

## **Evaluating Hookup Culture on Campus: A Lesbian Separatist Perspective**

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**Abstract:** Hookup culture on the college campus simultaneously offers young women a venue for sexual liberation, while reproducing gender inequities observed throughout much of society. Thus, women are subjected to power imbalances, sexual dissatisfaction, and restrictions in their own bodily autonomy in the pursuit of casual sex. Given this bind, I set out to evaluate hookup culture from the framework expressed through lesbian separatist practice. Specifically, I analyze The Furies Collective, a lesbian separatist group operating in Washington D.C. from the years 1970-1972. In these two years, the Furies developed a self-titled newspaper, educational networks, and a compelling set of feminist principles to guide their activism. In this project, I draw insight from both a personal interview with Furies Collective founder, Charlotte Bunch, as well as primary and academic sources. This research finds that while hookup culture does reflect various societal and physical inequities for women, it also provides opportunities for homosocial bonding, as demonstrated in lesbian separatism, that work to make this culture more satisfactory for women. Therefore, in order to benefit from the liberating aspects of hookup culture, women can capitalize on the separatist spaces associated with the hookup environment, like the sorority and pre-game, to fortify connections with one another as a means of protection in hookup spaces.

With the advent of birth control, sexual liberation, and increased enrollment of women on college campuses in the post-1960s years, America experienced a shift in its prior expectations of casual sex. This newfound perspective represented a movement toward what is widely known today as “hookup culture” (Heldman & Wade, 2010, p. 324). The term “hookup culture” represents more than just a casual sexual engagement; rather, it is a complex social framework that currently dominates the gendered relations of students on college campuses. Engaging in hookups has become increasingly common, with as many as 60 to 80 percent of college students in North America participating in some capacity (Garcia et al., 2013, p. 163). Despite such extensive participation, the movement toward non-committal sexual encounters has generated concern from feminists on the potential exploitation of young women and the negative impacts on their emotional and physical wellness. These arguments are countered by those who see hookup culture as a liberating alternative to exclusive relationships. Considering these arguments, it proves necessary to understand whether hookup culture contributes to women’s personal and collective satisfaction.

Hookup culture, which can be thought of as a sexual landscape that operates without the restrictions and practices of traditional relationships, has been studied thoroughly in academic literature (e.g., Heldman & Wade, 2010; Garcia et al., 2013; Wade, 2017). Feminist frameworks have been used to evaluate the merits and drawbacks of this sexual dynamic, and often find hookup culture to be a sexist practice that favors men’s preferences (Kelly, 2018, p. 321). While the feminist framework provides excellent insight into hookup culture’s main goals and functions, this research aims to further analyze activities associated with hookup culture that often play an important role in determining the ultimate safety and satisfaction for women. These associated practices, like pre-gaming, Greek life, and campus gossip, are integral parts of the campus hookup culture that tend to be overlooked. Thus, this research chooses lesbian separatism, a movement rooted in social and concrete action, to offer a new perspective on modern day hookup culture on college campuses. Lesbian separatism provides a relevant framework for evaluating the aims of hookup culture due to the movement’s critical perspective on the practice of heterosexual relations. Hookup culture, described as “a highly gendered and heteronormative sexual field,” often transfers agency to men and away from women (Andrejek, 2021, p. 760). The principles of lesbian separatism, which are made evident through their activist writings, rituals, and practices, guide this paper in analyzing the merits and drawbacks of this culture.

In addition to reviewing academic literature and primary documents, I also conducted an original interview with lesbian separatist Furies Collective founding member, Charlotte Bunch. Bunch played a critical role in the collective; fellow member Rita Mae Brown describes her as having been a strong leader and “diplomat” for the group (Brown, 1995, p. 129). From the interview, I extract insight from Bunch on a number of core issues surrounding separatism, hookup culture in the modern age, and the importance of centering women in one’s worldview. Bunch offers her perspective not only as a founding member of The Furies Collective, but also as an author, advisory committee member for the United Nations, organizer, and Rutgers Board of Governor’s Distinguished Service Professor (“Charlotte Bunch,” 2023).

