Does Hookup Culture Silence Women?

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Does Hookup Culture Silence Women?

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An Undergraduate Senior Thesis Submitted to the Department of Philosophy

University of New Hampshire

Advised by Professor Laure Barillas

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Introduction

“Hookup culture” permeates itself into all aspects of college life— from fraternities and sororities, dormitory life, going to college bars, and in most (if not all) interpersonal relationships. It is a topic that surrounds college campuses across the United States, seeping into popular music, social media applications, television shows, websites, and more. Hookup culture encompasses gendered roles, scripted normative behavior, and complicated sexual ethics which college-aged students are less than well-equipped to manage. Young adults simply cannot escape the social pressures of engaging in the kind of casual sex promoted by hookup culture.

Initially, I approached this thesis with the belief that the most effective way to conceptualize and examine hookup culture was through the empowering/oppressive dialectic. In my research, I found that framing the topic of hookup culture as empowering or oppressive limits our understanding of the problem by adopting a top-down perspective. As I worked through this idea, I discovered that reframing the problem became more successful in maintaining both a descriptive and normative commitment to the philosophical issues at stake. Through this analysis, I came upon Rae Langton’s paper, “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts,” which became pivotal in reframing this philosophical question. Instead of examining empowerment and oppression, I focused my theoretical lens on the act of silencing. The question of whether hookup culture could silence thus cultivated a more complex conversation surrounding pornography, media, and social scripts.

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In this paper I seek to demonstrate the ways in which hookup culture has the power to oppress young women by means of silencing, shaming, and rendering women powerless to contemporary standards of sexual behavior on college campuses. I will begin by briefly laying out a historical context of feminist literature in terms of sexual culture in the United States. I will discuss the anti-porn, sex positive feminist movements, and examine some of the events which have led to the culture we see today. By laying out a theoretical landscape of antagonistic views of pornography, I will discuss the parallels between porn and hookup culture, and further argue that both are harmful to sex-positive movements. Then, I will discuss the terminology, which is commonly used among young adults surrounding hookup culture and incorporate modern examples in popular media which demonstrate this language and behavior. I will then introduce examples of hookup culture through a linguistic lens of speech acts and examine how hookup culture has the ability to silence women through illocutionary speech. Then, I will move on to sexual ethics and consent, looking broadly at sexual assault statistics on college campuses and morally complicated sex. Through this, I will propose that we reexamine the value of the anti-porn movement through the lens of hookup culture in today’s world, and work to socially change the ways in which young people view sex and autonomy.
I.

Disambiguation

Firstly, it would be useful to give a descriptive account of the terms I utilize in this paper. The term “oppression” is a subject I use in a similar context as feminist philosopher, Marilyn Frye. Frye’s essay, “Oppression,” was one of the most influential papers I read while studying hookup culture. Her views on oppression are powerful, sometimes radical theories that made me think about my identity as a woman in ways I had not before. Drawing from her work, Frye states, “One of the most characteristic and ubiquitous features of the world as experienced by oppressed people is the double bind-situations in which options are reduced to a very few, and all of them expose one to penalty, censure, or deprivation.” Frye demonstrates her theory of oppression by explaining an analogy of a birdcage. She explains that by looking at each individual wire, one could not see that there is oppression, but instead, by stepping back, looking at the cage as a whole, it is “obvious” that there is complete restraint surrounding the bird. Complete oppression. Frye explains that without the macro understanding that “one is looking at a cage and that there are people there who are caged,” it can be extraordinarily difficult to see if one is being oppressed.

I also reference in this paper the existence of sexism, misogyny, and a patriarchal social structure. By these terms, I am referring to a social system built for men and by men. Women, on

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Frye, 43
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the other hand, find themselves in positions of society which regard them differently. Some women might argue that they have not experienced any level of sexism or misogyny. Even so, there are levels to societal power that some may not see in their positions. This functions with Frye’s birdcage analogy in mind. Some may not see their oppression from a micro-level. In this paper, I argue that hookup culture contains in it the ability to silence women. Further, I examine the different social scripts which have grown out of a new generation of technology and communication on social media and texting apps. These scripts tell us how to behave, and often place women in oppressed positions—this is a double bind.

The term, “objectification,” is a basic feature of the embodied experience of women. I use this term to discuss how we are more comfortable than ever stripping women of their sexual autonomy and viewing them as objects. Young people objectify themselves and others as a means of sexual transactions, reducing individuals of their whole person to something of an object. I find that hookup culture functions as a means to objectify, among other things, and I use the term often in reference to this concept.

Many analyses of hookup culture tend to either moralize casual sexual relations or excessively praise sexual liberation, both of which I have found to be inadequate. In this paper, I aim not to moralize hookup culture but rather to examine it within the context of gender inequality, a facet often overlooked or obscured. To do so, I am relying on the tools of philosophy of language as well as feminist philosophy, wondering if hookup culture, as a social norm, could be described as a pernicious script, one which I find we must radically change.
Chapter 1

The Relevance of Hookup Culture

Over the past three years, I have spent my time taking classes with the University of New Hampshire Department of Philosophy. I had not been interested in feminist literature until writing a paper discussing feminism and powerlessness in my senior seminar lecture. I became fascinated with what others had to say about gender, power, and sex in second and third wave feminist literature. Before my journey with this thesis, I did not have a moralistic view of hookup culture, instead my views surrounding the topic were mostly positive. The messaging which I had received from popular culture, like social media, television shows, and the social world around me seemed to encourage this behavior, embracing it as sexual liberation and the freedom for women to do what they want, when they please. Upon authoring the paper surrounding the topic of “powerlessness,” I found myself reconsidering the ways in which I had viewed hookup culture in the past. It was normalized behavior to me throughout high school and college, commonly talked about, joked about, and rationalized through conversations with friends. I suddenly felt quite different about this culture. Instead of positive, liberating, and powerful, it became something that actually obstructed the ability to experience sexual liberation and empowerment. Instead, hookup culture seemed to silence women, generating narratives that told women what to think and do, rather than allowing for freedom of expression or exploration.

Within this paper, I am discussing heterosexuality as a matrix for oppression. Hookup culture is profoundly rooted in a heteronormative culture in the male gaze. We see these social norms reveal themselves in Greek life and can examine the oppressive nature of these norms through the existence of pornography. Queer casual sex looks different from the mainstream of
hookup culture, as the norms of heterosexual hookup culture, though pervasive through all social
dynamics, are at their strongest in heteronormative hook ups.

