if I can't let my guard down, that's what makes it bad and then those experiences, the effects of those experience—like in high school I dated a boy for about a year, and he was just really mentally manipulative, and the sex was bad, and I just swore off sex for another two years. I said I didn't like sex. I just didn't want anything to do with it.

**P5:** As far as, so a couple—I think it was last week, we were talking about being tied up and stuff, and like I was saying I think it might be a on a subconscious level that I go after skinnier guys, and then I also usually, ninety percent of the time, date younger guys. Again, the guy that I dated [identifier] was the only boyfriend who was ever older than me. He was two years older than me. I usually date guys who are two-four years younger than me, and I think it's the set of power relations in that. But I like to be held down sometimes, but I don't want to be tied up or blind folded or stuff like that, because I feel like I am losing power, and it makes me feel—I don't know, unsafe? So I think those are some—I don't know—some messages of bad experiences that affect how I feel about *that*. Like maybe if I didn't associate being tied up and blind folded with being raped, maybe I would enjoy it more! But that's what I associate it with.

**P7:** Yeah I agree, because for me, I can be—I don't really like blindfolding, but I can be tied up, handcuffed, whatever, with girls but not with guys, because that actually was part of that experience [identifier].

**Me:** Well that leads us into: most people think there is good sex and there is bad sex, and what is on this quote on quote “not good” list. And we do not need to come to a consensus. So let’s first brainstorm what’s on our society’s not good list.

**P1:** You want us, from personal experiences?

**Me:** No it can be from whatever!

**P7:** Is this what we think or what society thinks?

**Me:** This is what society thinks, and then we are going to do what we think, because there could be a disconnect of what society thinks, and we could be like, “Well I have an experience where I actually enjoyed that.” So what does society say is on our not good list. Just throw ideas out.

**P5:** Finishing too soon.

[conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**P1:** For me, it was exactly the opposite. I really enjoy it that way, and also I really enjoy when my hands are tied.

**Me:** Do you think society says that being tied up is bad sex that people shouldn’t be tied up?

**P7:** I think it’s probably a little bit taboo [lot’s of yeah’s].

**Me:** Taboo and bad can be interchangeable, or it can be bad in the sense that it was “Oh that was really bad sex.” In the sense that it was just not good sex.

**P7:** Finishing too soon [someone: mhmm]

**Me:** So taboo and bad sex, what are considered on these things.

**P2:** Anal!

**P1:** Anal is bad sex.

**P5:** Is it taboo or bad or both?

**P2:** I think it fits both lists!

**P5:** This is society right?

**Me:** Yeah this is society.

**P1:** You said anal was bad for you also.

**P5:** I don't like it.

**P7:** I think poly—it wouldn't be amorous if we were talking about sex, but threesomes, foursomes [someone: mhmm]

**P5:** Yeah taboo!

**P7:** How ever many you want to include

**P4:** I guess nonconsensual sex.

**P7:** Certain age disparities, during certain age groups, so like ten years between a twenty year old and a thirty year old, some people would look at differently than between a fifty and a sixty year old [yeah's].

[pause]

**P1:** When I was young, I really wanted to have sex with a really old guy. I never had it—like forty or fifties. [laughs]

**P5:** How young were you!?

**P1:** Like fifteen or fourteen.

**P5:** Why?

**P1:** I just don't know. I was always attracted to old men.

**P4:** How old?

**P1:** Like forty, forty-five, like old

**P7:** I mean if you give me Patrick Dempsey

**P5:** I like Sean Connery. Do we have more for bad sex?

**P7:** I had something

**P5:** It will come when we talk about personals.

**Me:** Okay, so what are your personal ideas of bad sex or how do your personal ideas of bad sex from this taboo/bad list of finishing early, anal, threesomes, nonconsensual, fetishes and age disparities?

**P7:** I don't want *anything* near my butt. I am just putting that out there [Lots of yeah's].

**P2:** I am the same way!

**P7:** I know that some people freaking love it, but I don't want anything—I don't want penis. I don't want fingers.

**P1:** I just feel like women feel not to not like it.

**P7:** I just really don't like it! For me, it's—I just don't want anything there.

**P1:** Hear me out, I don't have any feeling with anal sex. I just feel like no one can have feelings. That's what I feel.

**P5:** No I know girls that really enjoy it, but I like some ass play but not anal.

**P7:** Like what? Like rimming?

**P1:** What is ass play?

**P5:** Like some uhhhh.

**P7:** Like spanking?

**P5:** No! Alright like, mmmm, how do I say this?

**P7:** Just say it! I will say something really weird after.

**P5:** Can we pass it down, like I will whisper it to you? [everyone laughs] Maybe not with a penis but maybe some fingers back there?