Using this interview and academic literature, I find that hookup culture reproduces inequalities for women that can be observed in most facets of modern society. However, more interestingly, this research finds that homosocial settings within hookup culture provide a protective and woman-centered framework compatible with the feminist values of The Furies Collective. This suggests that focusing on and centering homosocial relationships within hookup culture can improve the existing imbalances of power by relying on female friendship in an otherwise male dominated space. Thus, women can minimize the negative and even dangerous aspects of hookup culture in order to reap the benefits that casual relationships have to offer for women's social and economic liberation.

### **Analysis of Lesbian Separatism**

Separatism as a feminist political strategy extends deep into American history. The earliest women's organizations, formed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, worked toward achieving equality both in and outside of the home. The first women's only club, Sorosis, was formed in 1868 in reaction to exclusionary practices at a New York Press Club Banquet (Croly, 1886, p. 6). While lacking in racial diversity, the club's members still made a significant impact by employing separatism as a strategy for political equality. The goals of Sorosis, which centered around promoting intellectual female connections and raising feminist consciousness, are in many ways reflective of the prominent lesbian separatist groups that would emerge a century later. After the conception of Sorosis, feminists expanded their praxis in larger federations of women's clubs and all-female colleges. Additionally, women of color developed their own space, the National Association of Colored Women, to address the political concerns of Black women and men (Freedman, 1979, p. 517).

These early modes of separatism held women's suffrage as a primary concern, and the networking and political strategies employed by these women would eventually help to realize this goal. However, the years following the acquisition of the right to vote were inundated by theoretical disagreement over initiatives like the Equal Rights Amendment and troublesome assimilation into male-dominated political institutions (Freedman, 1979, p. 515). In the late 1960s, one such cause for disagreement was over the inclusion of lesbian voices in feminist and male-dominated gay rights activist groups. In order to address the specific concerns of lesbian women in the feminist movement, women in major cities across America organized collectives to achieve what could only be realized through lesbian separatist practice.

Branches of lesbian separatism existed widely throughout the United States in the early 1970s, with each unit representing unique schools of thought and strategies for women's liberation. Despite ideological diversity among separatists, at the foundation of all lesbian feminism is a belief that heterosexual relationships are oppressive toward women. All women are therefore called to reject relationships with men in favor of homosexual relationships with women. In modern scientific thought, this assertion would seem to contradict the scientific belief that sexuality is determined by a complex blend of genetic and environmental factors, rather than by choice (Burri et al., 2011, p. 1). Reflecting on the belief that all women can choose to be feminists, Bunch stated, "The work that's been done on sexuality in the 40 years since the Furies has really shown that it's not nearly as solid and rigid [of a] binary as we once thought it was"

(Interview with Charlotte Bunch, 2023). Nevertheless, lesbian separatists of the 1970s maintained that all women were lesbians—and any woman who claimed to not feel attracted to other women was experiencing an internalization of the patriarchy (Valk, 2002, p. 313).

In a literal sense, the demand for all women to engage sexually with other women is not a feasible call to action given current scientific and public opinion on human sexuality. However, what can be extracted from this sentiment is an acknowledgement of the importance of primacy in female relationships. In choosing lesbianism, women direct their love and energy toward other women—a concept defined by the New York Radicalesbians as being a “Woman-Identified Woman.” In this manifesto, collectively written in 1970, separatists argued that women are unable to self-identify in a heteronormative society. Lesbianism provides a solution to this problem by redirecting a woman’s identity inward so that she may value her internal characteristics and fully relate with her sisters, rather than her oppressors (Radicalesbians, 1970, p. 3). The collective values and emphasis on women’s relationships demonstrated in this document guided the frameworks of lesbian separatist groups throughout America. One of the most prominent of these groups was The Furies Collective, a group of women based in Washington D.C. who aimed to raise women’s consciousness toward lesbianism as the primary method for women’s liberation. This paper will look to the influential practices and feminist theory employed by the Furies in order to guide a critical analysis of modern-day hookup culture.

