Text to sex: The impact of cell phones on hooking up and sexuality on campus

Sascha L. Goluboff
Washington and Lee University, USA

Abstract

By centering attention on how students feel after casual sex, studies of the college social scene miss an extremely important phenomenon—namely, how hookups get started. This article argues that it is in the negotiation of contact during hookups that college students creatively navigate their sexual identity. Using a mixed methodology, this research reveals that the cell phone, as both an object of communication and consumption, is essential to the formation of self, and, as such, it provides the means by which men and women can play with gender boundaries. And yet, the male dominated fraternity system at college restricts the ability of women to realize full agency within the hookup scene.

Keywords

Cell phone, college, fraternity, gender, hookup, sex

Introduction: Hookup culture

Hookup culture dominates the American college social scene. Up to 81% of all college students have had at least one casual sexual encounter (Fielder & Carey, 2010). Such sexual interactions, which range from kissing to sexual intercourse, can occur between strangers, brief acquaintances, or even friends (Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, & Ward, 2009). College social life revolves around the exploration of student sexuality, and scholars, accordingly, have defined the campus as a "sexual arena" (Bogle, 2008), a "sexual marketplace" (Kimmel, 2008), and a "sexual institution" (Moffat, 1989), fueled by heavy alcohol use and hegemonic double standards.

Corresponding author:
Sascha L. Goluboff, Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Newcomb Hall, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA 24415, USA.
Email: goluboffs@wlu.edu

Popular media and scholarly research focus on the social, psychological, and physical outcomes of college hookups. Studies show how men benefit more from these relationships, due to gender stereotypes: "men are expected to desire and pursue sexual opportunities regardless of context," while women are supposed to keep good reputations by avoiding casual sex (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009, p. 593). Scholars argue that the fraternity system, because it separates men and women into socially distinct groups, can promote such phallocentric masculinity and encourage sexual exploitation and sexual objectification of women as a condition of manhood (Ray & Rosow, 2010; Rhoads, 1995; Sanday, 1990). Due to this sexual double standard, it has been reported that women often experience more regret and less pleasure in casual sex than their male counterparts (Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Fincham, 2010). As such, females supposedly evaluate their sexual needs in negative terms (Paul & Hayes, 2002), and they search for emotional connections and committed relationships with men (Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000; Stepp, 2008), in order to protect their reputations (Bogle, 2008; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990).

By centering attention on how students feel after casual sexual encounters, these studies miss an extremely important phenomenon—namely, how hookups get started—and I argue that the cell phone is integral to that process. Students rely on their cell phones to seek out and receive the "perpetual contact" that they crave from their peers (Gershon, 2010; Katz, 2004; Mihailidis, 2014). They move easily between "co-present" (face-to-face) interaction and "mediated interaction" (via technology) with friends (Ling, 2008). Using a mixed methodology, I propose that the cell phone, as both an object of communication and consumption, is essential to the formation of self and sexual identity. More specifically, it provides a forum in which college men and women can reinforce, evaluate, and even challenge sexual scripts and gender boundaries during hookups.

Conceptualizing hookups and sex talk

Scholarly accounts of how college hookups occur fall into two categories. The first describes hooking up as either "spontaneous," "something that 'just happens,'" or "planned" in that the person aims to have a sexual encounter that night but does not know exactly with whom (Paul et al., 2000, p. 76). While this approach acknowledges individual agency and personal experience, it does not identify how students orchestrate these situations within larger sociocultural frameworks. The second type of study answers such a critique by positing that students engage in a coherent hookup script of "attending a party, drinking alcohol, and dancing"—all of which leads to "participation in nonrelational sex" (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 415). However, this version provides an all or nothing model that does not leave room for creative negotiation in the early stages of communication between interested individuals. In fact, investigating such talk via the cell phone is essential to understanding both hookup culture and individual sexual experiences.

Studies have shown that mobile communication highly influences issues of sex, romance, and gender. Ling (2004) argues that teens use mobile phones to explore their sexuality and acquire social interaction skills outside the supervision of family and other social institutions. Teen sexting is a normal expression of sexuality and the development of social identity (Campbell & Park, 2014). Mobile media has become so "ubiquitous

and pervasive" that it is tied up with the "ordinary rearticulation of gendered power relations" (Casado & Lasen, 2014, pp. 250, 252). As Casado and Lasen suggest, "analyzing mobile communication within heterosexual couples can be fruitful for a deeper exploration of the articulations between love, intimacy and conflicts and between the so-called 'traditional' and 'consensual' models" (2012, p. 550). Student choices of when and how to contact possible hook-up partners via the cell phone thus engage larger cultural debates about gender and sexual identity.

To address the centrality of mobile media in sexual discourse, the first research question asked:

> RQ1: How do college students use their cell phones to contact possible hookup partners and negotiate hookup parameters?

Furthermore, there are at least three different scholarly approaches to student sex talk. The first conceptualizes college life as "a battle of the sexes" where men want to continue the "hookup script" after their freshman year, while women hope that hookup encounters will turn into "some semblance of a relationship" (Bogle, 2008, p. 77). These narratives show the internalization of the sexual double standard, which, in turn, is reinforced by institutional structures placing men in charge of campus parties. A new "intersectional approach," however, reveals a more complex picture, wherein middle-class White women are caught between competing expectations of the "self-development imperative," which allows for female sexual exploration as part of the college experience of "finding oneself," and the "relationship imperative," which mandates that women should be in committed relationships in order to have sex and avoid the slut stigma (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009; Wilkins & Dalessandro, 2013). Finally, some scholars acknowledge the ways in which men deviate from traditional male scripts by engaging in new masculine discourses that move "beyond sex as conquest or instrumental outcome to include emotionality, commitment, and love" and that recognize women as mutually pleasure-seeking and sexually assertive (Dworkin & O'Sullivan, 2005, p. 150; Epstein et al., 2009; Korobov & Thorne, 2006). To explore gendered discourses in cell phone use, the second research question inquired:

> RQ2: How do college students reinforce, evaluate, and/or challenge gender ideologies when using cell phones to initiate and enhance hookups?

