

Sul Ross State University
Sex Talk and Women's Health Care Seminar
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Safety and the Female Sexual Response:



A WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE PERSPECTIVE ON
OBLIGATION SEX VERSUS RELATIONSHIP SEX

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Pop Quiz 😊

The Pill is known to _____ clitoral size and orgasms in women.

- Increase
- Decrease
- Not affect

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Community Midwives and...Sex?

- ▶ **Physiological birth**
(labor that's allowed to follow the normal hormonal cascade, not disturbed or rushed)
- ▶ **Psychological safety**
(dark, quiet, private, familiar space with no strangers)



Community Midwives and...Sex?

Sex is part of the **fertility continuum** (a universal lifespan process that connects us to our ancestors and descendants)

- ▶ preconception and conception
- ▶ pregnancy and birth
- ▶ the Babymoon and Fourth Trimester
- ▶ breastfeeding and weaning
- ▶ childhood to adulthood and building a new family



Oxytocin: The



Hormone

- ▶ Hormone that plays an important role in social bonding, social learning, and cardiovascular function
- ▶ Discovered in 1906
- ▶ The first polypeptide hormone to be synthesized (1953), leading to a Nobel Prize
- ▶ We have **oxytocin receptors throughout the body**, with concentrations in the uterus, testes, mammary glands, and heart

Oxytocin: The



Hormone

“The Love Hormone”/ “The Shy Hormone”

- ▶ Creates “warm fuzzies”
 - ▶ feelings of calm, connection,
contentment, closeness, and caring
 - ▶ reduces blood pressure, inhibits cortisol, promotes healing

Oxytocin: The



Hormone

“The Love Hormone”/ “The Shy Hormone”

- ▶ Released from the pituitary gland during activities that involve social bonding, such as:
 - ▶ cuddling
 - ▶ sexual arousal & intercourse to orgasm
 - ▶ labor & childbirth
 - ▶ breastfeeding



Oxytocin: The Hormone

In a **physiological birth** where the mother feels **psychologically safe**:

- ▶ Stimulates contractions
- ▶ Initiates a positive feedback loop
 - ▶ Harder, faster contractions
 - ▶ Increased pain tolerance
- ▶ Stimulates FER (fetal ejection reflex)

Oxytocin: The Hormone



“The power that got the baby in is the power that gets the baby out”

-midwife Ina May Gaskin

Oxytocin: The 🥰 Hormone

The Golden Hour



• Right after birth, everyone in the room is bathed in oxytocin:

- Mom
- Dad
- Baby
- Siblings
- Attendants

Oxytocin: The



Hormone

The Babymoon

- ▶ Milk ejection reflex
- ▶ Shrinks uterus back to pre-pregnancy size
- ▶ Protective against feelings of sadness/anxiety



Oxytocin: The Hormone

The Fourth Trimester

- ▶ Social and emotional growth for baby
- ▶ Confidence for new parents
- ▶ Integration of the newborn family into the wider social network



Oxytocin: The 🥰 Hormone

Community midwives
are **oxytocin
specialists**



Oxytocin: The



Hormone

In a **sexual relationship** where the woman feels **physically** and **psychologically safe**:

- ▶ Able to relax and reach full arousal
- ▶ Able to communicate with her partner
 - ▶ What feels good
 - ▶ What may be uncomfortable or painful
- ▶ Greater orgasmic frequency

Oxytocin is the foundation of female sexual response.

The Body, Sex, and Love

▶ The foundation of consent

- ▶ A person is meant for relationship with others
- ▶ A person only exists in a body
- ▶ The body is an expression of the person

I'm not just **a** body. I'm **some**body.

The Body, Sex, and Love

▶ The foundation of consent

- ▶ The meaning and purpose of being human is **to love**
- ▶ Having a body means I can participate in the mystery of giving and receiving love
- ▶ It sets me free to make the **choice to love** or not to love

The Body, Sex, and Love

▶ The foundation of consent

“Freedom is given for love. It can lead to destruction and division, but it’s intended to bestow life and establish unity. It’s our *choice*.”

-Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners*

The Body, Sex, and Love

▶ The foundation of consent

- ▶ “Intimate sex requires that you feel as if your spouse values you not just for what you can give them but for *who you are*.”
- ▶ However, “sex divorced from intimacy can widen the chasm between two people.”

-Sheila Gregoire, *The Great Sex Rescue*

Obligation sex inhibits female sexual response.

Safety and Female Sexual Response

Threats to safety:

- ▶ Cultural messages/internalized beliefs about obligation sex

“It’s the right men feel to sexual pleasure, how dejected and even potentially angry they become when denied it.”

