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Whatever She Wants: An Ethnography of American Women, Sex and the Internet

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"Whatever She Wants":
An Ethnography of American Women, Sex and the Internet

by

Suepattra Grace May

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Medical Anthropology

in the

GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN FRANCISCO

AND

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

For my father

stereotypes I had held about Thailand's commercial sex industry. When I returned to the University of Washington as a Master's in Public Health graduate student focused on breast cancer screening in Senegal, I continued my engagement with anthropologists. Dr. Noel Chrisman helped me to understand better the advantages of incorporating applied anthropology into public health and clinical practice. Dr. Marjorie Muecke provided sage wisdom and guidance about anthropology and "the field", as I conducted my thesis research in West Africa. Dr. Sharyne Shiu-Thornton instilled in me the importance of cultural competence – no matter what the culture - in both public health practice and research methodology. All of these anthropologists cemented my desire to become a medical anthropologist.

Many people throughout my academic career have influenced me and helped to shape the ideas, theories and trajectory I ultimately pursued in this project. That said, I am most grateful for the support, the collaboration, the intellectual stimulation, the social support and the friendships I have made in the UC Berkeley and UC San Francisco academic communities. Doctoral students in the joint program are fortunate to have a community of scholars at two universities. My doctoral path was difficult, and my ultimate embrace of embrace of medical anthropology not simple given my transition from public health, but I grateful to the faculty in the Department of Anthropology, History and Social Medicine (DAHSM) for recognizing in me something that I was not able to see so easily at first myself. My growth as an ethnographer, a scholar, a researcher and an anthropologist would not have been possible without the exceptional mentorship and guidance of my dissertation committee and other DAHSM faculty.

Sharon Kaufman helped me to craft my first pilot proposal on this subject and ensured through her dissertation seminar four years later when I had returned from the field, that my analyses were equally as rigorous. Professor Philippe Bourgois encouraged me to pursue a research topic that despite the lack of a participant observation component could still prove to be good ethnography. Jeremiah Mock and Nancy Burke served as invaluable mentors – not only about traversing the world of anthropology but in finding balance in graduate life. Rena Pasick and Marjorie Kagawa Singer, ensured that I remained within the MTPCCR community and provided invaluable support throughout my doctoral career, helping me to believe that I could truly do it.

It goes without saying that without the assistance of Clair Dunne and Kimberly Bissell I would never have been able to navigate the UC bureaucracy, so I am thankful for their assistance throughout the years. Lastly, I am also grateful to the remaining staff and faculty of DAHSM. While they were not always involved directly in my work, they helped foster an environment that was conducive to the success of the project and myself as a doctoral student.

I am especially grateful for the many colleagues and friends I have made in the UCSF-UCB Anthropology, Sociology and Science and Technology Studies communities. My work, outlook and life perspective has been deeply enriched and shaped by the friendships I have made as a result. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my 2004 Medical Anthropology Cohort: Shana Harris, Stephan Kloos, China Scherz and Scott Stonington, whose support helped me through the good times and the bad and whose friendships with I know shall be lifelong. Thank you friends. In addition, there are many more across the medical anthropology and sociology cohorts – far more than whom I can

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Separately, I was able to participate and share my work and present my work during its development at many institutes. I made fantastic friendships and received immeasurable support and intellectual and epistemological encouragement from the people who I was fortunate to interact with. The 2006 Summer Institute on Sexuality, Culture and Society at the University of Amsterdam proved a seminal experience in my development as a researcher investigating sexuality and gender. I am grateful for the experiences that long hot summer in Amsterdam and for the intellectual and social stimulation I was exposed to in that wonderful place and space. In particular, I wish to acknowledge Annalies Hernandez and Rachel Kalish for their review and support of my work. Other places where I made wonderful friendships and received feedback on my research included the 2006 UCHRI Seminar in Experimental Critical Theory, the 2007 & 2008 Northern California Science and Technology Studies Workshops in the Marin Headlands, and the 2008 Spring Semester Gender and Sexuality Studies Seminar led by Lawrence Cohen. As well, I am thankful to friends and colleagues who read and

My friends and family have been a steady source of support and encouragement throughout my academic career, even when often times they had no idea exactly what it was that I was doing, and more importantly why. I shall be eternally grateful for the personal friendship of three people who have traversed the doctoral path before or along with me, and whose intimate knowledge of my personality, as well as what doctoral work entails, provided me with motivation and inspiration when I was lost. For their wisdom and friendship, I am grateful to Drs. Greg DeLory, Cynthia Jimes and doctoral candidate

Pamela Washington. Thank you. Dr. Lynn Schroeder served as my personal and professional sounding board and therapist for many years, helping me to overcome obstacles and face challenges. I am grateful to have had her steady advice for the duration of my time at UCSF. Many non-academic friends also provided equally incredible and important support and friendship, and whom I wish to acknowledge as well. For their unwavering belief in me, in the value of my dissertation project or both, I am grateful to Terri Peluso, Kelly Lance, Paul Lappas, Scott Slater, Rod McLean, Sylvestre and Angela Marlaud, Carlos Carbajal, Jerry Moss, Bill, Steve and Nish. Thank you.

With respect to my family, I wish to acknowledge the support of my mother, sister, and brother throughout the years. Without them, I wouldn't be here. As the granddaughter of Thai rice farmers and Kentucky coal mine workers, I am the first descendant on either side of my family to obtain a doctoral degree. To have done so brings immense pride to my Thai family and to my mother in particular. Given the hierarchy of Thai society, and the limited educational opportunities available to rural villagers, to have a Khun หมอ (Mo) – the Thai word for doctor - among their descendents is a very special achievement.

Lastly, I wish to thank my study participants, for sharing their very personal stories and very intimate experiences with me, and with which I can only hope I do minimal justice to.

ABSTRACT

Whatever She Wants: An Ethnography of American Women, Sex and the Internet

Suepattra Grace May

Background: The internet has revolutionized the ways that humans are able to create and maintain relationships through a variety of virtual media and portals including email, instant messaging and geolocation services. Within the realm of physically intimate relationships, the connectivity of the internet alone introduces the possibility of continuously new romantic and sexual connections across multiple media - from one's Facebook page to their smartphone. This dissertation is an ethnographic investigation focusing on how a technological innovation like the internet and opportunities such as online dating, "hooking up'' and casual sex encounters; changes women's conceptions of love, intimacy and sexual practice.

Study Purpose and Objectives: Through in depth interviews, an online survey and content analyses, this project investigates beliefs and practices around love, sexuality and modern intimacies among American women meeting their casual sex partners over the internet. Specifically, this project examines the experiences of women who meet their casual sex partners online; and the implications, if any, of moving the relationships from the virtual world to the real world.

Findings: The temporally brief casual sex encounter requires much more time and investment – "emotion(al) work"; and induces much more reflection about one's self than may have been originally anticipated. This dissertation argues that what circulates in these practices and narratives of internet mediated hooking up is an economy of intimacy

that holds love, lust, and other capitalist tropes as currency, value and commodity. It asserts that while utilizing a technology that allows for greater sexual freedom, expression and experience; through their participation in this economy of intimacy, women experience hooking up in ways that serve to form *new* identities, norms and engagements with sex, while also forcing a reconciliation of lingering *old* norms around love, sexual identities and relationships. This research posits that the production of sexual selves within this economy of intimacy has come about <u>not</u> shaped by the internet technology *per se* but rather by the way in which, through their emotion(al) work, women organize themselves, their feelings and their sexual practices.

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Introduction

Introduction

I am in the back of an outdoor courtyard of a European style café, sitting across from Ariana, a striking woman in her mid thirties, with piercing blue eyes and flaming red hair. Dressed like the corporate executive that she is in the real world (I know that Ariana is not her real name, because, as with several of my informants, she has chosen not to divulge that to me), she is talking rapidly between taking bites from a wild mushroom omelet and sips of freshly squeezed orange juice. She is recounting to me her first experience with craigslist's Casual Encounters:

> *Well, like other people I guess…..I went on Casual Encounters because of my marriage….my husband was admitted again [for inpatient treatment], for the third time, for addiction to pills. It was like the third serious hospitalization for addiction and for some reason it just made me completely focused on having sex …..even though we hadn't had sex for months. And after several days of being frustrated I decided to act on it…and I kind of knew what the whole Craigslist thing was all about....so I said to myself okay I'm going to try this. And I found one [ad] where someone was advertising that they were visiting from out of town and they were in a hotel close by.*

Laughing nervously, Ariana continued:

> *And I don't want any complications out of this and I had been frustrated for so damn long and um, and so I uh, emailed and got a call back within a few minutes and um, the stumbling block for me was the picture because I don't have a lot of current pictures and at the time I felt like I didn't photograph particularly well and it was weird that that was actually the biggest issue for me, given everything else…. So I sent it [the picture] but it didn't occur for me to ask for one in return. So then I spoke to him briefly on the phone and I took a cab over and I got there and I initially I thought 'I cannot believe I'm doing this' um, and he was an older man, maybe 50. So this guy from this first experience was probably in his mid 50's, um, so I went through with it and he was a very good lover. Not spectacular, but it was immensely satisfying and it did take care of how I was feeling. I felt a separation from all that was going on in my life and it was actually sufficiently fulfilling that I continued on Casual Encounters for over the last year and a half. I was feeling this immense relief and*

comfort and a necessary critical distance from what was going on in my life and you know it was very fulfilling and empowering. – Ariana, 39

This research project is about love, sex and intimacy in the age of the Internet. It is about how this new media technology is mediating forms of intimacy and transforming sexual practice among women in the United States today. Often times, when Internet mediated casual sex is portrayed, depicted or described in popular media, the focus is on the sex act itself, and any associated gratification. However, this project will show that Internet mediated hooking up is not just about sex, but rather, it is about intimacy and how this particular type of sexual practice is making demands upon popular conceptions of sex, intimacy and love.

For many of my informants, entrée in the world of Internet mediated hooking up occurred through Craigslist, and the introduction to Craigslist was often rather innocent. The first time I discovered Craigslist, I was preparing to move to San Francisco for a summer internship in 2003, and the few people I knew who lived in the area overwhelmingly told me to *"Look on Craigslist",* an online classifieds of sorts used by locals to find apartments, jobs, furniture, hobbies and activities, and even romance, as in dates and one night stands.

When I finally visited the site, I was rather unimpressed. How could this seemingly benign website, with gray screen backgrounds and blue hyperlinks, be the locus for all of my material and emotional needs? There were no bells and whistles. This was not Yahoo or my MSN homepage. There were no banner ads or enticements to draw me in, but when I clicked on the Personals Listings, specifically *Casual Encounters*, my curiosity was piqued. A warning and disclaimer page about the content I was about to

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view popped up. A rather foreboding message informed me that unless I was at least 18 years old, understood that Casual Encounters may include adult content, and agreed to release Craigslist from any liability that may arise from my use of the site, I should not proceed forward. Once on the actual Casual Encounters site, I was mesmerized. Questions were racing through my mind. Who were these people posting? Were they for real? Did people really do the things being described and sought? Did people really follow through with the scenarios they outlined and posted to the Internet? What was it like to experience this? I felt naïve but was intrigued, and thus the seeds of my dissertation project were planted squarely in the interrogation of the affective dimensions of Internet love and the new meanings of a modern intimacy fraught with intrigue, secrecy, the forbidden and the enticing.

For those who remember life before the Internet, the web has revolutionized how individuals are able to create and maintain connections through a variety of virtual media: email, chat rooms, instant messaging; and portals such as social networking, matchmaking and dating sites. Women of all ages shared with me their very personal experiences using the Internet to court, meet and "hook up" with potential partners.

While on the surface, "casual sex", "casual encounters" and "hooking up" portend the seeming non-development of a relationship of any kind with one's casual sexual partners, my research shows the opposite. For women, Internet mediated hooking up is very much fraught with the nebulousness and accoutrements of more "traditional" relationship forms, norms and expectations. Behind the stories of sexual exploits and adventures, an unexpected narrative emerged that was not about the casual encounter, or

the hook up, but was about so much more: about desire, love and ultimately intimacy. Despite popular media depictions of women openly engaging with sexuality and intimacy on their own terms, i.e. the popular HBO series *Sex and the City*; among my informants, casual sex facilitated by the Internet often remained a secret and transgressive act straddling complicated spaces of public and private intimacies and demanding constant negotiation of both new norms and identities as well as old norms around idealized relationships, women's sexuality, desire, and self expression.

The Ubiquity of Technology

The Internet has profoundly transformed the social fabric of human lives in the modern world, serving as a site of meaning-making and contestation, reconfiguring public and private spaces and vastly broadening the options for intimate human relations. Few would dispute the assertion that the Internet has heralded great change in the lives of many with access to information and computer technologies (ICT). Early in its history, Internet users were simply consuming published electronic content. Today, Internet users are actively connecting to "form, express and deepen their social alliances and affiliation (Kozinets 2009). According to the Pew Internet & American Life project, Internet use is diffusing more rapidly than any previous media technology; as of April 2009, 63% of all adults in the United States have broadband connections at home -- a 15% increase from a year earlier (Horrigan 2009).

