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## What you wish your partner knew: A mixed methods study on Western Washington University students' sexual satisfaction

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**What you wish your partner knew: A mixed methods study on Western Washington  
University students' sexual satisfaction**

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Senior Honors Capstone Project

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August 24, 2021

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Sexual satisfaction, often viewed only through the lens of physical satisfaction, also includes emotional satisfaction and is influenced by sociocultural determinants, such as gender and sexual orientation. This mixed-methods study explored these facets of satisfaction among Western Washington University students.

**Method:** A large convenience sample ( $N = 924$ ) of college students participated in an online survey from October 2020 to January 2021. Participants were majority women (68%), 43.7% in a relationship and 56.3% single, and identified as a variety of sexual orientations: heterosexual (52%), bisexual (24%), LGQ+ (24%). Participants responded to closed-ended survey questions about sexual satisfaction and 1 open-ended response question: “what do you wish your partner knew that you feel you could never tell them?” The quantitative data were analyzed with chi-squares and qualitative data with an inductive thematic analysis.

**Results:** Seven themes emerged in the qualitative data related to many facets of sexual satisfaction. In the quantitative data, men reported being more satisfied from partner orgasm than other genders. Single participants, more than those in a relationship, were significantly more neutral or dissatisfied. There were no differences in reports of satisfaction by sexual orientation.

**Discussion:** College students’ satisfaction comprises many elements, some of which they do not feel comfortable openly sharing, despite reporting high comfort in quantitative questions. Differences by relationship status and gender may be a function of sexual scripts and gender roles. Future education should focus on increasing open and comfortable discussion about sexual needs and sexual pleasure of women and gender expansive individuals.

## Introduction

The term “sex” has many different uses and interpretations. It is commonly used to both describe intimate physical behaviors as well as to identify the biological assignment of genitalia. Sex, at a societal level, is often viewed as a binary concept that delineates between people with vaginas (often assigned as “female”) and people with penises (often assigned as “male”). Sex is often conflated and used interchangeably with the term gender; however, they are distinctly separate concepts. Gender is a person’s internal experience with masculine and feminine characteristics and may differ from their assigned sex (Katz-Wise, 2020). The most common gender identities that have been included in sexual research are “man” and “woman.” However, like sex, gender is not binary, but a spectrum, that includes myriad genders such as “nonbinary” and “gender fluid.” Regardless of gender and sex, all individuals have a right to sexual health and sexuality. Sexual health and sexuality are complex and multifaceted concepts that have immense impact on the health of all individuals, especially young adults.

Sexual health is “the state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality and is not merely the absence of disease and dysfunction” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2011). A central aspect of sexual health is sexuality, which encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, pleasure, and reproduction. It is experienced and expressed through attitudes, desires, thoughts, behaviors, and relationships (Mark & Murray, 2012). Research within sexuality can be approached from many different disciplines and encompasses many different topics. However, sexuality research has been dominated by a biological discipline, which tends to focus on the medical aspects of sexuality (Mark & Murray, 2012) and often confines results and recommendations within a gender binary with a reproductive focus among people in heterosexual relationships. Thus, this

focus limiting the scope of the research to a smaller population of individuals not necessarily representative of all people that are engaging in sexual activities. Additionally, sexuality research often influences larger social norms; the focus on heterosexual relationships dictates what types of sexual activities and sexual relationships are considered as “normal.” This excludes and ostracizes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people and those who do not fall into heterosexual and gender binaries, which negatively impacts their health and wellness.

The key sexuality concepts of gender, identity, and sexual orientation have evolved away from the traditional binaries of “man and woman” and “heterosexual and homosexual” as people’s understanding of these concepts become more expansive and fluid. As our understanding and language grows, so do the number of people who identify in an expansive way and nonbinary way. This population of LGBTQ+ individuals are left out of most sexuality literature since much of research is based within reproduction or heterosexual focused frameworks (Frederick et al., 2018). Similarly, the concept of having sex for pleasure, instead of solely for reproductive purposes, is also often left out sexual research and education because of social stigmatization and misunderstanding (Kantor & Lindberg, 2020).

Further, the focus of most sexual research and education on college campuses is geared toward reducing instances of sexual dysfunction and disease through STI prevention and reducing risky behavior (Higgins & Hirsch, 2007; Kantor & Lindberg, 2020). Individuals in college are often experimenting socially and sexually to discover their gender identity, orientation, and sexual pleasure; often, they are not engaging in sex for reproductive purposes (Higgins et al., 2011). For these reasons, this literature review focused on factors that impact college student’s sexual satisfaction to provide necessary context for the current study on college students at Western Washington University (WWU).

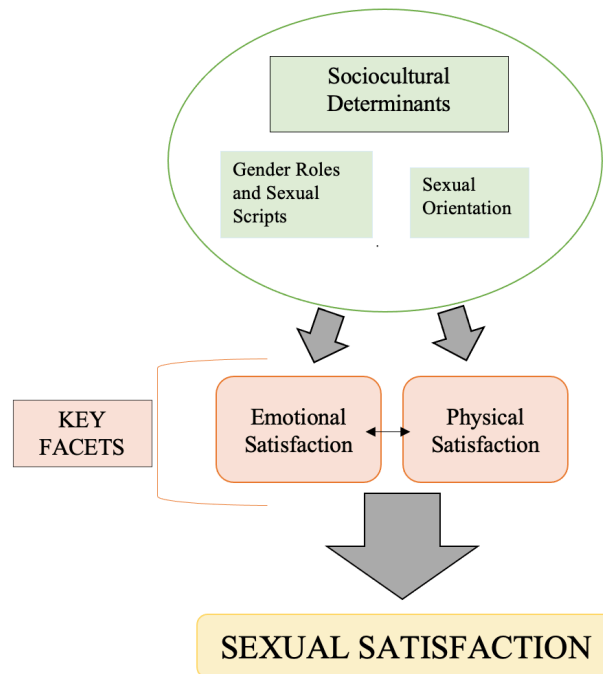
### **Sexual Satisfaction**

Sexual satisfaction is the affective response arising from one's subjective evaluation of positive and negative dimension associated with one's sexual relationships (Mark & Murray, 2012). In other words, sexual satisfaction is achieved when an individual is positively satisfied from a sexual interaction. A satisfying sexual life has been positively associated with general well-being, overall life satisfaction, and happiness (Stephenson et. al., 2011). Most research on sexual satisfaction is focused on physical aspects such as the frequency of vaginal-penile intercourse and orgasm, often between heterosexual men and women, typically in a committed or married relationship (Higgins et al., 2011).

However, sexual satisfaction is much more complex than the occurrence of an orgasm through sexual intercourse, especially in college-aged individuals, who may be sexually inexperienced and who may not be having vaginal-penile intercourse. Sexual satisfaction instead, is influenced by the interaction of at least two key facets: physical satisfaction (e.g., orgasm, behavior type, arousal/desire), and emotional satisfaction (e.g., relationship commitment/connection and communication). Moreover, these key facets are affected by the interplay of sociocultural determinants such as gender norms and sexual scripts, and sexual orientation (see Figure 1 for an illustration of these concepts). It is the combination and interaction between these determinants and facets that produce sexual satisfaction.

Figure 1.

*A Diagram of the Facets and Determinants of Sexual Satisfaction*



### **Sociocultural Determinants**

#### **Gender Roles and Sexual Scripts**

Gender roles are pre-scripted behaviors, appearances, beliefs, and attitudes that are assigned to individuals at birth and are enforced through social pressure (Planned Parenthood, n.d.). The gender roles that have been prescribed in society are heterosexual and binary and have been focused heavily on women and men (Planned Parenthood, n.d.). Traditionally, women's gender roles encompass attributes such as submission, heightened emotion, commitment, and purity. While men's gender roles tend to encompass dominance, masculinity, promiscuity, and toughness (Planned Parenthood, n.d.). The social construction of gender allows men to be more sexually expressive than women (Biss & Horne, 2005). That is, men are praised for having more sexual experiences and less commitment than women. From an evolutionary perspective, which



focuses on reproduction, men have a higher potential reproductive rate and less parental investment for offspring, allowing them to benefit from both short and long-term relationships. Women, on the other hand, have higher costs of sexual activity such as pregnancy and sexual violence, and are more likely to prioritize investment into longer-term relationships (Mark et al., 2015). This has been supported by research that has found young women have higher sexual satisfaction rates associated with emotional and relationship intimacy (Biss & Horne, 2005). Conversely, young men have an established attitude toward accepting casual sex (Mark et al., 2015).

These traditional, societal gender roles have become ingrained into sexual interactions and behaviors and have significant impact on how a person experiences sexual satisfaction. A key example of this is the presence of sexual scripts. Sexual scripts are culturally available messages that define what 'counts' as sex, how to recognize sexual situations, and what to do in a sexual encounter (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001; Wiederman, 2005). These sexual scripts are upheld through media, literature, and cultural values and vastly impact an individual's sexual experiences. A common example of a sexual script is that men should be dominant during sex while women should be submissive (Mark & Murry, 2012; Wiederman, 2005). Heteronormative gender roles and sexual scripts are pervasive themes that have immense impact on physical and emotional satisfaction. They tell people the default on how to act, feel, and offer comfort in unknown situations (Wiederman, 2005). However, as gender is an expansive spectrum, people may identify as a variety of genders, such as gender, nonbinary, and genderqueer/fluid. The sexual scripts for these individuals are less studied and therefore, these individuals do not always get the benefits of previously navigated social interactions. These will be discussed in more detail in

each of the subsequent sections of this literature review but is important to first have a general understanding of the sociocultural determinants that affect satisfaction.

### **Sexual Orientation**

Another sociocultural determinant of satisfaction is related to sexual orientation, which is “a person’s physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction towards other people” (World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.). As mentioned previously, sex research has been mostly focused on heterosexual individuals (Blair et al., 2017). However, young people are increasingly identifying on the LGBTQ+ spectrum, and even heterosexual interactions are moving away from those rigid roles and scripts (e.g., increased emphasis for heterosexual men to have emotional intelligence, women to be assertive; Blair et al., 2017). LGBTQ+ people suffer additional burdens of stress and health disparities as a result of cultural and societal discrimination (CDC, 2011), which can influence their sexual satisfaction. Physical and emotional satisfaction are influenced by the way individuals interact with sexual and romantic partners, which is often dictated by sexual orientation. For example, common and emerging sexual orientations are heterosexual/straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, and pansexual.

### **Physical Satisfaction**

Physical satisfaction is a state of pleasure achieved through physical sexual behaviors. Three factors that comprise physical satisfaction are orgasms, sexual behavior types, and arousal/desire. The following subsections discuss variation in experience of these three factors by gender, sexual orientation, and relationship status (e.g., hookups versus relationship), including rates of orgasm, faking orgasms, different behavior types (oral sex, non-penetrative sex, and intimate behaviors like cuddling and kissing), and arousal and desire.

## **Orgasm**

The way individuals experience physical pleasure from sexual experiences is influenced by social norms, gender, and sexual orientation and is the most common understanding of sexual satisfaction. The commonly known indicator of physical satisfaction is an orgasm, or a feeling of intense pleasure that comes during sexual activity (Sexwise, 2018). Orgasm rates split by sexual orientation and gender. For men, there is no difference among heterosexual and bisexual men. However, lesbian women experience more predictable orgasms than heterosexual women and bisexual women report the lowest orgasm rates (Frederick et al., 2018; Mark et al., 2015). Men of different sexual orientations repeatedly report higher orgasm frequency than women of different sexual orientations. This shows a significant gap in orgasm frequency between men and women separate from sexual orientation.