**P7:** like a stinker?

**P1:** Like still I always feel like I was...abnormal person, because I don't enjoy anything there! Like have orgasm or anything, so for me, it's like one sided. Like maybe that person is enjoying fingering or whatever, but for me, it is just giving me pressure!

**P5:** Just a little bit!

**P7:** I have never tried it. I *never* plan on it.

**P1:** I can break up with anybody based on that!

**P7:** Yeah!

**Me:** Any ideas of personal sex or taboo sex for yourself that other people might disagree with or you disagree with?

**P1:** I can never ever imagine myself with oral sex. I cannot touch somebody's private parts with my mouth, like ever. I cannot do it.

**P7:** Oh okay.

**P1:** I don't say it is *bad*, but I cannot do it. Like if somebody who I really really love tells me to do it, I might say "I am sorry, you have to find some other way, if I cannot do it."  
[laughs]

**P7:** I like it! More so with girls than with guys.

**P5:** I didn't orgasm from oral sex, ever in my life, until last semester.

**P4:** Yeah I have never orgasmed from it either.

**P7:** I have never orgasmed from it until like two weeks ago.

**P5:** What? Wait two weeks ago.

**P7:** Not two weeks ago, I lied. Much longer. I am losing track of time. More like a month ago.

**Me:** How did you come to choose these categories of what is bad versus what's good?

**P1:** What?

**Me:** How did you decide on these ideas of what was bad?

**P1:** Because we didn't enjoy—well for me.

**P4:** Yeah through personal experience.

**P2:** Yeah



**P7:** Also through talking to people who had a lot more experimental experiences than I did. Over the years I have made friends with people who have done some *unthinkable* sexual things and talking about it made me be like, “Wow even my craziest night now feels like very, very tame,” which made me more comfortable in general with realizing like a lot of people like a lot of different things and that is perfectly fine.

**Me:** do you think that matches up with what society views?

**P7:** *No* not at all.

**P5:** Unless it involves animals or children, I am game, just saying. Just kidding!

**Me:** Where do you think these messages come from of what bad sex is? Society’s idea of bad sex?

**P5:** I don’t know where society comes up?

**Me:** Well where do you get these messages?

**P5:** Okay what about animals!! Let’s talk about animals for a minute?

**Me:** Where did you get those messages? Who taught you those messages that this is bad sex? How did you learn to come to these categories?

**P2:** People who already had sex, and their opinions on it—on whatever it is.

[P1 gets up to leave]

**P7:** I think media a lot. I will never forget an article that I was way too young to read, and the headline of it was: “How to say no when he wants it in the butt” [People laugh] and so from then on—and I still firmly believe—it’s like wayyy, it’s like ten years old—but I like still think that my opinion on myself is very much my own, but I am sure when I saw that I was like “Huh, I probably don’t want that”

**P2:** Yeah

**Me:** Let me pause for a second. P1, can I ask you really quick, just because you won’t be here, to say a sentence on what impact has your involvement in this focus group had on you? Or what you want to change or what you learned or what you still don’t know? Anything! One thought on this focus group.

**P1:** You should have asked me before so I can think about it! [laughs] I would say that I had always thought that I was pretty open about talking about some issues.

**P5:** And then you met me [laughs]

**P1:** Now I feel like everybody is okay with what they are, like if they are different it's fine with them. Whatever I am, I am just totally fine with it. So there are a lot of more people. Thank you guys!

[P1 leaves].

**Me:** I am going to switch gears again, so we can try to get done. Let's talk about gender roles really briefly there is that stereotype that women value emotional pleasure over physical pleasure. Is that true in your own personal experience?

**P4:** Compared to men or just in general?

**Me:** I think it goes both ways.

**P5:** I wouldn't say over. I know I can have a very enjoyable, pleasurable, satisfying experience without an emotional connection with a man, but I am more likely to have it when there is an emotional connection and that I will want it more frequently, and it's easier for me to achieve an orgasm if I have an emotional—I will just be turned on more easily and yeah. I will want sex more frequently, and I will come more easily, but I have had really good experiences with guys that I wasn't emotional invested in or didn't have any strong feelings for. I was just turned on or it was in the moment, whatever: summer fling, whatever. But I would rather have both. Like I would rather have the emotional connection with the physical pleasure. What was the question? Is that right?