### *The Furies Collective*

The Furies Collective, consisting of 12 white lesbian women and three children, integrated sexual politics with feminist practice from the years 1970 to 1972 (Brown, 1995, p. 129). Like other lesbian separatist groups at the time, the Furies abided by radical feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson’s declaration that, “Feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice” (Johnston, 1973, p. 166). Accordingly, The Furies Collective advocated for all women to choose lesbianism as an alternative to inherently oppressive heterosexual relationships with men. This belief in an inherent difference between the essence of men and women categorizes lesbian feminism as a cultural feminist movement, which produced criticism from feminists who did not subscribe to essentialist frameworks. Nevertheless, the Furies believed that in shifting one’s sexual energies towards lesbianism, which was framed as a political choice, women would create an alternative culture to reject a male-controlled society. This reclamation of sexual agency would thereby make possible a feminist revolution in which women could control their own identities and destinies, untethered to their oppressor’s subjugation.

The woman-centered framework of the Furies is ideologically guided by the aforementioned “Woman-Identified Woman” manifesto. Charlotte Bunch affirms the importance of this publication: “The Woman-identified notion that came before the Furies, but that the Furies built on, was I think very central to our experience, which is that you would build your life around other women” (Interview with Charlotte Bunch, 2023). Through literal organization as a women’s collective, as well as in their centering of women in their political ideology, the Furies direct all energy toward the nurturing of homosocial and homosexual relations. Even though the Furies were strictly a lesbian separatist collective, a modern perspective allows the “Woman-Identified” framework to be adapted and expanded for women of all sexualities. Bunch speaks to this inclusivity, saying, “There are many Woman-Identified Women who have sex with men”

(2023). Thus, while the Furies of the 1970s had reserved the woman-centered identity for lesbians, a modern perspective reveals that women of any sexuality can center the experiences and perspectives of women in their activism and every-day life.

Spreading radical ideology required tactile organization among the women to involve the community in feminist practice. The Furies accomplished this through feminist education groups and disseminating theory in their self-titled newspaper (Valk, 2002, p. 304). The newspaper ran from 1972-1973 and featured a variety of authors from the collective. Issues featured in this paper ranged from defense techniques for fighting off male perpetrators to academic feminist theory and poetry. “Lesbians in Revolt,” an article featured in the first volume and authored by Charlotte Bunch, outlines the political direction and advancements inherent in lesbian separatism. Bunch asserts in this article that “being a Lesbian means ending identification with, allegiance to, dependence on, and support of heterosexuality....so that you join women, individually and collectively, in the struggle to end your own oppression” (1972, p. 7). Separatism, according to Bunch, is a means of reclaiming agency by socially removing oneself from the patriarchal institutions of a male dominated society. In circulating a newspaper containing these social theories, the Furies were able to raise feminist consciousnesses in their surrounding geographic environment. For women who did not have access to radical ideology through academic institutions, *The Furies* newspaper provided compelling intellectual articles that challenged the heteronormative status quo.

Delivering valuable resources to economically disadvantaged women was a priority in The Furies Collective. The Furies believed that “women with economic privilege ... should organize to meet the survival needs of women without economic privilege,” and demonstrated this sentiment in many areas of their lived practice (Brown, as cited in Valk, 2002, p. 315). For example, the Furies developed schools that specialized in teaching practical knowledge like car and home restoration, which was critical for aiding women’s financial independence from male-dominated academic institutions (Brown, 1995, p. 128). These practical workshops served the group’s aspiration for an alternative women’s culture by providing women with the resources to detach themselves from patriarchal institutions. The Furies’ conviction that women of higher economic classes should support those of lower economic classes was also promoted in their graduated income tax system. The system aimed to “rectify class differences” by accounting for women’s income and privilege (Brown, 1995, p. 130). By redistributing the wealth, the members with jobs would be able to support the labor and costs associated with the continuation of the group.