Social stigma associated with the acceptance of sexual exploration between genders is a significant driver of this orgasm gap. There is an outstanding sexual script that condones men expressing their sexual desires and activity, but limits women's openness for the same topic (Wiederman, 2005). Due to this stigma, women are less likely to explore their bodies and understand what type of sexual experiences bring them to orgasm. This stigma has led to the social acceptance that a greater social importance should be placed on men's orgasms over women's, especially in heterosexual relationships (Blair et al., 2017; Frederick et al., 2018). In lesbian relationships, in which individuals report the highest level of women's orgasms, there is more equity of pleasure between partners (Frederick et al., 2018).

Additionally, sexual script theory dictates that in heterosexual relationships, men act as the sexual "initiators" while women are the sexual "gatekeepers" (Beres et al., 2003), which contributes to power dynamics between sexual partners and can lead to lower rates of

orgasm, satisfaction, and communication. Since gay and lesbian relationships are single gendered, the initiator and gatekeepers roles are not as present and allow for more equal sexual initiation, orgasm, and satisfaction (Beres et al., 2003). The differences in behavior between heterosexual and LGB+ sexual activities may be drivers of orgasm and sexual satisfaction and will be discussed further in the subsequent section.

Relationship status between individuals also affects rates of overall sexual satisfaction. Men are more typically more concerned and attentive with women's orgasms in a relationship than during a hookup (Armstrong et al., 2012). Similarly, women report higher satisfaction in their relationship with higher frequency of orgasm (Frederick et al., 2018). Women, regardless of sexual orientation, experience more orgasms with partners they are familiar with. For all genders and sexual orientations, relationship satisfaction drives a motivation to engage in more intimate practices that enhance sexual pleasure and orgasm frequency (Frederick et al., 2018).

However, in both hookups and in relationships, women in college have reported a high instance of faking orgasms. The reasons for faking orgasms are complex and are also informed by sociocultural determinants. Howes (2019) outlines four reasons that college women report faking orgasms: concerns for feelings of sexual partners, wanting sex to end, saving the relationship, and pressure to perform. A sexual script relevant to this occurrence is that achievement of orgasm is a hallmark that indicates a partner's sexual proficiency and skill (Howes, 2019). As a result of this script, women's reasons for faking orgasm out of concern for their sexual partner's feelings included avoiding feelings of shame of failure. Similarly, the pressure to perform is another key reason why college women fake orgasms. The attainment of orgasms during a sexual experience is considered a social norm. To protect feelings of fear of inexperience or shame at their body, women are more likely to fake an orgasm.

Men in college systematically overestimate the orgasm frequency of female partners, in part due to women faking as well as limited knowledge about female pleasure (Frederick et al., 2018). College men have reported feeling that it was their responsibility to bring a female partner to orgasm. When orgasm was not achieved, these men indicated feeling distressed and shameful (Frederick et al., 2018). Women are often empathetic to their partners feelings and will report forsaking their pleasure to keep their partner's emotions in check (Jozkowski et al., 2017). Jozkowski et al. (2017) found that college women felt it was their duty to caretake their male partner's egos during sex. Women in this study reported subjecting themselves to discomfort (e.g., lack of orgasm) to prevent making their male counterpart feel rejected (Jozkowski et al., 2017).

The high frequency of faking orgasms present in college women is an example of the hegemonic gender roles rooted in social dominance of men over women (Blunt-Vinti et al., 2018) that contribute to higher reports of sexual satisfaction from men than from women regardless of sexual orientation. A main factor that contributes to this is the limited scope of definition of sexual satisfaction and sexual activity. Heteronormative sexual research has defined sexual satisfaction and sexual activity in terms of penile penetration, however there are many other behavior types that result in sexual satisfaction (Cohen & Byers, 2014).

### **Behavior Types**

The traditional behavior types that have been operationalized in research and literature that lead to sexual satisfaction are related to heterosexual achievement of orgasm and vaginal-penile (VP) penetration (Cohen & Byers, 2014). However, as previously discussed, there are many different sexual orientations and genders that do not consider VP penetration the pinnacle of sexual satisfaction. There are other sexual behavior types that may increase the occurrence of

sexual satisfaction including oral sex, manual genital stimulation, and traditionally nonsexual activities such as kissing, cuddling, and caressing (Cohen & Byers, 2014; Frederick et al., 2018). For example, similar to higher rates of orgasm among people in relationships, there are higher instances of kissing and cuddling in relationships, which are behaviors that are positively correlated with sexual satisfaction (Frederick, et al., 2018). Additionally, women, regardless of sexual orientation, report higher instances of orgasm from clitoral stimulation in addition to vaginal stimulation and most women do not usually orgasm from penetration alone (Blair et al., 2017).

Heterosexual, gay, and bisexual men all report high frequency of orgasm (Frederick et al., 2018). Due to the high focus of sexual health research on HIV/AIDS transmission, anal penetration between gay men has been the focus of intimate physical behavior with this population. However, mutual masturbation has been found to be practiced more often between gay men than anal sex (Blair et al., 2017). This indicates that expansive sexual orientations may consider behavior types outside of penetration to be just as, if not more, important to sexual satisfaction and orgasm.

Duration of sexual activity is also a form of behavior and differs by sexual orientation. Cohen and Byers (2014) found that heterosexual women report an average duration of sexual activity to be 18 minutes while nonbinary women reported an average duration of 57 minutes. This could be related to several factors. One factor is the presence of a sexual script in heterosexual relationships that dictates sexual activity ends when the man orgasms. A second factor is that nonbinary individuals in relationships may put more focus on leisure and pleasure for both partners (Cohen & Byers, 2014).

The motivation to engage in the sexual behaviors discussed above is another important aspect of physical satisfaction and sexual pleasure. This motivation can be understood as sexual arousal or desire and can have an immense positive or negative impact on individual's sexual experiences.

### **Arousal and Desire**

Sexual desire is when an individual experiences sexual thought, fantasies and urges to engage in sexual activity (Mark & Murray, 2012). It is influenced by both biology and the social convention. A prevailing sexual script is that men have stronger and more urgent sexual desires than women (Leiblum, 2002). This may be due to other social norms that allow men to be more aware of their sexual drive during puberty than women do. However, research indicates that men do not necessarily have a stronger sexual desire, but a more consistent one, while women experience more complex and inconsistent states of arousal (Leiblum, 2002). Men and women express their sexual desire differently which can lead to miscommunication and incongruent desires.

In heterosexual relationships between men and women in college, the concept of desire discrepancy has been found to predict sexual satisfaction (Mark & Murray, 2012). Desire discrepancy occurs when two partners in an intimate relationship desire different levels or frequencies of sexual activity (Mark & Murray, 2012). From women's perspective, higher desire discrepancy in a relationship has significantly predicted lower sexual satisfaction (Mark & Murray, 2012) meaning that a higher misunderstanding of sexual needs and wants, leads to lower satisfaction between men and women sexual partners. Gender roles and sexual scripts contribute to desire discrepancy by prescribing a "normal" sexual narrative that does not allow for deviation without perceptions of humiliation and shame (Howes, 2019). These social norms may not align

with a person's individual feelings of sexual desire; however, they are strong influences for sexual action.

A final determinant of arousal and desire is attraction and the satisfaction one has with their partner's body. Paap and Gardner (2011) conducted a survey with heterosexual college couples and found that men's relationship satisfaction was directly related to satisfaction with a partner's body shape. That is, if the man in the relationship was satisfied with his partner's physique, he was more likely to be satisfied with the relationship overall. Conversely, women in the study were more preoccupied about their own body shape with relationship satisfaction being influenced by how they felt about their own body (Paap & Gardener, 2011). This exemplifies that attractiveness is an important aspect of satisfaction to heterosexual men and that self-body image is paramount to women's satisfaction. This will be discussed in greater detail further in this paper.

Sexual satisfaction is greatly influenced by orgasm quality and frequency, nontraditional behavior types, and arousal across all genders and sexual orientations. However, these aspects are only part of the story. Emotional satisfaction is an equally important facet of sexual satisfaction that often receives less research focus because it is harder to operationalize.

### **Emotional Satisfaction**

Emotional satisfaction is the state of satisfaction based upon connection, and communication between sexual partners that has influence on overall sexual satisfaction (Mark et al., 2015). The following subsections discuss variation by relationship type and gender in connection between sexual partners, how emotional health and self-image impact relationships, and communication (expressing what people want and need out of a sexual encounter).



## **Relationship Type**

Emotional satisfaction is influenced by relationship type and status (Mark et al., 2015). Most relationship satisfaction research is limited to heterosexual and heteronormative perspectives and shaped by traditional gender roles and sexual scripts. The dominant sexual script in college is hookup culture (Mark et al., 2015). Hookups can be defined as “uncommitted sexual encounters between individuals who are not romantic partners or dating each other [and] ...may include a wide range of sexual behaviors such as kissing, oral sex and penetrative intercourse” (Garcia et al., 2012). In 2015, 60-80% of college students in the U.S. had engaged in some form of sexual hookup at least once (Mark et al., 2015). However, the frequency at which individuals experience sexual experiences does not necessarily equal the satisfaction they are experiencing. Sexual satisfaction has been found to be determined by the quality of the relationship and a “committed” relationship status results in higher sexual satisfaction (Armstrong et al., 2021).

Similar to hookups, friends with benefits relationships (FWBR) are sexual encounters in which individuals have a friendship as the basis of their relationship but also occasionally have sex (Lehmiller et al., 2014). In a study that directly compared the satisfaction between heterosexual FWBR and romantic committed relationships, college students in FWBR reported lower levels of passion, intimacy and commitment (Lehmiller et al., 2014). This is linked to yet another sexual script which is the social norm of monogamy or sexual exclusivity in romantic committed relationships (Lehmiller et al., 2014) This script is one that is upheld with high moral standards in that individuals in relationships are looked down upon if they engage in sexual behaviors outside of the relationship. In FWBR, sexual exclusivity is not the norm and leads to more sexual partners and higher frequency of sexual endeavors (Lehmiller et al., 2014).

However, as has been previously established, frequency does not necessarily equal satisfaction. Romantic or “committed” partners are more likely to report lower frequency of sexual activities but higher communication about sexual issues, desire and boundaries. This in turn leads to higher rates of relationship and therefore sexual satisfaction (Lehmiller et al., 2014). These conclusions are also present among different sexual orientations. In a 2014 study, relationship satisfaction was highest among gay and bisexual men when they were in monogamous relationships (Grov et al., 2014). Similarly, lesbian women report low emotional and sexual satisfaction from casual settings (Mark et al., 2015).

### **Communication**

An important aspect of any relationship, whether it be casual or committed, is communication. Open and positive sexual communication is vital to the health of any sexual relationship (Mark & Jozkowski, 2012; Rehman et al., 2019). Sexual communication is the degree to which individuals can express their preferences regarding sex and sexual behaviors (Kislev, 2019). Individuals who possess higher sexual communication skills can disclose their sexual preferences and ask their partners to fulfill their desires (Kislev, 2019). Effective sexual communication is an important component of sexual satisfaction for all parties involved (Blunt-Vinti et al., 2018; Mark & Jozkowski, 2012; Mark et al., 2015).

For college-aged individuals, communicating consent, setting boundaries, and discussing contraceptive use have been found to be meaningful topics of communication between sexual partners (Bedreé et al., 2020). However, gender roles and feelings of awkwardness, fear, and embarrassment often deter verbal communication between young sexual partners (Blunt-Vinti et al., 2018). This leads to a heavier reliance on non-verbal communications that may not fully encompass the expression of needs and wants between partners. Many heterosexual college

women are motivated to avoid verbal communication before and during sexual activity for fear of negative partner feedback and breaking normative sexual scripts (Blunt-Vinti et al., 2018). As previously mentioned, VP penetration is the sexual norm and individuals who do not find sexual satisfaction from this activity may be afraid to express different needs. This fear may be related to feelings of shame and/or embarrassment for not orgasming from VP penetration or feeling abnormal for requiring other types of sexual behaviors that have not be socially accepted (Blunt-Vinti et al., 2018).