**Me:** Just is the stereotype true? And thinking about the stereotype where does it come from?

**P7:** For me it is.

**P2:** Yeah for me it is.

**P7:** I also think I value emotional pleasure over physical pleasure more so than a lot of women that I know, as well.

**Me:** Since we are all saying it's true. Do you think it comes from personal experiences or do you think—where do you think this stereotype comes from. Can you all agree that it is a stereotype?

**P5:** I think there is an evolutionary dynamic to it. Like if you're talking about infidelity, men are widely and universally more upset with physical infidelity than when a women is friends with a man or coworker or something, but a woman gets more upset if her husband, boyfriend, partner whatever is having an emotional connection with another

woman—I mean I am not saying she wouldn't get upset if he was having a physical one, but I am just saying even if she knows nothing physical is going on, just to see that there is an emotional connection developing, because that means that the man is—it is possible that he could start allocating his resources away from you and take them to another woman! Say he strikes up a friendship with Mrs. Brown down the street, and she can't pay her electricity one month. He might kick her a couple bucks, which is not going to you, or to your offspring or to your potential offspring. Whereas, if a woman is physically cheating on her male partner, then he could be allocating resources to a child that isn't his. So I think that that dichotomy, there, kind of stems the emotional need. You want to keep that emotional bond with your partner so that he is not out developing other emotional bonds, so I think that that plays a role in it. I really do.

**P7:** Yeah I—there are very few things that you could convince me are biology or evolution over social construction [identifier], but I do think that that might be something a little more towards biologically man or woman, not male or female. If that makes sense, because I know a couple of trans people from back home whose perspectives line up with the gender that they are not with the sex that they are, which rocks your shit a little bit if you think about it. Because if we are talking from a biological perspective, you would think it would line up with your anatomy. Do you need clarification?

**Me:** You just said the opposite though. You said I think it is biology. Then you said I think it lines up with gender not the sex.

**P7:** I know, which really confuses me.

**Me:** Oh, so you are confused is what you are saying.

**P7:** I am confused, yes but I think [interrupted]

**P5:** maybe they are trying to play into gender norms.

**P7:** I think in terms of a—I think if I had to come down universally on it, I would say it is a little more inherently biological, because we see examples of it in animal kingdom.

**Me:** And what do you two think?

**P4:** I would have to agree with P5 that it is biological, and it is true for me at least that the emotional connection is more important and just based on like—I took [identifier] class, and it just made sense to me, because I don't have a reason why I am more emotional about it, and why I care about it more, but it is kind of like is a thing. I don't know what other reason there is besides biology. I guess I am just prescribing that, because I don't have any other explanation.

**P2:** Yeah, I just think, as women, we are supposed to show our emotions more than men. I think that definitely comes out during sex because that is so intimate.

**P7:** I also wonder—I am sure that if we got [a professor] in here she could make an argument of social construction of it through gender roles—that because we are in a culture where male pleasure is highly regarded, and female pleasure is not, we are left with emotional satisfaction.

**P2:** Yeah! Yeah that is a good point.

**P5:** That does sound like something she would say!

**P7:** I could make an argument for it.

**Me:** Well then can you feel satisfaction and emotional closeness without an orgasm?

**P7:** Absolutely

**P4:** Mhmm

**P2:** Yeah

**Me:** And does an orgasm enhance that closeness?

**P5:** Yes!

**P7:** Their orgasm enhances that closeness.

**P5:** Oxytocin is released. It's a bonding chemical.

**P7:** Yeah that is actually very proven to be true. For me, though, what will emotionally bond me to someone more is actually their orgasm and not my own, which P5 has a theory about [laughs].

**Me:** Okay, I am going to move on again so we can keep going. What are some of the main reasons women fake an orgasm?

**P7:** Ugh to not deal with having to explain [P2: Why you weren't..] “You just weren't doing it for me.” It's almost just like I'd rather [P2: you don't want] that and get it over with then be like “I don't know yeah you have had sex with ten other girls but you just...just...”

**P5:** I've done that before but I have also done it to make him feel better too.

**P2:** That's why I do it.

**P5:** Which I haven't done that in a long time though.

**P2:** They work so hard! But I wouldn't do it now, but I've done it before.

**P7:** I've also done it in relationships where I didn't want her to feel badly. In the context of a relationship, it's very much about her not wanting to be embarrassed, also cause of the one time it was obvious—not that I had faked it—but she knew that it just didn't really happen for me. She got really self-conscious, and then every time we had sex after that for like a month, there was so much pressure that like both of us were just like, “Is it going to happen? Is it going to happen?” and it never happened. Of course it never happened [empathetic moans].