Society is often told, and in many cases people truly believe, that technology and technological innovation will make our lives more efficient, and accordingly, more productive. Yet, technology, and new media technology in particular, has created a space where many are addicted to their smartphones, to their computer screens, to social

networking sites and to the endless possibilities that these new types of socialities and connectivity brings.[1]

When it comes to relationships, or rather, those that might fall under the rubric of the sexual, the heterogeneity and convenience of sexual opportunities and material available on the Internet enables a proliferation of all types of sexual activity and connectedness. Many researchers have noted that given the plethora of sex-related opportunities on the Internet, in combination with an ability to "shop" for sexual partners with select characteristics, it is not surprising that the Internet is used as a resource to pursue sexual encounters offline as well (Kim, Kent et al. 2001; Kim, Kent et al. 2001) There are many websites devoted to partner seeking in myriad forms….be that for brief hook-ups, long term relationships or a whole host of arrangements in between. It should be noted that while fascinating and abundant in its variation, the thousands of places online where people can meet potential sex partners can be simply overwhelming and are continually evolving, with new websites appearing on a continual basis.[2]

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[1] According to Wikipedia, a smartphone is defined as a mobile phone offering advanced capabilities, often with PC-like functionality (PC-mobile handset convergence). There is no industry standard definition of a smartphone. For some, a smartphone is a phone that runs complete operating system software providing a standardized interface and platform for application developers. For others, a smartphone is simply a phone with advanced features like e-mail, Internet and e-book reader capabilities, and/or a built-in full keyboard or external USB keyboard and VGA connector. In other words, it is a miniature computer that has phone capability.Wikipedia. (2010). "Smartphone." Retrieved February 15, 2010, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smartphone.

[2] Due to the breadth of websites available to meet casual sexual partners, and the rapid emergence of new sites and the failure of other websites, I have chosen not to include a list of websites even as an appendix item, as the sites would outdate quickly. However, besides the websites that will be discussed explicitly in this ethnography, the sites that my informants reported using included: The Ashley Madison Agency (*Tagline: Life is Short. Have an Affair.*), Bondage.com (*Tagline: The experienced Fetish and BDSM Community.*), Discreet Adventures (*Tagline: Unhappy with your current relationship? Looking for some EXTRA Excitement?*), Digiromp (*Tagline: Where all the Hot Girls Come*) and Moms that Play (*Tagline: For Moms who like to be Naughty*)

It should be noted that this research project is not about the websites created to facilitate connections between people for the specific purpose of "hooking up", "anonymous" or "casual" sexual encounters, or even love. Rather, it is about the women who use the Internet to find casual sex partners, about the forces that motivate their use, and about how their experiences are enunciating emotional spaces, shaping desires and creating fluid sexual subjectivities. While there has been much published in the peer reviewed literature about similar behaviors and practices in the MSM (men who have sex with men) community - and its putative association with the potential spread of sexually transmitted infections, very little is known about the motivations, relations and practice patterns of women, of any sexual orientation who engage in similarly anonymous or casual sex encounters.

An Anthropology of Contemporary Sexual Practice and Modern Love

Contemporary meanings of sexuality, love and intimacy among women in the United States engaging in casual sex encounters facilitated by the Internet show us the implications brought about by moving the interactions out of the "online" realm and into the "offline" world. I attempt to examine herein the meanings attributed to intimacy when a woman engages in a seemingly physically intimate act (sex) that seeks to be devoid of emotion(al) intimacy (love or other forms of endearment). This is not a project about what happens online. It is about what starts online and moves offline. By asking "*What is sex?*", "*What is love?*" and "*What does it mean to be intimate?*" when a computer screen, or more recently, one's smartphone , e.g. "sexting" serves as the conduit by which one communicates and engages with a potential sex (or love) interest, we reveal a complex and contested social space that warrants further investigation and analysis.

According to Dr. Sari Locker, "sexting" is defined as sex texting — sending or receiving a text message that has sexual content. "Sexting" can also be defined as sending nude, semi-nude, or erotic pictures or video via cell phone. "Sexting" could mean sending and receiving a series of sexually explicit text messages for sexual gratification in the same manner as having phone sex. ("Sexting" is not used to refer to having sexual conversations over the cell phone, since that would still be called "phone sex.") "Sexting" may be intended to be flirtatious or provocative, or it may be used to request or arrange a sexual encounter (Locker 2008).

In this project, I chose to conduct fieldwork in a radically new and dynamic field location – the Internet - that continued to change rapidly even throughout my field research; yet while examining subject matter – love, sex and intimacy – that has been documented from time and time again throughout human civilization.

Perhaps most salient to this work is that while technology may be changing society's understandings of what constitutes intimate relationships, it does so by invoking moral and ethical discourses introduced by a) the romantic ideals (and constraints) of the Victorian era; b) by the promise and cultural underpinnings of neoliberal values; and c) with extreme contradictions and fluidity operating in the many topical areas where my dissertation delves: in public and private spaces, across generations, geographic spaces and sexual orientations and in the places where online networking, be that social or sexual, makes us seemingly more knowledgeable about our lives and identities.

For women, and women's sexuality, the discursive spaces of intimacy are vexed, as women increasingly find themselves in a tangle of dependence and independence in the 21st century, with female sexuality as a fluid yet corkscrewing path of progression and

regression. Were women objectifying themselves as sexual objects by their casual sex seeking Internet use? How did women move from fighting objectification to seeking it? Are we experiencing a new wave of feminism whereby love and intimacy serve as the gauge of sexual revolution? How have patterns of love been altered with this new technology?

I also encountered my own reflexive ethnographic moment. While I sought to investigate the sexual practice of others, I was forced to face my own biases and assumptions. When I first embarked on this project, I was unsure of the types of women whom I would meet, the responses that I would receive during participant interviews, and the types of reactions I would have from friends, colleagues and strangers when I spoke of my dissertation research activities. I brought to my own work, the very same stereotypes, moral and ethical assumptions I sought to decipher about the women I hoped to study and what I perceived they did and why. Even though I wanted to study women engaged in casual encounters, I considered myself an outsider to this world of Internet mediated hooking up, situating myself along a continuum of respectability. I could not really empathize with or understand how they could share themselves in such an intimate bodily manner without *some* emotion. As my informants shared their experiences of seduction and sexual chemistry, of heartbreak and infidelity, and of sheer fun and fantasy, and of the mundane and banal, I was forced to question my own social situatedness.

As my field site, the Internet, transformed during the course of my fieldwork - logically, through rapid changes and improvements in technology, networking and infrastructure; a new awareness of the "practice" of casual encounters also made it into the American mainstream. In a 2008 episode of NBC's long running series "*Law and*

Order", the show opens with a middle aged business man in his hotel room getting ready for what appears to be a romantic date that evening, (he's shaving, putting on some cologne, there's champagne in the background, etc). The screen goes blank, the telltale Law and Order scene change sound effect sounds (cue gavel sound here: "*doink doink*") and the episode resumes with Detectives Cyrus Lupo and Bernard (played by actors Jeremy Sisto and Anthony Anderson) in the same man's hotel room several hours later, investigating what appears to be a pretty brutal homicide. The man (who evidently turns out to be a married doctor and father of two visiting NYC for a convention) lies dead on the floor with his laptop open in the background and blood spattered about the crime scene. Further investigation by the detectives reveals that the doctor had been browsing craigslist's online personals the day of his murder, *specifically* a Casual Encounters posting by a "bored housewife" looking for a hookup that evening.

Detective Lupo then turns to Detective Green and asks him "*Ever hook up online*?" Looking horrified, Detective Green responds: "*with all those weirdoes out there*? *No way*". The overarching message here is that is that seemingly normal people (your suburban dad) are hooking up on the Internet, but it is not a normal thing to do or a normal way to behave. At the same time, the use of the Internet for creating relationships which are intimate is exploding, despite the cautionary tales and media depictions. When it comes to hooking up, the Internet is a monster to be feared, a freedom to be embraced, and a risk to pursue or avoid.

On Language and Necessary Terms

A particular form of engagement – "Internet mediated hooking up" is the subject of this dissertation. However, how does one define hooking up exactly? The phrase

"hooking up" refers to the practice of casual or anonymous sex. In this ethnography, I shall employ the terms hooking up, casual sex and casual encounters interchangeably. In her 2008 moral panic inducing book, "*Unhooked: How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love and Lose at Both*", Washington Post journalist and author Laura Sessions Stepp describes "hooking up" as the un-relationship that:

> *"can consist entirely of one kiss, or it can involve fondling, oral sex, anal sex, intercourse or any combination of those things. It can happen only once with a partner, several times during the week or over many months. Feelings are discouraged and both partners share an understanding that either of them can walk away at any time"*. (Sessions Stepp 2007)

Helping to perpetuate, or capitalize upon, the practice of hooking up is, a whole cottage industry devoted to instructing women exactly how to do so – in the form of websites or popular press books or podcasts.

I originally planned to discuss "hooking up" as Stepp had defined it, but I found these categories were differently interpreted among my own study participants, despite my attempt to delineate a space for them to situate themselves within. The notion of finding a Mr. or Ms. "*Right*" was easily interchanged with Mr. or Ms. "*Right Now*". Women who "hooked up" often did not view or consider themselves as engaging in "hook ups" – but rather interpreted their experiences as "play" or "dating". Women who said they "dated" on mainstream sites or met people through portals that were not explicitly about casual sex, also did not see themselves as "hooking up". And at the other end of the spectrum, some women recognized casual sex for what it was, and simply just "hit it" and hooked up, although at times their "hook ups" would want more in terms of an emotional engagement. And for those representing the younger generation of informants, much like Stepp describes in the book, hooking up was simply the first step

towards determining whether or not a relationship may develop with a given individual. These positions will be more explicitly revealed in subsequent chapters.

My informants situated themselves somewhere between dating and hooking up, depending upon the contextual circumstances they were operating in at that moment in time. Thus, hook ups or casual sex or Internet mediated casual sexual encounters, are not in practice, as well defined as the categories that are employed, but rather in practice, can be complicated and ambiguous, much like relationships we encounter no matter the origin.

Methods

During the course of this project, my study objectives changed significantly. I had originally embarked upon a project about casual sex facilitated by the Internet among women, and its implications for women's sexual health. The scant public health literature on Men who have sex with Men (MSM) and other marginalized communities served as the primary model for attempting to understand sexually transmitted infections among men active in Internet mediated sex and social networks. However, after the first few informant interviews, it became clear to me that hooking up on the Internet held implications for women far beyond the casual sexual encounter which merited further investigation. Thus, my project was not only focused on internet mediated hooking up, but grew to include a much longer trajectory of women's casual sex experiences. Through this new temporal awareness, a hook up space requiring an incredible amount of unexpected time investment and labor, was revealed. This space included an examination of how women found themselves online, how they created online personas, and how they situated themselves in the real world encounter.

The dissertation research included qualitative in person interviews ('informant interviews'), a quantitative Internet based survey ('web survey') hosted by the website Surveymonkey$^{©}$ and as a complement to the qualitative and quantitative data collection, textual analysis of popular media, websites and books used to facilitate Internet mediated sexual encounters and "hooking up". Given the nature of the questions posed by this topic, I anticipated potential participant discomfort and the possibility that responses would be shaped or influenced by social norms and perceptions of opprobrium around casual sex and hooking up. And indeed as shall describe in subsequent chapters, they were. Put simply, during the interview, some of my participants gave me the socially desirable "appropriate" response, so I was attentive to what they were not saying as well as what they were saying.

Separately, I anticipated that social norms might also impact participant enrollment for the in person interviews, meaning that women who may be eligible would simply not want to participate or reveal their identity at an in person meeting. Thus, I developed the web survey to reach these women as well as women residing outside of the West Coast city in which I conducted the in- person interviews. Together, these three methods - the informant interview, the web survey, and textual analyses provide rich insight into the phenomenon of women who use the Internet to "hook-up".

The ethnography was conducted in two primary study sites. The first site was a large metropolitan area on the West Coast of the United States. This region was selected based upon the high level of broadband (Internet) penetration and adult Internet use in the region as reported by a 2003 Pew Internet and American Life research report on Internet use in the United States (Spooner 2004). Separately, participants who elected to

participate in the web survey were eligible to participate as long as they resided in the United States. To ensure that responses would be limited to US residents, the web survey was designed to only allow access to the survey with Internet protocol (IP) addresses originating in the U.S.

The second study site was essentially a "virtual" study site, located on the Internet and the many websites on which I was recruiting study participants. This second site was crucial to my study in terms of the ethnography I conducted and the data I collected, as I operated in this world at every step of the project, from its inception, to recruitment, to communicating with study participants and following the state of the field.

Over a period of three years (June 2005 – August 2008), I conducted 25 in-depth informant interviews with women between the ages of 18 – 57, all of whom used the Internet at least once in the year prior, to meet at least one sexual partner on a casual sex basis. My informant interviews were augmented by formal interviews with people whose opinions I considered pivotal to the genesis of this research topic including craigslist founder Craig Newmark of craigslist.org, Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, Director of the STD Prevention and Control Branch of the San Francisco Department of Public Health and one of the first public health officials in the country to report on the role of the Internet in sexually transmitted disease infection, and Dr. Carol Queen, a San Francisco based sexologist who has written extensively about the writes about the role of sex in culture.

During the course of my dissertation research, I spoke about the project at every available opportunity – in both formal and informal settings. At social gatherings amongst friends, including barbeques, potlucks and weddings; in more structured social settings, such as my book club or in knitting and cooking classes, I took the opportunity

to discuss my dissertation research, because simply mentioning a PhD program often led directly to a question about what I was doing my dissertation on. More formally, I gave guest lectures on my research at local universities – from undergraduate sociology majors to master's level students considering doctoral programs. In all settings, invariably someone had an opinion to share about hook up culture, whether that was a condemnation of the activity, shocked disbelief that women actually did this, or pulling me aside to whisper that they might know someone who would be interested in participating in the study.

In addition to the formal interviews and informal discussion, I created a Survey Monkey® hosted web survey which was 'live' for five months, between April and September 2008, with a total of 354 women completing the online survey.

Participants in both groups were recruited via announcements posted on websites and electronic bulletin boards including but not limited to Craigslist©, Backpage©, Facebook© and Blogher©. All study activities were approved by the University of California Committee on Human Research. Prospective participants learned about the study through online recruitment advertisements or by word of mouth from study participants. Interested parties were directed to a dedicated study email address and phone number for more information.