Hookup culture is a prominent component of fraternity culture. Gone are the days of
joining a fraternity as a simple function of elitist networking and courtship practices. Now,
fraternities operate as the physical grounds of hookup culture. Parties on Friday and Saturday
nights provide fraternity brothers with their selection of women to dance with and choose from.
Every step of this process contains the ability to objectify women. Without taking a patronizing
tone, it is arguable that discussing fraternity culture on college campuses sheds light on the topic
of a false consciousness which women may have while participating in fraternity culture. Though
it can feel liberating to make the choice to attend parties and be chosen as “one of the girls"
whom all brothers know and love, it is also a social expectation to want these things: the social
acceptance, the popularity, and the gratification of hooking up with a “frat” brother whom many
young women may also want. The valuing of this script as the ideal social norm for college-aged
young women is, in itself, oppressive. The idea that women must gain respect and value through
acceptance of fraternities on campus is in no way empowering. One could argue that as a culture,
we have started to move away from the acceptance of fraternity culture- no longer “cool,” but
rather, distasteful, sexist, and old-fashioned men’s clubs. 5 Certainly, there have been calls to
action surrounding the misogynist nature of Greek life on campuses nationwide. As of now,
though, fraternities and sororities remain a popular factor in choosing an undergraduate school to
attend and are still a considerable addition to a resume for networking.

As my concern for this topic grew, I chose to aim this paper in the direction of the term, “silencing,” as it allows for a more subtle understanding of casual sex on college campuses. Upon my reading of Langton’s paper, “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts,” it became necessary to carry over most of the framework she built to understand the specific harm of pornography. Functioning as a theoretical tuning point, I argue that the harms of pornography operate in a similar fashion as hookup culture, utilizing spoken and sometimes unspoken acts to silence and oppress women when it comes to sexual autonomy and liberation. I will utilize her work throughout this paper, and it will serve as an overarching framework to support my argument that hookup culture has the capacity to silence and legitimize the subordination of women in college. When we view hookup culture as silencing to women, this philosophical framing allows us to have a more delicate conversation surrounding the impacts hookup culture has on women (and men) in society, looking through a non-judgmental but concerned lens, considering the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses, as well as the lack of consideration hookup culture has for women’s sexual pleasure or enjoyment. I further this conversation by addressing the ways in which pornography has influenced hookup culture on college campuses, drawing theoretical ideas from Langton’s work on porn’s ability to silence.

I.

Talking to My Students About Porn

In my earlier work on this paper, I was asked to teach a class at the University of New Hampshire about what I had learned so far about hookup culture. The class, which was called “Philosophy and Feminism” was populated by mostly freshman and sophomore women. In my preparation for this lecture, I made some preliminary assumptions based on interactions I had
with other women around my age. Firstly, I assumed that the students would take issue with my overarching theme which posits that hookup culture is not empowering. I assumed they would debate with me, arguing that mainstream artists like Sabrina Carpenter, and Taylor Swift are feminist artists who were in fact empowered, and that songs like Carpenter’s “Feather” encourage other women to feel the same way- liberated, strong, free of the patriarchal standard’s we women have historically been held to.

I was shocked to find not one woman in class disagreed with me. In fact, they all shared stories of the expectations placed on them to hook up casually, and the scrutiny they are held to by men and women when they did not conform to the social norm. When I asked if they thought Sabrina Carpenter’s song, “Feather,” represented a woman who is empowered, one student said, “If she was empowered, she wouldn’t have to write a song about a man in this way.” I was stunned. While perhaps these were students who had already awoken to the topics I am talking about, as they were actively taking a class in feminism, it was surprising to me that they each had stories of circumstances in which they felt the external pressure of hookup culture and the judgment of others when they did not behave appropriately. It seemed, as I explored further the ideas I had previously conceived, that we are at a crossroads of debate in society- is this culture, which embraces and celebrates non-committed sex, something that harms women’s autonomy as sexual citizens?

My experience in this class was mirrored through Amia Srinivasan’s paper, “Talking to My Students About Porn,” in which her expectation was that her students would be mostly opposed to anti-porn feminism upon presenting the theory to her class. Srinivasan states, “Like the

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anti-porn feminists of forty years ago, they had a heightened sense of porn's power, a strong conviction that porn did things in the world.”\textsuperscript{7} Srinivasa’s work functions as a critical analysis of the way young people are viewing porn culture, and through her work, I conclude that pornography and hookup culture are tied closely together and have changed the way young people expect and engage in sex. The social script we are taught about sex through pornography certainly applies to hookup culture. We are taught through porn that sex is often unemotional, rough, and nonconsensual. Often, hookup culture mimics these “lessons” we learn from pornography, and we see the evidence of this demonstrated in statistics regarding sexual violence. We cannot look away from an obvious flaw in this system. Young adults are mimicking what they see.

II.

Pornography and Hookup Culture

I must emphasize that today’s college-aged students can generally be categorized as Generation Z, meaning they were born at a time when the online world was growing and evolving into the twenty-first century. As Amia Srinivasan states in her paper, “My students belonged to the first generation truly to be raised on internet pornography.”\textsuperscript{8} What we must acknowledge through Srinivasan’s observation that the modern landscape of sex has changed immensely- and I second this through my personal lens of hookup culture. Young people are having sex later on in life, and yet their first sexual experiences are likely online. It is my belief that pornography does not just oppress women, but instead oppresses both men and women. As

\textsuperscript{7} Srinivasan, 40
\textsuperscript{8} Srinivasan, 41
Generation Z has moved up in the world, we have seen a transformation of sexual behavior and understandings which have not been written about or studied enough yet. Young men who are viewing porn, which is mostly rough and steeped in rape culture, categorized into every fantasy you could think of, gain a perception, subconsciously or not. Though others have argued against porn’s ability to affect individuals, hookup culture makes it clear that it has. Young women who may or may not viewing porn, as Amia Srinivasan also argues, have their first sexual experiences based on the interpretation of the screen.9

The internet’s constant development has led to a surge in the availability of pornographic content in recent years. While this raises questions about accessibility and freedom of expression, it is crucial to consider the ethical implications of such widespread distribution, especially related to hookup culture. OnlyFans is an online platform mostly used for individuals to post and promote their pornographic work.10 Launched in 2016, OnlyFans gained notoriety during the COVID-19 lockdown, as sex workers moved to a digital world to produce content which they could monetize.11 This application has allowed the public to gain intimate access to various celebrities who promote their materials. During the 1990s and early 2000s, porn stars were not typically famous for any work in Hollywood besides their pornography, and even then, the conversations were typically “hush-hush” surrounding their notoriety. Nowadays, OnlyFans has normalized this work, publicizing it as empowering and lucrative. Podcasts like “Cancelled

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9 I will note this does not, of course, apply to every young adult. Of course there are exceptions. As I am writing from the perspective of a college-aged student, it is the normative world I am observing and describing.


with Tana Mongeau\textsuperscript{12}” which discuss topics surrounding OnlyFans, and internet influencers’ like “Taraswrld”\textsuperscript{13} promoting their explicit content on Instagram and X, OnlyFans is not by any means taboo. From a feminist perspective, women who monetize their work on OnlyFans self-objectify every day. When individuals subscribe to channels, they can purchase various subscription packages, from basic subscriptions to personalized interactions, sexual experiences become a parasocial relationship with celebrities that will actually interact with their viewers. The accessibility of porn is concerning to say the least. When men see the sexuality of women through a transactional lens, women lose their sexual autonomy. If this was not already happening before pornography was available at the tap of a finger, now, it is becoming a norm of social culture among young men. This, it seems, is what anti-porn feminists were worried about. When sexual fantasies are accessible in this way, does it not oppress, silence, and harm women?