Finally, the cell phone is a consumable product and a medium through which social relationships are conducted (Nafus & Tracey, 2002). Its use gets caught up in narratives of consumption and communication. As artifacts of consumption, cell phones are implicated in the larger ideologies of a consumer culture that values convenience, speed, and disposability (Bauman, 2003, p. 7). Since sexuality is commonly at the core of finding one's self in college and having fun, the notion of consumer choice helps students navigate their way through the "sexual marketplace" of college life (Moffatt, 1989). Consumerism taps into both women's new self-development imperative and the traditional view of sex as a man's prerogative because the marketplace portrays sexual activity as therapy, "legitimate routes in the individual pursuit of happiness" (Bauman, 2003,

p. 56). The cell phone helps to actualize the kinds of relationships that keep the individual in control. As such, there are "always more connections to be used" (Bauman, 2003, p. 60). By employing the cell phone to initiate hookups, students could draw on contradictory images of female empowerment and subordination in the media (Bordo, 1993; Love & Helmbrecht, 2007; Wolf, 2002).

And yet, relying on cell phones to communicate with others, students could enact their "collaborative selves." According to Sherry Turkle, students "need to be connected in order to feel like themselves," and by cultivating this outer-directed sense of self, young people "share feelings as a part of discovering them" (2011, p. 176). Therefore, texts sent back and forth between potential hookup partners could be collective and collaborative productions that directly engage with gender scripts (Fitzpatrick, 2011). Therefore, the third and fourth research questions for this study asked:

> RQ3: How do college students draw on the rhetoric of consumption and communication in their accounts of cell phone usage?

> RQ4: What are the ways that male and female students negotiate their sexualities in dialogue with one another via the cell phone?

These four research questions aim at bringing together the hookup literature with theories about the cell phone. In the process, this study provides new ways of conceptualizing sexual agency and gender scripts in the digital generation.

Methods

The data for this study come from in-depth interviews, structured group discussions, and a survey among students who attended Washington and Lee University, a small liberal arts college in Virginia.[1] The school has a "work hard, play hard" reputation, and in fall of 2011, when research was conducted, at least 80% of students were in the Greek system.[2]

Mindful of the how students at Washington and Lee are more open to talking about their sexual experiences among peers rather than with a "professor," I decided to employ student researchers to carry out the interviews and structured discussions. I chose three seniors (two females and one male) who took my class on communication technologies. I trained them on research methodologies and transcribing protocols. We chose interviewing as a methodology because such one-on-one discussions can elicit detailed narratives in which gender ideologies and narratives of consumption and communication might be present. My research assistants had input into writing the interview questionnaire (so as to help tailor it in ways that would make sense to the student respondents). It accessed attachment to cell phone, opinions about gender texting styles, and ways in which interviewees used their cell phones to begin and enhance heterosexual hookup and dating situations. We employed a sample of convenience, due to the school's small and relatively homogeneous socioeconomic student population. Interviews took place with 24 White females (5 freshmen, 7 sophomores, 6 juniors, and 6 seniors) and 20 White males (6 freshmen, 5 sophomores, 6 juniors, and 3 seniors). Aware of the problems in

Table 1. Survey respondents by gender and class.

Gender	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Females	22	26	27	25
Males	28	34	16	27

Note. Number of respondents: 151 individuals. All data are presented in percentages unless otherwise noted.

having students conduct interviews, I listened to the recordings and revised transcriptions accordingly.

To further explore how cell phone use in hookup situations reinforces and/or challenges gender stereotypes, my research assistants carried out gender-segregated structured discussions that they audiotaped and transcribed (I also listened to these recordings and made the appropriate revisions). These multiperson conversations dug deeper into the topics raised in the interviews. There were two groups of all female upperclassmen (run by the female research assistants) and one group of all male upperclassmen (run by the male research assistant).

Finally, to get a wider understanding of how men and women negotiate their sexualities with one another and to contextualize the information we gathered in face-to-face discussions, I developed a survey. The university's Office for Institutional Effectiveness orchestrated the random sample. The survey garnered 180 responses, totaling a 46% response rate from the 389 students contacted. Out of all who filled out the survey, 77 put down "female" as their gender, 74 noted "male," and 30 left the question blank (see Table 1). Analysis thus counts only those who answered the gender question, for a total of 151 respondents.

The survey was a representative sample of the student body. The majority of respondents were Caucasian, the percentage of which closely approximated the racial and ethnic makeup of the student body at the time (see Table 2). This ethnic factor is important, as other studies prove the popularity of hookups among Caucasian students (Owen et al., 2010). The survey's response rate of 51% male to 49% female was also the same as the overall student ratio that semester.[3] We thus sampled 8% the total student body of 1,793 individuals. In particular, we asked participants the same questions as in the structured discussions and interviews, but with an eye towards correlating male and female responses to determine the relationships between the variables of gender and different kinds of cell phone use during hookups.'