Potential participants in the web survey component were directed to a web page that contained the study information statement, including a description of the study, the possible risks to the respondent of participating, a privacy statement, and all other information included in the information statement. Passive informed consent for the web survey was obtained in accordance with recommendations from the literature including

recommendations made by the Association of Internet Researchers Ethical Decision Making Working Group. (Smith and Leigh 1997; Ess 2002). Following the information statement, participants were informed that by proceeding to the next page, also the first page of the survey, that the potential respondent was providing her consent to participate in the online survey. Each page of the web survey also included an option allowing the respondent to withdraw from the survey at any time.

While the study population had in common the experience of using the Internet to find sexual partners, my interview informants and survey respondents were quite heterogeneous with respect to many other demographic characteristics. Demographic characteristics of study participants included in both the in person interview and online web survey are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. - Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristic	Informant Interviews (n=25)		Internet Survey (n=350)	
	N	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
Age	*(Mean: 32.9 , Range: 21-54)*		*(Mean: 31.3, Range: 18 – 57)*	
18-29 years old	11	44	182	52
30-39 years old	9	36	101	29
40-49 years old	4	16	54	15
50+ years old	1	4	13	4
Sexual Orientation				
Heterosexual	14	56	197	72
Bisexual	8	32	64	23
Homosexual	4	16	14	5
Marital Status				
Single	16	64	221	63
Married/partnered	5	20	89	26
Divorced/separated	4	16	36	10
Ethnicity				
African American	1	4	38	11
Asian	8	32	53	15
Caucasian	15	60	204	59
Hispanic	-	-	29	8
Native American	-	-	4	1
Other	1	4	15	4
Education				
High school graduate	1	4	22	6
Some college	2	4	111	32
College graduate	14	56	96	27
Some post graduate	5	20	46	13
Post graduate	3	12	72	21

A list of cities where I posted recruitment advertisements for both the in person interviews and online survey components, is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. - Cities where recruitment advertisements were posted.

City	State	City	State
Albuquerque	New Mexico	Lexington	Kentucky
Allentown	Pennsylvania	Little Rock	Arkansas
Anchorage	Alaska	Los Angeles	California
Atlanta	Georgia	Madison	Wisconsin
Austin	Texas	Miami	Florida
Baltimore	Maryland	Minneapolis	Minnesota
Birmingham	Alabama	Nashville	Tennessee
Boise	Idaho	New Orleans	Louisiana
Boston	Massachusetts	New York	New York
Boulder	Colorado	Newport News	Virginia
Cedar Rapids	Iowa	Oklahoma City	Oklahoma
Chicago	Illinois	Philadelphia	Pennsylvania
Cincinnati	Ohio	Phoenix	Arizona
Cleveland	Ohio	Pittsburgh	Pennsylvania
Dallas	Texas	Portland	Oregon
Denver	Colorado	Raleigh	North Carolina
Detroit	Michigan	Sacramento	California
Fresno	California	San Antonio	Texas
Greensboro	North Carolina	San Diego	California
Greenville	South Carolina	Savannah	Georgia
Honolulu	Hawaii	Seattle	Washington
Houston	Texas	San Francisco	California
Iowa City	Iowa	Shreveport	Louisiana
Jackson	Mississippi	St Louis	Missouri
Kansas City	Missouri	Tampa Bay	Florida
Las Vegas	Nevada	Washington	District of Columbia

In preparation for the participant interviews, I researched hook up websites. I read hundreds of personal advertisements and user profiles on a number of different Internet sites, including free community bulletin boards as well as websites geared specifically towards finding partners. I selected these sites because they were well established, large and experienced potentially high volume in terms of the number and

type of advertisements for casual or anonymous sex that were placed on a daily basis. To better comprehend the initial experience associated with "going online" that my study participants themselves encountered in negotiating casual sex via the Internet, I placed four of my own anonymous personal ads for casual sex on craigslist Casual Encounters forums.[3]

With the exception of three interviews, all of the in-person interviews were conducted in a public place, generally in a café, restaurant or neutral location most convenient for the informant. Ironically, many of the hookups I shall describe in subsequent chapters often began in cafes and bars, and as such I believe that conducting interviews in these venues placed my informants in a mindset conducive to recounting their narratives.

The interviews ranged anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours in length, with the average interview generally taking about one hour. The sessions began with introductions, followed by brief conversation about the weather or interview location as well as getting settled and comfortable to begin the interview. Before beginning the interview, I provided the informant with a copy of the information statement and with a resource list of services and agencies in the area, should anything come up during the course of the interview that may have been uncomfortable. Before beginning the interview I reiterated that the information that they shared would be confidential, and that I would protect their anonymity to the greatest extent possible. I also asked them to select a pseudonym that would be known only to them and to me, so that they could identify

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[3] I will not be sharing the results of the responses to my personal ads, as many reveal true identities of unwitting respondents. However, I will say that placing my own ads and reviewing the responses has been very helpful in understanding my participant's experiences and the language and steps in negotiating a casual encounter.

themselves in the written materials. I utilized a semi-structured interview guide to assist in directing questions during the interview, and while by the end of the interview I made sure that all general areas were covered, I let the discussion guide the direction of the interview, so as to encourage the participant to feel that the interview was more of a conversation than a question and answer interview format.

The in-person interviews were conducted in English, audio-taped (with the exception of five interviews) and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analyses. Handwritten notes were taken when the study participant opted not to be audio recorded during their interview. At the end of each interview I recorded field notes describing the pre-interview circumstances and post-interview reflections. After the interviews I sent a thank you email to the study participants thanking them for their participation in the study and providing the link to my web survey (to pass along to friends and acquaintances, or to complete themselves) as well as a link to my study blog. Often times, the thank you email I sent inspired responses from my informants, thanking *me* for the interview, and containing further comments and reflections about our interview content and time together. In some cases, I asked my informants if they would share with me via email examples of personal ads which they found appealing (or unappealing) or even personal ads that they had responded to or posted themselves. Often times it was easier for my informants to share an ad that resonated with them, than to try to describe what they liked about particular ads or profiles during the course of our in person interview. The range of ads they found both appealing and which they crafted for themselves reflected the fluid sexualities and socialities new media technology has given rise to.

Fluid Sociality, Sexuality and Intimacies

Using ethnographic data to illuminate the practice of "Internet mediated hooking up" among women today, I shall describe what "going online" for casual sex entails: from how the women create online personas of themselves in the virtual realm to how they situate themselves in a real world physical sexual encounter. In particular, I attend to the subsequent implications the encounters have for individual subjectivities.

In the next chapter I shall provide general background on sexuality, "hooking up" and intimacy. This chapter begins with the question, "*In what context can we understand informant stories and experiences?*". Thus, in Chapter 2, I describe theories of gender and sexual difference which I believe are relevant to my research topic. To situate the context and era that my informants were influenced by and operate within today, as well as the tropes they continue to be influenced by, I review scholarly works on love, sex and intimacy since World War II. In particular I attend to what has changed historically and what influences abound (e.g. the culture wars). In Chapter 3, I describe the role of new media technology in situating my research project.

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I map the three distinct phases of Internet mediated hooking up. In Chapter 4, entitled *Foraging and Finding in a Forest of Potential Sexual Partners*, I explore the first phase of hooking up, describing why my informants have chosen to go online to seek sexual partners, where they go, and how they engage others in the virtual realm and the strategies they employ in the pursuit of partners. I discuss the new modes of sociality that the Internet introduces and the shifting value and worth accorded individuals, given the proliferation of choice of potential sexual partners. In Chapter 5, entitled *Of Time and Space and Sex and Selves*, I describe the second phase of

Internet mediated casual sex seeking for my informants: the hook up itself, from multiple angles and perspectives. This includes the way women frame and perceive themselves and others in pursuit of sexual pleasure. I parse this chapter with discussions of temporality and space in relation to the pacing and timing of the way a hook up or relationship progresses, introducing the importance of time as a key theoretical construct in the structuring and determining of sexual experiences. In Chapter 6, entitled *the Morning After: Emotion(al) Work for Sexual Pleasure*, I address the "emotion(al) work" and labor required to attain gratification from Internet mediated hook-ups. Here, I assert that hooking up is work, and the incredible amount of emotional work involved – be that for screening partners, managing dates, hiding identities, or feeling shame or euphoria - often trumps the fleeting pleasure of individual experiences.

In Chapter 7, entitled *Economies of Intimacy: The Cultural Work of Sexual Identity and Practice.* I describe the many ways that Internet mediated hook ups are held in relation to tropes of love, intimacy, and vulnerability; and describe how the actual casual sex encounter often takes a secondary role to the other emotions in play. While the sexual and physical intimacy is easily attained, in these narratives, it is the unexpected emotion(al) work and emotion(al) intimacy that casual sex encounters often introduced that complicated the seemingly casual experiences. In describing the stories of my informants, I revisit other scholarly works on intimacy and argue that a new economy of intimacy, engendered by a novel technological medium, has been created. In the concluding chapter I return to the genesis of my project, by asking not only what Internet mediated hooking up means for the public health enterprise and women's sexual liberation, but for ideologies accorded modern love, social norms and intimate relations.

This work critically evaluates and reflects upon the many ways in which people, specifically women, are relating through, by and with the new media technologies. The narratives in this ethnography represent a range of variability in motivation and experiences around hooking up on the Internet, yet underlying these seemingly disembodied voices is a consistent portrait of time investment and emotion(al) work, which the subsequent chapters shall elucidate more. I shall argue that such emotion(al) work has created a new economy of intimacy, whereby women who engage in Internet mediated hooking up adopt the tropes of a capitalist system to maintain a semblance of social stability around their often socially impermissible subversive practices. Situated at the nexus of intimate relationships, information and communication technologies, and ideals about love and intimacy, my project considers what it means to be human, to be a woman, and to experience love, sex and intimacy in a world increasingly mediated by Internet technology and where cultural ideals around love, sex and intimacy are being re-inscribed and reconfigured by these same technologies.

CHAPTER TWO

Sexuality and Intimacy:
A Review

Introduction

　　Love. Sex. Intimacy. The Internet. These words evoke complicated spaces of privates and publics and often demands emotive labeling: freedom, desire, self expression, democracy, equality. These words signify relations, with oneself, with one another, and with objects. They are linked together, yet distinct. And in this project, the words coalesce in the specific practice of casual and pseudonymous sex, popularly referred to as "hook up culture".

　　In what context can we understand the stories and experiences of women who engage in Internet mediated casual sex encounters? To better understand their experiences, it is useful to situate the context and time period that my informants were born into and operate within today, as well as the tropes they continue to be influenced by.

　　As I described in the Introductory chapter, when I first embarked on this project, I wasn't sure about the type of women that I would meet, the kind of responses that I would obtain during fieldwork nor the types of reactions I would receive from my peers, family members or friends when I told them about the type of research I was conducting. I came to the project with moral and ethical assumptions about the people I hoped to study and what I envisioned, imagined and perceived that they did. Despite my extremely far from "armchair anthropology" methods training, I was most definitely a naive anthropologist imbued with a sense of morality and appropriate social "norms". Even though I wanted to study women participating in casual sex encounters, I brought my own biases and assumptions to the project, and could not really understand how they could share their bodies and their selves in such a seemingly intimate bodily manner

without some emotion, albeit that that and their sexuality and practice is what I sought to understand as scientific knowledge. Regimes of epistemology are as much regimes of power as they are regimes of knowledge. And when it comes to sexual practice -- from a biomedical perspective -- the predominant regime of epistemology in a medical sciences setting -- sexuality is determined by predominantly by biological and physical processes that may be viewed objectively, but is not always so.

In reviewing the corpus of peer reviewed and popular press literature that comprise gender studies, sexuality, intimacy, new media technologies, public health and hook up culture in general, I attempt to approach the vast array of material available by considering the major works written in each realm, and how the published work may be in conversation with this project. In this chapter, I outline a broad genealogy of the published literature in these subject areas, considering the historical dimensions of each field as it pertains to and influences societal perceptions of love, sex and intimacy today.

The Culture Wars: Love, Sex, and Liberation

Since the Victorian era, sex and sexuality have been cast as a predominantly medical and medicalizable object (Foucault 1990 (1978)). The "naturalized" approach to sex focused on the biological components of the sexual, e.g. orgasm or the reproductive mechanisms of sex. The manner in which scholars have approached the issue of sexuality has changed dramatically over the past 100 years, and has been shaped by the frameworks within which sexuality has been disciplined and produced and ultimately, interpreted by the larger public audience as ammunition in the culture wars.

In his work, "*The Social Construction of Sexuality*", Steven Seidman asserts that early sexologists such as Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing and Henry Havelock-Ellis

(and to a certain degree, Sigmund Freud) produced research that influenced the way many people today think about sex and sexuality (Seidman 2003) . This is in largely because their work was stamped with the imprimatur of "science" (Seidman 2003). Victorian patriarchy informed theory and practice around sexuality, producing a medicalized discourse of sexuality whereby sex was viewed as "natural", and humans were born with a sexual nature and instinct that is by "nature", heterosexual and aimed towards reproduction. Medicalization is defined as a social process whereby human behavior and aspects of everyday life are brought under the rubric of medicine and biology to explain difference (Herdt 2007).

Although heavily influenced by the theorists of his time, Freud was the first scholar to separate the sexual act from pro-creation and reproduction. Freud's psychoanalytic approach recognized that sex and sexuality was oriented to pleasure and in so doing approached the issue as a social as well as biological phenomenon (Seidman 2003) . Freud challenged the assumptions sexuality, of child development, and the onset of sexual desire and practice. He argued that people were born with a sex drive that is similar to other biological instincts, for example, the human motivation to find food in an effort to satiate hunger.