The Furies’ engagement with theory and tangible action manifested in their collective “not as rigid ideology, rather as a process for living in the world” (Enszer, 2016, p. 181). Analyzing the Furies’ accomplishments and philosophy as feminist “process” allows us to identify specific actions that crafted the spirit of their movement. To encapsulate the defining pillars of lesbian separatism requires a consideration of both feminist theory and the physical elements of homosocial connection. In identifying these elements that make lesbian separatism an effective and convincing movement, authors Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp propose four connected categories: female values, separatism, primacy of female relationships, and feminist ritual (1993, p. 34). These areas account for the woman-centered theoretical prescriptions of the Furies, as well as the physical processes through which their theory manifested. Given that

hookup culture is similarly defined by a complex consideration of both social principles and action, these pillars facilitate the analysis between separatist ideals and casual sex on campus. Thus, this paper will proceed by comparing the aims and customs of hookup culture through the lens of lesbian separatist practice.

## **The Emergence of Hookup Culture**

Hookup culture, which permeates the social fabric of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has evolved for decades under the vigilant eyes of feminists. Although some sources trace the beginnings of casual sex to the 1920s, the extramarital relationships of the early suffragists demonstrate an even longer history of women's sexual liberation in America. Doris Stevens, an early advocate for women's rights and women's sexual emancipation, had a number of male suitors. However, Stevens, who communicated with her sexual partners through letters, reportedly "went to lengths to hide her liaisons" from other disapproving suffragists (Trigg, 2014, p. 74). This historical account reflects the divisive nature of casual sex among feminists as it has developed over time. In 1960, decades after the suffragists won their cause, the FDA approved the first oral contraceptive, encouraging many women to feel empowered by the newfound independence to moderate when or if they would become pregnant. Feminist motivations largely supported the expanded freedoms that birth control offered women, although some remained cautious of the implications of contraceptives on casual sexual relationships. Juliet Mitchell, a feminist psychoanalyst, expressed how "women are enjoying a new sexual freedom (changing moral attitudes and availability of reliable contraception) but this is often only for their greater exploitation as sexual objects" (Johnston, 1975, p. 153). Mitchell's analysis recognizes the often-indistinguishable line between "freedom" and "exploitation," a boundary which women must cautiously travel in the navigation of hookup culture.

In analyzing modern hookup culture on the college campus, this research looks at the practice of hooking up as more than just a sexual philosophy. Much like the Furies, hookup culture is greater than an abstract idea; it includes tangible practices, values, and settings that encapsulate the culture as a whole. Psychological researcher Nicole Andrejek claims that "hookup culture has much less to do with the amount of sex students are having and more to do with the shared social norms, rituals, and beliefs ... in the university context" (2021, p. 759). In viewing hookup culture as a set of "social norms, rituals, and beliefs," the current research can effectively compare these components against those of lesbian separatist practice.

## **Female Values in Hookup Culture**

The female values expressed through lesbian separatist practice include a variety of principles that guide women in their social relationships and personal lives. Taylor and Rupp identify "egalitarianism, collectivism ... respect for knowledge derived from experience, pacifism, and cooperation" as defining female values of this movement (1993, p. 42). Contrasting these traits with common practices and outcomes in hookup culture initially reveals an overwhelming incompatibility with lesbian separatism. The first of these values is egalitarianism, which is a prominent component of the Furies, as expressed through their

graduated income tax system and independence-oriented schools. Applying this egalitarian perspective to hookup culture reveals several disappointing inequalities for women.

One of many areas in which men seem to benefit more than women is in the gratification of the hookup itself. Dr. Laurie Mintz reports that 91% of men and just 39% of women usually orgasm in their sexual encounters. This article adds that an additional study of college students finds a more pronounced orgasm gap in casual sex in comparison to sex within a relationship (Mintz, 2019). Another area lacking in fairness is in the social outcomes in experience for those who participate in hookup culture. Whereas men tend to gain social capital by sleeping with women in non-committal settings, women tend to lose respect as they can be perceived to be “sluts” (Heldman & Wade, 2010, p. 326). This disparity represents the double standards that lesbian separatists addressed by removing themselves from the heterosexual culture entirely. However, many young women on college campuses today feel pressured to engage with these spaces that promote unequal outcomes for men and women. One of the most prevalent and imbalanced environments on the college campuses remains the fraternity party.