Findings

The cell phone proved to be central to both communication and consumption among the majority of students. Their descriptions depicted it as a coveted "love object"—an integral part of creating a coherent identity and presenting the self to others (Ahuvia, 2005). Jackson, a junior, exemplified this phenomenon when he described what happens to him when his phone breaks: "I have no clue. I really am like, jonesing for my phone… It feels as necessary as wearing clothes. I don't feel complete when I go… without my phone in my pocket."

Table 2. Comparison of race and ethnicity in the survey versus university enrollment in fall 2011. Survey participants.

Gender	Caucasian	African American	Asian American	Latino	Multiracial	International	Other
Females	77	9	4	1	6	1	1
Males	83	7	3	1	4	0	1

Note. Number of respondents: 149 individuals.

Males and females enrolled full-time at the university.

Gender	Caucasian	African American	Asian	Hispanic	Multiple races	Nonresident alien (NRA)	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Unknown
Females	83	3	3	3	2	4	.2	6
Males	85	3	3	2	2	4	0	5

Note. Data source: The Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Sample size: 1,793.

Table 3. Student attachment to cell phone by gender.

Gender	Very high	High	Middle range	Low	Very low	X^2
Females	44	40	14	1	0	10
Males	22	41	25	7	5	

Note. Number of Respondents: 150. Pearson chi-square = 256.20; *df* = 4.

Similarly, in the survey, equal numbers of women rated their attachment to their cell phone as "very high" and "high." Almost half of the men were in the "high" range, but the other half was almost split equally between "very high" and "middle range" (see Table 3).[4]

Students also referred to the importance of the cell phone in maintaining the constant connectivity and networking that is essential to their contemporary "cyborg"-like lives (Turkle, 2011). Jillian, a junior, typified the contemporary student who does everything through the cell phone: "It's my contact with the world, with my friends, my teachers, hookups, with anyone. [Without a phone,] it would be like being in public and having your vocal cord removed for a short amount of time."

Findings make it clear that an investigation of cell phone usage and attitudes towards the cell phone is essential to any contemporary study of the college hookup scene.

Reproducing gender stereotypes through texting

In reference to how students reinforce or challenge gender ideologies (RQ2), research showed that, at most basic level, cultivating consumer and collaborative selves via the cell phone reproduced stereotypes about males and females as inherently different.

Table 4. Opinion about which gender prefers to send short text messages (in percentages).

Gender	Females prefer this style	Males prefer this style	Both prefer this style	Neither prefer this style	X^2
Females	0	92	6	1	8
Males	5	58	31	5	

Note. Number of Respondents: 151. Pearson chi-square = 176.36; *df* = 3.

Table 5. Opinion about which gender prefers to send lengthy texts (in percentages).

Gender	Females prefer this style	Males prefer this style	Both prefer this style	Neither prefer this style	X^2
Females	86	0	8	6	8
Males	64	4	22	10	

Note. Number of respondents: 150. Pearson chi-square = 162.04; *df* = 3.

Students shared a set of understandings about how a text conveys the gender identity of the sender. For example, they believed that the typical male sends short messages (see Table 4). The fact that more women than men noted this difference indicated how women saw men as more curt in their texts, even if not all men saw themselves this way. In comparison, students said that females compose lengthy messages (see Table 5). That more women identified this as their trait showed how, in interviews and structured discussions, women were concerned that they were too wordy in their texts to men and thus seemed "too needy" and "clingy"—that is, too interested in establishing a relationship.

Interviews correlated these opinions. Billy, a freshman, said that "guys" were "more blunt about what we text girls," whereas females were "not quite open as about what they mean or what they want in terms of a flirting situation." John, a sophomore, directly linked these social differences to physicality:

> Most of the times girls are a little more bubbly… and flirtatious in their text message… wanting to keep the conversation flowing… Whereas I feel like guys seem a little more punctual in their text messages and sometimes have a sense of, like, I don't want to say brutality, but it's more of like a power, brutality, like masculine-like text message type thing.

Students surveyed also said that women send texts with more emoticons and emotional content (see Tables 6 and 7). More men than women noted this gender discrepancy, and it corroborates results from the interviews and structured discussions—namely, that male students policed the text messages they send to each other in order to reinforce heteronormativity. Men were sensitive to the ways in which the presence of emotions in their texts might contest the gender hierarchy. First, it could feminize the sender. For example, when asked if he would send a text message with "smiley faces and a bunch of exclamation points," John answered that while it is "good to show another side,"

Table 6. Opinion about which gender prefers to send texts with emoticons (in percentages).

Gender	Females prefer this style	Males prefer this style	Both prefer this style	Neither prefer this style	X^2
Females	69	3	14	14	8
Males	74	0	18	8	

Note. Number of respondents: 151. Pearson chi-square = 155.64; *df* = 3.

Table 7. Opinion about which gender prefers to send texts with emotional content.

Gender	Females prefer this style	Males prefer this style	Both prefer this style	Neither prefer this style	X^2
Females	68.83	1.30	27.27	2.60	8
Males	72.46	1.45	21.74	4.35	

Note. Number of respondents: 146. Pearson chi-square = 147.86; *df* = 3.

> I definitely think that there's an inkling to keep that masculinity. Just to show… a brute sense, I guess. When I text my guy friends, it's like sentence, by sentence, by sentence. No extra letters. Just plain straight to the fact, no beating around the bush type thing.

Ben, a junior, said something similar: "Guys try not to use smiley faces and stuff like that… because it's the equivalent of showing too much emotion, which is already something that men are sort of taught not to do."

Second, if a male student received an emotional text from another guy, it could transform him, the receiver, into the object of the male gaze and subordinate him to the less powerful female position (Bordo, 1997). This scenario was most evident in the structured discussion among males. Bobby, a senior, said that women "just feel the need to express their emotions more openly than guys do." Ugo, also a senior, then added: "I would never send another guy a text message, with a smiley face and multiple exclamation points on the fact that, if I got that from another guy, I would be like 'What the fuck?'"