With this, it is important to note that data shows a connection between statistics of sexual assault and their relationship to college campuses. It is my intention with this project to further argue that hookup culture is silencing to women by means of sexual assault as well. There is an inability to reckon with the numbers of sexual assault on campuses without asking ourselves if sexual assault is simply built into what hookup culture is by means of pornographic materials being more accessible than ever before. Pornography hosts a sexual script flooded with degrading and violent themes surrounding women. It seems fair to assume that pornography and


\textsuperscript{13} (@barstoolsports), “Taraswrld makes HOW MUCH on OF?! @planbriuncut” Tik Tok, March 3, 2023. https://www.tiktok.com/@barstoolsports/video/7206398442120269102?_t=8m07pQ2UrsJ&&_r=1
sexual violence on college campuses are tied closely together, as young adults follow the sexual script which has been taught to them.

III.

Sexual Violence and Hookup Culture

Before proceeding further with this project, I must delve much deeper into addressing the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses. While hookup culture has and currently does pose as a form of sexual autonomy on college campuses, there is a concerning pervasiveness of on-campus sexual violence. In terms of statistics, RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) reports that “13% of all students experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation (among all graduate and undergraduate students).”\(^\text{14}\) and “Among undergraduate students, 26.4% of females and 6.8% of males experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence, or incapacitation.”\(^\text{15}\) This data does not coincide with the argument that hookup culture is empowering in a feminist, sex-positive context. In a culture that is aimed at encouraging sexual liberation and autonomy over sexual behavior, it seems counterintuitive that college-age adults are also “at high risk for sexual violence.”\(^\text{16}\) These statistics show us that hookup culture might not be what it purports itself as. There is something else at play here that is not sex-positive or liberating, but instead it is highly concerning.\(^\text{17}\) The


\(^\text{15}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{16}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{17}\) Widely discussed among academic journals in the United States is the topic of decreased sexual activity in younger generations. It is useful to note that many of them were primarily conducted on “Millennials” (a generation born in the 1980s and 1990s), and fewer on “Generation Z” (born between 1996 and 2010.) Studies which were conducted on Millennials found that sexual behavior had decreased significantly compared to that of the generation prior (Generation X). Furthermore, studies which focused their scope on Generation Z were conducted when much of the population was high school aged, rather than college
ramifications of sexual violence and hookup culture is one of the strongest contenders against sex-positive conversations surrounding feminist philosophy.

It is not that sex-positive conversations should not be happening by any means. Of course, sex-positive movements across the world have greatly benefited our population in varying ways- including policies and discourse surrounding women’s’ reproductive rights, the rights of queer communities, and making healthcare more accessible to women who might not have been treated otherwise. At the University of New Hampshire, the existence of SHARPP (Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Programs) came into existence after a gang rape on campus in the 1980s. Discourse surrounding the ways UNH dealt with the assault brought wide criticism and new programming to support all students on campus with education surrounding sexual violence and provided victims a supportive and safe way of getting help.

Starting freshman year, students are provided with lessons from SHARPP about safe sex, access to free contraception, and resources for sexual violence or harassment on campus. Sex-positive theory would likely endorse this approach. Encouraging students to embrace and explore their sexuality in a safe space through open, non-judgmental conversations is certainly a way to bring awareness and understanding to young men and women about sex. However, once again, those statistics are jarring, and there is clearly a need for rape prevention on college campuses across the country to this day- but why? It seems justified to reconsider our approach to sex-aged, though these too found that the population was having less sex than generations prior. Accompanying this statistic is the COVID-19 pandemic which swept across the world in 2020, likely contributing to a decrease in sexual activity as many young people were not socially interacting (in person) with others as much during this time. It seems fair to make the claim that young people nowadays are having sex less than previous generations before- a symptom of the rigid and complex economic and social climates of today’s world.

positive movements, which seems in any case more reactive than proactive to rape culture. Through this, I believe we must reflect on historical accounts of anti-porn feminism, and apply some of their concepts to a new, online era.

IV.

Sexual Liberation: A Historical Backdrop

Though I will further discuss empowerment and domination theories in a philosophical context, it seems pertinent to lay out a background surrounding the sexual politics in feminism over the past fifty years. Furthermore, I will be utilizing varying theories in feminism to construct my own argument for a pathway forward to a more contemporary framing of what sex looks like to young people now. This paper therefore operates as a normative and descriptive, non-ideal view of hookup culture. I intend to both provide an account of what sex is like for young – heterosexual - college students and propose that as a philosophical community, we ought to reexamine hookup culture and its implications on college-aged adults and encourage change on college campuses.

In Western culture, the “sexual revolution” is known to have started in the 1960s. Though the first wave of feminism started in 1848, this focused more on women’s equality in society, including the right to vote. The second wave of feminism began in the sixties, surrounding the hippie movement during the Vietnam war. As Charlotte Kroløkke and Anne Scott Sorensen write in their book “Gender Communication Theories & Analyses: From Silence to Performance”, “At the core of this new movement was another significant book, Sexual Politics, by Kate Millett (1969), in which she insisted on women’s right to their own bodies and a sexuality of their
“own”—a sexuality that is disconnected from the obligations of marriage and motherhood.”¹⁹

Varying theorists and feminist scholars began to write and argue for sexual liberation. This wave centered around sex-positive and anti-pornography arguments. The theoretical arguments I am using are very much grounded in the second wave of feminism through the use of Catharine MacKinnon’s work and her involvement in the anti-porn movement. The third wave of feminism, engaged in advocating for more opportunities for women and empowerment, including sexual empowerment revolving around the ontology of gender (Butler) and the collision of feminist theory with queer theory.

Feminist philosophers have long since debated sexual ethics. Anti-porn feminists such as Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin²⁰, argue that porn serves as the training ground for sexual violence against women. Porn is the theory; rape is the practice. Dworkin, in her book *Intercourse*, states, “Any violation of a woman’s body can become sex for men; this is the essential truth of pornography.”²¹ In response to this argument, sex-positive feminists like Drucilla Cornell, Judith Butler, and Anne Eaton emerged, arguing that sex-negative perspectives reduce women to a lack of ownership over their own bodies and victimizes them no matter the kind of sex they had. Thus, began what is referred to as the “Feminist Sex Wars.”