**P2:** Yeah

**P4:** Yeah, I feel like in the relationship where I faked my orgasms a lot in high school, like the relationship would have been over if he knew I was faking it, because I feel like he would have just been like, so like upset and disgruntled with it that we would have never tried again, and we just wouldn't have had sex, and that would have been a problem, because we were having so much sex.

**P5:** I mean I've been in relationships, where I don't come when we are having sex. There are times when he'll try in the beginning, and it doesn't work, and we'll be like “Oh, it doesn't work. Let's just have sex now.” And that's fine sometimes. Sometimes you're like “No, let's try a little more!” and I'll be like “No.”

**Me:** How does it feel to fake an orgasm?

**P7:** Mundane at this point.

**P5:** Well sometimes it can feel, I don't know. I haven't faked an orgasm in a really long time. [identifier]

**Me:** And P2, I know you said “I wouldn't do it now.” Why wouldn't you do it now?

**P2:** Uhh because I think that if you fake it, I guess it's just—I don't know. I think it kind of downplays all of the times it actually happens. It makes those moments, where it actually happens, less special, I guess. Plus, like I don't really see the benefit as much now—of faking it—because I think you know what, it's not going to happen everytime, and you got to work for it! And you know.

**P7:** For me, I don't do it anymore, because I realized that it really doesn't help me out in the end, because it actually then leads the person to think that what they are doing

[mhmm, P2: is working?] is working when it's not. And so then it makes it a lot harder to be like "This is what I enjoy," because then they are like, "I thought that's what you enjoyed." [whoops!] It's like "Ehhh. No, not quite"

**Me:** So then how does it feel when you did fake it, if you don't anymore or when you do fake it?

**P4:** I don't..um

**P7:** It's really upsetting for me [yeah]. I don't know. I just feel badly. I don't really know quite why. I don't know if I feel badly as in I owe an apology, or whether it's: "This sucks for everyone." It's just not—it sucks [yeah's]

**P4:** And it takes a lot of energy and thought commitment to do it, at least for me, because I am not a very good actor. So it takes a way from the experience as a whole, because I am just sitting there being like, "I hope they don't question me about this," because then you have to answer, and it's just a mess.

**P2:** I just feel disappointed because you like deceive someone! And then you guys are on two different levels, because they are happy you came, but then you are just like "Ehhhh" so I don't know—usually don't feel very good about it after.

**P5:** Yeah, I think that's why I stopped doing it.

**Me:** This is the last question before the wrap up. Is faking an orgasm a powerful experience?

**P5:** I was going to say that first, but I think I was just thinking of Meg Ryan in—What the hell is that movie? *When Harry Met Sally*, and I was like I didn't actually have that experience, I think it was just in the movie.

**Me:** In what ways is it powerful? And is it not powerful?

**P5:** Cause it's almost like you're taking control of the situation, and it's powerful because you did deceive someone, so I don't know. It can go both ways. I just—I am not going to give you an award for something you didn't do.

**P4:** Yeah

**P7:** I feel the complete opposite. I feel like it's very weakening to fake an orgasm for me, just because I feel like what are you doing for yourself? You are selling yourself short. You're like essentially lying to somebody, and I think my perspective on lying is maybe not one that most people take. I think I consider a lot more things lies than most people

would, but like I don't know. I just feel like I am disappointing my honest self [Someone: Mhmm, yeah I'd agree with that]

**Me:** Any other thoughts on that question?

[pause]

No? Now we are going to wrap up and think about all of these focus groups. You might want to do the close your eyes activity, if you want. Think about what impact your involvement in these focus group has had on you. Some things to maybe think about besides the impact are what have you learned, what do you still not know, what might you like to be apart of, what contributions has this focus group had in your life.