Freud introduced new terms that explicated sexual identities and supported a new identity based discourse based upon sexual proclivity: inversion, bisexuality, repression, sublimation, sexual object and sexual aim (Freud and Rieff 1963). The construction of sexual difference applied to all realms of the sexual and constituted what was deemed normal or pathological, good or bad, legitimate or illegitimate, and ultimately laid the foundation for the development of a sexual hierarchy with reproduction oriented

heterosexual pairings situated firmly at the top. *Normality* became the way by which individual sexual behavior was judged, regulated and disciplined, produced a deeply embedded (and idealized) practice of hetero-normativity.

Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner define hetero-normativity as "the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is organized as sexuality – but also privileged. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked, as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment. It consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than of a sense of rightness produced in contradictory manifestations – often unconscious, immanent to practice or institutions (Berlant and Warner 1998). Contexts that have little visible relation to sex practice, such as life narrative and generational identity, can be hetero-normative in this sense, while in other contexts forms of sex between men and women might not be hetero-normative. Hetero-normativity is thus a concept distinct from heterosexuality. One of the most conspicuous as it's opposite. Because homosexuality can never have the invisible, tacit, society-founding rightness that heterosexuality has, it would not be possible to speak of "homo-normativity" in the same sense (Berlant and Warner 1998).

Regardless of ideology, "normativity" expresses the beliefs of the dominant social group. For example, in examining a sexual behavior continuum, a hetero and homo binary also excludes other sexual identities or orientations (asexual, transgender, or bi-sexual) by virtue of a scale of normativity. Today, while we may live in a world of plural values and plural sexualities these entrenched ideals around normality and normativity,

particularly in my informant narratives, continues to dominate how people situate themselves along a continuum of from normal to deviant.

In the second half of the 20th century, in a Western context, the notion of sex as recreation (*the sexual pleasure discourse*) emerged and it was during this time period that many of the social constructionist works on sexuality were produced. While Weeks (Weeks 1986) is credited with pioneering a sociological approach to sexuality studies that incorporated the concepts of essentialism and constructionism, sociologists John Gagnon and William Simon developed the *script theory* of sexuality (Gagnon 2004; Simon 2005).

Essentialism is the notion that sexuality is a basic and essential part of being human. Constructionism views sexuality as a learned way of thinking and acting. Sex and society are not separate domains, and by mapping the transition from a focus on behavior (sodomy) to deviant identity (homo/lesbian) to positive identity affirmation (gay or lesbian) we can see the explicit separation of sex from prior views of sex being equated solely with marriage and parenting. (Weeks 1985)

The script theory of sexuality postulates that sexuality is socially learned (Gagnon and Simon 1973). They argued that humans are taught what feelings and desires count as normal, and accordingly what the appropriate "scripts" for sexual behavior are. They explicated three different types of scripts: *Intra-psychic* (an internal dialogue within an individual), *Interpersonal* (scripts for intimate relations and the mechanism through which appropriate identities are made congruent with desired expectations) and *Cultural scenarios* (the instructional guides that exist at the level of collective life) (Simon 1996). Herdt & Howe note that the script theory is particularly salient in the age of Internet mediated sexuality because as people perform different roles and identities (than say, in

real life) the Internet blurs the boundaries between these various types of sexual scripts (Herdt 2007). With the new media technologies, and with continually fluid and shifting identities, new *hook up scripts* are being articulated and defined, and will be further explicated in subsequent chapters.

Seidman's analyses of the social construction of sexuality in the United States highlights the forces that influence historically marginalized sexualities (gay, bisexual and transgender sexual identities) (Seidman 2003). As with his social constructionist contemporaries, he views sexuality as socially learned and influenced by structural conditions. A constructionist view of sexuality arose within the context of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. It was during this period that subjugated knowledges and new voices emerged, developing their own validating system of knowledge and challenging the dominance of specific, often repressive, discourses. The birth control pill was approved for contraceptive use in 1960, allowing a new type of sexual freedom. The Stonewall riots occurred in 1969 and abortion was legalized in 1973.[4] And the women's liberation movement was in full force.

What counted as "normal" became a contested category. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault provides a genealogy of modern discourses about sexuality and its relation to state power, and in particular the concept of normalization (Foucault 1990 (1978)). Foucault makes use of this concept, along with power, to understand the ways

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[4] The Stonewall riots were a series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations against a police raid that took place in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn, in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. They are frequently cited as the first instance in American history when people in the homosexual community fought back against a government-sponsored system that persecuted sexual minorities, and they have become the defining event that marked the start of the gay rights movement in the United States and around the world. Wikipedia. (2010). "Stonewall Riots."   Retrieved March 23, 2010, from Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stonewall_riots>.

that sexuality is controlled, not through repression, but through a proliferation of discourse, where the technologies of sex reside at the axes of power and knowledge.

Sexuality is at the core of disciplinary control (Foucault 1990 (1978)). By controlling sexual feelings, behaviors, and identities, the state makes possible a great deal of social control over bodies and actions. Sexuality is a crucial part of the way modern societies control their citizens. Seidman notes that social institutions had good reason to want to control people's sexuality – massive urban migration demanded mass literacy, growing dependence on national power for economic prosperity and "A society that can control sex can manage the behavior of individuals and whole populations" (Seidman 2003).

Activism, Human Rights and Capitalism

The most recent paradigm of sexuality discourse is based in activism and human rights movements that worked to upend the traditional historical views of a sexual citizenship based on a hetero-normativity. Queer theory and intellectual movements intent on "queering" the social sciences and humanities have been instrumental in rethinking sexual identity and practice (Herdt 2007). Queer analytic space is useful in understanding those that are not queer subjects (in relation to normativity) because queer spaces make demands on the rest of the human population or those whom are not queer. To understand the modern sex/gender system, how it is operationalized and the forms of power enacted through this system requires a brief look at history.

The roots of activism around sexual identity can be traced to the era depicted in George Chauncey's *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World: 1890-1940*, a time when homosexuality was not closeted but was described

simply as gender "deviance" (Chauncey 1994) . Prior to emergence of a homosexual and heterosexual dichotomy in the middle of the 20th century, before World War II, Chauncey notes "that most men were labeled as [queer] only if they had displayed a much broader inversion of their ascribed gender status by assuming the sexual and other cultural roles ascribed to women. The abnormality (or 'queerness') of the 'fairy,' that is, was defined as much by his 'woman-like' character or 'effeminacy' as his solicitation of male sexual partners; the 'man' who responded to his solicitations -- no matter how often -- was not considered abnormal, a 'homosexual,' so long as he abided by masculine gender conventions. Indeed, the centrality of effeminacy to the representation of the 'fairy' allowed many conventionally masculine men, especially unmarried men living in sex-segregated immigrant communities, to engage in extensive sexual activity with other men without risking stigmatization and the loss of their status as 'normal men.'"(Chauncey 1994))

Chauncey argued that "the gay male world of the prewar years was remarkably visible and integrated into the straight world" in the early twentieth century (Chauncey 1994). It was not until after Prohibition and drinking returned to the public sphere in 1933 that the dominant hetero-normative focused influences marginalized and criminalized homosexuality. With the 1920's change in hotel zoning laws, Chauncey writes: "to use the modern idiom - the state built a closet in the 1930s and forced gay people to hide in it" (Chauncey 1994).

In his seminal work *Capitalism and Gay Identity*, historian John D'Emilio argues that gay men and lesbians have not always *existed,* but rather "were associated with the emergence of a capitalist enterprise and free labor system that allowed men and women

in the late twentieth century to call themselves gay, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity" (D'Emilio 1999). In so doing, the community was able to challenge the dominance of ideologies that appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of sexual value, with reproductive heterosexuals at the top. Of particular note is that while capitalism is based on productive (heterosexual) family units, it actually weakens the nuclear family ideal. He writes:

> *"Ideologically, capitalism drives people into heterosexual families: each generation comes of age having internalized a heterosexist model of intimacy and personal relationships. Materially, capitalism weakens the bonds that once kept families together so that their members experience a growing instability in the place they have come to expect happiness and emotion(al) security. Thus, while capitalism has knocked the material foundation away from family life, lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual feminists have become the scapegoats for the social instability of the system.* (D'Emilio 1999)

Ironically, in this dissertation project, I shall argue that in a new economy of intimacy, women who engage in Internet mediated hooking up adopt the tropes of a capitalist system to maintain a semblance of social stability around their subversive practices. They thereby ensure that that the heterosexist model of intimacy and personal relationships are not ruptured.

The civil rights movements of the 1960's paved the way for the subsequent gay and women's liberation movements that would change the sexual landscape of the nation (D'Emilio 1999). While women as individuals were still defined by gender, they were able to fashion a sexual and social life reflecting their needs. Until the second half of the 20th century the dominant social code regarding the sexuality of women and men continued to represent a lust-dominated sexuality for men and a complementary

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(romantic) love or relationship-dominated sexuality for women, with female sexuality remaining highly subordinated to male sexuality (Wouters 1998). Until the sexual revolution, a woman's sexuality and her reputation

> *"remained interconnected within social codes in such a strong way that, in retrospect, it gives the impression that as far as her reputation was concerned, a girl who admitted to having sexual needs might as well take a seat behind a window in the red light district even though more and more women deviated from this in throughout the past century"* (Wouters citing van Dantzig, 1998).

While Internet mediated casual sex allows women greater sexual experimentation today, these codes, or scripts, remain strong and muddied. In their recent book, *21st Century Sexualities*, Gil Herdt and Cymene Howe note that the definition of sexuality has expanded dramatically beyond "sex", to include gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction (Herdt 2007). Separately, the World Health Organization employs a working definition of sexuality that encompasses a broad spectrum of elements related to sex, sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights. In 2002, the World Health Organization convened an international technical consultation on sexual health which created working definitions of sex, sexuality, sexual health and sexual right.

Relationship Forms & Norms

In her book *Love: an Unromantic Discussion*, Mary Evans titles her first chapter "*What is this Thing Called Love*"? (Evans 2003) What indeed, is this thing called love? While the pursuit of love appears to have engaged human energy for centuries, how are humans conceptualizing contemporary forms of love? (Evans 2003). Evans notes that we often invoke the word love when expressing an emotional state - feelings for objects,

situations, ideas and for many, love for another (e.g. parent, child, or friend). It is love for "a chosen unrelated other" that pervades contemporary conceptions of love, and often this type of love involves a sexual relationship as its full expression (Evans 2003).

While the tradition of love may seem antithetical to Internet mediated hooking up, I begin with it because I believe it to be useful in considering the emergence of pedagogies of intimacy. Evans writes that in contemporary times, there is equal footing among men and women in the search for love.[5] Such presumed democracy paved the way for the existence of a contemporary popular culture (at least in the West) "in which fleeting sexual encounters [i.e. sex without marriage] are regarded, if not necessarily normal or desirable, then certainly as commonplace" (Evans 2003). A move away from romantic love and towards (seemingly unromantic) sex and sexualities signifies a de-traditionalization that further ruptures the social collective. It is in this space that my informants often find themselves, in having to reconcile and rationalize their Internet sex seeking activities with the often gendered demands of mundane lives.

Marriage, and increasingly, committed partnerships, has long been a social institution of regulation and control. And while the women's revolution purportedly emancipated women's sexualities and its expression outside of marriage, a double standard is still firmly in place. When women express a desire for sex outside of marriage, all manner of social institutions take control - including medicine and science, the criminal justice system, and even mass media. Moral panics ensue. Moral panics are

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[5] When women were largely confined to the home and not in the workplace it was the responsibility of the man to express feelings of love into order to persuade women into sexual relationships (marriage). Evans notes that although such exchanges still might occur in the present, and are still part of people's assumptions (e.g. the man should pursue the woman and propose) this does not invalidate the fact that the expectation is no longer held as the singular discourse of love as it seemed to have been in the past Evans, M. (2003). Love:An Unromantic Discussion. Cambridge, Blackwell.

an excellent example of when and where sexuality becomes a heightened political, moral, or ideological issue, particularly for women. (Herdt 2007) Examples of moral panics include the white (female) slave hysteria of the late 19th century, anti-homosexual campaigns of the 1950's and more recently sex trafficking and online predator panics. Jeffrey Weeks has written extensively on moral panics, noting:

> *"The moral panic crystallizes widespread fears and anxieties, and often deals with them not by seeking the real causes of the problems and conditions which they demonstrate but by displacing them on to "Folk Devils" in an identified social group (often the 'immoral' or 'degenerate'). Sexuality has had a peculiar centrality in such panics, and sexual 'deviants' have been omnipresent scapegoats."* (Weeks 1990)

The idea of nature and a natural (sexual) instinct has been used to understand sexual identity, behavior and morality. In their piece, *Sex in Public*, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner assert that queer social practices like sex and theory try to unsettle the garbled but powerful norms supporting the privilege of heterosexuality (Berlant and Warner 1998). How do personal desires interface with structures of power? Carole Vance, echoing D'Emilio, notes that the conditions of interrelation in subject hood are critical to narratives of modernity – e.g. the production of sexual subjectivities cannot be separated from systems of power and that these subjectivities are produced through symbolic, financial and political economies and discursive traditions (Vance 1991).

In her seminal work, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, Margaret Mead demonstrated early on that when it comes to sexual identity, innate dispositions are shaped by social and cultural milieus in addition to individual circumstances (Mead 1943). She reinforced the influence of cultural determinism of shaping gender and sexuality in her subsequent work *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (Mead 1935). In another time

and place, as a major critic of the operation of heterosexuality in the United States, Adrienne Rich, in her provocative piece, *Compulsive Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, explicates exactly how family and institutions are involved in the shaping of sexual selves. She notes that "we are taught and coerced into adopting conventional gender identities…individuals learn what is acceptable sexuality through romanticizing of heterosexual relationships and through marginalization of those that are considered "deviant" (Rich 1999). Separately, while ideals of romance and marriage are shaped at an early age, Rich argues that there have always been women who chose to remain single or who have challenged such gender norms. This is a particularly salient point as I consider how hook up culture may be challenging, or subsumed under contemporary gender norms.