### **Self-Image and Identity**

Emotional and sexual satisfaction cannot be fully attained without an individual's security and satisfaction with their own self-image and identity. As discussed earlier, sex and sexuality are socially charged topics. In the United States there is a societal pressure at deems certain body shapes and sizes more sexually appropriate and desirable. Within the gender binary, both men and women receive external pressure about their body image. Women are expected to strive for a thin and lean physique and anything deviating from that is seen as ugly or not attractive (Mercurio & Landry, 2007). Men are expected to stive for large muscles and chiseled jaw lines (van den Brink et al., 2017). These societal measures objectify bodies and have negative impacts on people's mental health and satisfaction (Mercurio & Landry, 2007).

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) coined the term "self-objectification" which occurs when "women internalize a third person perspective on their physical self in which they see themselves as on object." It is important to note that self-objectification can occur for any gender, but it has been seen most prominently in women (van den Brink et al., 2017). Self-objectification, accompanied by negative attitudes about one's appearance has been connected to sexual dissatisfaction for both men and women (van den Brink et al., 2017). Similarly, exaggerated

body self-consciousness, body surveillance, and body shame have negative impacts on sexual satisfaction (Claudat & Warren, 2014). It has been established these emotions interfere with sexual pleasure and satisfaction by taking up too much space in the mind of individuals. Or in other words, people are overwhelmed thinking negative thoughts about themselves and their body that they become distracted from the sexual activity they are engaging in. Heterosexual women's physical shape was also correlated with relationship satisfaction. If the woman in the relationship had body image distortion, she was more likely to report lower relationship satisfaction for both herself and her partner (Paap & Gardener, 2011).

There has been little research on self-image and sexual satisfaction for nonbinary individuals. Often nonbinary individuals experience more barriers to feeling like their true self than their heteronormative counterparts due to their authentic identity being not fully accepted by society. Beren et al. (1996) found that gay men are more dissatisfied with their bodies than their heterosexual counterparts. Conversely, body concerns were found to have less influence on sexual dissatisfaction in lesbian women. Beren and colleagues (1996) theorized that this may be due to the removal of the "male gaze" in lesbian relationships where social pressures for body image are not as present as in heterosexual relationships.

### **The Current Study**

Historically, sex research has heavily focused on reproduction, heteronormative behavior and avoiding dysfunction, and less often focused on sexual satisfaction due to social stigma and its complex nature. It encompasses physical and emotional facets and is impacted by gender and societal norms. Sexual satisfaction is particularly relevant to young adults who are engaging in sex for pleasure and not for reproductive purposes and who identify as LGBTQ+. Through quantitative (a set of closed-ended questions) and qualitative data (an open-ended

question: “What do you wish your partner knew that you feel you could never tell them?”), this study investigated college students’ satisfaction of sexual experiences, including their physical satisfaction and emotional satisfaction, and was guided by the following research questions (RQ):

RQ 1: How do WWU students experience physical satisfaction?

- RQ 1.1: What are WWU students’ experiences with orgasm (during partnered activity, alone, faking)?
- RQ 1.2: What are WWU students’ experiences with different physical behaviors (providing, receiving, pleasurable experience, equality, self-behaviors)?
- RQ 1.3: What are WWU students’ experiences with arousal, desire, and attraction?

RQ 2: How do WWU students experience emotional satisfaction?

- RQ 2.1: What are WWU students’ experiences with different types of relationships?
- RQ 2.2: What are WWU students’ experiences with communication in their relationships?
- RQ 2.3: What are WWU students’ experiences with self-image and identity?

RQ 3: How do sociocultural determinants (gender and sexual orientation) impact WWU students’ sexual satisfaction?

## Methods

### Procedures and Participants

A large convenience sample of WWU participated in a cross-sectional, online survey through Qualtrics. The survey was advertised on social media platforms, and by email and word of mouth. WWU faculty, resource offices, and student organizations (e.g., WWU Honors Program, Be Well WWU) disseminated the survey to students during the Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 quarters. Students were recruited in two waves to take the survey. During the first wave in the fall, some professors offered extra credit to students who completed the survey. Additionally, the team put the survey on the SONA system, a research subjects pool for students taking classes in the psychology department, for research credit. Then the research team received grant funding and 250 participants received a \$10 e-gift card in the second wave of data collection in the winter. Not all participants who took the survey received a gift card, research credit, or extra credit; many participants took the survey without receiving an award.

To participate in the survey, students had to be over the age of 18, currently enrolled at WWU, and consent to participate in response to the informed consent page before taking the survey. The survey consisted of questions about students' sexual behaviors and experiences and took approximately 25-30 minutes to complete. Students ended the survey in one of two ways. If at the end of the survey they wanted to receive extra credit or a gift card, participants answered "yes" on a final question. This redirected them to a separate, unlinked survey, to keep their answers from the previous survey anonymous. Participants could then enter their information to receive their earned incentive. If participants selected "no" on the final question, the survey ended. The study procedures were approved prior to data collection by the WWU Institutional Review Board.

## **Measures**

Faculty in Public Health and staff from the WWU Prevention and Wellness Services developed the survey. During the development of the survey, the instrument was piloted with three undergraduate research assistants, eight undergraduate peer educators, one professor in Public Health, and the director of WWU's LGBTQ+ Resource Center. This survey assessed many different sexual attitudes and behaviors, but this paper will focus on a subset of those questions related to student sexual satisfaction.

### ***Demographic Information***

Students were asked to self-report their age, year in school, gender identity, pronouns, major, sexual orientation, relationship status, race and ethnicity, and current living situation. Though these were closed-ended questions, participants could write in an option not listed as well.

### ***Quantitative Questions on Satisfaction***

Participants responded to a set of 14 quantitative questions about satisfaction with pleasure and positive sexual experiences. Questions addressed a range of physical and emotional satisfaction concepts. Each question was on a 5-point Likert Scale with an additional "N/A" option. The first two questions on communication in relationships were rated on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree):

1. I feel safe and respected in my intimate relationship(s)
2. I feel comfortable communicating with my partner(s) about what I want and don't want when it comes to sex.

The third question, on faking orgasms, could have been answered: "Always/almost always," "often," "sometimes," and "never/almost never."

3. I fake orgasm or pleasure (act like it was feeling better than it was for the behalf of my partner)...

The next seven questions measured a person's satisfaction with their experiences and were rated on a scale of 1 (completely dissatisfied) to 5 (completely satisfied):

4. To what degree do you feel "satisfied" with: Orgasm (frequency, quality, etc.) during partnered sexual activity?
5. To what degree do you feel "satisfied" with: Orgasm (frequency, quality, etc.) during solo sexual activity?
6. To what degree do you feel "satisfied" with: What you are providing for your partner(s)?
7. To what degree do you feel "satisfied" with: What you are receiving from your partner(s)?
8. To what degree do you feel "satisfied" with: pleasure from experiences?
9. To what degree to you feel "satisfied" with: equality in sexual experiences from all partners?
10. To what degree do you feel "satisfied" with: exploration of your own body?

The next question measured a person's comfort with communicating their sexual wants and was rated on a scale of 1 (completely uncomfortable) to 5 (completely comfortable)

11. To what degree do you feel comfortable saying what you want sexually?

The next question measured how sure a person was about their sexual wants and was rated on a scale of 1 (completely unsure) to 5 (completely sure).

12. To what degree do you feel sure of what you want sexually?



The next question measured the participants' expectations of romance and intimacy with their reality and could be answered on a scale of 1 (completely unaligned) to 5 (completely aligned).

13. To what degree do you feel your expectations of romance and intimacy align (match) with your reality?

The last question measured participants' sexual authenticity and was rated on a scale of 1 (completely in authentic) to 5 (completely authentic).

14. To what degree do you fee authentic (behaving in a way that is consistent with your beliefs/values) in your sexual experiences?

### ***Qualitative Question***

At the end of the survey, participants also responded to an open-ended question: "What do you wish you partner knew that you feel you could never tell them?"

## **Analysis**

Data analysis for this study was comprised of two parts, quantitative data analysis of the multiple-choice questions and qualitative data analysis of the open-ended question.

### **Quantitative Analysis**

To analyze the quantitative survey items, we ran frequencies on descriptive statistics and chi-square comparisons through SPSS 28. The items on which we ran chi-square comparisons were: 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 14 from Table 2. We chose these 6 key items as representations of each of the emotional and physical aspects of sexual satisfaction discussed in the literature review. Before running the chi-square comparisons, we collapsed answer categories from a 5-point Likert scale into 3 categories: "yes," "no," and "neutral." For example, the answer categories of "completely dissatisfied" and "somewhat dissatisfied" were combined into "no," "completely

satisfied” and “somewhat satisfied” were combined into “yes,” and “neither dissatisfied nor satisfied” was “neutral.” We reported a Cramer’s  $V$  for our chi-square tests as a measure of effect size and followed up with Fisher’s Exact tests on significant chi-square tests to determine where significant differences were. See Table 2 for full frequencies of items and Table 3 for significant chi-square results.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

To analyze open-ended responses, we used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a systematic procedure that identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns within a data set.

#### ***Thematic Analysis***

Thematic analysis is method of a finding repeated themes and subthemes within qualitative data. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question(s) and is consistent throughout the data. Themes do not have a right or wrong method to determining prevalence, however research judgment is needed. Thematic analysis can be conducted through either deductive or inductive identification. This study used inductive identification which is data driven and allows the data to create the themes. The analysis of the data allows the data to reveal the main results of the question for further analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) provide 6 phases of thematic analysis that this study followed to code the data set. The phases are: 1) Familiarizing oneself with the data, 2) Generating initial codes, 3) Searching for themes, 4) Reviewing themes, 5) Defining and naming themes, 6) Producing a final report.

***Familiarizing oneself with the data.*** In this phase, researchers transcribe, read, and note initial ideas from the responses. In this study, four researchers individually reviewed a subset of data (150 responses) at the beginning of analysis and noted emerging themes.

***Generating initial codes.*** The second phase allows researchers to generate initial codes after becoming familiar with the data. Coding is the term used for reducing large chunks of data into smaller chunks of meaningful data. Organizing the responses in this manner allows researchers to code interesting features of the data in a systematic way across the entire set. The researchers met and compared initial themes after their individual reviews.

***Searching for Themes.*** Once initial codes have been generated, researchers can organize the codes into larger overarching themes. This entails gathering all the gathering all the data related to each emerging theme. The lead two authors consolidated all four researchers list of themes and arranged them into a framework of themes and subthemes for the master codebook.

***Reviewing Themes.*** After searching and organizing emerging themes, the next step is to solidify and review themes. This checks that the themes work in relation to coded extracts for the entire data set. This phase is also for generating a thematic map of analysis which allows for the quantitative analysis of qualitative themes. At this point, the research team applied the codes to several subsets of data (20 responses at a time) to ensure codes were clear and comprehensive.

***Defining and Naming Themes.*** This phase is an ongoing analysis to refine aspects of themes and the overall story that the data is revealing. The generation of clear definitions and names for each theme are important for the accuracy and reliability of the analysis.

The research team coded the responses individually then met weekly to compare findings until a 90% consensus was reached. This process continued until all responses were coded.

***Producing the report.*** This is the last phase and final opportunity for analysis. After all the prior phases have been completed it is time to compile the findings in a scholarly report. Researchers are tasked with selecting vivid and compelling responses as examples to represent the data and relate back to the research questions and relevant literature.

In this process, seven main themes emerged: 1) Orgasm and Pleasure, 2) Communication and Negotiation, 3) Relationship, 4) Sexual Behaviors, Preferences, and Enhancements, 5) Identity, 6) Potential Blocks and Barriers, and 7) Society. The themes and their subthemes became the master codebook to map all 517 of the open-ended responses (see appendix).