This statement was followed by much laughter and the comment, "Like he's gay and trying to hit on me." At the most basic level, then, cell phone use reinforced gender hierarchies between male and female students (RQ2).

Hookups and the consumer self

And yet, on college campuses today, where consumer choice applies to the sexual marketplace of the social scene, the research results also showed a more complex situation, namely that hookup scenarios (RQ1) linked up with the contradictory narratives of hegemonic masculinity and female self-development (RQ2). First and foremost, crafting a consumer self (RQ3) substantiated the hegemonic "hot man thesis" (Bordo, 1999), whereby men pursue and women flirt, reinforcing a heterosexual desire and common

discourse that presupposes, as well as constructs, a unity of experience among sex and gender (Butler, 2006).

In response to the first research question about the process of contacting a potential hookup, students in the majority of interviews reiterated the more traditional sexual scenario whereby males initiate hookups. J.J., a male sophomore, epitomized this dominant and patriarchal hookup script:

> Females aren't usually the first ones to text a guy in the hook up situation, and they're usually… hoping for something, a text message, a phone call, some sort of sign, and… once they get that sign, they could play along and see if they have interest, and they could go with it. Basically, they are there to answer.

In this formula, a "typical guy" engaged in the "booty call text." Ben described it as happening at 10:30 or 11:00 late at night, a "Hey, what's up?"—a "low risk way for someone to hook up." The booty call enabled the male to cultivate his own consumer self. As George, a senior, noted: "I think a lot of guys might text girls and try to sense their interest rather than calling or seeing them in person. I think texting is an easier [and] less pressure way to communicate."

Females, in turn, discussed how they could discern the sincerity and physical state of the male depending on the time of day he sent a text. A man who was really interested in getting to know a woman, rather than just hooking up, would text her during the daytime and on nonparty evenings. Holly, a sophomore, explained:

> You're out… and at eleven o'clock he texts you and is like, "Where are you? Oh you want to hang out drunk and not sober?" You know, that kind of thing, just like checking in to see what your status is, so he can come and hook up with you.

However, the traditional booty text did acknowledge the potential for women to have passion, thus drawing on new masculine discourses (RQ2). For example, Jackson explained that booty call text messages start with the phrase "What are *you* up to." This means "I'm drunk, I'm horny, we need to hook up, and hoping that you feel the same way." If the targeted woman then responds, the following text conversation can ensue, according to Frank, a senior, in the structured discussion among male students:

> You start earlier in the night like, "What are you doing? Where are you headed to? Am I going to be able to see you tonight?" And then it goes like, "Yes?" "Yes?" or "No?" then "Yes?" and then just "?" And it's implied what's going on.

For women, choosing to hookup for personal pleasure and forgoing a relationship for long-term goals of a career can challenge paternalistic ideologies (Stepp, 2008; Taylor, 2013), and this is especially true when they take the lead in the situation and/or participate in a situation in which both genders initiate and respond similarly (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3).

Only three of the females interviewed discussed the possibility for mutual sexual contact between men and women. Dani, a first year female, mentioned how women also can engage in a booty call:

Table 8. Students initiating a hookup at any time while on campus.

Gender	No	Yes	Probably	Refuse to answer	X^2
Females	51	30	16	3	8
Males	51	42	7	0	

Note. Number of respondents: 150. Pearson chi-square = 157.10; *df* = 3.

> I'm sure a lot of guys would text multiple girls at a time and like, see who bites. I have girlfriends who do that too! I think there are other guys who probably text one girl if they like one person.

Chrissy, a sophomore, related how women can act like men and men can act like women:

> I think that there are forward girls and then there are forward guys. I think stereotypically, they say that guys are more forward and like "Where are you? Let's hook up," that kind of thing, but plenty of girls do that too, so it's hard to say.

Tammy, a junior, surmised that texting "has replaced talking in terms of hookup culture… Now you don't actually have to talk to the person in the sober world you can just text them [while you are drunk]." She mentioned how,

> There's a guy and girl who once or twice every weekend end up hooking up, and they're in different social circles. [During the weekday], they might see each other and make awkward eye contact and wave, or maybe they won't even acknowledge each other, but then on a Friday or Saturday night, they can just text each other instead of having to call and actually… It adds to the convenience of a hookup.

Survey results revealed that more women were engaging in this kind of behavior than usually acknowledged within public campus discourse. In answer to the question if they ever initiated a hookup with their cell phone, 46% of females and 49% of males answered in the affirmative[5] (see Table 8). Therefore, while most students talked as if men are doing most of the pursuing, females and males were actually behaving similarly in contacting possible hookups (RQ1 and RQ4).

Furthermore, although more females than males said that someone contacted them to start a hookup, the survey shows that a substantial amount of men received inquiries from women (see Table 9). It could be the case here that, as Dani and Chrissy said, women were acting like men. However, interview data showed that females initiated hookups differently on their cell phones (RQ1).

Females used a less-aggressive texting style that couched their sexual assertiveness in a more acceptable female conversational sociality. Veronica, a sophomore, said that while a guy

> would go right for like 'Where are you?' to try and find out where you are to meet up ASAP, a girl might be like, "Hey where are you going tonight?" Or like, "How are you doing?" Might

Table 9. Students contacted to engage in a hookup at any time while on campus.