Looking at modern culture, the contemporary sex-positive movement tends to claim victory over the wars. At their early onset, most anti-porn activists argued against porn culture as it enveloped society; dirty magazines, XXX stores and theaters, and television channels which featured

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nudity. Porn found itself in the public eye more frequently, not just tucked away under a bed. Nowadays, porn has become more elusive to the public eye, but it is not lost by any means. There has been an emergence of content-creating apps like “Only Fans”, which has been popularized through social media and is “used primarily by sex workers who produce pornography…”.²² Other apps are utilized for their lack of policy surrounding porn content like Twitter, now “X”, which does not prohibit nudity or pornographic material on their site and pornographic platforms, such as YouPorn.²³ This emergence of technology in the pornographic industry has made porn, in any form, readily available at the tap of a finger. Even if one is not looking for it, it is there. Although the wars may be over, porn and hookup culture are heavily prominent, and to the average young adult, they are normal.

My hope with this paper is to propose the theory that hookup culture does not partake in sexual liberation instead it poses as a form of liberation for men and women but is something else entirely. I aim to reveal that sexual liberation in the context of oppression has been an illusion and hope to contribute to what sexual liberation would look like for women in a non-oppressive context. It is not to embrace the anti-porn feminist philosophy entirely, as I do identify with some of the narrative which sex-positive feminists endorse, but rather, to examine further how hookup culture and pornography have taught young adults a sexual script, one that narrates subordination and domination, and teaches social normativity through its narration. With this, perhaps we can begin a new conversation surrounding the risks to young women on campus.


that hookup culture poses, and how we must reconsider the ways we embrace and celebrate casual sex in society and on campus.

Chapter 2

Language and Linguistics in Hookup Culture

Language, which has become one of the central themes I have discovered throughout my research, is something young adults have utilized and changed over time to discuss the complex terrain of hookup culture. As Generation Z has grown up with technology, the phrases and communicative spaces have changed with the technology. Phrases and their meanings have adapted, and communication has widely affected hookup culture on college campuses. Because the way we communicate changed, so have the ways we talk about sex. Many words have morphed into a double entendre, been shortened, or have inferred meanings that one must be aware of to know which inferences to make. Along with language and terminology comes silencing. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Langton’s “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts” is a philosophical work which I draw from heavily within this paper. Langton’s linguistic approach to pornography is entirely applicable to hookup culture in its ability to silence and subjugate women and sex.

I.

Speech Acts

In Cambridge professor Rae Langton’s 1993 paper, “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts”, she examines speech as an action in reference to pornography. Her work contributes to a larger academic debate about the relationship between language, power, and oppression. While
focusing on the speech effects of pornography in its subordination of women, her analysis of speech and its effects can be applied to hookup culture as its own entity. As I mentioned before, my work centers around Langton’s account, and it has become increasingly clear to me that we must examine the speech of hookup culture as an action through the theoretical lens of Langton. I will use her work to demonstrate how speech applied to pornography draws parallels between hookup culture as well.

Langton begins her discussion through philosophical claims, not legal claims (unlike Dworkin and MacKinnon). She argues for two central claims throughout her paper. Firstly, that porn subordinates’ women, and secondly, that porn silences women. Before Langton delves into pornography as speech, she lays out three terms which can be used to define speech as an action: locutionary acts, perlocutionary acts, and illocutionary acts. In past rulings and arguments surrounding pornography, judges and philosophers alike have reasoned to conclude that pornography itself can indeed subordinate women. A popular discussion within debates surrounding the First Amendment, porn often centers itself in censorship controversies. Though many feminists have advocated for the censorship of porn, the infiltration of pornographic materials exists in almost every form of media across the country. Similarly, hookup culture, which finds itself as a central topic in feminist debates continues to exist in forms of media nearly everywhere we look.

If we are to understand porn in this way, that porn subordinates and silences, we must also understand that this is because pornography functions as a speech act. Looking at performative speech, we come to understand that speech, whether it be in art, movies,

24 Langton, 294
magazines, or short videos, has the ability to do something—empower, enlighten, convince, subordinate, the list goes on. Langton’s argument centers around illocutionary speech acts, as she argues that some forms of speech related to subordination and oppression, have inherent illocutionary force beyond simply conveying information. As she analyzes pornography in this context, she claims it functions as a subordinating illocutionary act, and lays out a framework of three ways this happens.\textsuperscript{25} She introduces locutionary acts, which address the utterance of a sentence with a particular meaning as it would be traditionally conceived. For example, if a prominent environmental activist says, “Switch to hybrid cars to save the Earth!” and others act from this speech, we can deem it as a locutionary act. She then introduces perlocutionary and illocutionary acts, perlocutionary being speech which intends to do something, like saying “Look out!” when a tree is falling, and no one can hear you.\textsuperscript{26} You have attempted to tell people to get to safety with your words. Illocutionary speech acts are forms of speech which are prevented from having the impact they intend, like yelling “Look out!” when a tree is falling, but people around you think you are making a joke.

The second part of Langton’s paper argues that pornography silences speech. Langton uses multiple examples to demonstrate illocutionary speech acts that can be prohibited from succeeding in their intentioned action. I will not explain these examples, as Langton does a substantial job proving the claim that illocutionary acts can be silenced. Instead, I use this claim to demonstrate the relationship between Langton’s theory of pornography’s ability to silence speech and hookup culture’s ability as well. Applying this to porn, Langton claims that speech

\textsuperscript{25} Langton, 302

\textsuperscript{26} Langton, 316
“can be silenced” and that “speech can silence.” The word “No.” is a speech act of illocutionary action. If a woman says “No.” to sex, she intends to stop it, she attempts to refuse the interaction. If she is ignored, and thus raped, the refusal, Langton argues, is “unspeakable.” The utterance itself had no effect on the scenario and did not succeed at its intended outcome. They have no power, and the rape would occur regardless of whether “no” was stated.

Pornography, Langton explains, is able to “rank women as sex objects,” establishing a power imbalance between men and women, often portraying men in dominant positions and women as passive objects. Langton states, “Pornography is, first, verdictive speech that ranks women as sex objects, and second, exertive speech that legitimizes sexual violence.” The legitimation of this exertive speech authorizes certain attitudes and behaviors towards women, potentially inciting violence, and discrimination. In American culture, young boys are inundated with pornographic content on social media and more. For many, their first impressions of sex are based on pornography. When we set a standard of social interactions, we create an expectation among young adults of what a sexual experience should be like, moreover, what it will be like, pushback or not. Not only does this culture teach young men how to behave, but it also teaches young women what they are obligated to do.

The result of this is a form of deprivation, which silences women by stripping them of agency and controlling the narrative of sexuality. As porn influences sexual behavior, which regularly glamorizes abusive, painful, and rough sex, it normalizes it, and results in an

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27 Langton, 329
28 Langton, 319
29 Langton, 307
30 Langton, 307-308
expectation of performance. If women do not conform, they risk having all agency stripped from them in the form of assault.