Cohen's kappa, a conservative measure of interrater reliability (Perreault & Leigh, 1989), was calculated after coding was completed. Values for each question ranged from .945-.987 indicating acceptable agreement among the coders. After all data were coded, we calculated frequencies for all themes (See Table 4).

## **Results**

We present a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to illustrate each research question (RQ). Descriptive statistics for all quantitative demographic questions are listed in Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all quantitative satisfaction questions are listed in Table 2. Descriptive statistics for all seven qualitative themes and subthemes are listed in Table 3. Each theme will be discussed under its corresponding research question.

### **Physical Satisfaction**

The first RQ explored how students experience physical satisfaction through the constructs of orgasm, physical behaviors, and arousal, desire, and attraction. The qualitative themes that related to physical satisfaction were 1. *Orgasm* and 4. *Sexual Behaviors, Preferences, and Enhancement*.

**Orgasm.** The survey questions that pertained to orgasm were items 3, 4, and 5 in Table 2. The largest groups of participants reported that they were either completely or somewhat satisfied with orgasm during partnered sexual activity (48.1% of the sample), with orgasm during solo activity (66.8%), and that they either never or sometimes fake orgasms (63%). See Table 2 for all frequencies.

In response to the open-ended prompt about what they feel they could never tell their partner, 8.5% of participants (N=44) gave qualitative responses related to *Orgasm*. Under this theme, there were 6 subthemes (see Table 4). Many students talked about experiencing difficulty having orgasms. For example, a participant said: “*Penile/vaginal penetration is not good enough to make me orgasm.*” Others mentioned wanting more orgasms (subtheme 1.3), never having had an orgasm (subtheme 1.2), and faking orgasms (subtheme 1.4): “*I’ve lied about all the orgasms I’ve had, I’ve never had an orgasm with my current sexual partner.*” A participant mentioned feeling embarrassed about their orgasms and stated that they felt: “*Embarrassment over climaxing too fast.*” Additionally, some responses mentioned wanting more equity in their orgasm experiences (subtheme 1.5): “*I don’t feel our sexual relationship is equal in terms of pleasure and satisfaction.*”

**Physical Behaviors.** The survey items that pertained to physical behaviors were: 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 in Table 2. The majority of participants reported that they were either completely or somewhat satisfied with what they are providing to their partner (60.7% of sample), with what

they are receiving from their partner (57.9%), with pleasure from experiences (64.9%), with and with their exploration of their own bodies (67.4%). Additionally, the largest group participants answered that they were either completely or somewhat satisfied with equality in sexual experiences (45.7% of sample). The qualitative theme that related to this construct was 4. *Sexual Behaviors, Preferences, and Enhancements*.

Almost a quarter of participants (24.8%; N=128) gave qualitative responses related to 4. *Sexual Behaviors, Preferences, and Enhancement*. Under this theme, there were 13 subthemes (see Table 4). The largest subthemes in this category were 4.2 *Frequency of sex* and 4.4 *Technique: Wanting Something More/Different* during sexual behavior. For example, a participant said: “*I want us to have a more frequent sex life,*” while another participant said they wanted their partner to “*work their hips correctly when having sex.*” People also talked about their aversions and dislikes (subtheme 4.6) during sex: “*I don’t particularly like giving oral, I don’t really like sex, and I don’t like talking about it.*” In this category, participants expressed desire to try new things, either generally (subtheme 4.3): “*I want to explore more ways to have sex,*” “[want] *to experiment more.*”), or listed thoughts about specific types of behaviors like oral sex (subtheme 4.7) and foreplay (subtheme 4.8), anal play (subtheme 4.10), dominance and control (subtheme 4.11), and using different types of enhancements like toys, role-play, and lubrication (subtheme 4.12). See Table 4 for full frequencies. For example, a participant shared that “*foreplay is important and you can’t just jump into it spontaneously whenever you want.*” and another participant said, “*I do want to use sex toys, I am just awkward about saying it, even though he has brought it up.*” One participant expressed their preferences about oral sex: “*oral sex is best when there’s more build-up, instead of going straight into it.*”

**Arousal, desire, and attraction.** Survey item 12 in Table 2 pertained to this construct. The majority of participants reported that they felt completely or somewhat sure of what they want sexually (65.7%). Responses in the qualitative themes of 3. *Relationships* and 4. *Sexual Behaviors, Preferences, and Enhancement* related to this construct.

One subtheme of *Relationships* that pertained to this construct was 3.4 *Intimacy, Connection, Love and Affection* where responses (N=32) about desire and arousal were recorded. One participant expressed that desire does not always have to be physical: “*I wish they knew that you don't always have to show love by being sexual.*” Similarly, another participant shared the need to feel intimate in a non-sexual setting: “*Sometimes I don't want sex, I want to spend real time with them.*”

Additionally, some responses coded under *Sexual Behaviors, Preferences, and Enhancement* related to this construct as well, particularly 4.2 *Frequency of Sex* (N=26) in which responses about sexual drive and libido were included. Many students talked about a discrepancy in their desire for sex compared with their partner's desire for sex. For example, one participant said: “*We sometimes had sex more often than I wanted to. Each individual time was great but I felt it became less special when we did it too frequently.*” While another participant expressed an opposite message, “*I am not always satisfied with the amount of sex we have.*”

### **Emotional Satisfaction**

The second RQ explored how students experience emotional satisfaction through the constructs of relationship type, comfort with communication, and self-image. The qualitative themes that related to emotional satisfaction were 2. *Communication and Negotiation*, 3. *Relationships*, 5. *Identity* and 6. *Potential Blocks and Barriers*.

**Relationship Type.** Quantitative survey item 1 related to this construct (Table 2). The majority of participants reported that they either completely or somewhat agreed they felt safe and respected in their intimate relationships (91.1%; see Table 2).

In discussing what they felt they could never tell their partner, 37.5% (N=194) of participants gave a response related to *Relationships*. There were 8 subthemes under this theme (see Table 4). The majority of the sample expressed that they either did not currently have a partner or they had never had a partner (N=114). Others discussed intimacy, connection, love, and romance, some of which fell under the arousal and desire category; participants also talked about feelings of trust and safety within their partnership (subtheme 3.5): *“I have a hard time trusting people due to trauma,”* and their commitment/compatibility (or lack thereof) (subtheme 3.3): *“I think about marrying him nearly everyday,”* or conversely, *“I think our values on commitment don’t align and I consider breaking up with them pretty often.”* Some participants expressed a desire to open their relationship (subtheme 3.1): *“I wish they knew about my openness for a variety of sexual and romantic partners outside of a monogamous relationship.”* Participants assessed their partners’ physical qualities (subtheme 3.7): *“I wish his dick was bigger...”*. Last, some students talked about engaging in sexual behaviors out of obligation for their partner (subtheme 3.6): *“There are many times when I did not care to have sex but felt expected to fill a role or need. I feel like I have to forgo my need for sleep and individual time to make sure you are sexually satisfied, or socially satisfied.”*

**Comfort with Communication.** The survey items that related to this construct were questions 2 and 11 in Table 2. The majority of participants responded that they feel somewhat or completely comfortable communicating with their partner about what they do and do not want



when it comes to sex (86.5%) and (in general) saying what they want sexually (61.2%). The qualitative theme that pertained to this construct was 2. *Communication and Negotiation*.

About thirty-five percent (N=183) of participants gave qualitative responses about communication with a partner(s). The majority of these participants felt they could tell their partner anything (subtheme 2.1): *“I feel that I tell my partner everything”* and *“can’t think of anything I don’t feel comfortable telling my partner.”* However, other participants felt they could not communicate with their partner and wished for more open communication (subtheme 2.4). A participant said: *“I probably wish my partner knew more about my preferences and took the time to ask me what I want.”* While another said: *“They really don’t listen to communication about sex when they’re trying to improve...”* Some people expressed hesitancy to be communicative because of fearing their partners’ reaction to feedback (subtheme 2.3): *“I wish it was easier to talk about thing I like/dislike without hurting his feelings.”* Others specifically mentioned communication about consent (subtheme 2.2): *“I wish my partner would ask for consent instead of waiting to hear “no” if I’m uncomfortable.”* Finally, participants mentioned communication about reciprocation (subtheme 2.5) *“I’m often uncomfortable expressing significant affection even in a long-term relationship out of fear of rejection or a lack of reciprocation.”* and negotiating pace and time of sexual encounters (subtheme 2.7): *“I would love to have sex more often but I feel bad constantly asking for it...”*

**Self-Image.** The survey item that related to this construct was question 14 in Table 2. The majority of participants reported feeling either completely or somewhat authentic in their values and sexual experiences (67.5%; see Table 2 for full frequencies). The qualitative themes that related to this construct were 5. *Identity* (3.9%; N=20) and 6. *Potential Blocks and Barriers*, (13.7%; N=71), divided into 3 and 6 subthemes, respectively. *Identity* encompassed when

participants mentioned their sexual orientation as something they were not able to tell their partner (subtheme 5.1): *“I am also attracted to girls sexually,”* their gender identity and expression (subtheme 5.2): *“I wish my partner had known about my gender identity,”* and general statements about attraction (subtheme 5.3): *“I don’t know if I have ever actually felt sexual attraction toward someone.”*

The biggest barrier or subtheme that participants listed from theme 6. *Potential Blocks and Barriers* was 6.3 *Body Image, Insecurity, Confidence, and Self-Esteem* (N=19). One participant said, *“My worries about my own body image and how that affects what I want to try and how I want to be handled when being intimate.”* Similarly, another participant shared: *“I don’t really love my body always and nothing they say really changes it.”* Others listed experiences of sexual harm and trauma, mental health and medication, uncertainty or lack of experience, or general anxiety and fears as affecting their self-image and as barriers to sexual satisfaction.

### **Sociocultural Determinants**

The third RQ examined sociocultural determinants, including gender, sexual orientation, and relationship status, on key quantitative questions pertaining to each construct of sexual satisfaction. We performed chi-square comparisons and post hoc Fisher-Exact Tests on item 4 to assess the construct of orgasm, items 6, 7, and 8 for physical behaviors, item 12 for arousal/desire/attraction, item 2 for communication, and item 14 for self-image (Table 2). For each of the chosen items, we collapsed the five-point Likert-scale into three categories: Yes, No, or Neutral. Chi-square results are reported in Table 3. Additionally, the qualitative theme that related to sociocultural determinants was 7. *Society*.

**Quantitative comparisons by Gender.** There was one significant difference by gender on the question 4: “To what degree do you feel “satisfied” with: orgasm (frequency, quality, etc.) during partnered sexual activity?” [ $\chi^2(2, N=918) = 32.949, p < .001$ ]. Post-hoc pairwise Fisher’s exact tests with a Bonferroni correction indicated that a higher proportion of men were satisfied from partner orgasm compared with women and gender expansive individuals.

**Quantitative comparisons by Sexual Orientation.** There were no significant differences by sexual orientation on the chosen items.

**Quantitative comparisons by Relationship Status.** There were significant differences by relationship status on items 2, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9 (see Table 3). (item 8).

**Society.** In response to the qualitative question about what they felt they could never tell their partner, a small number of participants (N=16; 3.1%) listed larger, societal factors that affected their sexual satisfaction. Participants mentioned societal pressure on their sexual activities (subtheme 7.1): *“Sexual activity shouldn't be a stressful thing where either partner is expected to perform to a standard set by society. People will be hurt if either/all partners feel insecure by their own measurement to what they feel is normal,”* power dynamics (subtheme 7.2): *“Even after almost two years of being together, it's so hard to articulate my concerns of gender and power dynamics from our relationship and how that translates to our sex life,”* pornography (subtheme 7.3): *“Pornography is not an accurate depiction of sex,”* and purity and religion (subtheme 7.4): *“How afraid I am of having sexual intercourse because of the religion that I grew up in.”*

## Discussion

Through quantitative (a set of closed-ended questions) and qualitative data (an open-ended question: “What do you wish your partner knew that you feel you could never tell them?”),

this study investigated college students' satisfaction of sexual experiences, including their physical satisfaction, emotional satisfaction, and sociocultural determinants. Our study revealed several important points to discuss regarding sexual satisfaction in college students and implications for education. Our data illustrate the multifaceted nature of sexual satisfaction and complexity beyond the physical aspect such as frequency of orgasm and intercourse. This remained constant regardless of sexual orientation. There were notable differences in satisfaction between the quantitative and qualitative data. Of the items we chose, there was one difference in a piece of sexual satisfaction by gender: men reported being more satisfied from partner orgasm than other genders. Additionally, single participants, compared with those in a relationship, more frequently selected neutral or dissatisfied on quantitative satisfaction items.