**P5:** I mean I just feel more comfortable talking—not that I was uncomfortable talking—but I didn't feel the need to talk about [pause] how do I want? So I did [an activity for Bucknell's campus]. I was with these girls for [a long period of time] and after, they are girls I wouldn't necessarily see a lot of. They are in sororities or they are theater kids and they are people I had never met before, and we were together [identifier], and I was with these four girls, so we didn't really get close, but we were doing the same thing and routine and [identifier] I actually started talking about sex on campus and bringing up some of the topics, [identifier] and stuff like that so I feel *a reason* to talk about this with girls more, because I feel like I talk about sex enough. Like, I feel like there didn't need to be a reason to talk about it more. Like, I am open enough about it, but it was a reason to talk about it with a different population, especially because [identifier] I have had experience, a different experience, I am comfortable with sharing that, saying that, because I talked about it with them. [Passage omitted for confidentiality]. So I started talking about ,well you know, some of the things we have discussed here about why that's a problem, and I don't know. So it is interesting because I think this kind of thing would be beneficial, not necessarily on a larger scale, but in general to have something like this every semester. I know you are not going to be here, but like I don't know if [identifier] for someone every year I don't know. You did a phenomenal job facilitating [yeah's and applause]. It was amazing. The way—your redirection skills and just the way—you are very good, and you're comfortable sharing. It's just very good. I think that people, the girls on campus, would benefit from something like this and hearing other people's experiences, and I think it would make them more comfortable. And it's empowering! Cause if you have a bunch of girls, talking about this with each other and realizing that they are having the same shitty experiences with these freaking guys on campus! [laughter]. I don't know.

**Me:** Did you think it was beneficial for yourself and empowering for yourself? Because you use those two adjectives

**P5:** N—uhh maybe a little bit, but like I know I told the story of how I have been hooking up with this guy and sometimes it's really terrible and sometimes it's not! It's actually,

with him, it's more about the emotional connection, even though the sex isn't that great. [identifier] Like one time I just had him over and I told him he was going to come over for sex, and we just cuddled. We just cuddled all night, and I wouldn't let him touch me. And we just cuddled. We just cuddled all night. And then there are other times where he'll come over and I will entertain him [identifier]. It's like kind of like a power dynamic, like puppet master thing [laughs], so I know the sex aspect isn't what it is about with him, and we took a break the other night, and I pulled out the big guns [laughs to self]—it's so weird to just say like that. I am sorry! Oh my god, this is going to be so weird when you listen to this over again [laughs]. So I am comfortable with asserting what I want sexually and stuff like that so it's not—and I understand what goes on on this campus is different from the real world, and I have had those experiences, so it's not as empowering in that sense, but it just gives me hope that maybe something like this could facilitate change on this campus, and that's empowering.

**P7:** I think it's been very freeing in the sense that I have a lot of experiences, and I am comfortable talking to my close friends about, but I almost feel like it is a twenty-first century version of the Feminine Mystique—do all of you know what that is? It's like one of the very first feminist publications that spread like wildfire back in the beginning of the feminist movement, and all of these women were starting to talk women, and all these women were like “Oh my god. Every woman across the nation has been feeling this same,” so I feel like in a way—clearly because if I take all the people that came here, we are all different. We are different class years. We come from different places in the country. We are involved in different activities. Some of us are straight, some of us are not. Some of us are anywhere in between, yet we can all come together on these commonalities: both the good and the bad, so I feel like it's been—I didn't realize how much I had to share until I was actually asked.

**P4:** I think I didn't realize how much there was for me to know. I didn't know about myself and about other people. I learned a lot in this group, and I always feel a sense of high when I walk out of here.

**P2:** Yeah

**P4:** I am not the only one. You know there are other people who feel this way and maybe there are a lot of other people who feel this way, and it's like there are only seven of us in the room who we got together, but there's like potential like she said. So I like that. And it's just been a good experience, cause like I don't know. I wasn't comfortable with Bucknell's culture with guys, and now like I realize it's okay not to be comfortable with it, and I can actually change it.

[Conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**P2:** Yeah I definitely think there is a—it makes me want to have more of these conversations outside of class, and I think that a lot of my conversations about sex prior



to this were kind of repetitive, and we talk about the same things, but this talking about sexual pleasure more than just sex has been an interesting topic to talk about, and I also feel like I think that my close group of girls that I talk to about all of this, they have I guess more narrow ideas about a lot these things, so it was cool to talk about all of this with a group of really strong different women, and so I think that I—I definitely think that I'll—I have become more confident, sexually and just like more assertive about myself and just from talking about it. Yeah! [Someone: Yayy!]

**P7:** It's also really interesting talking about not heterosexual sex with people who have had heterosexual experiences. Most of my conversations surrounding sex for the past like two-three years actually, with the expectation of my best friend who is great, have been with mostly LGBT individuals, and it is really different to talk about it with people who aren't exclusively LGBT.

**Me:** And going off of that. What are some specific things that you all have learned. Like maybe one or two—a list. You don't need to elaborate, but like something that you learned in this focus group that you didn't know before. It could be about your body; it could be about your body as a site of sexual pleasure; it could be about orgasms; it could be anatomical; it could be a value. What is something you could tangibly say you learned?