In her New York Times editorial New Yorker short story, “Cat Person,” Kristen Roupenian captures the essence of intimacy and disgust with a sexual partner and the self in one fell swoop.31 I will use her story as an example of the social dynamics and internal dialogue of hookup culture but will lay out Roupenian’s storyline in order to demonstrate the themes at hand. “Cat Person” details a growing dialogue between Margot, a junior in college, about Robert, a thirty-year-old man in whom she is interested. It seems, in fact, that they do not talk much.

Margot frequently states how little she knows this older man. However, she creates who he is—this simple, sorry, slightly innocent, slightly needy, sensitive older man. She feels a keen sense of empathy for him—a theme which coincides with the term “himpathy,” which Kate Manne coins as “the inappropriate or outsize sympathy extended to male perpetrators of misogyny and sexual violence over their female victims, who are often erased in the process. As Manne states, "'Himpathy means worrying about his bright future, not her suffering.’"

Margot feels badly for Robert, and thus leads herself to believe she must make him feel better, until drunkenly throwing herself at him, thinking of what it might be like to have sex with him. She objectifies herself by imagining how Robert must view her, in a young, sexual way, and it quells some of her worry about the sexual interaction. We begin to see the regret stir in Margot as the sexual encounter ensues at Robert’s home. She is not attracted to him, she finds him almost grotesque, and unappealing. Though she does not want to move forward with the encounter, she calculates the risk of telling him “No,” and she does not want to hurt his feelings,

especially given how little she knows about him. She chooses to stay silent, a choice which ensures she will not be raped.

Margot chooses to conform to Robert's sexualization or rather, oversexualization of their interaction in order to maintain her agency in the moment. Kristen Roupenian writes, “…the thought of what it would take to stop what she had set in motion was overwhelming; it would require an amount of tact and gentleness that she felt was impossible to summon.” 32 While logically, we understand this is not assault, we also know there is something deeply wrong with her decision to stay silent out of fear of seeming like “a brat” as Margot fears.33

Langton’s ideas surrounding speech which silences and speech which is unspeakable can be applied to my understanding of hookup culture. In my examination of “Cat Person,” it seems as if Margot has been silenced, but how? What illocutionary speech acts have resulted in maintaining silence in order to keep herself safe? As her story comes to a close, we read that Robert, out of frustration that Margot has ignored him, calls her a ‘whore.”34 Is this the sort of behavior that hookup culture encourages? Langton’s work posits that pornography perpetuates harmful social dynamics that our culture learns and adapts as norms. If hookup culture operates similarly, we can venture to suppose that Margot’s experience was a result of the culture which surrounds us, emphasizing that we can engage in relationships that are short term, noncommittal, and void, and encouraging us to find pleasure and desire for such interactions. As we navigate this unfamiliar territory which surrounds young adults daily, we come to understand the blatant disregard for women’s sexual experiences in the world of hookup culture.

32 Kristen Roupenian, “‘Cat Person,’”
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
Pornography and hookup culture are both forms of speech on campus, whether we are comfortable to admit it or not. As mentioned in the introduction, porn is accessible in many more ways than traditional porn sites and dirty magazines— it can be found everywhere if a student has a phone. Hookup culture is also accessible in many more ways than meeting someone at a bar and having a “one-night stand,” though this does happen. Now, students are able to download an app and swipe until they find an individual attractive or interesting enough that they would be interested in. One could ask, do all online interactions result in a hookup? Of course, not all of these interactions result in sex, but I would argue on college campuses, the fastest way to find someone to have sex through is through swiping right on Tinder, asking for someone’s Snapchat, and “talking” until asked to “come thru.” In every way, this is illocutionary speech according to Langton. The words, the images, and the behavior all have the ability to do something.

In terms of Langton’s arguments, I believe both lines of her reasoning are true for hookup culture as well. Firstly, I believe hookup culture subordinates women. In her paper, “Talking to My Students About Porn,” Amia Srinivasan describes a pornographic script which has taught our young people how to have sex—the positions, the expected behavior, and the dynamics are all taught through learned behavior. I believe hookup culture does the same. Hookup culture is a college-specific script crafted by pornography. We learn a script from society, in whatever medium it comes in, as generations before us have done as well. Similarly to porn, college-aged men and women have learned the language, the behavior, and the interpersonal dynamics to live up to an expectation. One may argue that this argument, then, would also place men in a similar position of subordination. Perhaps there is a social expectation placed on both men and women to perform certain ways. However, I argue that men are not subordinated in a way that women are.
Pornography, laden with narratives and imaging that silence women and reduce them to mere objects of sexual fantasy, mirrors broader societal attitudes towards women. Porn reinforces the objectification of women, teaching young men and women to view themselves and others through a lens of commodification. The normalizing of objectification extends beyond explicit content, permeating mainstream media, where sexual scripts and idealized interactions perpetuate self-objectification among both men and women. The insidious cycle perpetuated by media consumption like television, magazines, and pornography itself, further entrenches the silencing of women, thus reinforcing the transactional dynamics between men and women as objects for sex rather than for relationships or intimacy.

As the sexual script has changed for young people, so have their ways of communicating about sex. Pornography commodified sex for young people, and thus their language followed. This language is the literal script behind hookup culture and shows us how media and the porn industry has changed the way young people interact about sexual intimacy, if you can even call it that, at a basic level.

II.

Terminology and Social Scripts

Communication styles of young people have evolved over the course of technological advancements, proving to be an elusive aspect that is not often discussed regarding hookups. Ironically, it is also one of the most important aspects to study. Young adults have always communicated in new ways compared to generations before them, as media and trends shift, so does the language of young people. However, hookup culture has largely influenced the way young people communicate about sex, and at a more rudimentary level of how young people
interact. This change of language has altered the terminological and communicative landscape for this generation.