### **Multifaceted Nature of Sexual Satisfaction**

Seven themes emerged in the qualitative data that aligned with many facets of sexual satisfaction: orgasms, communication, relationships, sexual behaviors, identity, barriers, and society all have an impact on satisfaction. Studies may allude to these elements when discussing sexual satisfaction, however, often many only focus on a few (e.g., Howes, 2019; Rehman et al., 2019). It is important for future sexual health education initiatives on college campuses to approach these facets comprehensively, as they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Many of the qualitative responses included multiple themes. Western Washington University's efforts to promote sexual health on campus should use these data to inform more holistic education that includes all the facets of sexual satisfaction. Research shows that sexual satisfaction can promote overall health, wellbeing, and happiness (Stephenson et. al., 2011). The data from this study has the power to help improve the health and wellbeing in students by pinpointing certain areas where students are lacking in their ability to express their sexuality.

### **Quantitative vs. Qualitative Differences**

The majority of the quantitative data indicated that participants were satisfied with partner orgasm, what they were providing and receiving from partner(s), communication, and authenticity. However, the qualitative data indicated several areas where students were disjunctive in their satisfaction. This may be a function of societal messages to refrain from speaking openly about sexual satisfaction and pleasure, yet individuals are expected to be satisfied from their sexual interactions (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001). These messages are seen specifically in literature and film. When characters are portrayed as being fully satisfied from sexual interactions that are not representative of all people having sex, it creates a cultural pressure, sexual scripts, and gender roles. When participants were answering the closed-ended survey questions, they may have felt pressure to respond that they are satisfied. But when given the chance to respond openly about elements of their sexuality that they keep from their partners, students could share that some desires are not being met.

A large majority of individuals quantitatively reported they felt comfortable talking about what they did and did not want during sexual encounters. However, many open-ended responses revealed there are many needs and desires they do not feel comfortable sharing openly.

Communication is a determinant to relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction (Mark & Jozkowski, 2012; Rehman et al., 2019). The discrepancy between comfort with communication could be addressed by WWU Prevention and Wellness Services (PWS) in future education efforts. This could be specific classes or workshops focused on communication skills and facilitating open communication between sexual partners. These educational events could be held in dormitories, club meetings, and with sports team practices. Peer health educators at WWU could also help inform and influence students by practicing open communication styles

and then use it in their everyday lives. Support groups for sexual relationships facilitated by PWS could also be beneficial. This would allow people to openly speak about their sexual experiences in a group of supportive individuals. As we saw in the data, people were willing to share about their barriers to sexual satisfaction when given the opportunity.

### **Gender, Sexual Satisfaction and Relationship Status**

Our data indicated that men experience more satisfaction from partner orgasm than women and gender expansive individuals. This could be because society supports men's orgasms more than other genders through gender roles and sexual scripts. These sexual scripts allow men to be more open about their sexuality and sexual needs and stifle those same aspects in other genders (Cohen & Byers, 2014). Future education at WWU should focus on supporting women and gender expansive individuals to explore their sexuality and pleasure, including improving communication on what can better facilitate their pleasure. In sexual health classes, the focus should be moved toward a conversation about pleasure for all genders and sexual orientation. Too often these classes are geared toward biology and dysfunction and are limited by genital binaries. Educational programming that includes topics such as emotional intimacy, connection, and pleasure seeking would allow for students to understand that sexual satisfaction is an individualized and unique experience.

Sexual orientation did not have a significant difference on sexual satisfaction in this study. There are a few possible explanations for this. First, heterosexual and LGBTQ+ individuals in this sample could be experiencing sexual satisfaction at the same rates. Additionally, we had to combine identities of sexual orientation for data analysis and this could have resulted in a lack of nuances in satisfaction between sexual orientation.

A higher proportion of single people answered either neutral or dissatisfied to quantitative items than those in a relationship. This has a few possible explanations. Research shows that people who are in relationships have higher comfort talking more openly about their sexuality and sexual preferences (Lehmiller et al., 2014). This leads to higher rates of sexual satisfaction. People in healthy relationships also have higher levels of confidence and autonomy, leading to higher levels of sexual satisfaction (Armstrong et al., 2012) In short, participants in this study who were in relationships may have more context (more communication, comfort, and confidence) to be sexually satisfied than those who are single.

Another explanation to this difference by relationship status is the COVID-19 pandemic, which may also be a limitation to this study. COVID-19 had a significant impact on sexual behaviors (Knight, 2021). If people were single during the pandemic, they may have been less likely to be engaging in sex than those in a relationship. Also, selecting “single” as a relationship status on the survey also included engaging in hook-ups and one-night stands. The pandemic likely stopped those from happening, thus decreasing the frequency of sexual behaviors and therefore sexual satisfaction of single individuals (Lehmiller et al., 2020). The mental health impact that isolation may have created could have also impacted sexual satisfaction. Rates of depression and anxiety increased in college aged individuals during this time, and often these mental health issues result in decreased libido (Balzarini et al., 2020). This could have been impacting the satisfaction in all participants, regardless of relationship status, so rates of satisfaction may not be generalizable to the entire population.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study had several notable strengths. First, was that our participant sample (N=1064) was large for an undergraduate online survey. This allowed for more in-depth statistical analysis

and a comprehensive thematic analysis. Second, this survey included inclusive language for participants to share their gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, and sexual orientation. This was an important aspect of our survey because many prior studies on sexual research do not include inclusive demographic language. The use of inclusive language allows for participants to feel more seen and understood as their authentic self. This creates a more comfortable research environment for the participant and can result in more accurate data.

Our study also had several limitations that need to be addressed. We collected data through convenience sampling and therefore the sample is not necessarily generalizable to all WWU students or all college students. Our sample included high proportions of participants who were peer health educators, psychology students, honors students, and students taking classes in the Health and Human Development Department. This population of individuals may have more education related to sexuality and may be more open about their sexual behaviors and pleasure. This may have skewed the data to indicate students are more sexually satisfied and is not entirely representative of the WWU population.

As previously mentioned, our study had inclusive language for participant characteristics. However, for the purposes of data analysis we had to collapse and combine many of these characteristics into larger and more general categories. This may have resulted in the loss of specific experiences from these populations. Future research may benefit from more in-depth focus groups and in-person interviews with specific populations of the Western student body.



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## Appendix

**Table 1.** *Participant Demographics (N=957)*

Characteristic	<i>n</i> (%)
Age	
18	128 (13.4)
19	252 (26.3)
20	270 (28.2)
21	167 (17.5)
22	78 (8.2)
23-24	29 (3.1)
25+	33 (3.3)
Year in School	
First Year	197 (20.6)
Second Year	257 (26.9)
Third Year	281 (29.4)
Fourth Year	171 (17.9)
Fifth Year or Above	39 (4.1)
Gender Identity	
Man	211(22.0)
Woman	641 (66.9)
Gender Expansive <sup>1</sup>	98 (10.2)
Pronouns	
He/Him	223 (23.3)
She/Her	648 (67.6)
They/Them	47 (4.9)
Another Pronoun Combination	39 (4.1)

**Table 1.** *(Continued)*


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College of Major	
Business and Economics	60 (6.3)
Fine and Performing Arts	41 (4.3)
Humanities and Social Sciences	323 (33.7)
Science and Engineering	190 (19.9)
Fairhaven College of Interdisciplinary Studies	26 (2.7)
Graduate School	4 (0.4)
Huxley College of the Environment	57 (6.0)
Woodring College of Education	44 (4.6)
Don't Know/Undeclared	212 (22.1)
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	500 (52.4)
Gay	18 (1.9)
Lesbian	45 (4.7)
Bisexual	230 (24.1)
Asexual	37 (3.9)
Another Orientation <sup>2</sup>	124 (13.1)
Relationship Status	
Single <sup>3</sup>	538 (56.3)
Relationship <sup>4</sup>	419 (43.7)



**Table 1.** (Continued)

Racial and/or Ethnic Identity	
Asian	65 (6.8)
Black/African American	9 (.9)
White/Caucasian	724 (75.6)
Hispanic/Latinx	32 (3.3)
Native	2 (0.2)
Pacific Islander	1 (0.1)
Multiracial <sup>5</sup>	125 (13.1)
Current Living Situation	
On-campus <sup>6</sup>	122 (12.8)
Off-campus <sup>7</sup>	645 (67.4)
Permanent residence	149 (15.6)
Other	40 (4.2)

*Note.* <sup>1</sup>Gender Expansive included participants that selected agender, genderqueer/fluid, nonbinary, trans man, trans woman, two-spirit and a gender not listed as their gender identification.

<sup>2</sup>Another orientation included participants that selected queer, pan, and not listed as their sexual orientation.

<sup>3</sup>Single included participants that selected “single and not currently dating,” “single and wanting to date,” “single but casually seeing someone,” and “single but casually seeing more than one person.”

<sup>4</sup>Relationship included participants that selected “in a committed relationship with one person,” “in a committed relationship that is open,” and “engaged, married, another relationship.”

<sup>5</sup>Multiracial included participants that selected more than one racial identity or wrote in a racial identity not listed.

<sup>6</sup>On-campus included participants that selected “residence hall,” “on-campus apartment alone/with roommates” and “on-campus apartment with partner.”

<sup>7</sup>Off-campus included participants that selected “off-campus apartment alone/with roommates” and “off-campus apartment with partner.”

**Table 2.** *Frequencies of Quantitative Survey Questions about Satisfaction*

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Completely Disagree N (%)	Somewhat Disagree N (%)	Neither Disagree nor Agree N (%)	Somewhat Agree N (%)	Completely Agree N (%)	N/A N (%)
<b>1. I feel safe and respected in my intimate relationship (N=744)</b>	17 (2.3)	17 (2.3)	32 (4.3)	171 (23.0)	507 (68.1)	
<b>2. I feel comfortable communicating with my partner(s) about what I want and don't want when it comes to sex (N = 755)</b>	20 (2.6)	48 (6.4)	34 (4.5)	239 (31.7)	414 (54.8)	
	Never N (%)	Sometimes N (%)	Often N (%)	Always N (%)		N/A N (%)
<b>3. I fake orgasm or pleasure (N = 918)</b>	347 (37.8)	230 (25.1)	85 (9.3)	35 (3.7)		221 (24.1)
	Completely Dissatisfied N (%)	Somewhat Dissatisfied N (%)	Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied N (%)	Somewhat Satisfied N (%)	Completely Satisfied N (%)	N/A N (%)
<b>4. To what degree do you feel "satisfied" with: orgasm (frequency, quality, etc.) during partnered sexual activity? (N=918)</b>	38 (4.1)	100 (10.9)	95 (10.3)	276 (30.1)	165 (18.0)	244 (26.6)
<b>5. To what degree do you feel "satisfied" with: orgasm (frequency, quality, etc.) during solo sexual activity? (N=920)</b>	35 (3.8)	53 (5.8)	84 (9.1)	301 (32.7)	314 (34.1)	133 (14.5)
<b>6. To what degree do you feel "satisfied" with: what you are providing for your partner(s)? (N=918)</b>	11 (1.2)	47 (5.1)	81 (8.8)	336 (36.6)	221 (24.1)	222 (24.2)
<b>7. To what degree do you feel "satisfied" with: what you are receiving from your partner(s)? (N=917)</b>	8 (.9)	77 (8.4)	79 (8.6)	307 (33.5)	224 (24.4)	222 (24.2)
<b>8. To what degree do you feel "satisfied" with: pleasure from experiences? (N=915)</b>	11 (1.2)	49 (5.4)	94 (10.3)	353 (38.6)	241 (26.3)	167 (18.3)