Nancy Chodorow found that for girls in particular, the production of sexuality cannot be separated from the embeddedness and shaping of sexual desires and social constructs (Seidman 2003). In her object relations model of female subjectivity, Chodorow argues that girls develop a psyche that has porous ego boundaries and is relationship oriented. Accordingly, women tend to connect sex with intimacy and value it as a means of sharing and caring (*Seidman citing Chodorow*, 2003).

As invoked as his work on the disciplinary regimes and production of sexuality is, Michel Foucault has also been criticized for failing to address how sexualities are created and sustained in everyday life (Seidman 2003). He did not (or was not able to) take into consideration how social positions such as gender, race and class impact sexual identity. One theory that may be useful for analyzing sexual identity is Judith Butler's performative theory of gender identity. Butler examines the way gender is constructed

through specific corporeal acts, and the possibilities that exist for the cultural transformation of gender through such acts (Conboy, Medina et al. 1997). She asserts that the omnipresent nature/culture dichotomy creates two distinct opposing genders – men and women, which in turn continue to support the dominant hetero-normative sexual binary hierarchy. Herein, natural is assumed to be good/normal, while expert systems declare exactly what acts or identities count as natural or as bad/abnormal or "the [deviant] other".

If one challenges proscribed gender roles, she then is also challenging the dichotomous hierarchy. Seidman notes that when people "perform" gender – providing the illusion of these core feminine and masculine gender identities, they conceal the many social and political forces that shape them into gendered and sexual beings. Such forces do not leave room for anyone whom does not conform to one of these two identities (Seidman 2003). He argues that "approaching sex as a social fact means understanding that, whether or not we are actually born with a sexual nature, the meaning of our desires and acts, the way they are organized, and which sexual expressions are socially approved and which are stigmatized are products of social factors" (Seidman 2003).

It should be noted that these and other social constructionist theories of sexuality are not without their critics. Such critiques state that social constructionists (particularly "radical social constructionists" as radical feminists, gay, lesbian or queer theorists are often labeled) deny the possibility of anything biologically driven (i.e. without human awareness or influence) and that human sexuality corresponds to the goal of radical sexual politics (Rival, Slater et al. 1998). These critics assert that social constructionists give primacy to the concept of self and in so doing the construction of erotic roles,

reflecting a peculiarly Western objectification of sexuality and neglectful of the fact that most people experience sex in 'mundane' reproduction (Rival, Slater et al. 1998). Such critiques underscore the dominance of the hetero-normative paradigm in Western civilization.

Intimacy: Intimate and (In)visible Practices

What does intimacy mean in our culture today, a culture that is mediated by technology, and specifically, the interweaving of intimacy and electronic technology? Where does this leave intimacy? What assumptions and values are brought to intimacy and technology? Internet technology facilitates real time text and visual communication, changing the way people relate. For example, Internet dating is characterized by seamless movement between reading descriptions, writing responses and exchanging messages and is viewed as easier than the effort, awkwardness, risks and physical embarrassment often associated with 'real world' dating (Hardey 2002). As Ross notes, "sexuality in the unfolding of the virtual age is also a discourse about human interaction at the closing of the mechanical age" (Ross 2005).

Robert Young argues that despite intimate communications, sex on the Internet is quite starkly opposed to intimacy (Young 2002). Young asserts that "electronic mail, virtual conferencing and the Web are uncannily intimate media. For example, people are routinely found to pour out their hearts in electronic mail, in a way that they would not do in the face to face world" perhaps except to people whom they know (Agre 2002). Further, people use media on the Internet to *have* intimacy. Through a case study, Young describes how a male patient's fetish for spanking photos on the Internet is utilized as a

way to apprehend intimacy, despite the physical presence of a wife and family whom he desires to be emotionally intimate with, but is unable to be so.

The shift in values engendered by the sexual emancipation of women has inextricably linked sex with intimacy. While the two terms are not necessarily intertwined, they have been made to exist in conceptual political spaces, which trouble the relations with intimacy. It is certainly possible to have intimacy without sex (e.g. visiting one's gynecologist for a routine exam) and to have sex without intimacy (commercial sex transactions). Yet, intimate spheres occupy space, sex and capital. In order to understand the phenomenon of computer mediated intimacy – a realm of instant gratification and connection where sometimes intimate human exchange does not even require physical presence, it is useful to examine the field of sexuality, as both useful and limiting in understandings of intimacy.

What is intimacy? Where and how does it occur? How is it apprehended? In what forms does it take shape? Among humans, intimacy is a multi-faceted experience that manifests in physical acts, in words, in emotion and in the perceptual senses. Intimacy is shaped by moral judgments, by social and economic hierarchies and ethical regimes of living. More recently, in the scholarly literature, intimacy has emerged as a powerful analytic category to assess the uncertainties and new social conditions of a modern world and challenge ideologies of "tradition".

How does one trouble the figure of intimacy as a form of caring? What kinds of intimacies have been created, assumed or curtailed? What kinds of intimacy are meaningful? What stands as the barometer or gauge of intimacy? How does one "do" intimacy? Certainly, there exist zones of intimate familiarity and comfort. In the

introduction to her edited work *Intimacy,* Berlant writes that the "usual story" places intimacy in friendship, the couple, the family form, and expressive and emancipating kinds of love. Yet the awkwardness of intimacy is met by a corresponding publicness and proliferating forms of therapeutic publicity and witnessing genres (Berlant 2000).

Berlant begins by focusing on what she terms is the secret epitaph of intimacy: "*I didn't think it would turn out this way*". She writes, "to intimate is to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures, and at its root intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity" (Berlant 2000). However, intimacy becomes complex when one is required to adjudicate the norms of a very public modern world. Berlant asks how can we think about the ways attachments make people public (and I would add private), producing certain identities and subjectivities, when those attachments come from within spaces as varied as domestic intimacy, to the virtual realm of the Internet to massively mediated disruptive crises such as Hurricane Katrina or 9/11 (Berlant 2000). Attachment is defined as the kinds of (collective, personal) authority, expertise, entailment, and memory that can be supposed, and the kinds of (collective, personal) futures that can be imagined (Berlant 2000).

What were pedagogies of intimacy in the 19th & 20 centuries? The present day focus on relationships is not a product of modernity, as Anthony Giddens would claim. In her work *Intimacy Transformed*, sociologist Lynn Jamieson argues that how personal life is conducted is [not] more intensely intimate, individualized or personalized than ever before is a long running theme, and not new (Jamieson 1999). She provides an example of how 18th century philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment viewed intimate friendship as a "modern" pattern emerging in their time. Adam Smith believed that prior

to the development of impersonal markets, friendships were necessary and in sociological writings about the family, the themes of intimacy, privacy and equality date back to the 1940's (Jamieson 1999)

In his work, *Before Intimacy: Modernity and Emotion in the Early Modern Discourse on Sexuality*, English Literature scholar Daniel Juan Gil analyzes how 16th century literature distinguished sexual experience from other domains of early modern social life. In so doing, we are able to see an early modern uncertainty about the connection between emotions and selves to celebrate the ability of intense emotion(al) states that unsettles the self and its connection to the social world [i.e. intimacy] (Gil 2002). Gil asserts that the literature he is analyzing in the early modern period resembles the modern notion of private intimacy, which is also a sexualized experience of others that stands apart from society and yet is recognized by it. This served as perhaps an alternative to modern intimacy at a time when normative hierarchies were being challenged, much like today. I am not so sure that I agree, but I thought it important to cite works that predated Anthony Giddens' findings.

Perhaps the greatest body of contemporary work on intimacy, and in particular sexual intimacy, has been produced by Anthony Giddens. In *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies,* Giddens examines how changes in sexuality are not about sexuality *per se*, rather, changes in the nature of sexuality can be best understood through relationships and in particular intimacy (Giddens 1992). Giddens defines two general models as templates for which one may consider intimate relations. The first is the traditional model of *romantic love*, which is how love was conceptualized in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Giddens writes:

"Central to this view of love is that it provides a narrative within which an individual can make sense of the unfolding of his or her life. Romantic love is connected to rationalization because an intimate relationship, viewed through the lens of romantic love was a potential avenue for controlling future as well as a form of psychological security (in principle) for those whose lives were touched by it." (Giddens, 1992)

Giddens claims that this particular form of love (romantic love) does not predate modernity, although he concedes that discourses of love can be found in pre-modern societies.

Evans notes that major social theorists including Weber, Engels and Durkheim have long recognized the connection between romantic love and modernization and that a generalized discourse of love first made its appearance in the 18th century. And from which explicit sexual desire and shared secular interests became the basis of contemporary, heterosexual, romantic love (Evans 2003). Those that deviated from this model found themselves up against powerful constraints. However, the ideals of romantic love were fragmented under the female sexual emancipation and autonomy that arose as a result of modernity. In the post traditional model of love, a new type of love, which Giddens has termed *confluent love*, emerged. In this model, confluent love is an active contingent love based on lovers opening themselves up to each other as equals (Giddens 1992). Accordingly, this type of love does not mesh well with the forever and eternal love that is associated with the romantic love model. Giddens postulates that the separation and divorce societies of modernity are an effect, rather than cause, of confluent love (Giddens 1992).

Confluent love laid the groundwork for a *pure relationship* no longer inextricably tied to sexuality, because the pure relationship was a relationship of equals. A pure

relationship is one founded upon the autonomy of both parties and their ability to relate to each other as separate, functional and emotionally competent adults who exist within a framework of intimacy (Giddens 1992). The pure relationship in turn (logically) leads to what Giddens has termed *plastic sexuality*. Plastic sexuality refers to the heightened self awareness of the plasticity of sexuality, meaning that there is no pre-given way of being sexual and if one party in the relationship is not meeting the terms of the relationship, he or she is given cause or reason to leave, because each party contributes equally and is communicative (Giddens 1991).

In Giddens' view, globalization is responsible for disembedding individuals from tradition as well as from the social rootedness of local, place based orientations (Beck 1992). Such detraditionalization, i.e., the receding of customs, beliefs and institutions that had anchored people's lives in predictable, transgenerational practices, provided people the opportunity to live their lives autonomously (Gross and Simmons 2002). However, Evans notes that despite an erosion of tradition, as inhabitants of complex societies, humans live within a set of rules, expectations and norms. "Many of us", she writes," are much more free from material constraint than we were in the 19th century, but at the same time we are endlessly constrained by the demands of the labor market." (Evans 2003). So exists a conundrum where on the one hand there is ontological security (defined as sense of continuity and order in one's life – a basic psychological need) yet post traditional societies are rife with insecurity (including the relationships that promote the ontological security), which destabilizes long-term life narratives (Gross and Simmons 2002).

Giddens believes that globalization and the rise of expert systems have wrought changes in every type of personal relationship, and in particular intimate sexual

relationships (Giddens 1992; Gross and Simmons 2002). Further, today's increasingly globalized world is a radically new social configuration that demands a new order of relationships which (purportedly) values equality and a balancing of gender relations (Gross and Simmons 2002) . Accordingly, in an increasingly complex technologically driven existence, the ideologies of love and romance are enduring. Like tradition. Evans posits that such thinking makes the distinction between sex and love explicit, but it leaves us deeply confused about love and morality (Evans 2003). "In a culture that privileges expert knowledge, traditional views about personal relationships begin to appear antiquated [yet are held onto] (Gross and Simmons 2002).

Separately, Giddens has many critics. Is his analysis of personal relationships in modernity correct? It is appealing, but in reviewing critiques of his version of intimacy transformed, Giddens' interpretation appears increasingly limited. Should we not consider the structural characteristics of the world we are living in and how economic needs and ideologies of romance may actually be inhibiting, not transforming intimacy? (Evans 2003) Giddens' portrays a seemingly simplistic, but logical, approach to intimacy. However he has been criticized because the pure relationship is predicated on plastic sexuality, which in turn is predicated on finding and maintaining equal relations between two partners in the attainment of sexual pleasure. Thus, in confluent love, sexuality and intimacy are tied together as never before (Giddens 1992). Need we more idealized versions of what constitutes (a universalized) sexual intimacy? Sexology researchers William Masters and Virginia Johnson viewed intimacy as a self expressive intimacy:

> *"Sharing at the emotion(al) level is one of the hallmarks of intimacy. Unless two people are willing to reveal a good deal of information about themselves, not only biographical but also in terms of what they feel, what they fear, what they worry about, and what they hope for or dream about,*

it is unlikely that any meaningful intimacy can exist. It is actually in this process of communication that the essence of intimacy is expressed". Vogler citing Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (Vogler 1998)

A review of the literature indicates that intimacy is multi-dimensional and constitutive of human relations. Further, structural inequalities exacerbate conditions of modernity: globalization, disembeddedness, risk, production of selves, dominance of expert systems. Intimacy is also manifest in forms of caring that circulate through as conduits and producers of the values, morality and ethics that guide human relations that are invariably hierarchical. Who resides at the top of the intimacy hierarchy? That would be the equal heterosexual couple (ironically, despite the fact that the most pure of relationships in Giddens' view can be located in homosexual relationships), followed by intimate relationship pairings. Yet not all intimacies are affairs of the self and the fact that some intimacies are not affairs of the self is exactly what makes people want them. Candace Vogler, in her piece *Sex and Talk* refers to this as 'depersonalizing intimacies'(Vogler 1998). It is the very type of self expressive intimacy that can be used to draw us into the public sphere, another important facet of intimacy. In Vogler's view, sex serves as a scene of depersonalizing intimacy and an escape from the ordinary business of exemplary heterosexuality (Vogler 1998).

