

"We're like the sex CPR dummies": Negotiating (hetero)sex in a university residential setting

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"No need for a 'birds & bees' talk, Dad... I already checked out all the web pages you have bookmarked on your PC."

Research Topic

- Looking at the expectations and preparedness of students during the transition from living in the family home and attending high school, to living in a halls of residence (campus accommodation) and attending university.
- Specific to sex and intimate relations

Current New Zealand Research

- Sexual victimization of undergraduate university students (Gavey, 1991)
- Sexual violence in Victoria University Halls of Residence (Keene, 2015)
- Binge Drinking at Waikato University (McEwan, 2009)

Research Objectives

- Where did students gather information and learn about sexual relations (e.g. sexual education classes, parents, friends, internet) prior to living in halls of residence?
- To what extent do students feel that what they learnt has taught/prepared them for the reality of any sexual relations they have experienced or talked about in halls of residence?
- The participants shared their perspectives on these initial aims to an extent, but...

Research Process

- Directly out of high school and the family home into halls of residence
- Heterosexual
- Focus groups (men or women only)
- Staff group interviews

Key Themes

- **Liminality**
 - **Sexual Double Standard**
 - **Male Entitlement**
 - **Sexual Violence**
- Close Proximity
 - Screwing the Crew
 - Porn
 - Alcohol
 - Virginity
 - Contraception
 - Gossip
 - Miscommunication
 - Women's Pleasure
 - Learning about Sex
 - Transition to Halls

Before Halls of Residence

(Liminality)

“At home we all knew each other. Coz [participant’s hometown] is really small. So my parents knew everyone so there was no ‘I’m gonna booty call with that person’ coz then another person would find out and then that would just go round”

(Young Man)

Halls of Residence

(Liminality)

“You live in more like the proximity of seeing people every day as well, it’s a lot closer, like I mean, think about when you’re at home you have six hours of your day at school and you see all your school mates, you hardly see your family until you get home. And it’s like, coming back home here it’s like a family, but it’s not a family as such: because it’s at that level where we’re not all related and there is [sexual activity] going behind the scenes that people either do know of or they don’t know of.”

(Key Informant)

Sexuality in Halls of Residence

(Liminality)

“And especially like when I was at home, like in high school and stuff, and I’d go out drinking [and] at the end of the night you just go home. And whoever you were hooking up with at a bar or whatever, they’re not there because you go home with your friends. But here you go home, and the person you’re hooking up with in town is the same person that you come home with, because like you live together. And that’s probably what accounts for like 60% of the stuff that goes on coz people are drunk and then they just end up in the same bed coz the hooking up never stops...it just escalates”

(Young Woman)

Young Men in Halls of Residence

(Liminality)

I feel like for a lot of the guys here, we're like the test dummies, you know like when learn to do CPR on a dummy. We're like the sex CPR dummies because they don't know how to do anything with their fingers, or whatever, and they're like 'I'll just figure it out on you coz uni is the time to experiment', but it's like 'ow'

[Laughter]

I had someone like that, I'm like 'no, no, that's not how you do that. Don't put that there'

[give me] a chart, and I'll show you the female anatomy

Like 'no, no, no, no, stop, down'

No, too far

[Laughter]

(Young women)

Preparation for Leaving Halls of Residence

(Liminality)

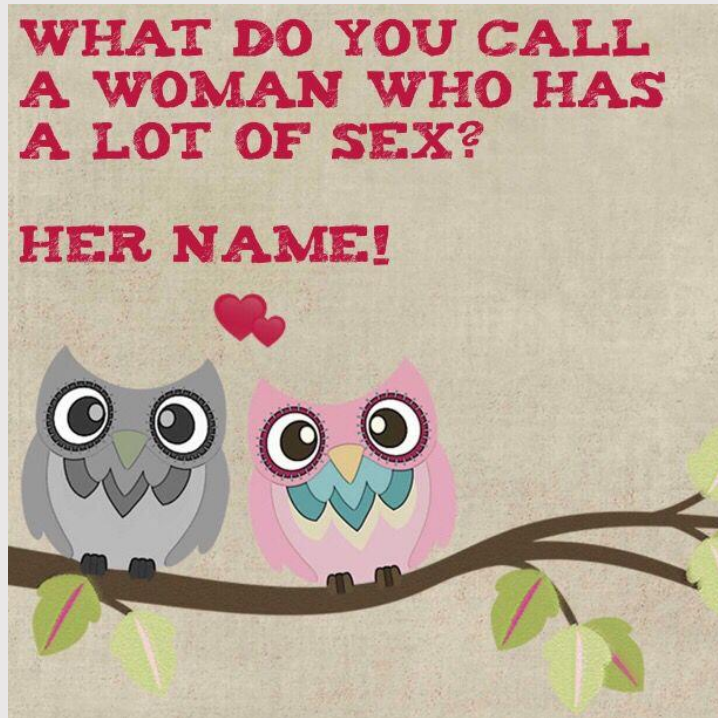
“You’re pretty prepared if you’ve been to halls because if you haven’t had to deal with it personally, you’ve seen it or you’ve witnessed”

“Heard about it”

“You’ve had to counsel someone through it”

“You’ve had to be like, okay that actually happens rather than, coz if I went flatting, firstly you’d have bugger all friends, so you’d only have to live off your own mistakes...coz we all live through each other and try to like you know, do the best for everyone else”

(Young Women)



Sexual Double Standard

“And being judged your worth on how many people you’ve fucked, and it’s like the more the girl has, the less you are, and the more a guy has the more he is”

(Young Woman)

Starting the Conversation....