<b>9. To what degree do you feel “satisfied” with: equality in sexual experiences from all partners? (N=915)</b>	13 (1.4)	112 (12.2)	123 (13.4)	233 (25.2)	188 (20.5)	246 (26.9)
<b>10. To what degree do you feel “satisfied” with: exploration of your own body? (N=918)</b>	21 (2.3)	92 (10.0)	131 (14.3)	321 (35.0)	297 (32.4)	56 (6.1)
	Completely Uncomfortable N (%)	Somewhat Uncomfortable N (%)	Neither uncomfortable, nor comfortable N (%)	Somewhat Comfortable N (%)	Completely Comfortable N (%)	N/A N (%)
<b>1. To what degree do you feel comfortable in saying what you want sexually? (N=919)</b>	39 (4.2)	155 (16.9)	102 (11.1)	320 (34.8)	243 (26.4)	60 (6.5)
	Completely Unsure N (%)	Somewhat Unsure N (%)	Neither unsure, nor sure N (%)	Somewhat Sure N (%)	Completely Sure N (%)	N/A N (%)
<b>2. To what degree do you feel sure of what you want sexually? (N=919)</b>	23 (2.5)	149 (16.2)	112 (12.2)	391 (42.5)	213 (23.2)	31 (3.4)
	Completely Unaligned N (%)	Somewhat Unaligned N (%)	Neither unaligned, nor aligned N (%)	Somewhat Aligned N (%)	Completely Aligned N (%)	N/A N (%)
<b>3. To what degree do you feel your expectations of romance and intimacy align (match) with your reality? (N=919)</b>	54 (5.9)	195 (21.2)	109 (11.9)	335 (36.5)	165 (18.0)	61 (6.6)
	Completely Inauthentic N (%)	Somewhat Inauthentic N (%)	Neither inauthentic, nor authentic N (%)	Somewhat Authentic N (%)	Completely Authentic N (%)	N/A N (%)
<b>4. To what degree do you feel authentic (behaving in a way that is consistent with your beliefs/values) in your sexual experiences? (N=917)</b>	7 (0.8)	86 (9.4)	85 (9.3)	307 (33.5)	312 (34.0)	120 (13.1)

**Table 3. Significant Chi-Square Results for Sociocultural Characteristics and Satisfaction Items**

	Yes n(%)	Neutral n(%)	No n(%)	$\chi^2$	Cramer's $V$
<b>To what degree do you feel “satisfied” with: orgasm (frequency, quality, etc.) during partnered sexual activity? (N=918)</b>					
Gender Identity				32.949***	.157
Man	125 (81.2)	20 (13)	9 (5.8)		
Woman	281 (61.5)	68 (14.9)	108 (23.6)		
Gender Expansive	34 (55.7)	6 (9.8)	21 (34.4)		
Relationship Status				53.195***	.281
Single	154 (50.8)	56 (18.5)	93 (30.7)		
Relationship	286 (77.3)	39 (10.5)	45 (12.2)		
<b>To what degree do you feel “satisfied” with: what you are providing for your partner(s)? (N=918)</b>					
Relationship Status				29.846***	.207
Single	221 (70.8)	54 (17.3)	37 (11.9)		
Relationship	335 (87.5)	27 (7.0)	21 (5.5)		
<b>To what degree do you feel “satisfied” with: what you are receiving from your partner(s)? (N=917)</b>					
Relationship Status				86.640***	.353
Single	188 (59.9)	62 (19.7)	64 (20.4)		
Relationship	342 (90.0)	17 (4.5)	21 (5.5)		
<b>To what degree do you feel “satisfied” with: pleasure from experiences? (N=915)</b>					
Relationship Status				39.349***	.230
Single	264 (70.4)	65 (17.3)	46 (12.3)		
Relationship	329 (88.7)	29 (7.8)	13 (3.5)		
<b>I feel comfortable communicating with my partner(s) about what I want and don't want when it comes to sex (N = 755)</b>					
Relationship Status				26.867***	.189
Single	283 (79.7)	22 (6.2)	50 (14.1)		
Relationship	369 (92.5)	12 (3.0)	18 (4.5)		
<b>To what degree do you feel authentic (behaving in a way that is consistent with your beliefs/values) in your sexual experiences? (N=917)</b>					
Relationship Status				59.024***	.272
Single	269 (66.6)	64 (15.8)	71 (17.6)		
Relationship	349 (89.3)	20 (5.1)	22 (5.6)		

Note: With Bonferroni correction,  $\alpha = .05/9 = .006$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 4.** *Theme Frequencies of responses to “What do you wish your partner knew that you feel you could never tell them?” (n=517)*

<b>Code</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Kappa Value</b>
<b>1 Orgasm</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>.974</b>
1.1 Orgasm Challenges/Difficulty	10		
1.2 Never Orgasmed	9		
1.3 Want more Orgasms	3		
1.4 Faking Orgasms	5		
1.5 Pleasure Equity	4		
1.6 Orgasm Other	16		
<b>2. Communication and Negotiation</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>35.4</b>	<b>.945</b>
2.1 Can tell them anything/Nothing	112		
2.2 Communicating Consent	7		
2.3 Partner’s Reaction to Feedback	15		
2.4 Desire for Open Communication	20		
2.5 Reciprocation	10		
2.6 Negotiating Pace and Time	9		
2.7 Communication/Negotiation Other	29		
<b>3. Relationships</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>37.5</b>	<b>.955</b>
3.1 Open/Non-monogamous	5		
3.2 Never had a partner/NA	114		
3.3 Relationship Compatibility, Commitment	8		
3.4 Intimacy/Connection, Love, Romance and Affection	32		
3.5 Trust/Safety	8		
3.6 Partner Obligation	14		
3.7 Assessment of Physical Qualities	7		
3.8 Relationship Other	16		
<b>4. Sexual Behaviors, Preferences, and Enhancement</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>24.8</b>	<b>.955</b>
4.1 Quality of Sex	7		

4.2 Frequency of Sex	26		
4.3 Trying New Things	15		
4.4 Technique: Wanting Something More/Different	25		
4.5 Knowledge of Anatomy	6		
4.6 Aversion and Dislike	18		
4.7 Oral Sex	17		
4.8 Foreplay	6		
4.9 Masturbation/Self-Pleasure	7		
4.10 Anal Play	4		
4.11 Dominance and Control	8		
4.12 Enhancement: Toys, Role-Play, Lubrication	7		
4.13 Enhancement/Preferences Other	17		
<b>5. Identity</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>.987</b>
5.1 Sexual Orientation	10		
5.2 Gender Identity and Expression	3		
5.3 Attraction	8		
<b>6. Potential Barriers or Blocks</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>.966</b>
6.1 Sexual Harm and Trauma	18		
6.2 Mental Health and Medication	12		
6.3 Body Image, Insecurity, Confidence, and Self-Esteem	19		
6.4 Uncertainty, Lack of Knowledge and Experience	13		
6.5 Anxiety/Fear/Stress/Worry	15		
6.6 Potential Barriers or Blocks Other	5		
<b>7. Society</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>.967</b>
7.1 Pressure and Expectations	4		
7.2 Gender and Power	4		
7.3 Pornography	3		
7.4 Purity/Virginity/Religion	5		

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## Thematic Codebook

### Major Themes:

1. ORGASM AND PLEASURE	2. COMMUNICATION AND NEGOTIATION	3. RELATIONSHIP	4. SEXUAL BEHAVIORS, PREFERENCES, AND ENHANCEMENTS
5. IDENTITY	6. POTENTIAL BARRIERS AND BLOCKS	7. SOCIETY	

Category	Description (operational definition)	Response Examples
<b>1. Orgasm and Pleasure</b>	Anything in the category Orgasm is going to include subcategories 1.1-1.6: 1.1 Orgasm Challenges/Difficulty, 1.2 Never Orgasmed, 1.3 Want More Orgasm, 1.4 Faking Orgasm, 1.5 Pleasure Equity, 1.6 Orgasm Other.	One from each subcategory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How sexual experiences/desires are harder for me to have. I have trouble orgasming and desiring sexual pleasure</li> <li>• I've never orgasmed to sex with another person.</li> <li>• I wish I could tell them that I really want to be able to climax more</li> <li>• I lied about all the orgasms I've had, I've never had an orgasm with my current sexual partner.</li> <li>• I would like my orgasm and pleasure to be an equal priority during sex as their orgasm and pleasure.</li> <li>• I'm ace and aro. I don't have nor want a partner, but I am very aware of what I want with my body. I can still pleasure myself outside of it being sexual. Sometimes the dopamine release from an orgasm is just nice.</li> </ul>