In their piece, *Sex in Public*, Berlant and Warner acknowledge that "heterosexual culture achieves much of its meta-cultural intelligibility through the ideologies and institutions of intimacy" (Berlant and Warner 1998). They argue, however, that while the intimate relations of private personhood appear to be in the realm of sexuality itself, allowing "sex in public", to appear like matter out of place, forces intimacy itself to be

publicly mediated in several senses (Berlant and Warner 1998). These include the structural differentiation of personal life from work, politics and the public sphere; the normativity of a heterosexual culture that links intimacy only to the institutions of personal life (thus making them the privileged institutions of social reproduction, capital and self-development); by making sex "personal" hetero-normative conventions of intimacy block the building of non-normative or explicit public sexual cultures; and such conventions conjure a mirage of a home base of a pre-political humanity from which intimate citizens can immerse themselves in a fantasy world devoid of economic and political inequality, away from the damaged humanity of mass society and the confusing and unsettling distractions and contradictions of capitalism and politics (Berlant and Warner 1998).

Establishing Intimate Boundaries and Transgressing Intimate Norms

The underlying driving question behind this project into Internet mediated hooking up is what happens when relationships are not the goal? When relations are not the goal? One may argue that any type of interaction with another human being or object, "hook-up" or otherwise, may be some form of a relationship. That said, when looking at the public and private spheres of intimacy examined by contemporary scholars, there is a meta discourse of *relationships* circulating throughout. Is there room for the type of intimacy discourse that I have sought to apprehend in this project?

With the omnipresence of globalization and Internet technology, where does the private end and the public begin? Before globalization, men dominated the public world (and in some places they still do), while women remained in the domestic private realm. As modernity and globalization allowed women an opportunity to venture out into the

public and divisions of labor to be transformed: college, the work force, etc, gender roles appeared to have less dominance. The gender division, thought to be the force under girding a stable social order started to collapse (Seidman 2003). Giddens attempts to neatly address this by stating that

> "*Intimacy implies a wholesale democratizing of the interpersonal domain, in a manner fully compatible with democracy in the public sphere. There are further implications as well. The transformation of intimacy might be a subversive influence upon modern institutions as a whole.*" (Giddens 1992)

The prevailing hetero-normative, gendered notions of the public and private have not altogether collapsed, and this in turn wholly dominates contemporary discourses of intimacy. Berlant writes that "the prevalent US discourse between the proper relation between public and private, spaces traditionally associated with the gendered division of labor, legacies of a Victorian fantasy, that the world can be divided into a controllable space (the private) and an uncontrollable one (the public)" (Berlant 2000). In considering intimacy, Berlant asks how we may "articulate the ways the utopian, optimism sustaining versions of intimacy meet the normative practices, fantasies, institutions, and ideologies that organize the modern world" (Berlant 2000). Going further, Berlant questions, "how intimacy absorbs and repels the rhetoric, laws, ethics, and ideologies of the hegemonic public sphere, while also personalizing the effects of the public sphere and reproducing a fantasy that private life is the real in contrast to the collective life?" (Berlant 2000) Berlant argues that this organization has historically organized and justified other legally and conventionally based forms of social division, e.g. male/female, work/family, colonizer/colonized, friend/lover, and hetero/ homo. She writes that this "taken for grantedness" of spatial taxonomies makes this cluster of taxonomic associations into facts

within ordinary subjectivity as well, and why this chain of disassociations provides one way of understanding why so many institutions not usually associated with "feeling" can be read as institutions of intimacy (Berlant 2000).

Berlant believes that intimacy refers to more than that which takes place within the purview of institutions, the state, and ideologies of public-ness. She asks the reader to consider what one would see if intimacy emerged from more mobile processes of attachment? What if intimacy is portable, unattached to a concrete space, and a drive that creates spaces around it through practices? (Berlant 2000) She writes:

> *"What kinds of (collective, personal) authority, expertise, entailment, and memory can be supposed, and what kind of (collective, personal) future can be imagined if, for example, sexuality is not longer bound to its narrative, does not lead to stabilizing something, something institutional (like patriarchical families or other kinds of reproduction that prop up the future of persons and nations)"* (Berlant, 2000)

These last questions are particularly relevant for this project, and introduce an ethical and political troubling of a binary that has been established in the literature, and in the social, not just with hetero and homo normativity, but also with sex and intimacy. There seem to be no alternative plots.

> *"The love plot of intimacy and familialism that signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way – community -- is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship. A whole field of social relations becomes intelligible as [reproductively oriented] heterosexuality and this privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness – embedded in things and not just in sex is what we call hetero-normativity, and is more than just ideology, or prejudice or queer phobia; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; and education as well as in the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance and other protected spaces of culture.* (Berlant 2000)

There have been challenges to the public/private intimacy taxonomy from feminists. Berlant also notes that queer social practices have tried to unsettle the garbled but powerful norms supporting the heterosexual privilege. For example, Warner's *Queer Counterpublics* – in the creation of a queer world, required the development of forms of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, kinship, the couple form, etc. These intimacies bear a relation to a counter public. (Berlant 2000)

Hetero-normativity serves as a fundamental motor of social organization for relationships in the United States and has largely included conceptions of intimacy and love along with it. The Internet also serves as a new form of social organization that is reconfiguring relationships, particularly where the sexual and the intimate are concerned. Most Americans are accustomed to thinking about sexuality as a form of intimacy and subjectivity within a meta discourse of relationships and hetero-normative practices.

In describing the published works, theories and background salient to this project, I have attempted to provide a comprehensive analyses literature relevant to a particular micro-practice: *hooking up*. I see a corollary between this practice and the apparatuses of love, sex, intimacy and technology – a bricolage engendered by an identifiable social collectivity of bricoleurs - women involved in Internet mediated hook up culture. In so doing, I attempt to better describe the experience of women seeking Internet mediated casual sex encounters. In her presentation *Carnal Knowledge*, Wendy Doniger notes that the sexual act is the ultimate key to unlocking a concealed identity. This is a Freudian assumption which she believes Michel Foucault sums up well:

> *"We also admit that it is in the area of sex that we must search for the most secret and profound truths about the individual, That it is there that we can best discover what he is and what determines him. And if it was*

believed for centuries that it was necessary to hide sexual matters because they were shameful, we now know that it is sex itself which hides the secret part of the individual: the structure of fantasies, the roots of ego, and the forms of his relationship to reality. At the bottom of sex, there is truth." (Doniger quoting Foucault Hercule Barbin introduction x-xi) (Doniger 2000)

The informant stories collected during the course of my dissertation research are newly emerging narratives of the erotic, the sexual and the intimate. These are stories that the Internet has influenced and helped to create. These stories are both enabling and plunging humans into new economies of intimacy and allowing new ways of being. Social capital no longer resides in the traditional institutions of marriage or family but are being challenged and reinvented in new and original ways.

People live their sexuality through narratives (e.g. lesbian and gay coming out stories), and through the telling of narratives and sexual stories, people seek to validate themselves. For every new story of independence and self-discovery (*Naked on the Internet and Girls Gone Wild*) there is an old one revived (*Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*) where tradition and morality reign supreme (Levy 2005; Ray 2007). Evans notes that "What is now more chaotic is our morality about love and sexuality: the disappearance of a widely endorsed fusion of love, sexuality and marriage has opened up new possibilities about the explicit separation of love from sexuality, and sexual relationships from marriage" (Evans 2003).

As Americans renegotiate intimate relationships within the context of massive social technological change, through a computer and information mediate technology that can serve as a means to an end (i.e. connecting with others), how can we explain the burgeoning hook up culture? How is intimacy plotted in relation to modernity and

technology? Do casual encounters map to societal conceptions about what constitutes "good" and "bad"? How is this practice integral to shaping a mode of life that allows, in particular, women to function and to fit themselves within a unique category of social space and a "role"? Will technology reveal how sexuality and intimacy creates and destroys? Or in the human pre-occupation for access, agency, authority and authenticity, is it hidden? The Internet is a new panopticon, and one's participation leaves behind an electronic trail for continued surveillance. The Internet is isolating but it connects.

CHAPTER THREE

New Media and Technologies of the Social:

A Review

"Our new intimacies with our machines create a world where it makes sense to speak of a new state of the self. When someone says "I am on my cell", "online", "on instant messaging" or "on the web", these phrases suggest a new placement of the subject, a subject wired into social existence through technology, a tethered self: I think of tethering as the way we connect to always-on communication devices and to the people and things we reach through them".

– Sherry Turkle interviewed by Liz Else. (Else 2006)

Introduction

What do we talk about when we talk about technology, other than technology? In most instances, when we reference technology we are also speaking of science, and in particular the co-constitutive nature of science and technology. While science exists prior to the actual technology (providing the impetus for people to act upon their ideas), science is not a separate entity. Where science is viewed as creative, technology is perceived as a tool to be used. With technology emerges the potency of a non-human actant. Technology is linked to the mobilizing of desired entities and reconfigurations of identity for humans. Technology serves as the interface that connects one person to another, to a network, or to an object. At its core, technology is pivotal to everything falling into place, but sometimes it is like matter out of place. Emergent technologies have been a frequent site of cultural anxiety. How have anxieties around technology displaced or replaced discourses for other anxieties? What does it mean to be a human in a technological world? In response to new technologies, is there too much reliance on older ideas about what it means to be human? What are the social implications of new technologies?

Over the past 100 years, humans have been confronted with a range of artifacts that have shaped and comprised modern life, allowing an examination of cultural practices and modern life. In that sense, the Internet is very similar to the residual technologies of eras past. Yet, how a particular material technology is inscribed in a culture can be very different. In her work, *The Printing Press and the Internet: from a Culture of Memory to a Culture of Attention*, Aleida Assmann examines how media thresholds are always accompanied by reflections about the possibilities of each medium (Assmann 2006). She compares the utopian visions of the Print Age to those of the Internet era in order to understand how "these media supplement, contradict or replace each other" (Assmann 2006). She notes that in the electronic age, the flow of information has gained a speed and dynamic that can no longer be contained by Nietzschean constructions of *Bildung* and memory (Assmann 2006). Assmann argues that the concept of face-to-face interaction was destroyed by writing and print culture in the Gutenberg era and has since been reinstated as a value by electronic culture (Assmann 2006). Where the new electronic age is about transcending space through attention, print media was about transcending time through historicization.

There is an eclectic range of media forms that can be classified as either communications media – e.g. the telegraph for sending timely messages; and the telephone, which first captured sound in the office and in the home; or performance media (wireless, radio, television, DVD's). All were crucial to a variety of human practices: vaudeville, concerts, and journalism to name a few. Computing and networked media soon developed and it is from here that the Internet emerged.

The Internet

What exactly is the Internet? What is the World Wide Web? Wikipedia distinguishes and defines each as follows:

> "*The terms Internet and World Wide Web are often used in every-day speech without much distinction. However, the Internet and the World Wide Web are not one and the same. The Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks. In contrast, the Web is one of the services that runs on the Internet. It is a collection of interconnected documents and other resources, linked by hyperlinks and URLs. In short, the Web is an* application *running on the Internet. Viewing a web page on the World Wide Web normally begins either by typing the URL of the page into a web browser, or by following a hyperlink to that page or resource. The web browser then initiates a series of communication messages, behind the scenes, in order to fetch and display it*. (Wikipedia 2010)

Further,

> *The Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks that use the standard Internet Protocol Suite (TCP/IP) to serve billions of users worldwide. It is a network of networks that consists of millions of private, public, academic, business, and government networks of local to global scope that are linked by a broad array of electronic and optical networking technologies. The Internet carries a vast array of information resources and services, most notably the inter-linked hypertext documents of the World Wide Web (WWW) and the infrastructure to support electronic mail* (Wikipedia 2010)

For the purposes of this project, I shall employ the terms interchangeably based on the referent material. Academics have described the Internet and the World Wide Web as an emergent (emerged) institution, that is a mixture of the ephemeral and the permanent (Schneider and Foot 2004). In their work, *The Web as an Object of Study*, scholars Schneider and Foot assert that similar to other performance media such as radio and television, Web content is ephemeral in its transience and its construction. However, Web content needs to be reconstructed or re-presented in order for others to experience it. The authors note that older media, such as printed materials, film and sound recordings

can be archived in the form in which they are presented; no additional steps are needed to recreate the experience of the original (Schneider and Foot 2004).

At the same time, "the web has a sense of permanence that clearly distinguishes it from traditional performance media. In contrast to other performance media, Web content must exist in a permanent form in order to be transmitted" (Schneider, 2004). In this way, the Web shares characteristics similar to other permanent media such as film, print and sound recordings, however fleeting the "permanence" may be. Explained as a material, literal and social technology, the Internet is described by Information Studies scholar Philip Agre as:

> *"A general protocol for moving digital information from point A to B. This protocol can be implemented on top of any type of hardware, and it can be used as a platform for the construction of a boundless variety of information services in turn. Although it has several other properties that have institutional consequences, on the whole the Internet is loosely coupled to the institutional world around it. It does not inherently promote freedom or oppression, hierarchy or decentralization, privacy or social control, individualist or collectivist values, markets or socialism. Considered narrowly as a technology, it is capable of participating in any combination of social orders. Considered more broadly as a malleable architecture interacting with a complex and contested institutional environment, however, the Internet is a complicated phenomenon indeed".*
> (Agre 2002)

Further, Agre asserts that the Internet is fundamentally reinventing the technologies of information by destabilizing the cultural sprawl, setting in motion a vast renegotiation of social relationships. (Agre 2002)   Philip Agre believes that to understand the cultural phenomena of the Internet, that it is useful to speak of institutions, which are persistent structures of interaction through which people organize their lives and exist in large part to solve informational problems such as negotiating identity,

coordinating activity, managing risk and establishing divisions of intellectual labor. He provides examples of such institutions as banking, telephone greetings, form contracts, norms of public politeness, and the rules and conventions of driving on the highway. (Agre 2002)

Interestingly, when scholars first began to look at typical uses of the Internet, many adopted an analytical framework whereby the Internet was simply another "third place". In his work, *The Great Good Places: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts and how they get you through the day*, Ray Oldenburg (1987) coined and defined the term *third place* as places distinct from home and work, yet integral parts of social life (Oldenburg 1999). MUU is short for *Multi-User Domain* (or *Multi-User Dimension*) a cyberspace where users can take on an identity in the form of an avatar and interact with one another. Originally, MUDs tended to be adventure games played within enormous old castles with hidden rooms, trap-doors, exotic beasts, and magical items. Nowadays, the term is used more generically to refer to any cyberspace. MUDs are also known as *3-D worlds* and *chat worlds.* MOO is Short for *Multi-User Domain, Object Oriented,* a specific implementation of a MUD system developed by Stephen white. MOO is in the public domain and can be freely downloaded and executed. With the creation of virtual realms early on such as MUDS and MOOS, it was simple to conceptualize the Internet as one of these third places where people socialized, without much consideration given to when people moved their actions from the online realm into the real world (Howard, Rainie et al. 2001).