-Peggy Orenstein, *Boys & Sex*



Safety and Female Sexual Response

Threats to safety:

- ▶ Cultural messages/internalized beliefs about obligation sex

“Transaction: I did this, so you owe me.

Obligation: You owe me. **Coercion:** You owe me, so I’m going to take what I want.”

--Sheila Gregoire, *The Great Sex Rescue*



Safety and Female Sexual Response

Two types of obligation sex:

- ▶ Within a relationship

Gregoire et al. (2021): study of 20,000 married evangelical women

- ▶ Outside of a relationship

Armstrong et al. (2012): study of 15,000 heterosexual undergraduates



Safety and Female Sexual Response

When a woman's **physical** or **psychological safety** is threatened:

- ▶ Feelings of calm, connection, contentment, closeness, and caring are lost
- ▶ Nervous system may engage in fight, flight, fawn, or freeze
 - ▶ Stress hormones (adrenaline, cortisol) replace oxytocin
- ▶ May feel detached or disconnected from her body and partner (mild to severe dissociation)

Safety and Female Sexual Response

Outcomes of Obligation Sex:

- ▶ Female sexual pain
 - ▶ *The Great Sex Rescue* study: one third of respondents
 - ▶ estimated 18-28% of women worldwide
 - ▶ can be physiological or psychological in origin
- ▶ The “orgasm gap”
 - ▶ *The Great Sex Rescue* study: 95% of men almost always/always orgasm during a sexual encounter, vs. 48% of women
 - ▶ national average: 3 to 1 in favor of men



Safety and Female Sexual Response

Cultural messages/internalized beliefs - within a relationship

- ▶ I have to have sex to prevent my partner's porn use
 - ▶ 19% more likely to experience sexual pain
 - ▶ 24% less likely to orgasm reliably
- ▶ I'm obligated to have sex whenever my husband wants it
 - ▶ 37% more likely to experience sexual pain
 - ▶ 29% less likely to frequently orgasm



Safety and Female Sexual Response

Cultural messages/internalized beliefs - outside of a relationship

- ▶ Hookups are a low-risk way to enjoy sex in college
- ▶ Being drunk allows you to hook up with anyone without commitment
- ▶ It's acceptable for men to pressure women for sexual acts
- ▶ Hookups are about male pleasure
 - ▶ A woman who asks a male hookup partner to prioritize her pleasure is rude and demanding
 - ▶ A woman should feel guilty for expecting a hookup partner to give her an orgasm
 - ▶ A woman should do whatever she can to bring her male partner to orgasm during a hookup



Safety and Female Sexual Response

- ▶ The hookup orgasm gap (Armstrong et al., 2012):
 - ▶ Initial hookup: man 31%, woman 10% (orgasm gap 3.1:1)
 - ▶ Repeated encounters with same partner: orgasm gap shrinks each time
 - ▶ In a relationship: man 85%, woman 68% (orgasm gap 1.25:1)

Study Participant: "I'm all about just making her orgasm."

Interviewer: "The general her or like the specific her?"

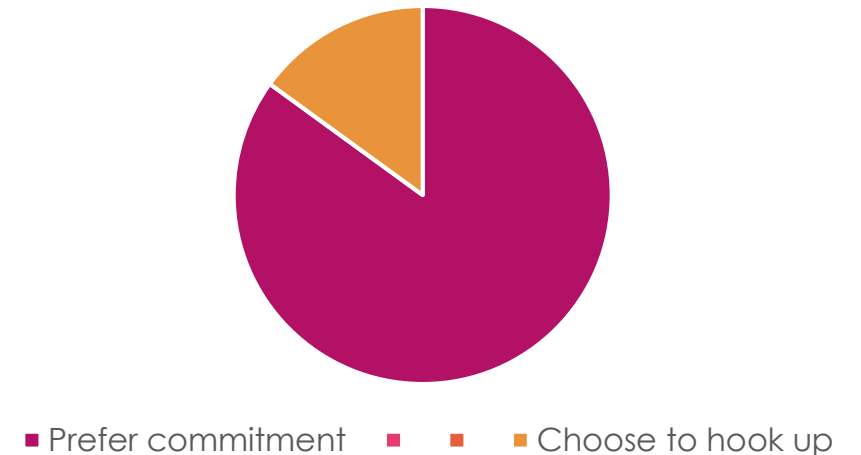
Participant: "Girlfriend her. In a hookup her, I don't give a shit."