Fraternities employ an array of tactics to maximize their members’ sexual prospects, often at the expense of women’s agency and safety. Methods of achieving this goal include requiring a ratio of men to women at the party, or simply only allowing entrance based on women’s attractiveness. Controlling sexual prospects as an economic form of supply and demand serves to treat men as a “scarce” resource at the fraternity party, thereby creating a simulated competition amongst the curated pool of women admitted entry (Heldman & Wade, 2010, p. 328). In addition to creating unnecessary restrictions on women’s agency, fraternities that employ “skewed gender ratios” at their parties were more likely to be associated with a higher risk of rape (Boswell & Spade, 2017, p. 137). Partaking in this system is not aligned with separatist values, as the power imbalance and individualistic nature of the social competition contrast with the female values of cooperation and egalitarianism. In creating an environment where women must compete with one another for male attention, fraternities impede on women’s ability to cooperate and connect with other women. Thus, the sexual landscape of the fraternity party is at stark odds with most, if not all, of the Furies’ female values.

One dimension of hookup culture, which is undeniably compatible with the values of lesbian separatism, is the postponement of marriage. As young women have been historically pressured into rushing into marriage for economic security, hookup culture encourages the opposite. Charlotte Bunch comments on this liberating component: “The good thing about hookup culture is freeing women from the notion that every relationship is a potential marriage partner, and therefore has a heavy-laden moralistic expectation” (2023). Without such expectations, women can explore more freely their own sexual preferences and desires. This practice also enables women to create their own economic and educational destinies, a critical motivation of the Furies’ practice. In this case, the aims of hookup culture do align with the Furies’ values of economic egalitarianism. Presented with this beneficial aspect of hookup culture, women are given an opportunity to enjoy newfound economic power. However, this is at least partly negated by the lack of autonomy women must endure in the male-dominated party space.

## **Separatism**

The Furies' use of physical separation as a political strategy reveals the importance of environment in activism. The collective lived in a home together, where they could focus fully on their cause, surrounded by other women. In considering the element of sex-segregated space, this research finds that hookup culture provides a surprisingly complex and separatist mode of female networking that aims to expand women's autonomy and improve the safety of their sexual landscape. These networks are made possible by the formation and strengthening of female friendships through separatist spaces like "pre-games" and sororities.

What the Furies were able to gain through separatist organization can be similarly conveyed through women's pre-game practices. A pre-game or "pre" is defined as a gathering where alcohol is consumed before an event or night out (Merriam Webster, 2023). The pre-game has been regularly accounted for in the literature regarding its role in drinking culture, but only recently has been studied for the sociological importance for women navigating hookup culture. The pre-game may seem like an inconsequential aspect of the typical "girls' night out," but undergraduate women often view the pre-game as being just as important as the night's main event (Andrejek, 2021, p. 764). As a sex-segregated space, women can engage in adult play, bonding, and recreational drinking without the fear of being taken advantage of. Thus, the pre-game presents itself as a valuable separatist environment of woman-centered relationship building.

The sorority, another sex-segregated community, is also associated heavily with the formation of hookup culture on college campuses. Women in Greek life present a complexity in hookup culture because they often socialize with fraternities as part of the larger Greek community, but at the same time present women with a compelling form of separatist gender strategy. Sororities create a sex-segregated community where women can depend on each other for support. This is particularly important when these women must negotiate relationships in inequitable spaces, thus framing the sorority as a "collective response to, adaptive strategy for dealing with, a male-dominated culture" (Handler, 1995, p. 252). Furthermore, Handler illustrates the women-centered nature of sororities in her finding that "decreased dependence on boyfriends was a benefit of sororal life" (1995, p. 245). Independence and protection from male-centered institutions and relationships paints sorority life as being compatible with lesbian separatist aims. However, the tension between friendship and romance can reproduce problematic heteronormative standards and ideals for young women.