The Internet has also been perceived as the new colonial endeavor, whereby only people with access, connectivity and the means and resources to communicate, could

participate. There is a digital divide associated with race and class that is not inherently egalitarian. Again, early on, Agre notes that the early 1990's enthusiasm was that the Internet leveled hierarchies and decentralized society. There are still widespread views, ideology, to that effect, when in fact the Internet actually achieves the opposite (Agre 2002) While viewed as a democratic endeavor, it is not. And it is through the purported democracy of the Internet that it appears infallible, when it is not (Balsamo and Balsamo 1996) . The Internet only gives voice to people who have access to it and are able to learn how to use a computer and the Internet. Table 3 depicts results from a Pew Internet and American Life Project survey describing new media technology ownership among American households by household type (Wellman 2008).

Table 3. - New media technology ownership by household type

Type of technology	All Adults (n=2,252)	Married with child/children (n=482)	Other household types (n=1770)	Other multi-member households (n=1189)
Cell Phone(s) in household	84%	95%	80%	88%
Computer(s) in household	77%	93%	71%	81%
At least one household member goes online	77%	94%	71%	83%
Have a home broadband connection	52%	66%	47%	55%
Source: *Pew Internet & American Life Project Networked Family Survey. Dec 13 2007-Jan 13, 2008. N+2252. Margin of error is +/- 2% on the overall sample* **(Wellman 2008)**				

Other movements did not associate Internet with institutions, such as the military or state, but instead sought to use the Internet to displace or destroy them (Agre, 2002).

Regardless, Agre writes, "The concept of cyberspace offered an escape, with all of the positive and negative connotations that the idea of escape suggests: escape from limits, from oppression, from institutions, from responsibility, and from reality" (Agre, 2002). This enthusiasm abounds and is integral to the subsequent discussion of sexuality and the Internet, and specifically Internet mediated hooking up. Agre continues by asserting that "the sociological point is that the Internet becomes deeply bound up in the specific arrangements by which people conduct their lives. In this sense and others, the Internet is embedded in a tremendous network of organized social relationships, and is becoming more so every day" (Agre 2002). He continues stating that it is strange that it is understood as a world unto itself, as a parallel realm known as cyberspace that obeys its own laws, noting that the "contrast between cyberspace and the corporeal world has often been invidious; enthusiasts imagine face-to-face interaction and the built environment withering away, replaced by the virtual sphere of non-spatial interaction' when it is in fact doing exactly the opposite. (Agre, 2002) While the initial forays online are conducted in cyberspace, the informant narratives in the subsequent chapters will reveal exactly how the Internet has become deeply bound up in the ways in which my informants were creating, acting upon and maintaining connections with their casual sex partners.

Overall, debates around the Internet are longstanding, with scholars, users and technologists alike holding many different positions. Publications, both popular press and peer reviewed, have argued the ill effects of this technology on real communities and individualism. We have heard this all before: information overload, a shearing of social networks, a proliferation of fraud and con games. The opposite stance has also been well

explicated, i.e. the Internet helps maintain social connections, it flattens hierarchies, it helps entrepreneurs and business, it helps people raise awareness and funds on myriad issues, and allows one to research just about anything. No matter what one's position about the Internet, it becomes clear that

> *"culture happens in the routine patterns of action and interaction by which people coordinate their activities and negotiate their lives together. As various social groups appropriate the technology and contest the various sorts of access it affords, the Internet participates in a thousand dynamics that unsettle these patterns and set the culture in search of new equilibria"*. (Agre 2002).

Women who engage in Internet mediated hooking up are unsettling normative sexual patterns through their subversive practices and establishing new sexual scripts. The concept of script in Science and Technology Studies (STS) was pioneered by Madeline Akrich, and while her work is more focused on the relationship between design and use, it is useful to consider how Akrich defines the script: as "technical objects defining a framework of action together with actors and the space in which they are supposed to act" (Akrich 1992).

A technology script is defined as the assumptions about the use context, which pre-structures the technology, with innovators being interested in their users. In so doing, innovators and designers construct many different representations of the users – inscribing actors with specific tastes, competencies, motives and aspirations. Akrich notes that users can also shape the script themselves by refusing to accept the scripts designers have accorded them. This is well demonstrated in the Web 2.0 shift from the Internet as information catalog to a more participatory Internet experience whereby users create and actively participate in blogs, forums and various social networking sites.

Internet Users: Configuring and Being Configured

Who are the users of the Internet? Since 1999, the Pew Internet and American Life Project has published many reports on who has access to the Internet, who uses the Internet, and how use is delineated by ethnicity, socio-economic class and gender (Fallows 2005; Fox 2005; Boase, Horrigan et al. 2006; Boase, Horrigan et al. 2006; Horrigan 2007; Horrigan 2007). Empirical data from a 2007 Pew Internet and American Life Project show that over 70% of Americans access the Internet from home, work or another location (Horrigan 2007). Of those, 94% have an Internet connection at home and use the Internet to engage in a variety of online activities (Horrigan 2007). A plethora of other scholarly publications have delved into the lives of Internet users – be they ethnographies of online virtual reality games such as *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life* to the psychological implications of the Internet in marital relations to issues of freedom of speech.

An issue circulating around the user, the user experience and user practice is that people are inscribed by the technologies they use; and they in turn inscribe the technologies through co-construction. Steven Woolgar notes that by setting and constraining limits, technologies configure users physically and mentally by shaping one's way of knowing and being (Woolgar 1991). In his work, *Nihilism on the Internet*: *Anonymity versus Commitment*, Hubert Dreyfus compares post modern life with Soren Kierkegaard's 1846 work *A Literary Review's "The Present Age",* drawing parallels between the press, the public sphere and the nihilistic social leveling that took place at that time with the introduction of freer speech, and which Dreyfus asserts is occurring now with Internet technology (Dreyfus 2002). Kierkegaard felt that the only solution to

the nihilistic leveling was a plunging into any kind of activity with passionate commitment, into what he termed the *aesthetic sphere of existence* whereby each sphere attempts to escape the leveling of the present age by making some way of life absolute (Dreyfus, 2002). Dreyfus writes that that such an aesthetic response is characteristic of the modern day "Netsurfer" for whom information gathering and the sheer range of possibilities has become a way of life, and where something interesting is only a click away (Dreyfus, 2002). He continues:

> *"Such a life produces what we would now call a postmodern self – a self that has no defining content or continuity but is open to all possibilities and to constantly taking on new roles"* (Dreyfus, 2002: 81).

While Dreyfus arrived at this non empirical hypothesis in the next chapter, I shall describe, using empirical data from my research, how this notion of a postmodern self is particularly relevant for my informants and their Internet mediated hook up practices.

The Pew Internet and American Life Project also reports that although the gender gap in computer use has closed dramatically over the past twenty years, women use computer mediated technology in a different way than men (Boase, Horrigan et al. 2006). Interaction and human connection are the primary benefit reported by women with women using the Internet for email, search for health information, and gain support for personal problems (Boase, Horrigan et al. 2006).

In her work on cyber personae on the net, Sherry Turkle looks at the cues of interaction and identity, and in particular the socialization required to function in this particular space of relation and communication. *In Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet,* Turkle writes extensively about identity on the Internet, and the nature of

the real in the realm of the virtual (Turkle 1995) . While her specific focus is on MUDs and MOO arenas, she provides detailed case studies on experimentation with "identity", including gender switching and experiments with sexual identity (Turkle 1995). She notes that in this realm, there are no boundaries, as humans are not constrained by the status of being in the real world. Her work is useful in examining the social implications of spinning off virtual personae that are unhindered by the weight and physicality of embodiment (Turkle, 1995), and raises larger questions about whether or not the real self is always the naturally occurring one, but is limited when considering how a user functions in the real world (Turkle, 1995) A body of scholarly literature is emerging around the constructed difference of the virtual vs. the real. Several scholars are asserting that the virtual is in fact the real, and to think of the virtual realm as not real is a mistake. This shall be explored further in subsequent chapters.

The New Tearoom Trade: Sex and Hooking Up via the Internet

At the interstices of new media technology and sexuality, one encounters a longstanding and complex network of relations and contentions. The convergences of these two realms serve as an extremely rich site to debate not only human-technology interaction, but also human-human interactions. Over the last two hundred years, one can easily document the melding of sex and technology. Early on - in print form, sexual media evoked concern and censorship (Stern and Handel 2001; Stern 2001), heralding the passing of the 1873 Comstock Law by the United States Congress, which expanded the definition of obscene to include a variety of printed materials. Sex education and pornography became media which required control. With the advent of private telephones at home and in the office at the beginning of the 20th century, phone sex emerged. Later,

the introduction of Polaroid instant cameras and video recorders in the middle of the 20th century to the mass market made it possible for people to produce their own personal sexual media content.

Today, depictions of sexuality in *performance media* (i.e. over the radio, on the television, at the movies) continues to be heavily regulated by the FCC (Federal Communications Commission, the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) and a host of special interest groups attempting to exert influence on what constitutes appropriate displays of sexuality and accordingly, sexual practice.

And now with digital technology permeating American households, people continue to have "*technology mediated sex*" from the privacy of their own homes or their personal mobile devices equipped with cameras, video and "sexting" capabilities.

On the Internet, sexuality exists in many forms – be that in pornography, erotic cyber chat and email, marketing and even sexual health information – all of which extends the sexual (and sexually intimate) senses. People can now have "computer mediated sex" without their computers – using smartphones to share video, photos and text messages. There are even computer mediated virtual sex simulators for American soldiers in Iraq to have intimate relations with their wives and partners (Lynn 2005) . Where technology goes, sex follows.

Given the abundance of websites exclusively dedicated to dating, there are seemingly endless opportunities for dating, flirting, and meeting potential sexual partners online (Madden and Lenhart 2006). [6] What makes the Internet unique compared to other

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[6] According to the Pew Internet Report on Online Dating, the Top 10 Personals and Online Dating sites in January 2006, as reported by comScore Media Metrix, the Global Internet Information Provider, were:

modes of "hooking up" with potential sexual partners? In short, the "Three A's": accessibility, anonymity and affordability and the "Three C's": communication, collaboration and communities (Leiblum 2002). The heterogeneity and convenience of sexual opportunities and material available on the World Wide Web has contributed to the proliferation of all types of sexual activity and connectedness.

Many researchers have noted that the plethora of sex-related opportunities on the Internet, combined with the ability to "shop" for sexual partners with select characteristics, actually facilitates use of the Internet as a resource for the pursuit of sexual encounters offline. (Bull and McFarlane 2000; McFarlane, Bull et al. 2000; Morahan-Martin 2000; Kim, Kent et al. 2001; Cooper 2002; Leiblum 2002; McFarlane, Kachur et al. 2004; Alapack, Blichfeldt et al. 2005; Brown, Maycock et al. 2005; Ross 2005; Bell 2006; Bolding 2007; McKirnan, Houston et al. 2007; Vitzthum 2007). A 2004 study by Colfax and colleagues demonstrated that the phenomenon of people searching websites for sexual partners is not uncommon in the general population and is not a practice specific to men who have sex with men (MSM), or historically marginalized communities, as had been previously reported in the literature (Colfax, Vittinghoff et al. 2004). This study found that 18% of those surveyed had searched for sexual partners online, and approximately 3% had met in person with sex partners they first met online.

Another 2004 study by McFarlane and colleagues at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) assessed the relationship between Internet use and sexual risk behavior

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Yahoo! Personals, Match.com sites, Market Range Inc. Spark Networks, MATE1.com, TRUE.com, E.HARMONY.com, LOVE@AOL, Zencon Technologies Dating Sites and LOVEHAPPENS.com.

specifically among women (McFarlane, Kachur et al. 2004). Using a cross sectional Internet based survey, this study found that the Internet is a flourishing sex venue, and women too are using this new vehicle to seek out sex partners. The study noted that "the wide pool of potential sex partners found online coupled with ease of travel and an increase in partners has the potential to spread an STI or HIV with greater efficiency than ever before imagined. Although women with Internet partners may engage in protective behavior more frequently than women with no Internet partners, they also engage in higher risk behaviors. This population, therefore, needs to be recognized and targeted with STI and HIV education and prevention efforts." (McFarlane, Kachur et al. 2004).

Findings from this study and others indicate that the Internet is perceived as a realm in which women can communicate and act upon their sexual desires, allowing a semblance of anonymity and perceived safety that may not otherwise exist in more "traditional" venues for meeting partners, such as nightclubs, bars or in other social spaces. Although these studies show a correlation between a specific type of Internet use and risks to sexual health, they do not reveal how women decide to engage in Internet mediated sex, how often online interactions lead to sexual encounters and what risks are inherent in the process.