Emotional Safety and Hooking Up

- ▶ 85% of college women would prefer not to hook up
 - ❖ Most women **want to reserve sex for an exclusive bonded relationship** characterized by mutual commitment and caring (for the majority, this means marriage)
- ▶ 15% willingly and regularly hook up (this group accounts for 50% of hookup encounters)

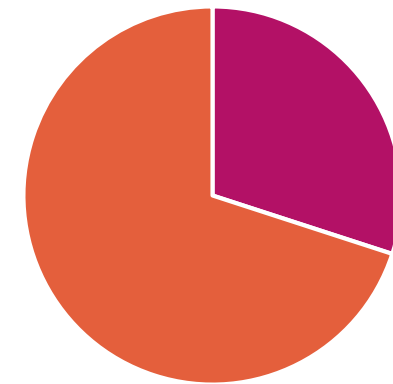
College Women



Emotional Safety and Hooking Up

- ▶ 30% opt out of hooking up
- ▶ 55% hook up against preference

College Women



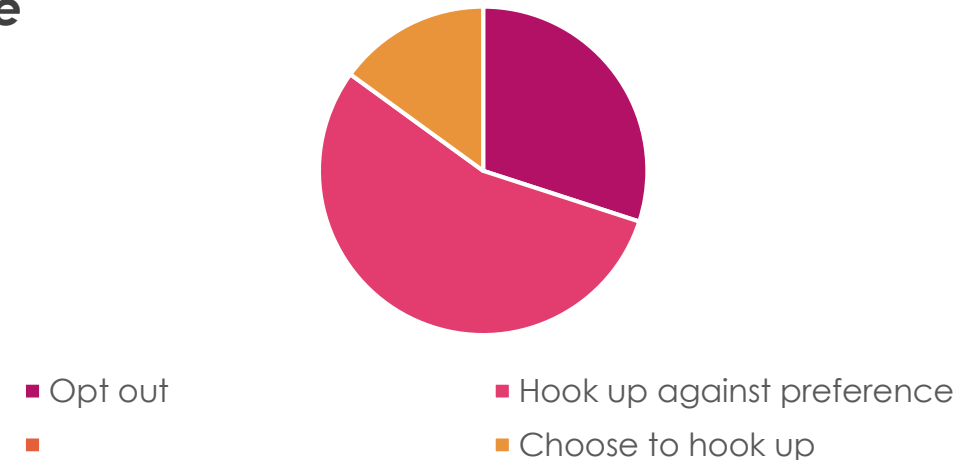
■ Opt out ■ Hook up (including against preference)

Emotional Safety and Hooking Up

So why do women participate in hookups?

- ▶ **55%** of college women hook up because of **social pressure**
 - ▶ Overestimate how often their peers are hooking up
 - ▶ Afraid of losing their chance at a career if they commit to a relationship in college
 - ▶ Social activities and dorm life center around sex
 - ▶ Pressured by men into sexual acts
 - ▶ Feel compared to dating apps, social media, and porn
 - ▶ Are told they should only sleep with the guys they don't like (to avoid "catching feelings")

College Women



Emotional Safety and Hooking Up

Catching Feelings

“Saying we can have sex without emotions is like saying we can have sex without bodies.”

-Lisa Wade, *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*



Safety and Female Sexual Response

- ▶ Armstrong et al. (2012): “relationship sex is better for women in terms of orgasm and sexual enjoyment”



Safety and Female Sexual Response

- ▶ More oxytocin for her (calm, connection, contentment, closeness, and caring)
- ▶ More vasopressin receptors for him (modulates testosterone, enables oxytocin) - stays in the brain if he's around her but **not** having sex



Safety and Female Sexual Response

- ▶ One in four college women reported being victimized in some way as a result of hookups (Online College Social Life Survey)
- ▶ 80% of campus sexual assaults occur during a hookup (Malone & Harris, *Battles of the Sexes*)
- ▶ 64% of freshman women who hook up do so under the influence of alcohol (Malone & Harris)
- ▶ Hooking up has a greater negative impact on college women's health, including mental health, than nutrition and exercise (Malone & Harris)



Safety and Female Sexual Response

- ▶ “Hookup culture...demands carelessness, rewards callousness, and punishes kindness. In this scenario, both men and women have the opportunity to have sex but neither is entirely free to love.”

-Lisa Wade, *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*



Community and Online Resources

- ❖ Family Crisis Center of the Big Bend (Alpine, Presidio, Terlingua) - fccbb.org
- ❖ Singing Rose Tea & Soul Care (Presidio & virtual) - singingrose.me
- ❖ Anthus Women's Health Collaborative (Midland) - anthusmidland.com
- ❖ Natural Womanhood - naturalwomanhood.org
- ❖ Love & Fidelity Network - loveandfidelity.org
- ❖ Sex IQ and Empowering Smarter Sexuality - sexiq.org