Gender	No	Yes	Probably	Refuse to answer	X^2
Females	32	57	4	5	10
Males	50	39	0	8	

Number of respondents: 150. Pearson chi-square = 159.93; *df* = 3.

> do more of a like… I know it sounds like the same thing, but a girl might do more of a conversation… like, "What's up? How ya been?" *Then*, like, "Want to come over?"

Claudette, a junior, explained how a woman would protect herself from being seen as a slut by targeting one man in particular:

> A female would be more likely to text earlier in the night while the guy is going to text later in the night… Because I think the girl seeks out the guy and knows which guy she wants to hook up with, but guys want to hook up with any girl, and if they're not successful, *then* they use their phone.

Some men felt uncomfortable with this strategy because it challenged gender boundaries. For example, when interviewed about how female students use their cell phones to initiate hookups, Jackson talked about the following "scary" phenomenon:

> If they have their sights set on a particular person, I can see a girl sending out a text to all of her friends like "Hey, do you know where so-and-so is? I really want to find him tonight," and then find where he's at, and hunt him down.

Furthermore, women themselves were aware of how being forward in initiating hookups could resist gender norms and perhaps stigmatize them within the social scene. Sometimes, if they sent out very masculine (i.e., short and to the point) messages, females used the culturally legitimate excuse of "being drunk" to deny and mitigate their own agency, a practice that reflects the need to be drunk to hookup (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). In her interview, Kay, a senior, admitted, much to her chagrin, to being a "drunk texter."

> I always break every social convention because… it's usually my inclination to want to text someone first, and I have to hold back. I have to confess I'm a big drunk texter because… for some reason, I never get to a point where I misspell… I can be so direct and so clear! So when it's someone I genuinely like or just want to hook up with… I have to sit on my hands… and avoid texting them in a hookup situation because there are sometimes when I will drunkenly text some guy and be like, "Where are you?" But I feel like that necessarily isn't the norm… It's normal for a girl to respond to texts from guys… I feel like that's the social expectation. I feel like that's part of the playing hard to get that I still struggle with.

Similarly, in one structured conversation among female friends (all seniors), the women talked about the advantages of sending out "drunk texts":

Bonny: It [texting] gives you a way to say something you've been wanting to say to the person but not face to face, like, blame it on a drunk text.

Ellie: And I feel like, especially in hookups, you can become freer, if you're drunk you can become free. You can be like, "Oh what are *you* doing?"

Dee: A lot of the things you would never say like "Hey can I come over?" "Can we hang out?" Because if they're like, "No, I'm tired," then you're just like, "*Okay*"… but if they said it in person it would be way worse.

By deciding to directly take on the masculine consumer self (RQ3), women challenged the dominant discourse and followed the self-development imperative (RQ2). However, they ultimately wound up reinforcing the cultural norm by either retooling their texts to be less agentive or using alcohol as their excuse for finding a voice (RQ1). In other words, they used a "feminine style" and/or intoxication to get their point directly across and needs met without outwardly challenging patriarchal campus culture. The cell phone allowed women to try to get what they want while still claiming their place as willing participants within the fraternity party scene.

The digital Cyrano: Fostering the collaborative self

Once a potential hookup had been identified, men and women engaged in collaborative texting interactions with their friends to gauge the intentions of the interested party (RQ3 and RQ4). In interviews, female students said that they read text messages differently than their male counterparts. First, females claimed that they worried more about the content of hookup texts. Lea, a female senior, noted: "I feel like girls do tend to overanalyze what they're saying in their text message, like they re-read it to make sure they put in an exclamation point or a nice adjective or something."

Second, females had the impression that they consulted their friends more often to help them interpret received texts. Chrissy stated "the typical female scenario": "If a boy, like, texts you, and you're not sure how to read it—like whether he's just being friendly or whether he's being like flirty. It's always helpful to relay something past another friend."

Third, females frequently asked their friends to make sure that they sent appropriate texts to potential hookups. Jillian commented: "You don't want it [the text] to come off as too flirty or too desperate or not interested enough when it comes to text flirting."

However, male interviewees mentioned using their guy friends to help them navigate hookup texting. Because of the social demands imposed on women by traditional gender roles to avoid showing direct and explicit interest in someone, men said that they sometimes found it hard to figure out what women really meant in their texts. Billy described the following problem:

Sometimes I feel that if I can't decipher what somebody is trying to say, like if their message is a bit too coy, or a bit too subtle… I can't quite understand what they're saying. I'll be like [to a guy friend], "Oh what do you think this means? What do you think I should do? What do you think I should say back?" It's pretty common.

Thus, while women used their friends to make sure that they conformed to gender stereotypes, men turned to their buddies to help them to negotiate the role of masculine pursuer

(RQ2). Like females, males had to strike a balance between, as Ben said, "being too interested in the relationship and not interested in it enough."

And yet, the ambiguity of text messaging also allowed men to play with gender boundaries in several important ways. First, text messaging gave them room to talk about emotions and explore the presentation of self. They could be more "feminine" in their conversations with their male friends about the texts they sent and received. J.J., a sophomore, stated the following:

> It's never a bad thing in my opinion to consult a friend, a good friend, if you have a question about the text message you want to send to a girl, how you think you'll come off to them, what you think they'll get as the main question or something. So I feel like a friend can help, because they can judge what a text message is saying.

Male students tried to envision what a female reader might think of their texts. They attempted to engage with new masculine scripts, even if this caused them some confusion. J.J. said that, as a guy, he experienced some hesitations about how to represent himself:

> You don't want to go down all the way to the female level, but you don't want to be the brute, beast that sometimes men get the appearance of… I think they [girls] get maybe scared, and they feel dominated… Girls nowadays are looking for more power, and they don't want be dominated anymore, they don't want be put down anymore. So it's never a bad thing to not sound [like] that big muscle guy that you might be.