**P2:** I think this is totally specific, but that one time we were talking about lesbian scissoring. [someone laughs] I learned a lot from that!

**P7:** For your education!

**P4:** I mean I guess I learned that hardly anyone questions society's values about sex and what things we just kind of thought were things that aren't exactly the norms.

**P5:** I am still thinking.

**Me:** P7, can you think of anything?

[long pause]

**P5:** I can't think. It's not that I didn't, I just can't.

**P2:** Putting us on the spot!

**Me:** No, I understand!

**P7:** I can't think of anything off the top of my head that I *learned*.

**Me:** What is something that you still want to know?

**P2:** I'd like to sit in on this whole conversation with guys or just watch from afar and listen. [Mhmm] So I guess like, I don't know. It's great to talk to women, and I learn a lot about myself, but I don't think I have ever really had this in-depth of a conversation with guys, so I would like to hear more about that.

**P4:** I guess I don't know what else is out there, so I guess if there was a thing like this in the future, I'd like to keep exploring different topics, learning through that, because you can't really miss what you have never learned before.

**P7:** I would like to know I guess more—I would honestly like to talk to more women who have had experiences with nonconsensual sex that are still predominately heterosexual, I guess.

**P5:** I think I would just like to hear more, I feel like, okay [identifiers about focus group participants]. I feel like that speaks volumes on who is comfortable talking about sex and whose not. I think it would be interesting to get more from the traditional [identifier].

[conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**P7:** But you know I do think that being non-normative to begin with helps you be non-normative [P2: yeah]. Nothing about my sex life is normative; therefore, me talking about it at all is already a weird thing [P5: yeah]

**Me:** And also it's interesting too, that we all signed up for this, because we are all open to talking about sex. Like getting someone who is not open would be an interesting dynamic too [P2: Mhmm].

**P5:** [Identifier]

**P2:** I would not consider myself a typical Bucknellian.

**P5:** [Identifier]

**P2:** But there are a lot of things that make me a typical Bucknellian too [identifier].

**P5:** You are not as confirmative! [pause] And you ,[P4], are a freshman so you are not necessarily—you haven't been brainwashed [everyone laughs].

**Me:** What might you like to be apart of in changing for women in terms of sex and pleasure?

**P5:** In general or on campus?

**Me:** That's in general and the next is on campus. We can shoot these out, because I know it's time to go.

**P5:** I can't think about in general.

**P7:** I want us to talk about this more. [yeah's] I want more groups like this. I want this to continue, even if it's not apart of your research

[conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**P4:** Yeah, I would love to keep talking about this

[conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**P7:** I think we should keep communicating

**P2:** I think communication needs to increase.

**P5:** I think this would—I don't know it has the potential to go along way.

**P7:** I think that even though there is four of us today, and not more than seven of us in the times that I have been here, I think it has accomplished *exactly* what you wanted it to.

**Me:** Definitely [everyone laughs].

**P7:** I think for women who wanted to talk about pleasure and understand themselves. And their bodies as sites of pleasure.

**Me:** And what might you like to be apart of changing on this campus or what contributions would you like to make on this campus?

[Conversation omitted for confidentiality]

**Me:** [Identifier] Does anyone else have anything? You said maybe leading this next year.

**P2:** Just talking to people that normally don't have these conversations is something small scale that I could do.

**P4:** Yeah. Just leading by positive example. Like if you are so comfortable talking about it, like "Oh why is she so comfortable? Maybe I should be too?" Just kind of participating, because I have four years to.

**P7:** Yeah I am actually really jealous that you get this experience as a freshmen.

**P2:** Yeah I wish I had had this as a freshman.

**P4:** I am excited.

**P7:** Feel lucky!

**P2:** Especially as a freshman, I was trying to be—trying to conform a lot more than I am now I think.

**P7:** Yeah everyone—my hall was soooooo heteronormative in the sense that, yes everyone was heterosexual but that wasn't the thing. The thing was like everyone *highly* valued drinking Wednesday night Friday night Saturday night, hooking up each time, each person. Like if you did that? You were a god or a goddess on our hall for the next week until you proved that you could do that again. [identifier] I don't know how, [it] made me feel badly that I did not go and have sex with someone that weekend. My first alcohol experience at Bucknell was that I knew that everyone was pregaming in some room, and I came in and to pregame, and I came in to someone with a water bottle full of vodka just bottom up chugging it. [oh my god!] [passage omitted for confidentiality].

**Me:** Thank you guys so so so much!