In viewing the sorority as an influential actor within hookup culture, it is relevant to examine this organization's relationships with lesbian and queer women. Though sororities have become more inclusive with time, there remains stigma and exclusionary practices toward lesbians, non-binary people, and transgender women. Each of these groups has either historically faced discrimination or continues to be barred from participating in panhellenic sororities. Researchers have described that one motive for heterosexual women to exclude lesbians from joining sororities is that they diminish the sexual appeal of the sorority as a whole (Hamilton, 2007, p. 146). This can lead to lesbians being excluded from sororities in order to avoid male disapproval. When they are included, though, there remains concern from sisters about their sexuality. One study that interviewed sorority sisters expressed a concern that lesbians joining sororities is "inherently 'uncomfortable.'" The author continues: "At times, sorority actives



stressed that they themselves would not be uncomfortable but that other parties, such as more conservative sorority sisters, fraternity men and other women on campus, would be dramatically uncomfortable” (Stone & Gorga, 2014, p. 354-355). The rampant heteronormativity within sororities creates two barriers that affect both homosexual and heterosexual women. The first barrier blocks entrance to lesbian women from gaining entrance to the sorority in the first place. The second acts within the sorority, as heteronormative focuses create competition between women, impeding their ability to connect with one another.

The sex-segregated environments of modern-day hookup culture reflect some successful components of lesbian separatism, but are also challenged by heteronormativity and anti-lesbian biases. The proximity of the sorority to the fraternity exacerbates these issues, as sisters de-center their relationships with women in pursuit of romance with brothers. At their best, sororities have the capability to nurture relationships with other women, serving as a beneficial strategy when they enter male-dominated spaces.

## **Feminist Rituals**

Using events like support groups, poetry readings, and strategy sessions, separatists disseminated their ideology and values to other feminists, thereby raising feminist consciousness within and beyond their communities (Taylor & Rupp, 1993, p. 48). Hookup culture similarly involves a number of rituals that young women partake in, though whether these rituals are in line with the tenets of radical lesbian feminism proves to be a divisive subject. A variety of academic literature and investigative reporting characterize hookup culture as facilitating a culture of toxic gossiping. One of such practices is called “ritual retelling,” which author Lisa Wade describes as an opportunity for college students to “reassure one another that they didn’t act too crazy, stroke the egos of disappointed friends, and brag” after an eventful night out (2017, p. 119). However, ritual retelling may play a more important role than this description would suggest. In the context of gendered communication, research shows that a greater proportion of women than men would be “very likely” to disclose a hookup experience with friends of the same sex (Auster et al., 2018, p. 6). Although this practice is largely disapproved of, the finding that women frequently gossip about their hookups to other women may be more complex than meets the eye.

Gossip has been studied both empirically and historically for both its destructive qualities, as well its merits. In much of the literature on hookup culture, the practice of gossip is characterized as being a problematic method of enforcing social norms and unfairly monitoring the behavior of third parties. However, empirical data paints a different picture of why people choose to gossip. One study shows that the most common self-reported reason for gossiping was “to gather and validate information,” and the least prevalent being to “negatively influence another” (Brady et al., 2017, p. 1). Other findings suggest that a primary motive of gossip is for group protection, or a way to warn others about harmful third parties (Hartung et al., 2019, p. 11). Gathering information in inequitable sexual landscapes can protect women from potentially dangerous men, or even reveal prior injustice. Historically this has been observed in a variety of settings, some of which include the Ghost Rapes of Bolivia, the #MeToo and Time’s Up movements, the report on Senator Roy Moore, and the “Rape List” of Brown University (e.g.,

Massey, 2017; Peters, 2020). Each of these events involved informal communication between women that ultimately served either legal justice, or increased community awareness of threatening men. Writer Rachel Gattuso writes, “we can understand gossip as weaponized intimacy — as the power of marginalized communities to build guerilla information networks to keep ourselves and each other safe” (2016). From this perspective, the gossiping networks within hookup culture demonstrate a form of collective consciousness raising—reflective of the values exemplified in the Furies newspaper and community theory discussions.

