
In a Women's Voice: A Qualitative Study on First-year Women's Development and Hooking Up

Annual conference on the First Year Experience and Student in Transition

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Overview/Importance

- Research indicates that females have more emotional impact from the consequences of sexual encounters than men.
- With a risk of sexual assault, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy, mental health issues, and other negative outcomes, college women are at risk of academic persistence.
- With the variety of delivery methods on sex education prior to college, males and females may lack information to make critical and potentially life changing decisions.

Conceptual Framework / Methodology

- Theoretical Frameworks: Feminist Theory and *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Cognitive Development: Women's Voice).
- These frames help to identify the ways women voice their experience about sex and how it influences their overall collegiate experiences.
- Qualitative Study – 90 minutes phenomenological face-to-face interviews
- Purposeful sampling of first-year women.

Findings

- Public Sexual Self - Development of public perception (friends, family, social norms) about sex and gender roles connected to silence or received knowledge. Develops with confidence.
- Private Sexual Self - Emergence of private sexual identity as they transition through cognitive development stages. Strongly linked to decision –making self efficacy and mental health.
- Desire for partner's acceptance before, during, and after. Conditioned through public and private sexual self. Negotiations with their self-realization and external influences.
- Male-dominated decision-making in sexual relationship (women's silence stage).
- Sexual decision silences women in the decision-making process, in refusal to pursue legal or disciplinary action, and by inability to prevent these forced sexual situations from repeating.
- Processing with friends and their own sexual decisions helps to normalize experiences and serves as a way to manage emotions and feelings associated with their sexual behaviors.
- Fully developed procedural knowledge women may have empowerment by their decision and can effectively reflect on them.

Conclusions/Implications

- College success and persistence will increase as women become more competent in using their voices and directly making decisions about their sexual behaviors.
- Instructors can use specific tactics in their first year curriculums to better educate and inform female students to make confident decisions.
- Gives proactive and preventative insight into how to protect against incurable STDs, unplanned pregnancy, or mental health risks that may link to drop out rates.
- It is essential to have intentional sex education programming, and sexual assault conversations with college students so they know resources.