New and old terms can be found with various meanings, and though I will draw from outside sources, I also have integrated my understandings and terms which I have used or learned from my own experience within this culture. In Peggy Orenstein’s book, “Girls & Sex: Navigating the Complicated New Landscape” she discusses the varying vocabulary used among “boys and girls” to talk about sex. The terms which she identifies in her research are mostly accurate as far as my personal and extended knowledge goes, though I will define them in slightly different ways. A common term used in the context of hookup culture includes “talking” which explains the dynamic between two people who are interested in each other, who text or talk (in person) in a flirtatious manner. In using this term, it is undetermined if the goal between the two parties is to be in a relationship or if the goal is for a casual sexual interaction and nothing more- this is dependent upon each individual scenario. “Hooking up” poses as a vague term, encompassing a wide variety of different interactions, including sexual intercourse, oral sex, and kissing, among other things. A more playful combination of terms is “catching feelings” which refers to the slightly dreaded, yet frequently unavoidable experience of feeling


36 It might also be worth noting my use of gendered terminology in this project. Peggy Orenstein uses the terms “girls” and “boys” in her research, infrequently referring to the girls she studied as “young women.” It seems to me that the term “girls” risks infantilizing an age group that is generally past the age of being a minor. It would seem more appropriate to address the genders I am discussing as young men and young women, or simply men and women. It is worth noting that infantilized gendered terms could in fact be a tactic in reference to how we treat young women culturally. While the topic of gendered terminology is a large component to sexual interactions in feminist literature, I will not be discussing it at length in this paper. Moving forward, I will be using the terms “young women” and “young men” to discuss hookup culture in colleges, as I believe this both accepts the adolescence of the average undergraduate college student and holds them accountable for their personal behavior as adults would be and as the law would.
more than just platonic emotions for an individual one is hooking up with. We could consider this to be falling in love, but oftentimes the relationship does not go further than a casual sexual interaction. Further, the abbreviation “FWB”, which stands for “friends with benefits”, is a common phrase used to describe hooking up with no intention of being more than friends, this is purely a sexual relationship and nothing more. Often, this phrase is used as a “catch-all” way of describing hook ups. The more elusive term, “dating” refers to an actual relationship, made official by both parties who agree to be exclusive.

I will further add that young adults use many different phrases to insinuate an invite to hooking up. One version of this invite is “Come thru,” which, in a flirtatious or sexual context, means one is inviting the other over for sex. This form of communication may seem laissez-faire, and it is. Young adults put less effort into these communications, perhaps to seem as if they are unbothered either way, or maybe also because hookup culture has cheapened the value of sexual interactions. There is less effort in this form of communicating because there is a lack of care and respect for the request itself. It is important to emphasize that language has become a crucial component to hookup culture on college campuses, as it can work as a sort of code between young men and women to explain relational dynamics of varying degrees.

In “A Hookup of Her Own,” Allison B. Wolf defines hooking up as “anything from kissing to petting to sexual intercourse,” though she also argues it is both “spontaneous and unplanned”. Though I would agree that hookups can vary in their levels of physical intimacy, it would not seem that all hookups are spontaneous and unplanned. Due to the use of social media,

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37 The definitions of terms referenced here are both based on readings and personal anecdotes which I have added. Some of these terms were also brainstormed by classmates, who reminded me of phrases like “friends with benefits.” These terms are used as colloquialisms among young people, and thus definitions change over time as well.

many interactions that now lead to sex are rarely from meeting someone at a bar or club, having sex with them once and never again. Now, many hookups are in fact planned, though they may be spontaneous, it often involves “talking,” or flirting, and a more long-term, unemotional relationship in which two people are having sex. There are many terms to encompass the different efforts and intentions with hooking up. Much of the problem with the terms in hookup culture is how nuanced and unclear they can be- often leading individuals to be confused with the type of relationship they are in. The complex language which I have referenced in this section is confusing for a reason- young adults do not have the language or tools they need to navigate this world. I argue that the lack of clarity surrounding this language is oppressive in itself. The lack of effort, coherence, and explicit communications have the ability to silence as well.

Wolf discusses the ways in which young men, ages 18-26 seek to assert their masculinity through the act of hookups and argues that women should seek out their own sexual pleasure, by means of a new sexual revolution. Though I do not aim to argue for a similar outcome as Wolf, it does seem that our culture has heavily emphasized the importance of male satisfaction through a variety of media. We are led to ask ourselves why women have not been seeking their own pleasure this entire time… and why social movements surrounding empowering women have not been successful in challenging the norms surrounding female sexual autonomy. Accordingly, conversations surrounding dissatisfaction with hookup culture and fraternity culture are also incredibly prevalent on campuses as well.
Chapter 3

Sexual Ethics

In her essay titled, “The Fraternal Social Contract”, Carole Pateman asks, “The social contract is a modern patriarchal pact that establishes men’s sex right over women, and the civil individual has been constructed in opposition to women and all that our bodies symbolize, so how can we become full members of civil society or parties to the fraternal system?” The term “sex right” describes the entitlement a man feels about a woman’s body and presence. Pateman is widely known for her work in feminist literature regarding the “social contract,” developed by philosophers John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Pateman challenges the idea of a social contract by demonstrating “...the contradictions and paradoxes surrounding women and contract, and the relation between the sexes...shed new light on fundamental political problems of freedom and subordination.” In her book “The Sexual Contract,” Pateman works to demonstrate how social contracts actively function as oppressive instruments in society. She argues that the sexual contract functions in society as man’s domination over women, guaranteeing men’s patriarchal right to women's bodies, with freedom resting on the subordination of women. Pateman further argues that social justice cannot be achieved as long as contract theory functions in society. For women, hookup culture both subordinates and silences by means of the sexual contract.

There is a repressed sexual contract in hookup culture which operates in a not-so secretive way by any means. Consider again the existence of fraternities on college campuses across America. Normalized and celebrated, fraternities operate as exclusive, male-only clubs, which perpetuate and reinforce traditional gender roles. Fraternity culture hosts an environment
where women are objectified, and marginalized. For example, at The University of New Hampshire, I have firsthand witnessed fraternity brothers turning girls away at the door if they are not “hot” enough. Interestingly, a student in the class I lectured referenced an experience in which the girlfriends of fraternity brothers stood at the door of a party and made the decision as to whether or not other women were “hot” enough to enter the fraternity, which separately demonstrates the shame women can place on each other through objectification. Additionally, Pateman argues that the sexual contract normalizes sexual violence against women, as it is built upon the assumption of men's sexual access to women's bodies. Fraternity culture has often faced criticism for its previous and ongoing role in contributing to a campus environment where sexual violence and misconduct are normalized or downplayed.

The way we interpret our sexual interactions relies heavily on the varying mental states we are in. Viewing sexual ethics through this lens, we can start to see how our language surrounding these topics is widely underdeveloped in regular social interactions. Elise Woodard’s paper, “Bad Sex and Consent” discusses the gap between consent and our idea of “good sex.” Woodard asks us, “Does consent have to be affirmative or enthusiastic? Aren’t these subjective?” and moreover, “Does this risk the overcriminalization sex that is not criminal?” Consent certainly has its limits, but hookup culture seems to risk encouraging young people to frequently engage in varieties of bad sexual interactions and what Woodard points to as “gray rape.” Gray rape, originally defined by Laura Sessions Step, is “sex that falls somewhere between consent and denial.”

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40 Woodard, 4
In “Cat Person,” we could venture to define Margot’s experience as such. The sexual encounter is something she knows she does not desire, and instead she wants to get through it, and to move on. This sort of sexual experience often comes with the territory of hookups. Consent, in this case, evolved as the night went on, and although Margot did not express her feelings, we can see that although this sexual experience may have seemed consensual to Robert, it could also be viewed as an assault to Margot. This is epistemically unsafe sex, in which we avoid risk at all costs, and consent becomes irrelevant to the sexual interaction.