Once in the hookup environment, women continue feminist ritual by combatting unwanted physical advances through using their bodies as “shields” (Andrejek, 2021, p. 769). Women who play the role of the shield may step in front of men or pull her friends away from unwelcome male actions. Adding to this sentiment, Bunch says, “we still live in a world where men exploit women, so I think women have to be more careful in hookup culture because of that” (2023). This protective feminist ritual highlights the importance of safety and being “careful” in a potentially dangerous environment. The shield is also unique because it is a protection method designed not to aid oneself, but other women. This collective perspective emphasizes a woman-centered outlook within the party space, demonstrating further compatibility with the Furies’ practices and values.

### **Primacy of Female Friendships**

Interacting with, learning from, and loving other women, not just sexually, was a fundamental aspect of The Furies Collective. In their adherence to the principles of the “Woman-Identified Woman” manifesto, the Furies held their sisters’ personal and political well-being at prime importance. Bunch asserts that the practice of centering women in the collective was “the most important thing about the Furies” (2023). Applying a woman-centered framework to the analysis of hookup culture in a modern context is useful because straight and queer women alike can be considered “Woman-Identified.” To center women in one’s worldview goes beyond just the act of sleeping with other women; rather, it can represent support in a multitude of contexts. Thus, women in a heteronormative space like hookup culture can resist the dominance of men by fortifying one’s relationships with women, whether they be romantic or platonic. Using this perspective, one can find a variety of ways in which homosocial relationship building is demonstrated to be an important part of navigating the complicated terrain of hookup culture. As described previously, the sex-segregated space of the pre-game fosters an important environment for women to connect and learn from one another while being physically removed from men. Within pre-game activities, there exists further evidence that hookup culture can facilitate friendship building between women.

Encouragement and sharing are two prominent features of relationship building before a night out. During pre-games, which are reported to last anywhere between two and five hours, women work together to uplift each other through words of affirmation and support (Andrejek, 2021, p. 763). Relationship building is also aided by the swapping and sharing of clothes, a practice that demonstrates the importance of collectivity in the pre-game. Through these actions, women express a caring nature which strengthens their bonds before entering male-centered

institutions like bars and fraternity parties. In unfamiliar or dangerous environments, the connection and trust that women have with each other can dramatically impact their safety.

After the pre-game ritual has occurred, woman-centered practices continue at the night's main event. Once at this event, women of a Canadian University express that their priorities do not lie in searching for a hookup partner, but in enjoying the company of their friends. Andrejek describes how "their insistence that dancing with their friends is the primary motivator for participating in the hookup scene illuminates the importance of women-centered rituals to their self-conception" (2021, p. 767). Women being able to truly engage with their "self-conception" was a critical aspect of the lesbian separatist belief in the "The Woman-Identified Woman." Given that women can enter the hookup culture landscape without prioritizing men, there exists a compelling compatibility between environments of casual sex and the primacy of women's relationships. The practice of a woman centering herself in a collective of other women, much like the Furies did, can promote her own sense of self identity even when physically surrounded by men. While some women can adopt a woman-centered worldview in hookup spaces, the competitive nature of the culture can complicate women's reliance on each other.

The competition for male attention has the potential to turn young women against each other. Sororities, which represent a unique prevailing mode of separatism, are particularly vulnerable to this competitive system. As sorority sisters are encouraged to fraternize with boys within the Greek life community, sexual prospects ultimately diminish, causing tension among sisters looking to hookup. Social psychologists find that "female intrasexual competition manifests in highly social, yet indirect ways—through harming social opportunities via gossip or exclusion" (Reynolds et al., 2018, p. 1). Accordingly, a "highly social" setting such as the pre-game can quickly become a space for damaging social competitiveness, rather than an environment of protection and bonding. Not only should this competitive strategy be viewed as a barrier to meaningful relationships with other women, but also as antithetical to the lesbian separatist values of pacifism and cooperation. Therefore, the compatibility of gossip as a communication method in hookup culture with separatism depends on whether it is used to build relationships between women or break them down.