1.1 Orgasm Challenges/Difficulty	This subcategory encompasses responses about challenges or difficulty surrounding orgasms including trouble having them, fear, embarrassment, and lack of knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How sexual experiences/desires are harder for me to have. I have trouble orgasming and desiring sexual pleasure</li> <li>• I don't like orgasming that much</li> <li>• Sometimes I feel very uncomfortable after I orgasm and just want to leave</li> <li>• I haven't had sex with my current interest yet. In the past I struggled with orgasming because I get so nervous about myself and I can't fully enjoy it, plus I take anti-depressants which don't help.</li> <li>• That I appreciate how much they care about me orgasming, but it can be overwhelming and stressful.</li> </ul>
1.2 Never Orgasmed	This subcategory includes responses that explicitly indicate they have never orgasmed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I've never orgasmed to sex with another person.</li> <li>• That I never have orgasmed</li> <li>• I don't think I've ever had an orgasm but I'm not sure.</li> <li>• That I have never orgasmed and I think something is wrong with me or that that particular position or thing is painful.</li> <li>• That they've never made me have an orgasm. Even though he's never asked if I have, I still don't think I could bring myself to say no.</li> <li>• I have never had an orgasm with a partner during vaginal sex.</li> </ul>
1.3 Want more Orgasms	This subcategory includes responses about wanting more orgasms, in general or from their partner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wish I could tell them that I really want to be able to climax more</li> <li>• I just wanna cum a little more</li> </ul>
1.4 Faking Orgasm	This subcategory encompasses responses disclosing experiences of faking orgasms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I do not have a partner, but when I have in the past I wish I could tell them I was faking orgasms a lot</li> <li>• That sometimes I fake an orgasm and wish they could try a little harder or know that I'm done</li> <li>• I lied about all the orgasms I've had, I've never had an orgasm with my current sexual partner.</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many times I have faked an orgasm and that I always need more time, but now it seems too late</li> </ul>
1.5 Pleasure Equity	This subcategory includes responses about wanting more effort given to pleasure equity (e.g., all people in the relationship are given the opportunity to receive the pleasure they need/want/desire).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would like my orgasm and pleasure to be an equal priority during sex as their orgasm and pleasure.</li> <li>• I wish I could tell my partners that: I want my pleasure to be just as much of a focus that theirs is, that doesn't feel good, I don't want to do that, that's not my clitoris, this is what I want to do, can you go down on me?, can we have more foreplay before we have sex?, I need/want you to wear a condom, please don't do something without asking, can you not kiss me so hard, I actually don't want to have sex right now</li> </ul>
1.6 Orgasm Other	This subcategory includes responses that do not align in the previous categories but reference orgasms (and/or pleasure) (e.g., pressure to reach orgasm, orgasm for release)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm ace and aro. I don't have nor want a partner, but I am very aware of what I want with my body. I can still pleasure myself outside of it being sexual. Sometimes the dopamine release from an orgasm is just nice.</li> <li>• I have never had a partner I haven't honestly communicated with, and the people I casually date right now are always interested in engaging in conversations about providing each other pleasure, learning how to provide that, and how to have a healthy relationship outside of sex.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Communication and Negotiation</b>	This category includes anything from subcategories 2.1-2.7: 2.1 I Can Tell them anything, 2.2 Communicating Consent, 2.3 Partner's Reaction to Feedback, 2.4 Desire for Open Communication, 2.5 Reciprocation, 2.6 Negotiating Pace and Time, 2.7 Communication/Negotiation Other.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nothing I feel I couldn't tell them</li> <li>• I'm not very experienced with sex so I feel insecure. I feel like they have expectations of me that I don't know how to live up to which makes me scared to try new things sexually. I wish my partner would ask for consent instead of waiting to hear "no" if I'm uncomfortable.</li> <li>• it doesn't feel good when you start off aggressive or fast and that I need more attention in foreplay</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wish it was easier to talk about things I like/dislike without hurting his feelings.</li> </ul>
2.1 Can Tell them anything	This subcategory includes responses indicating that they feel they can tell their partner anything or there is nothing they would not tell their partner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nothing I feel I couldn't tell them</li> <li>• I don't have anything I can't tell my partner</li> <li>• My partner knows everything, we have very open communication</li> <li>• I feel comfortable telling my partner everything</li> <li>• Nothing we are completely open with each other</li> <li>• I tell her everything</li> </ul>
2.2 Communicating Consent	This subcategory includes responses related to negotiating consent with their partner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Me and my partner have actually talked about this, but i'm not sure if I truly communicated to him how much safer and more respected it makes me feel for him to consistently ask for consent to touch or kiss me. I do feel safe in my relationship, but sometimes when we'll be making out or what have you i want to explicitly be asked is it okay to touch you here, instead if having to to correct or say hey can we not?</li> <li>• I'm not very experienced with sex so I feel insecure. I feel like they have expectations of me that I don't know how to live up to which makes me scared to try new things sexually. I wish my partner would ask for consent instead of waiting to hear "no" if I'm uncomfortable.</li> </ul>
2.3 Partner's Reaction to Feedback	This subcategory includes responses about fear, worry and/or concern for their partner's reaction to or judgement about feedback detailing their needs/desires/wants in the relationship (e.g., telling them things without upsetting them, hurting their feelings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I haven't had a sexual partner, but I think I might be afraid to tell a romantic partner that I do not wish for any sexual contact for fear of disappointing them.</li> <li>• Another thing is that I wish I could communicate what I felt would me achieve an orgasm without him getting defensive or feeling like he's bad in bed, despite my approach being as suggestive, positive and open as possible.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes I don't want something, and it's not my partner's fault. I feel like they get offended and sad, where it isn't purposefully manipulative but I can see that she feels unwanted when I don't want to engage with her. It is manipulative whether she knows it or not, but I also know it isn't fair to make her feel bad for having a reasonable response to being rejected.</li> <li>• I wish it was easier to talk about things I like/dislike without hurting his feelings.</li> </ul>
2.4 Desire for open communication	This subcategory encompasses responses wanting more direct and clear communication with their partner, including difficulty communicating their needs, boundaries, preferences, and desires [because of current communication style].	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wish we could have been a bit more open about what we wanted to try</li> <li>• I wish they communicated more often and more directly.</li> <li>• To take time to ask what I want</li> <li>• I'm not sure because I've never experienced sexual activity, but I would want my partner to make sure I'm doing fine. I also wouldn't want to hurt their feelings by lying that I wasn't satisfied when it came to any sexual activity.</li> </ul>
2.5 Reciprocation	This subcategory includes responses about giving or receiving sexual behaviors with a partner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That I am interesting in trying new things but worried at being perceived as "bad" at them. I like receiving oral sex but get nervous giving oral. I am insecure about how they are feeling during the experience, i.e. is it pleasurable enough for them?</li> <li>• I don't enjoy giving head and I don't always need it in return</li> <li>• I'd rather make you feel good (orgasm) than to get off myself.</li> </ul>
2.6 Negotiating Pace and Time	This subcategory includes responses about time and/or pace (e.g., faster or slower) in negotiating their sexual behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have to go slow at first/foreplay is important for us ladies (I can tell/have told them this, its just more important than I can usually get across)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it doesn't feel good when you start off aggressive or fast and that I need more attention in foreplay</li> <li>• How many times I have faked an orgasm and that I always need more time, but now it seems too late</li> <li>• Embarrassment over climaxing too fast</li> </ul>
2.7 Communication/ Negotiation Other	This subcategory includes responses that do not align in the previous categories but focus on communication/negotiation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I do not believe it is useful to withhold information from one's partner</li> <li>• I wish that my future partners could understand me perfectly, its very unrealistic but my outlook on sex changes all the time and having a partner that is supportive of me and is happy with me then that would make me happy</li> </ul>
<b>3. Relationships</b>	This category includes anything from subcategories 3.1-3.8: 3.1 Open/Non-monogamous, 3.2 Never had a partner/NA, 3.3 Relationship Compatibility, 3.4 Intimacy/Connection, Love, Romance, and Affection, 3.5 Trust/Safety, 3.6 Partner Obligation, 3.7 Assessment of Physical Qualities, 3.8 Relationship Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That I want to open up our relationship</li> <li>• I've never had a partner :/</li> <li>• I don't think we fit as life partners. We're too different.</li> <li>• Sometimes I don't want sex, I want to spend real time with them.</li> <li>• I don't trust him emotionally</li> <li>• I wish my partner knew that oral sex makes me uncomfortable and that I was only doing it to please them.</li> <li>• Sometimes I wish she had a bigger butt but I love her very much.</li> </ul>
3.1 Open/Non-monogamous	This subcategory includes responses about opening up relationships, polyamory, non-monogamous relationship status.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That I want to open up our relationship</li> <li>• That I'm interested in polygamy</li> <li>• I wish they knew about my openness for a variety of sexual and romantic partners outside of a monogamous relationship.</li> <li>• I'm afraid I'm missing out on other romantic/sexual experiences with other people</li> </ul>

3.2 Never had a partner/NA	<p>This subcategory includes N/A responses or specifications that they have never had a partner.</p> <p>*does not include when participants say they do not currently have a partner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I've never had a partner :/</li> </ul>
3.3 Relationship Compatibility, Commitment	<p>This subcategory includes responses about the nature of compatibility and commitment of a relationship. Also includes mentions of relationship status (e.g., want to be in a relationship, don't want to be in a relationship)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I don't think we fit as life partners. We're too different.</li> <li>Wish I could tell my partner that I'm having just an okay time with sex. May not be the right person for me.</li> <li>That I want to be in a relationship with them.</li> <li>That I still love my last partner, and I don't think my current partner can compare to the happiness I found with my ex.</li> </ul>
3.4 Intimacy/Connection, Love, Romance, and Affection	<p>This subcategory includes responses about non-sexual touch, expressions of love, care, and affection towards a partner. Also includes mentions of emotional connection and understanding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I wish they knew that you don't always have to show love by being sexual</li> <li>Sometimes I don't want sex, I want to spend real time with them.</li> <li>I wish he would spend more time touching me in a non sexual way, just casually during every day life</li> <li>Not everything needs to end in a sexual activity. Not every date, sleepover, or party needs to end with sex or a sexual activity.</li> <li>Sometimes I wish we were more physically intimate, not even in a sexual manner, just in general.</li> <li>I wish he was open to more romantic gestures and activities.</li> <li>I love them</li> <li>I can't have pleasure from intercourse unless we have an emotional connection</li> </ul>
3.5 Trust/Safety	<p>This subcategory includes responses about trust and safety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It's hard for me to have any sexual interactions with someone if I don't feel safe. It's hard for me to be vulnerable and many times someone who wants to hook</li> </ul>

		<p>up has ended up pushing things past the point of no return for myself in which I completely disassociate from the experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't trust him emotionally</li> <li>• I wish I could have trusted them to keep our private life private. I wish when I tried to engage in rather uncomfortable but important discussions I wasn't blown off. I wish one of my exes didn't shame me for being interested in normal activities.</li> <li>• I have a hard time trusting people due to trauma.</li> </ul>
3.6 Partner Obligation	<p>This subcategory includes responses about doing things for their partner even when they aren't into it or in the mood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I do not want to be engaging in sexual activity nearly as often as we do.</li> <li>• I wish my partner knew that oral sex makes me uncomfortable and that I was only doing it to please them. I also wish they knew that I don't get the same pleasure out of certain sexual activities as they do.</li> <li>• That I mostly engaged in sexual intimacy for their sake, even though I knew it likely wouldn't be nearly as pleasurable for me. They never forced me into anything and I love them immensely. Mostly I just didn't want them looking elsewhere for their natural feeling and desire of sexual intimacy.</li> <li>• Sometimes I'm not totally into it but I want her to be happy and feel closer to me because that's what it's more about to me. I don't really get much out of it personally.</li> </ul>
3.7 Assessment of Physical Qualities	<p>This subcategory includes responses about a partner's physical attributes (e.g., body size, wishing for something different). Both for critique and appreciation. *does not include self-assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• she's got a great ass!</li> <li>• I wish she knew how different it is to be in a fat body in comparison to her thin one.</li> <li>• Sometimes I wish she had a bigger butt but I love her very much.</li> </ul>

3.8 Relationship Other	This subcategory includes responses that do not align in the previous categories but focus on relationships, including non-romantic partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel frustrated with myself, but also a little jealous and resentful of you when you finish during sex.</li> <li>• I just want to wait a while for us to get to know each other better and I don't think I enjoy sex.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Sexual Behaviors, Preferences, and Enhancement</b>	This category includes subcategories 4.1-4.13: 4.1 Quality of Sex, 4.2 Frequency of Sex, 4.3 Trying New Things, 4.4 Technique: Wanting Something More/Different, 4.5 Knowledge of Anatomy, 4.6 Aversion and Dislike, 4.7 Oral Sex, 4.8 Foreplay, 4.9 Masturbation/Self-Pleasure, 4.10 Anal Play, 4.11 Dominance and Control, 4.12 Enhancement: Toys, Role-Play, Lubrication, 4.13 Enhancement/Preferences Other.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• i want you to exercise more so we can have better sex</li> <li>• More sex and let's get more wild</li> <li>• I wish we could have been a bit more open about what we wanted to try</li> <li>• How to work their hips correctly when having sex</li> <li>• I wish my partner knew more about female anatomy and be a bit more understanding with that kind of stuff (in that for a lot of people with vulva's, they need both penetration and clit-rubbing in order to (help) "finish", whereas folks with penises don't need that dual action.</li> <li>• I don't like doggy style</li> <li>• My partner is bad at oral sex.</li> <li>• That foreplay is important and you can't just jump into it spontaneously whenever you want.</li> <li>• That I can make myself orgasm more than they can and that's ok.</li> <li>• Anal doesnt feel as great as I wish it would</li> <li>• I wish he knew how much I enjoy when he's confident/dominant.</li> <li>• toys aren't bad!</li> </ul>
4.1 Quality of Sex	The subcategory includes responses on sexual satisfaction, wanting better sex, not liking the sex they are having (e.g., it doesn't feel good).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• i want you to exercise more so we can have better sex</li> <li>• That I wish I could provide better pleasure for them, I don't want sex to be all about myself finishing.</li> </ul>
4.2 Frequency of Sex	This subcategory includes responses about wanting more or less sex and mentions of their libido (e.g., "sex drive"), potentially in relation to their partner's libido.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More sex and let's get more wild</li> <li>• I wish I could tell them that sometimes I wish that we had sex more.</li> <li>• I don't want to have sex with my partner, I have never wanted to have sex with my partner, and I never will</li> </ul>

		want to have sex with my partner, and they don't accept that. They think I'm broken.
4.3 Trying New Things	This subcategory includes responses about exploration, variation, and trying new things during sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That I am interesting in trying new things but worried at being perceived as "bad" at them. I like receiving oral sex but get nervous giving oral. I am insecure about how they are feeling during the experience, i.e. is it pleasurable enough for them?</li> <li>• I wish we could have been a bit more open about what we wanted to try</li> <li>• I wish my partners would have more variation and be more open-minded to new things.</li> <li>• to experiment more</li> <li>• I want explore more ways to have sex</li> </ul>
4.4 Technique: Wanting Something More/Different	This subcategory includes responses about wanting a partner to do things differently/more/better during sex. Also includes mentioning their partner's effort (e.g., wanting them to try harder).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to work their hips correctly when having sex</li> <li>• That rubbing my labia doesn't do anything</li> <li>• I just wish they put more effort into sexual relations (no longer together, previous relationship).</li> <li>• He's not very good at rhythm with thrusting.</li> <li>• That they suck at what they do</li> </ul>
4.5 Knowledge of Anatomy	This subcategory includes responses referencing knowledge of anatomy (e.g., clitoris, vulva, labia) or anatomy in the context of sexual behaviors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wish my partner knew more about female anatomy and be a bit more understanding with that kind of stuff (in that for a lot of people with vulva's, they need both penetration and clit-rubbing in order to (help) "finish", whereas folks with penises don't need that dual action.</li> </ul>
4.6 Aversion and Dislike	This subcategory includes responses about not liking or having an aversion to certain sexual activities/behaviors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't like doggy style</li> <li>• That I don't like when they use hands</li> <li>• I don't actually enjoy penetrative sex, I just want to feel wanted</li> </ul>