I.

Empowerment and Self-Objectification

Empowerment and self-objectification are two concepts at the core of feminist sexual ethics. In order to approach this discussion as robustly as possible, we must ask ourselves the following questions: 1. What does empowerment look like in hookup culture?, 2. How do women self-objectify in a world of media which is propagated by the sexualization of women?, and further, 3. How do we navigate the more complex terrain of hookup culture, drawing from feminist philosophies?

I will begin this section by laying out some of the key theories surrounding empowerment and domination feminism, utilizing Amy Allen’s essay, “Rethinking Power.” I seek to draw from Allen’s work in developing a scaffolding of feminist literature, building upon each example as I present my arguments. To start, I will address the fields of domination and empowerment feminist literature, as defined by Allen. Within the realm of empowerment theory, feminists are focused on women's empowerment, and the innate power women have to transform themselves, others, and the world around them.
Though this concept seems to place women in oppressed roles as homemaker and child bearer, empowerment feminism encourages women to value their “innate” strengths. Domination theorists work “in opposition to the conventional view of the nature of gender,” as they focus their work on male domination and emphasize the ways in which women are victimized. Allen explains that feminists who agree with domination theory argue “...women are powerless, and men are powerful as such, through processes that are coincident with, or that may even precede, the very creation of the terms “man” and “woman.” Domination theory draws from the work of prominent feminist philosophers such as Marilyn Frye, Catharine MacKinnon, and Andrea Dworkin, among others.

Though both domination and empowerment theories encompass a wide variety of feminist viewpoints, the discourse surrounding both are complex and delve heavily into the topic of power. Allen’s work utilizes the concept of “power” and its applicability to the two approaches. “Power-over” is applied to domination in the sense that one or more individuals have the ability to restrict and disadvantage the choices of another. “Power-to” she states, is “the ability of an individual actor to attain an end of series of ends.” Allen weaves together a picture of the divisiveness the two theories have brought to feminist literature, and instead presents a theory of compromise- “power-with,” or, “the ability of a collectivity to act together for the attainment of a common or shared end or series of ends.” Though her conclusion is to find a

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42 Allen, 22

43 Allen, 23

44 Allen, 35

45 Ibid.
sort of common ground between the two theories, I argue that these theories must adapt to a more modern understanding of sexual liberation in today’s world.

Empowerment theory began, as Allen states, “by noticing that women have special skills and traits that misogynist culture have devalued.” This misogynistic culture has not dispersed by any means and will be important to draw upon in this paper. Nowadays, this concept can be applied to involuntary celibate ideology, more commonly referred to as “incel culture.” In a study titled, “Involuntary Celibacy: A Review of Incel Ideology and Experiences with Dating, Rejection, and Associated Mental Health and Emotional Sequelae” the authors state, “‘involuntary celibates’ refers to a loose collection of individuals who are experiencing sexlessness despite their desire to be active.” The topic of incels has become a popularized topic of controversy in philosophical debates. To briefly summarize, as there are many ongoing conversations in feminist literature about the topic, incel culture has attracted “male-only assemblies whose sexual frustrations were often directed at the women who have "shunned " them.” Within hookup culture, incel culture pervades. As growing numbers of men consume media surrounding incel culture, so has grown male entitlement, and the belief that sex is owed to men. Even if the media is not consumed, word of mouth has ignited a new fire among young men. If this culture has pervaded itself into modern conversations among young men, which it has, it would also seem that hookup culture is then a victim to this line of thinking.

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46 Allen, 26

Incel culture is steeped in a notion of pure entitlement. There exists an expectation for women to perform for men sexually, emotionally, and functionally in life. When women do not fulfill these expectations, the entitlement turns to outrage and blame. Reflecting on the “Cat Person” example, Robert, furious with Margot’s lack of interest in seeing or engaging with him, resorts to calling her a “whore,” after begging her to talk to him. Women are further silenced through this entitlement, as the behavior which incel culture promotes is becoming more widely accepted among young, college-aged men. With this, it is fair to assume that hookup culture and incel culture both exist on college campuses, and their prominence and interconnectedness is growing. Both possessing the ability to shun and shame young women into silence, they also grant young men behavior and power to boast about and share with one another. Now, women have increasingly less space to say “No.”

At the core of this complex dynamic is the developing social script by why young adults follow. Social scripts create norms by which we adhere to in our normal day-to-day interactions. In their paper, “How to Disrupt a Social Script,” Samia Hesni examines “…what it would mean to disrupt a social script and explain why and when it is prudential to do so.” For example, if A (a young man) texts B (a young woman) “Come thru,” the script tells B to say “When?” or “Okay.” To “disrupt” this script, as Hesni explains, places B in a double bind. If B wants to say “No.,” B also risks being shunned socially, verbally harassed, or physically harmed. Similarly, in “Cat Person,” Margot wants to say no, but she realizes how costly it will be if she does say no.

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The social script of hookup culture is, simply put, oppressive. It constrains the recipient’s response options, forcing them to either “play nice,” or disrupt the script and risk a repercussion that may follow. Hensi states, “Thus, the scripted interaction is effectively imposed on the script recipient by the script initiator, and she is unable to choose for herself how the interaction will go or even how to respond.” The complicated nature of this script and far too often places women in double-binds. The scripts of hookup culture were categorically developed by the pornography industry, teaching men how to behave before, during, and after sex, and whether intentionally or not, taught women the same. The language and images within porn generated a new way for young people to engage and communicate, altering the sexual experiences and silencing women who have learned that this is “the way” we do things.

II.

Pop Culture & Media

With this growing culture in mind, we can use the language and understanding of domination and empowerment theories and apply them to what we know about contemporary hookup culture. We can look to various forms of media to understand how the “culture” of hooking up truly surrounds young people in the United States, and how entitlement plays a key role in this. In his 2023 hit single “I KNOW?”, popular rapper and producer, Travis Scott, mumbles the words;

“It's 5 AM and I'm drunk right now
Tell me, can we still fuck? (Fuck that shit).”

This is just one glimpse into the way popular music demonstrates social norms among young adults. We see in just two verses that the narrator (a man) has been up (assumptively all night). He has been drinking and is asking someone (a woman) to come over to hook up. There is no intimacy in these lines. Instead, it is a transactional relation, as the male believes he is entitled to sex, and he expects the women to perform the way she is supposed to, or in other words, a script.

In the form of media across the United States (and the world), we see this social script reveal itself. Cosmopolitan magazine authored an article in 2019 entitled, “7 Tips for the Steamiest Hookups Ever (Yes, you might have to make the first move, but it’s worth it!)”