(Sexual Double Standard)

“All sorts of shit has gone down already this year, and I’m just like...you can’t look at them the same. Like you see someone in the dining hall-”

“...You’re filthy”

“I know what’s been in your mouth”

“...I can’t look at them the same anymore”

(Young Women)

Getting to know fellow residents

(Sexual Double Standard)

“And I don’t think [fellow residents] thought I’d slept with like hardly any [men], if any. And then I gave my number [of sex partners] and they were like, oh shit.”

“And the way they look at you completely changes”

“...And then one of my friends who is a virgin, and she was all like no [I haven’t had sex], and then you could see their faces change to like oh my god, you’re a virgin, like this is so awkward, like have sex already too.”

(Young Women)

What the men think

(Sexual Double Standard)

“Guys see chicks they have slept with...as easy. It’s like [a woman] may have slept with lots of people, doesn’t mean you’re easy.”

“Maybe you just want to”

“...Yeah it’s the difference between being easy and wanting to. It’s like they don’t take into account that it’s our choice to do it. They’re like aw they got romanced by this guy and I’m like...[a women can] actually make a conscious decision, like I want to do this”

(Young Women)

Male Entitlement #1

(to reciprocated feelings and sexual interest)

“No [male resident] hates me...Coz I had a thing with someone, and [male resident] is like, ‘oh why won’t you go for me?’ And I was like ‘oh but I like this guy’. And then I didn’t like that guy anymore and I went for someone else and [male resident] was like ‘oh but why would you go for someone else, what about me?’”

“It’s like ‘oh I was waiting in line and then you just skipped me’”

“I put nice coins into you and sex didn’t fall out”

(Young Women)

Male Entitlement #1.0

(to reciprocated feelings and sexual interest)

“I found out that two guys in my block had a bet on who would sleep with me first. And I found out because I was getting quite close with one of the guys and then the other guy came up to me and was like ‘no I’ve got \$50 on you, you can’t go home with him’ type thing. And I was like ‘excuse me?’ And then I didn’t go home with the [first] guy. And he was like ‘are you okay?’, and I’m like ‘yep I’m just going to go to bed, sorry for losing you \$50.’”

(Young Woman)

Male Entitlement #2

(to sexual activity based on women 'showing interest' in men)

“Some of my friends say that I’m leading people on when I just talk to them. How is that leading someone on if you just talk?”

“...Or if someone gets a haircut, I’m like that’s a cool haircut. I’m not like that’s a cool haircut, please put your dick in me.”

(Young Women)

Male Entitlement #3

(to sexual pleasure and 'normalised' sexual behaviour)

“I think I’m like that one girl ever that when I’ve [orgasmed], I’ve been like ‘okay that’s enough’. And I’ve been like ‘okay I’m good.’ And then I’ve told people and they’ve been like ‘that’s so mean.’”

(Young Woman)

“You’re just taught to shame yourself. Like everything is wrong. Like you’re not allowed to go and do what you want or be happy or whatever because that’s what guys do”

(Young Woman)

Sexual Violence

(as an all encompassing term)

...and it just baffles me how common [sexual assault and violence] is. Coz once I had told my friends [about an assault] they were like 'aw yeah well that's just something that happens' and I'm just 'like yeah well it fucking shouldn't be something that happens'

(Young Woman)

Sexual Violence

“I feel like I was naive when I was younger. It’s like when you hit 18 and you start in that drinking environment like not drinking at high school parties, like drinking in public with people that are adults. Like you know there’s older people around and that’s when it really sinks in that holy shit like [sexual victimization] does go down.”

(Young Woman)

Sexual Violence

“Yeah I took one of my friends to town on her 18th and she was like drunk off her face. She started dancing with this guy and then he started putting his hands up her dress and I was like “Don’t fucking touch her like that, she doesn’t want it.” He was like, “Did you see how she was dancing? Of course she wants it”

(Young Woman)

Sexual Violence

“And people in town...like the fact that girls have to be prepared. I didn't wear underwear to town one night and one of my friends said well that's risky, what if somebody touches you, and I'm like yeah but the thing is, I shouldn't prepare myself for something like that to happen. Coz it was a long tight dress so I was like fuck undie lines. But the fact that we have to prepare ourselves for that shit. Coz I didn't think that it was something that happened”

(Young Woman)

Sexual Violence

“When we got a call, coz girls didn’t think a guy should be staying in another girl’s room, because she was too intoxicated. So we got him out of there”

“They came to us”

“It was good. It was good of the neighbours to look after her coz they knew she was intoxicated
And they knew that in previous incidences, she had been sober and not wanted him to be there...and so he was taking advantage of the situation. So yeah, they came to us and we got him out because they were a bit scared too I think”

“And yeah that wasn’t a one-off...that’s a couple of times”

(Key Informants)

Sexual Violence

“Like does that actually happen, like do [women] all just forget everything [when drinking too much]?”

“Surely it can’t”

“..Yeah I’m sure you can’t like fully forget aye you must know some point “

“Yeah “

(Young Men)

“...I don’t remember like the ride to town in the taxi but apparently, some shit happened I don’t really remember and then [female resident] was fucking angry with me the next day so...”

[General Laughter]

“Awesome”

“I literally don’t remember any of it. I like got to town and then...but I don’t care you know. It’s all good. All for the fun of it.”

[General Laughter]

“For me it’s all a dream when you’re drunk like I forget it all and then someone reminds me, and it just all starts clicking”

(Young Men)

Summary

- **Liminality:** A liminal year, where you no longer have the same sexuality norms as when at home and in high school, but you're also not yet an 'adult'
- **Sexual Double Standard:** Still prominent. Clear dichotomy of he's a stud and she's a slut.
- **Male Entitlement:** Also still prominent, linked to men's 'investment' into women, and 'normative' sexuality.
- **Sexual Violence:** Lack of awareness of SV prior to entering 'adult' environment

References

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Questions?

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