In texting back and forth with potential hookups and consulting friends in the process, male students moved beyond the role of aggressor. Jackson admitted how, at times, he experienced insecurity about himself as a guy because he wanted to take the woman's feelings and needs into consideration:

> I don't know if I'm being as aggressive in this relationship as I should be, like, I don't know if I'm pushing us forward as quick as she'd like to go, because obviously I'd like to go faster… You'd be texting, sort of… beating around the bush, and you'd get the catastrophic interpretation of the text message, like oh "this clearly means she's uncomfortable with what we're doing," but in actuality it's just like, "I'm not in the mood today."

When women worked together through constant texting to foster a collaborative self, they performed typical female gender scripts by conversing in ways that were in tune with emotions and concerned with the opinions of others (Coates, 1988; RQ3 and RQ2). For males, their collaborations with guy friends afforded them opportunities to create personas that are more feminine—less competitive and more exploratory of their feelings and those of a potential hookup (Cameron, 1997; RQ3 and RQ2). The fact that men were willing to discuss their own personal experiences with this phenomenon shows that they were comfortable with cultivating this softer side through and around the cell phone. However, since they only consulted with other males, perhaps many females did not know about the lengths men will go to get a text "right," which then reinforced the impression that only "girls" worry about texts.

Table 10. Students sending a suggestive text during their college career.

Gender	No	Yes	Probably	Refuse to answer	X^2
Females	39	58	1	1	8
Males	38	49	7	5	

Note. Number of respondents: 147. Pearson chi-square = 153.13; *df* = 3.

Table 11. Students receiving a suggestive text during their college career.

Gender	No	Yes	Probably	Refuse to answer	X^2
Females	33	64	0	3	8
Males	36	53	7	4	

Note. Number of respondents: 147. Pearson chi-square = 154.16; *df* = 3.

Table 12. Students sending and receiving suggestive sexts during their college career.

	Never got a sext	Got a sext	Possibly got a sext	Refuse to answer	Total number of respondents	X^2
Never sent a sext	79	20	0	2	56	16
Sent a sext	8	89	4	0	79	
Possibly sent a sext	14	57	29	0	7	
Refuse to answer	0	0	20	80	5	

Note. Pearson chi-square = 334.89; *df* = 6.

Sexting

For this study, I defined sexting as sexually suggestive texts or texts propositioning sexual activity (Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011, p. 1698). Survey data indicated that such texts with sexual innuendos were reciprocal, revealing an equality in expressions of male and female sexual agency (RQ2 and RQ4). Almost half of those surveyed said that they sent sexual innuendos to someone since being a college student (see Table 10). Looking further, significant numbers of both genders admitted to receiving a suggestive text from someone during that same time frame (see Table 11). And, those who sent suggestive texts were more likely to receive them (see Table 12). In addition, those who sent suggestive texts to a hookup were more likely to receive them from a hookup (see Table 13). In fact, more suggestive texts were sent in hookups than in dating situations. Hookups are clearly the place where students work out their sexual and social identities.

Hookup texts tend to be vague, and this characteristic benefits the sender and receiver. Jillian, for example, decided how she should respond to a text with sexual innuendos based on the context of the message:

Table 13. Students sending and receiving suggestive sexts in the following situations during their college career.

	Sent to a hookup partner	Sent to a dating partner	Sent to a hookup and dating partner	Sent to a platonic friend	Total number of respondents	X^2
Received from hookup partner	94	0	0	6	17	16
Received from dating partner	0	90	7	3	30	
Received from hookup & dating partner	9	4	78	9	23	
Received from platonic friend	0	0	8	92	12	

Note. Pearson chi-square = 256.20; *df* = 9.

Table 14. Opinion about flirtatious texting style.

Gender	Females are more flirtatious	Males are more flirtatious	Both are equally flirtatious	Neither has this kind of style	X^2
Females	22	3	75	0	8
Males	13	7	77	3	

Note. Number of respondents: 147. Pearson chi-square = 153.60; *df* = 3.

> If it is someone where there is something flirtatious going on or we're very close friends—like this has happened to me and some of my guy friends—I'll just laugh it off. I usually don't take it seriously even if somewhere in my heart I know they are being serious, if I don't want to move on it… I won't respond in turn, but I would respond with a "haha" sort of thing. [If I were interested,] I would probably respond the same way but maybe add a winky face or something. Like the most practical emoticon that I could think of… because I think it's uncomfortable if you're not hooking up with someone to send sexts… I don't think most girls are that forward.

According to Jillian, the proper way for a woman to respond to an unwanted sext is to ignore it or make a joke out of it, but never to confront the sender negatively. No student interviewed ever questioned the right of male students to pursue whomever they wanted. In this way, the male would save face if his move failed. In addition, there was a blurry line between being platonic friends and being flirty friends, as seen in similar studies (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000; Campbell & Park, 2014; Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2006). At the beginning of her statement, Jillian suggested that being flirtatious is part of the texting protocol between coed friends, but then later, she negatively evaluated women who start the flirtation. However, her opinion might be in the minority. In the survey, when asked who had the more flirtatious texting style, a significant number of males and females listed both genders as possessing this quality (see Table 14). Flirtation was a collaborative effort, and it gave students indirect ways of initiating a hookup so as to protect themselves from failure (RQ4).