Longstanding lingerie company Victoria’s Secret ended its 2023 inclusivity rebrand as it was met with substantial backlash by “Gen Z”, who claimed they had no interest in seeing “body-positivity,” and begged the brand to go back to its original, impossible standards for women to look like. We can easily see how women are objectified and dominated. Even if the masses cling to it, the trends set by outside influences affect culture deeply.

However, this is not the only approach to viewing sexual standards in culture. In contrast, in her new song “Feather,” singer/songwriter Sabrina Carpenter sings;

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“I slam the door (slam the door), I hit ignore (hit ignore)

I’m saying, "No, no, no, no more"

I got you blocked, excited to never talk, I

I’m so sorry for your loss”  

This song has an entirely different tone. We can look at the music video of this song to understand the audience and message Carpenter attempts to convey. As she dances around in a floofy black tutu, Sabrina sings her song while men that have flirted with her are slowly killed in various ways according to their behavior. Though the theme is dark, we see Carpenter take her power back. It seems to me; this is a sort of empowerment theory at play. The narrator (female) has moved on from the relationship (male), and sarcastically sings that she does not care about the relationship, or the man, at all. Firstly, we may ask the question, is she empowered? More importantly, we should instead ask the question, “is this a way she is manifesting her freedom and agency or is this yet another way her subjugation shines through?

Our media plays a key role in setting examples of what our behavior should look like in relational dynamics. As new apps and technology develop, young adults are exposed to these examples far more often. As the social media app TikTok became more widely used in the United States, so did social media “influencers” who discuss various aspects of their lives and experiences by recording videos and uploading them. One of these influencers is Alix Earle, a twenty-three-year-old who quickly became TikTok’s “It Girl” as Rolling Stone Magazine called her, filming videos like “Get ready with me to go out in New Jersey!”, in which she spends the

time doing her makeup and talking about her life. Earle began posting while she was a student at the University of Miami, appealing to a college-aged audience as she went through her senior year at school and graduation. Earle’s platform has expanded to a podcast called “Hot Mess with Alix Earle,” inviting guests to talk about boys, college life, and girlhood. In a podcast episode titled, “First Dates: Finds & Fails”, Earle states, “I think we need to also differentiate for people the difference between you are hanging out with a guy and you are going on a date with a guy because I think that can be super confusing.” Earle’s platform, which consists of 6.4 million followers on TikTok alone, bases its relationship with users as “the older sister we all needed.” In this particular podcast, she discusses the intricacies between knowing if you are in a committed relationship with a man, or if you are “just a hookup.” We begin to see here how deeply woven these conversations are in young adult culture- especially among women. A young woman who may view or listen to Earle’s podcast will quickly understand that there are complex dynamics between college aged men and women, especially when it comes to sex. These are dynamics which women are at the mercy of, and need to play their cards right if they are to fit into modern standards- or at least pretend they do.

Earle does not at any point in this podcast discuss the negative implications of hookup culture, or the downsides of the culture as a whole. She briefly mentions, however, that you can get down “a rabbit hole” if a woman is looking for a relationship and the man is not. These conversations are being had at intimate levels in society and are taught to younger women as the


54 (@alixearle), “im scared for us #jerseyshore” Tik Tok, August 11, 2023.

norm. This conversation, which she shares with a guest speaker, is meant to be a sort of tutorial for other women, as they are giving advice based on past experiences. Their interaction with each other makes it clear this conversation is one that is bonding, as they laugh and share personal stories, they not only bring viewers closer, allowing the audience to feel as if they’re connected to Earle and her guest, but the hosts are also closer, as they share advice and experiences. My hope with this example is not to bash these forms of media in our culture, but instead to show more clearly how deeply woven hookup culture is in society.

Through the examples I suggest surrounding the oversaturation of media content involving pornography, or scripts written by the porn industry have changed the way we normatively view sex. Now, sex is a commodity, a contractual social script which expects women to fall in line. I do not blame young men, but instead I look to propagandists of porn culture and varying avenues of media, which have taught both young men and women how to have sex without intimacy. This is an epidemic, and it will permanently change the way young people grow up and interact with one another in the long run, likely impacting the social bonds built along the way.

Conclusion

Looking Ahead

I started this thesis with the intention of contributing to an ongoing conversation about hookup culture- what it is, what the ramifications are for young people, how it will continue to affect our youth. Now, my view of this project is that of a proposition, an argument about the ways we have put young women at risk, and how we have continued to do so by normalizing
behavior that is violent, oppressive, and harmful to all participating individuals. But most of all, I argue that women are indeed silenced by hookup culture.

We have taught young adults a sexual script that instructs young men about pleasure and gratification by means of domination, and young women about acceptance and approval by means of subservience and obedience. We consider sex-positive movements to be the solution to this through encouraging young women to “take back” their sexuality, recognize their autonomy, and prioritize their own pleasure. I do not think this message is bad. We should normalize prioritizing women in sex culture, as we have not done so for long enough. However, hookup culture, which sits among these narratives, posing as a sex-positive alternative, something “free,” something “easier” and noncommittal, is not sex-positive. It is not empowering. It fetishizes the abuse of women through pornography. It teaches young men how to have sex without intentionality, without care. It silences and expects silence. We must change the way we approach hook up culture, no longer embracing it as casual and liberating, but something that anti-porn feminists warned us about forty years ago.

Moving forward, we not only must seek social change in college hookup culture, but we must also demand it. As porn culture continues to subvert the ways young adults think about sex, it seems pertinent through this discussion that we work to change this culture. I look to Cristina Bicchieri’s chapter, "How Change Occurs" as a source of integrating change into the ways we view sex and the norms surrounding it on college campuses. Bicchieri discusses the ontology of social norms and ethics of social change through analysis of script and schema change. Her view, which I share, is that we cannot change social norms without “…the important cognitive underpinnings of certain practices.”56 Through Bicchieri’s lens, I propose that we address

hookup cultures’ ability to silence women by reexamining the cognitive experiences young adults have with pornography. If we are able to reframe the ways young people view violent and degrading porn as the script through which sexual interactions must occur, we can thereby change the experience shared among women (and men).

I believe groups which focus their advocacy on encouraging “sex-positive” environments should reevaluate their messaging and incorporate a more thorough emphasis on how pornography has taught young people how to have sex, and why this does not have to be the norm. Further, this learned behavior does not originate in schools or in sexual education classes, it starts at home, looking at screens, watching explicit content, listening to podcasts which objectify women for comedy, watching movies which glorify rough and degrading sex, and consuming endless amounts of content which teach us the ongoing script of how to engage with each other. This script needs to change, and we must both disrupt the cognitive appeal of this content to viewers, but we must also reconsider how the anti-porn movement could be incorporated into modern society now. Hookup culture certainly does and will continue to silence women. It is our collective responsibility to work towards eliminating the social structures in place that have allowed this silencing to occur.
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