## **The Future of Hookup Culture**

This research reflects the concerns of a wealth of literature that examines both physical and social consequences for women who participate in hookup culture. Through mechanisms which limit women's autonomy and sexual satisfaction, I find a gendered hierarchy within hookup culture that in many ways benefits male desires and preferences. However, simultaneously operating within this culture is a network of homosocial relationships that work to improve women's safety and conditions as they navigate the sexual landscape of the college campus. Women take part in separatist collectives, whether it be through the pre-game or sorority culture, which provides opportunities for protective woman-centered bonding. The separatist spaces that are available to women on college campuses today, while imperfect, provide a valuable outlet for women to learn and connect with each other.

Given these mechanisms for improving hookup culture on college campuses, it may be possible to create a future in which women can more fully enjoy the liberating aspects of casual

sex. After all, hookup culture does provide some convincing benefits in the movement toward women's equality. In rejecting the "moralistic expectations" of traditional relationships, women can more fully focus on their education and careers, which is essential for economic independence. Author Hanna Rosin goes as far as to say that "feminist progress is largely dependent on hookup culture," given its economic advantages (2012, p. 46). In order to preserve the beneficial aspects of hookup culture, women can expand their woman-centered networks in separatist spaces around campus, like the pre-game or in sororities. Here, women should not be afraid to engage in the stereotyped and taboo act of gossip, as long as it is not aimed at tearing down other women. One feminist critique of hookup culture posits that "the act of speaking allows individuals not only to reflect on their experiences but also to have power over their own identity" (Kelly, 2018, p. 326). Here, the act of sharing personal experiences in hookup culture can be thought of as a method for reclaiming agency in a culture that often relies on ambiguous language. Through this communication, women can rely on the experiential knowledge of one another to protect themselves from dangerous situations and environments.

Sororities have a unique responsibility in the aspiration to make hookup culture a more equitable space for women. As this paper has expressed, the sorority at its core is a separatist space by which women can rely on and support one another as they navigate casual sexual relationships. This potential is sometimes overshadowed by competitive urges and homophobic exclusionary practices. Competition and homophobia in the sororal space are often the result of women trying to increase their own desirability for men in the hookup culture. Decentering male acceptance is essential for overcoming heteronormativity and homophobia in the sorority. One method by which women can decenter male approval from their sororal practice is through the adoption of the "Woman-Identified Woman" philosophy. Utilizing this outlook can help the sorority secure its potential as a positive method of gender strategy, capable of improving the conditions of women within hookup culture.

Another means by which sororities can reclaim power in the hookup environment is by expanding their control over parties. As stated previously, fraternities are highly restrictive spaces, but are one of the only public hookup spaces for women under the legal drinking age. To combat this monopoly, sororities should consider expanding their control over parties by throwing their own. This transfer of power has already occurred in eating clubs, a prominent social institution, at Princeton University. Wade argues that "when women are in charge of parties, events feel more gender-egalitarian." She also quotes a female president of one club, who says that women have, "greater access to security for themselves and others in danger" when they are in control of the party space (2017, p. 234). As the Furies have shown, sometimes women must take power away from male-dominated institutions in order to make progress for women's conditions. Therefore, in taking this power from fraternities, women can make hookup environments safer and more pleasurable for themselves.

Sexual liberation for neither women nor men will be achieved by returning to traditional sexual values. After all, it was these traditional, patriarchal values that united the Furies against male-dominated institutions in the first place. However, women should not be satisfied with the current state of casual sex on campus. Instead, they can draw from the historical knowledge presented to them from past activists. The values and practices of the Furies offer modern women a strategy by which they can combat the negative and exploitative forces ingrained in

hookup culture. Strengthening networks of women, redistributing power in the party space, and being aware of the environments that impede on women's agency are all methods drawn from the woman-centered strategies of The Furies Collective. In this sense, this research demonstrates not only tangible actions that can help to improve the current hookup culture, but also illuminates how women of history can help guide women through the struggles of today.

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