Conclusions

This study set out to provide insight into how the cell phone, as an object of consumption and communication, is integral to the hookup scene on college campuses today. The first research question explored how students used the cell phone to start and negotiate hookups. The findings showed that students frequently texted hookup partners and that they relied on their friends to help them interpret the messages they sent and received in this endeavor. The second research question investigated how students reinforced, evaluated, and/or challenged gender norms when using the cell phone to engage in hookups. And, when coupled with the third research question about how students actualized their consumer and cooperative selves while texting, the results revealed that hooking up via the cell phone generally reaffirmed gender hierarchies. However, in some cases, it did provide individuals with the means to critique and transcend gender norms. In addition, the study showed that the cell phone, because it is a communicative device, lent itself easily to the process of negotiating of sexual desire among potential partners.

These discoveries lead to three larger questions. Who gains the most agency from texting in the college hookup scene? What are the ramifications of the consumer and collaborative selves on college social structure? And, more broadly, how can investigations of cell phone hookups push digital communication theory forward?

Because they still control the social scene, men have the freedom to choose between two options without negative consequences: to follow the hegemonic male script of the booty call or to engage in new masculine discourses in their texting strategies. When they do the latter, they are more accepting of women as in touch with, and expressive about, their needs and fantasies. In addition, when men talk to one another about how to craft a text to, or read a text from, a possible hookup, they create a self more open to the opinions of the opposite sex. They engage in those new discourses of masculinity that see women as equally pleasure seeking and sexually assertive. Men can openly explore issues of emotion and commitment with their male friends without stigma.

Women also have a choice between following a more traditional passive role in the hookup scene or attempting to actualize their consumer selves in order to gain more sexual agency. However, this last option is fraught with difficulties. A female student could send a text out to multiple men to see who is interested. Or, she could write a text that targets a particular guy by contacting his friends to locate him or by texting him directly. Her first option would be the most challenging to social convention. These scenarios could contest gender hierarchies, but their potential is marred when females either embellish their texts with more conversational and feminine prose or use the excuse that they were drunk and thus should have known better than to send out such explicit accounts of their sexual desires. In communicating with female friends about receiving and sending hookup texts, women work together to police the boundaries of proper female discourse and sociality. By making the claim that they sent a text while under the influence of alcohol, women continue to reinforce the importance of the male-dominated party scene. Drunk texting also legitimizes the social stigma against outward expressions of female sexuality. Therefore, narratives about female sexual agency are rarely heard in public campus discourse.

In retrospect, the survey could have asked more details about the sexting process. The inquiry about sending sexts should have been accompanied by a list of reasons why, so

that it might have been possible to discern whether females sent sexts first and the reasons behind their behavior. Were they acting on their own initiative or out of an anxiety to please particular men and thus keep up their social status through male affiliations (Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011)? Additionally, asking students to describe what a hookup meant for them may have aided investigation into the ambiguous and sometimes contradictory field of college sexuality, as well as provided more context for better understanding their own experiences (Paul & Hayes, 2002).

The results of this study bring up some important implications for understanding sexuality in the digital generation. Heterosexual desire and gender scripts can no longer be studied separately from the technologies in which they are formulated and expressed. Mediated communication, in addition to the sexual acts that follow, is integral to the hookup experience. The process of initiating a hookup through the cell phone generates just as much, and sometimes even more, conversation among friends as the hookup itself. Future studies could take this topic even further by recruiting students to contribute the actual content of their hookup texts for investigation and follow-up discussion. This could yield more insights into the ways that college students negotiate of sexuality and gender, perhaps revealing "novel modes of sociality" beyond sexting (Curnutt, 2012, p. 366). The mobile phone has become a driving force in student communication today. This study hopes to provide a base for understanding its integral role in that typical college experience—the hookup.

Funding

Notes

1. Permission to undertake this research was granted by the university's Institutional Review Board. The approval numbers are IRB-2011-005 and IRB-2011-020. My heartfelt thanks to the following people who helped make this article possible: my research assistants Lev Raslin, Liz Bell, and Lauren Acker; Dr. Krzysztof Jasiewicz; Dr. Lynny Chin; and students in my course "Campus Sex in the Digital Age."
2. Data is from the University's Office of Institutional Effectiveness.
3. Data is from the University's Office of Institutional Effectiveness.
4. I accept all relationships of significance at a .05 level.
5. To encourage more students to discuss their sexual behaviors in a nonjudgmental forum, my student researchers insisted that we include "probably" as a choice with the rationale that those surveyed would feel more comfortable answering "probably" to a practice that they deem deviant or they might not remember clearly because they were drunk.

References

Afifi, W. A., & Faulkner, S. L. (2000). On being "just friends": The frequency and impact of sexual activity in cross-sex friendships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *17*(2), 205–222.

Ahuvia, A. C. (2005). Beyond the extended self: Loved objects and consumers' identity narratives. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *32*, 171–184.

Bauman, Z. (2003). *Liquid life*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Bogle, K. A. (2008). *Hooking up: Sex, dating and relationships on campus*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Bordo, S. (1997). Reading the male body. In P. L. Moore (Ed.), *Building bodies* (pp. 31–73). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Bordo, S. (1999). *The male body: A new look at men in public and private*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Butler, J. (2006). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Cameron, D. (1997). Performing gender identity: Young men's talk and the construction of heterosexual masculinity. In S. Johnson, & U. H. Meinhof (Eds.), *Language and masculinity* (pp. 47–64). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Campbell, S., & Park, Y. (2014). Predictors of mobile sexting among teens: Toward a new explanatory framework. *Mobile Media & Communication*, *2*(1), 20–29.

Casado, E., & Lasen, A. (2012). Mobile telephony and the remediation of couple intimacy. *Feminist Media Studies*, *12*(4), 550–559.