4.7 Oral Sex	This subcategory includes responses about oral sex.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My partner is bad at oral sex.</li> <li>• That oral sex is best when there's more build-up, instead of going straight into it</li> <li>• I don't enjoy giving head and I don't always need it in return</li> <li>• I prefer not to do oral sex</li> <li>• I want more oral pleasure</li> </ul>
4.8 Foreplay	This subcategory includes responses about foreplay.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have to go slow at first/foreplay is important for us ladies (I can tell/have told them this, its just more important than I can usually get across)</li> <li>• Foreplay is fun but sometimes you go a little rough on the clit my dude</li> <li>• That foreplay is important and you can't just jump into it spontaneously whenever you want.</li> </ul>
4.9 Masturbation/Self-Pleasure	This subcategory includes responses about masturbation and/or self-pleasure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I masturbate when I am at my own home, but she would probably see that as an indication of infidelity or emotional distance, however that's not the case at all. I masturbate, and I don't feel guilty about it, but I know that my girlfriend would be hurt.</li> <li>• I cum harder by myself</li> <li>• That I can make myself orgasm more than they can and that's ok.</li> </ul>
4.10 Anal Play	This subcategory includes responses about anal play (e.g., anal sex, pegging).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anal doesnt feel as great as I wish it would</li> <li>• I want a finger in my butt</li> <li>• I'd like to try anal but I've caught hints that they're not into it so I don't want to pressure them in any way so I don't bring it up.</li> </ul>
4.11 Dominance and Control	This subcategory includes responses about dominance and control in the sexual situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wish he knew how much I enjoy when he's confident/dominant.</li> <li>• I want them to take control more.</li> <li>• Sometimes I would like you to take more action</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I want to be degraded.</li> <li>• I wish they would take more control</li> </ul>
4.12 Enhancement: Toys, Role-Play, Lubrication	This subcategory includes responses about the use of toys, role-play, and lubrication during sex.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wish his dick was bigger/ I would be interested in role-play situations.</li> <li>• That I do want to use sex toys, I am just awkward about saying it, even though he has brought it up</li> <li>• toys aren't bad!</li> </ul>
4.13 Enhancement/Preferences Other	This subcategory includes responses that do not align in the previous categories but focus on enhancement or preferences during sex.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ... I feel like I have to pretend to want/enjoy sex for anyone to want to be in a relationship with me.</li> <li>• that I would like to finish inside her and use plan b the next morning and she is on birth control</li> </ul>
<b>5. Identity</b>	This category includes subcategories 5.1-5.3: 5.1 Sexual Orientation, 5.2 Gender Identity and Expression, 5.3 5.3 Attraction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That I am bisexual</li> <li>• I wish my partner had known about my gender identity</li> </ul>
5.1 Sexual Orientation	This subcategory includes responses about sexual orientation, or how they find themselves feeling drawn (or not drawn) to some other people, in sexual, romantic, and/or other ways (often categorized with gender (e.g., asexuality, ace, aro, bisexuality))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That I'm asexual, that I feel like I have to pretend to want/enjoy sex for anyone to want to be in a relationship with me.</li> <li>• That I may be lesbian</li> <li>• I feel like I might be bisexual, but I am in a committed relationship with a man and I feel like telling him might only cause problems.</li> <li>• That I am bisexual</li> <li>• I'm ace and aro. I don't have nor want a partner, but I am very aware of what I want with my body. I can still pleasure myself outside of it being sexual. Sometimes the dopamine release from an orgasm is just nice.</li> </ul>

5.2 Gender Identity and Expression	This subcategory includes responses about <b>gender identity</b> , how they, in their head, experience and define their gender, based on how much they align (or don't align) with what they understand the options for gender to be, and <b>expression</b> , how they present their gender (through actions, clothing, and demeanor), and how those presentations are viewed based on social expectations (e.g., nonbinary, gender bending)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crossdressing/gender bending</li> <li>• I wish my partner had known about my gender identity</li> <li>• being a nonbinary/trans afab individual makes me feel like sex is expected but am uncomfortable doing so because I have not started my medical transition journey</li> </ul>
5.3 Attraction	This subcategory includes responses about attraction (or lack thereof) to their partner due to personal identity reasons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't know if I have ever actually felt sexual attraction toward someone</li> <li>• I have no attraction or physical desire for things...</li> </ul>
<b>6. Potential Barriers or Blocks</b>	This category includes subcategories 6.1-6.5: 6.1 Sexual Harm and Trauma, 6.2 Mental Health and Medication, 6.3 Body Image, Insecurity, Confidence, and Self-Esteem, 6.4 Uncertainty, Lack of Knowledge and Experience, 6.5 Anxiety/Fear/Stress/Worry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't think my partners understand rape trauma</li> <li>• my depression makes me not in the mood for sex</li> <li>• In the past I didn't enjoy sex because of body insecurities</li> <li>• I'm not very experienced with sex so I feel insecure.</li> <li>• That I'm afraid of total intimacy with them (being emotionally intimate and</li> </ul>
6.1 Sexual Harm and Trauma	This subcategory includes responses about participants' past sexual harm and trauma (and potentially its effect on them now, like disassociation).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am completely scared to give oral sex because, in a past relationship, they forcefully made me give them oral sex.</li> <li>• Sexual trauma I experienced when I was younger.</li> <li>• I don't think my partners understand rape trauma</li> <li>• I wish they knew my past sexual assault experiences so they understand why I want things to do slow.</li> </ul>
6.2 Mental Health and Medication	This subcategory includes responses about participants' mental health (e.g., depression, anxiety) as well as use of medication that affects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lot of my issues come more from my mental health and past that are really hard for me to talk about since I have a very hard time recalling. I believe I have a</li> </ul>

	their sexuality (e.g., antidepressants, birth control).	<p>personality disorder but I am not in the position to get a diagnosis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel bad that I am on antidepressants because it has taken away my drive to have sex, I feel like it's my fault that we don't have sex anymore, I feel like he deserves more from me that I am not able to give.</li> <li>• my depression makes me not in the mood for sex</li> </ul>
6.3 Body Image, Insecurity, Confidence, and Self-Esteem	This subcategory includes responses about participants' body image, eating disorders, insecurity, confidence and self-esteem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I wish I could feel more comfortable being naked in front of her.</li> <li>• In the past I didn't enjoy sex because of body insecurities</li> <li>• The extent to which my low self esteem impacts my self image and makes me feel like I'm repulsive.</li> <li>• how unworthy I feel, not because of him just in general.</li> </ul>
6.4 Uncertainty, Lack of Knowledge and Experience	This subcategory includes responses about participants' uncertainty (about what they want, what they like), lack of knowledge, and inexperience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm not very experienced with sex so I feel insecure. I feel like they have expectations of me that I don't know how to live up to which makes me scared to try new things sexually. I wish my partner would ask for consent instead of waiting to hear "no" if I'm uncomfortable.</li> </ul>
6.5 Anxiety/Fear/Stress/Worry	This subcategory includes responses about participants' anxiety/fear/stress/worry in regards to sex, intimacy, and relationship with partner. Also includes sexual performance or functioning worries and concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That I'm afraid of total intimacy with them (being emotionally intimate and becoming sexually intimate)</li> <li>• I sometimes get scared to have sex with them</li> <li>• Im scared to finish in front of him</li> <li>• Sometimes I'm too nervous to do things they want to do and I feel bad.</li> </ul>
<b>7. Society</b>	This category includes subcategories 7.1-7.4: 7.1 Pressure and Expectations, 7.2 Gender and Power, 7.3 Pornography, 7.4 Purity/Virginity/Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual activity shouldn't be a stressful thing where either partner is expected to perform to a standard set by society. People will be hurt if either/all partners feel</li> </ul>

		<p>insecure by their own measurement to what they feel is normal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a woman, I sometimes don't feel safe with men. Even when I sexually crave them, there are many contradicting and confusing feelings about them. I'm not calling you a bad guy when I say there is an unequal power balance, I'm just noticing that something you did made me feel "small" or like I don't have a say, and what I would really appreciate is some time and space and the respect to think about what I want, independently from my partner's wants. I try to explain this, but they either don't understand or say that they already know and therefore it doesn't apply to them...</li> <li>• Pornography is not an accurate depiction of sex.</li> <li>• Their religious views on sexuality are not beneficial for their mental health</li> </ul>
7.1 Pressure and Expectations	This subcategory includes responses about participants' feelings about societal pressure (e.g., it feels like I am supposed to want these things) and expectations in their relationship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being a nonbinary/trans afab individula makes me feel like sex is expected but am uncomprtable doing so becasue i have not started my medical transiton journey</li> <li>• Sexual activity shouldn't be a stressful thing where either partner is expected to perform to a standard set by society. People will be hurt if either/all partners feel insecure by their own measurement to what they feel is normal.</li> </ul>
7.2 Gender and Power	<p>This subcategory includes responses about participants' gender and power dynamics in their relationship (on a more macro scale).</p> <p>*Not related to dominance and submission in sexuality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a woman, I sometimes don't feel safe with men. Even when I sexually crave them, there are many contradicting and confusing feelings about them. I'm not calling you a bad guy when I say there is an unequal power balance, I'm just noticing that something you did made me feel "small" or like I don't have a say, and what I would really appreciate is some time and space and the respect to think about what I want, independently from my partner's wants. I try to explain</li> </ul>

		<p>this, but they either don't understand or say that they already know and therefore it doesn't apply to them...</p>
7.3 Pornography	<p>This subcategory includes responses about pornography.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have dysfunctional ideas about sex that I learned through pornography that I am actively trying to unlearn</li> <li>• Pornography is not an accurate depiction of sex.</li> <li>• if you think porn is sexual/ health education, please pick up a book or go to a formal class (it's not a very reliable source for how things go down).</li> </ul>
7.4 Purity/Virginity/Religion	<p>This subcategory includes responses about participants' purity/virginity/religion. Also includes mentions about partners' purity/virginity/religion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How afraid I am of having sexual intercourse because of the religion that I grew up in.</li> <li>• Wearing a condom while having sex does not mean that you haven't lost your virginity.</li> <li>• Their religious views on sexuality are not beneficial for their mental health</li> </ul>