Casado, E., & Lasen, A. (2014). What is disturbing and why not to disturb. On mobile phones, gender, and privacy wihtin heterosexual intimacy. *Mobile Media & Communication*, *2*(3), 249-264.

Coates, J. (1988). Gossip revisited: Language in all-female groups. In J. Coates, & D. Cameron (Eds.), *Women in their speech communities: New perspectives on language and sex* (pp. 199–223). London, UK: Longman.

Dworkin, S., & O'Sullivan, L. (2005). Actual versus desired initiation patterns among a sample of college men: Tapping disjunctures within traditional male sexual scripts. *Journal of Sex Research*, *42*(2), 150–158.

Epstein, M., Calzo, J. P., Smiler, A. P., & Ward, L. M. (2009). "Anything from making out to having sex": Men's negotiations of hooking up and friends with benefits scripts. *Journal of Sex Research*, *46*(5), 414–424.

Eshbaugh, E. M., & Gute, G. (2008). Hookups and sexual regret among college women. *Journal of Social Psychology*, *148*(1), 77–89.

Fielder, R. L., & Carey, M. P. (2010). Predictors and consequences of sexual "hookups" among college students: A short-term prospective study. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *39*(5), 1105–1119.

Fitzpatrick, K. (2011). *Planned obsolescence: Publishing, technology, and the future of the academy*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Gershon, I. (2010). *The breakup 2.0: Disconnecting over new media*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Glenn, N., & Marquardt, E. (2001). *Hooking up, hanging out, and hoping for Mr. Right: College women on dating and mating today*. New York, NY: Institute for American Values.

Grello, C. M., Welsh, D. P., & Harper, M. S. (2006). No strings attached: The nature of casual sex in college students. *Journal of Sex Research*, *43*(3), 255–267.

Hamilton, L., & Armstrong, E. A. (2009). Sexuality in young adulthood: Double binds and flawed outcomes. *Gender & Society*, *23*(5), 589–616.

Holland, D. C., & Eisenhart, M. A. (1990). *Educated in romance: Women, acheivement, and college culture*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Katz, J. E. (2004). A nation of ghosts? Choreography of mobile communication in public spaces. In K. Nyiri (Ed.), *Mobile democracy: Essays on society, self and politics* (pp. 21–31). Vienna, Austria: Passagen Verlag.

Kimmel, M. (2008). *Guyland: The perilous world where boys become men*. New York, NY: Harper.

Korobov, N., & Thorne, A. (2006). Intimacy and distancing: Young men's conversations about romantic relationships. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *21*, 27–55.

Ling, R. (2004). *The mobile connection: The cell phone's impact on society*. San Francisco, CA: Morgan Kaufmann.

Ling, R. (2008). *New tech, new ties: How mobile communication is reshaping social cohesion*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Love, M. A., & Helmbrecht, B. M. (2007). Teaching the conflicts: (Re)engaging students with feminism in a post-feminist world. *Feminist Teacher*, *18*(1), 41–58.

Manning, W. D., Giordano, P. C., & Longmore, M. A. (2006). Hooking up: The relationship contexts of "nonrelationship" sex. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *21*(5), 459–483.

Mihailidis, P. (2014). A tethered generation: Exploring the role of mobile phones in the daily life of young people. *Mobile Media and Communication*, *2*(1), 58–72.

Moffatt, M. (1989). *Coming of age in New Jersey*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Nafus, D., & Tracey, K. (2002). Mobile phone consumption and concepts of personhood. In J. E. Katz, & M. A. Aakhus (Eds.), *Perpetual contact: Mobile communication, private talk, public performance* (pp. 206–221). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Owen, J. J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S.M., & Fincham, F. D. (2010). "Hooking up" among college students: Demographic and psychosocial correlates. *Archives of Sexual Behavior 39*(3), 653–663.

Paul, E. L., & Hayes, K. A. (2002). The casualties of "casual" sex: A qualitative exploration of the phenomenology of college students' hookups. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *19*(5), 639–661.

Paul, E. L., McManus, B., & Hayes, A. (2000). "Hookups": Characteristics and correlates of college students' spontaneous and anonymous sexual experiences. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *37*(1), 76–88.

Ray, R., & Rosow, J. A. (2010). Getting off and getting intimate: How normative institutional arrangements structure Black and White fraternity men's approaches toward women. *Men and Masculinities*, *12*(5), 523–546.

Rhoads, R. A. (1995). Whale tales, dog piles, and beer goggles: An ethnographic case study of fraternity life. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *26*(3), 306–323.

Sanday, P. R. (1990). *Fraternity gang rape: Sex, brotherhood, and privilege on campus*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Stepp, L. S. (2008). *Unhooked: How young women pursue sex, delay love, and lose at both*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books.

Taylor, K. (2013, July 12). Sex on campus: She can play that game, too. *The New York Times*.

Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Weisskirch, R. S., & Delevi, R. (2011). "Sexting" and adult romantic attachment. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *27*, 1697–1701.

Wilkins, A. C., & Dalessandro, C. (2013). Monogamy lite: Cheating, college, and women. *Gender & Society*, *27*(5), 728–751.

Wolf, N. (2002). *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. New York, NY: Perennial.

Author biography

Sascha L. Goluboff, PhD, is a professor of cultural anthropology at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, where she teaches courses about gender, sexuality, and desire. Her original work focused on Jewish religious revival and ethnicity in the former Soviet Union (Russia and Azerbaijan). Some of her more recent scholarship addresses the ways that digital technology influences gender identity and realms of emotionality.