At one end of the published literature spectrum, the majority of the peer reviewed literature on Internet related sexuality falls under the rubric of examination through a clinical "gaze" and associated classifications. In searching the literature for the key terms of sex and the Internet, one finds the terms often coupled with other overwhelmingly negative, dysfunctional states of being, including "infidelity", "cyber-sex addiction", "fetish" and "fantasy" (Griffin-Shelley, 2003). There is an abundance of scholarly work

devoted to cyber sexuality and the messiness of bodily desire and computer mediated physicality. At the opposite end of the spectrum, many of the popular press books on women and hook up culture from how to guides to moral treatises, would have one believe that hooking up is solely about having sex devoid of any notions of love, emotion and commitment. That hooking up is *simply about the sex*. But is it? That is one of the primary research questions underpinning this study, which found it is about so much more.

How is the new media technology changing interpersonal relationships? From MySpace© to Facebook© to Adult Friendfinder© to online personals to sexting to Verizon© mobile chat, people are communicating and creating new relationship configurations. Early in my project, I interviewed Dr. Carol Queen, who is considered an icon in the world of positive sexuality in San Francisco and probably the nation. She wears many hats: as an author (among her titles - *Exhibitionism for the Shy*) writing explicit fiction, essays, commentary; as a speaker on topics as diverse as lesbian and gay identity, prostitution, pornography, sex toys and erotica; as a sex educator, particularly around safe sex issues; and as a sex activist. In addition, she has a doctorate in sexology. She publishes a monthly opinion column which appears in the *Spectator* and *Libido* magazines and has produced numerous articles appearing anywhere from local newspapers to the *Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality*. She helped co-found and is part owner of Good Vibrations, a San Francisco based multi-channel retailer of sex positive products and educational materials, well known for their wide selection of vibrators. Included among the entities she has founded is the *Center for Sex and Culture* - a not for

profit sexuality education center she started with her partner, and the location where I interviewed her.

The Center for Sex and Culture is an interesting place. Their motto is "*Vita, Libertas et Apetito Felicitas*", and according to the brochure the Center's mission is to provide adult sex education and support to diverse populations by means of classes, workshops, social gatherings, and hands-on practical skills-building events. The Center holds many different events, from readings and performances to sex workshops to parties.

While I waited for Dr. Queen to finish a phone call, I looked around the space, which was decorated like someone's living room, painted a warm shade of eggnog yellow, with comfy couches, (erotic) paintings on the wall and a coffee table. The dead giveaway about the type of environment you were actually in was exemplified by a "storage" room located behind a glass window in the waiting area. In the center of a room was a table full of sex paraphernalia - including vibrators, myriad mechanical devices, a few whips and sets of handcuffs, and some other furry, fuzzy stuff that I could not discern quite easily.

Dr. Queen emerged from a conference room and came out to greet me. When she introduced herself, I was immediately struck by how warm and genuine she was. She was a smaller framed woman, in her 40's with a great smile and positive energy. She was wearing an oversized sweater and leggings and explained to me that she had just returned from New York the previous week and that the Center was busy preparing for the annual *Folsom Street Fair*, which was taking place that Sunday following our interview. The Center would have a large booth at the fair to publicize and get the word out about safe and positive sexuality. Having studied sex and culture for most of her adult life, I was

interested in interviewing Dr. Queen for her perspective on the Internet and women's sexuality. I asked Dr. Queen to tell me about the first time she recognized the role of the Internet in the broader realm of women's sexual identity and practices:

> *In the early 90's, I knew a woman who had been publishing a sex "zine" and I had been writing for most of the local sex "zines" that's really how my writing work got out into the world before I got book gigs. And, I remember that she sent word around that she was going to be putting her magazine - her paper zine, onto the Internet as an "e-zine" and she was the first person I knew who was going to do that. And she included this, this impassioned statement about how important the Internet was going to be and she wanted to get in on the ground floor. I think that may even be the first time I heard the phrase world wide web and had it spelled out. I had seen the 'www' but I didn't know what it stood for yet, it was relatively early on. And, I had, I don't even remember if I had email yet. And the second really meaningful understanding I think…was when Robert [Dr. Queen's partner] and I went to visit friend of ours who at that time worked at Autodesk and they had much cooler computers than your average friend. And he was able to pull up windows and show us little porn movies, which was the first time I had seen, actually, I think it was the first time I had seen, any movies at all, any animated anything at all on the Internet, and he just pulled up one after the other after the other after the other. – Dr. Carol Queen*

I asked her why she felt the Internet was so extraordinary for sexuality related purposes.

She replied:

> *Well, any medium that allows for any kind of sexual communication is bound to be used on a number of levels, and that is exactly what we've seen unfold since then. The level of provision of porn content, not surprising. Uh, around that time I started to hear about the alt.sex.etc… [Dr. Queen is referring to the numerous alt.net forums that were very popular during the early years of the net] There were first person discussions, there were community discussions. And then when I read Linnea Due's "Joining the Tribe", which is a book looking at the issues of gay youth and how in the 90's, in the particular cultural context of the 90's, they came out, got support, dealt with homophobia, got information etc. and (laughing) several of them talked about the Internet being the only way they had ever so much as met another gay person. They were completely isolated in the middle of the country, in small towns, and only via the Internet, only being able to find, i.d. associated websites and chat rooms and such, did they have anybody to communicate with about their*

identity. And if I needed any more convincing, I read that book, that was the nail that nailed it down. That was clear, from then on out it wasn't just a matter of, partly then, it wasn't just a matter of adults being frisky with one another…it's not surprising that something like Craigslist wouldn't just have garage sales, but if people with no other contact around sexual issues and youth were able to utilize the Internet for community as well as probable for partner finding eventually. Then that said to me that that was a really extraordinary um, really new element. – Dr. Carol Queen

From Dr. Queen's narrative, it is evident that the Internet very early on held possibility and opportunity for identifying a community of like minded individuals. In Dr. Queen's experience, finding a like minded community was important for gay youth, but representative of so much more with respect to the possibility of finding like minded individuals and communities. In seeking casual sex on the Internet, and in particular, specific types of sexual acts and activities, I shall later describe how for my informants, the Internet allowed them to find like minded individuals and communities as well.

In this chapter I have sought to describe how profoundly the Internet has transformed the social fabric of human lives in the modern world. The Internet serves as a site of meaning making and contestation, reconfiguring public and private spaces and vastly broadening the options for intimate human relations and allowing one to find like minded individuals and communities. In the next chapter, I shall describe how my informants foraged and found like minded individuals in a forest of potential sexual partners.

CHAPTER FOUR

Foraging and Finding….

….in a Forest of Potential Sexual Partners

Figure 1. - Hooking Up on the Internet: Terms, Spaces and Places

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the first phase of Internet mediated hooking up, what I have termed the "*Foraging and Finding*" phase. In this chapter, I describe why my informants have chosen to go online to seek sexual partners (as opposed to more "traditional" venues); where they go; and how they engage others in the virtual realm. In so doing, I introduce the new modes of sociality that the Internet allows and which facilitates the finding of prospective casual sex partners. Further, given the proliferation of choice for potential partners in this realm, one can begin to see how the narratives reveal the shifting value and worth Internet sex seekers accord prospective partners, to be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

Foraging and Finding: An Apt Metaphor

I've chosen the title "*Foraging and Finding in a Forest of Potential Sexual Partners*" because it serves as an apt metaphor for the experience of seeking casual sex partners online. When "foraging" in the online space, a woman clicks around and explores a given site – directing their mouse to select here or click there, with each motion revealing a possible new avenue of exploration, and potentially different outcome. In navigating sites, particularly hook up sites, my informants enter a different mode of being where the things – the clicks if you will - that drive the foraging may appear benign, but have real life ramifications. These sort of "things": subheadings, bylines, and other graphics which comprise a web site, structure not only the website interface immediately visible to the web surfer; these same things structure the possibility of interactions among the community of users in these realms.

One informant's story, Coco, is emblematic of what the "typical" arc of an Internet facilitated hook up experience can be. For my informants, all hook ups began with a website, and the types of websites that exist will be further explicated later in this chapter. Most of my informants used a number of different websites ranging from paid to free sites, often settling on one or two preferred sites to search for potential partners. Much like the "*Choose your own Adventure*" fiction books that outline different scenarios and outcomes based on different decisions and choices, the "typical" hook-up can be equally as uncertain in outcome, while the goal remains the same: to finish the story.

Coco, a bubbly, effusive thirty something South Asian graduate student, pulls her laptop out of her backpack during our interview at Starbucks late one hazy winter day.

She has decided to walk me through one of her "foraging and finding" sessions. Tucked away in an alcove upstairs overlooking the local university campus entrance, I scoot my chair around and observe Coco as she logs onto the wireless network, signs onto her *Match.com* account and starts perusing men's profiles - much like one would shop for goods on EBay or books on Amazon.

Online dating and hook up sites often allow one to search for profiles by outlining desired criteria. Coco navigates to the search screen and details the characteristics she's interested in. *Age?* She types in between 35-40. *Location?* Geographically desirable is a man located within 10 miles of her registered zip code. *Ethnicity and hair color?* Today she's looking for a taller Caucasian man, perhaps brown or sandy blonde hair (definitely not distinguished gray or bald – too old - she notes as she clicks on the checkboxes of associated features on the screen). In terms of height, she wants the potential match to be at least 5'9 but no more than 6'2, as that would be too tall for her petite stature. Indicating those details in the desired height range, she stops to consider body type. Coco explains that body type can be deceptive and it's important to verify this in pictures. She decides that today's results needed to include men of at minimum athletic and toned stature, so men who have described themselves as "slender", "heavyset" or with "a few extra pounds" will automatically be excluded from the search results. In terms of education and income, Coco tells me that she finds she has much more in common with men who have a college education, earn an acceptable salary (ideally a six figure income) and who indicates travel, wine and dining out as some of his interests.

Why so particular about what she wants if she's really only looking to hook up, I enquire? Coco replies coolly: *"the reality is that while I may only be looking for a*

quickie, even in this forum, I'll want that quickie with someone with whom I hold shared interests, so that at the very least we'll have something to talk about while I figure out if I like him enough to take him back to my bed".

A list of search results appears on the laptop screen. Eight hundred and twenty two to be exact, with results ranked in order of match criteria, how recently the man had been online on the website and geographic distance. This is fairly standard, and on other sites, rank may be determined by other criteria such priority listing for members with premium paid memberships [i.e. more Gold or Silver members on AdultFriendfinder©] ensuring that their profiles appear at the top of the ranked search results.

Clicking through the profiles and photos of the resulting matches, Coco explains that the primary picture speaks volumes about the guy and often times if a man's primary profile photo is unflattering, she will not even bother clicking on the profile no matter how much they may meet her specified criteria. For example, on some of the hook up sites, it is not unusual to see an explicit photo of an erect penis or a man standing in front of his luxury car. It is surprising the number of men who have regular face photos up on such sites. Conversely, on sites such as AdultFriendfinder©, Coco says she is actually more intrigued by men who keep their real identity hidden, as this signals a man who does not put himself out there for public scrutiny, and who knows how to exercise some discretion (whether that is for his benefit or for hers is another story altogether). Regardless, it is a trait that she values, particularly if the interaction is going to be purely casual.

As Coco clicks through the different profiles, reading tag lines and personality descriptors, she learns a lot more about her potential partners through the snippets of

information that each member chooses to provide about themselves: their preferences and proclivities, favorite books, quotes, food or music. On other sites (but not on Match$^{©}$), members can state what they are looking for (a long term relationship, friends first, casual dating, etc).

At this juncture, Coco is able to further refine the returned search results because 800+ is simply unmanageable. The website has features which allow her to "bookmark" profiles by adding a member to her "favorites" list or by blocking them from contacting her or appearing in search results in the future if she's completely not interested. By adding a profile to her "favorites" or on other sites "hotlist" or "wishlist", Coco may return their profile for further consideration at a later time or date.

What happens next, I ask? One contacts the person they are interested in or alternatively, if one chooses not to view profiles anonymously, the men who Coco has looked at will receive a notification that she has viewed their profile, and thus the cat and mouse game begins. Coco explains:

> *Well, there is a protocol....I really do get a sense that there is a protocol...it has to be very dry, firstly...some people put themselves out there in their profile but when you email they tend to be a little more terse and reserved because putting it out there for everyone is apparently very different than putting it out there to one person...and so I think it's really interesting that people are very different in their profiles...even if they're exuberant in one sense they're not going to be in their emails when they are honing in and that happens to me almost entirely* -Coco, 33

I asked Coco to describe what a typical communication looks like when she is pursuing a potential hook up, be that on Match.com or through another site. Coco sighs. She explained that it is so very different depending upon who they are, where they are at, where you are at, what they want, and what you want, etc. When seeing all the results on

a site like Match.com or perusing craigslist, the possibilities seem endless. When the proverbial rubber hits the road, when one engages the prospective other in a communication, is when the real work begins. Coco describes how she normally proceeds:

> *Well, usually, the instant messaging interface, or the chat rooms on these sites aren't that great, but I start out by using them just to see if the person is going to interesting to chat with. For example, if they say "hey sexy , u r so hawt", chances are I am going to cut the chat short and definitely NOT share my email address or real chat ID. At least try and say something meaningful! It's not like we are text messaging on our phones or something! – Coco, 33*

Coco continues:

> *If they seem interesting, and we seem to be hitting it off digitally, I will usually share my Yahoo Messenger ID or Gchat User ID so that we can chat privately. So then usually I spend some time just chatting with them and sometimes it can be really intense. It's really funny how much a guy will reveal without really thinking they're revealing who they are. Well, sometimes, they use their real name as their Chat ID and that's just stupid, but other times they have handles that like try to sound sexy and all without using their name. As far as what we talk about, it really depends on where we met. For example, a chat session with a guy from AFF (AdultFriendfinder) is going to be very different than someone I meet on Match. Some guys are really nice, others want to know what your experience has been like on the site, the occasional one is WAY too needy and others just get straight to the point – like what turns you on, what doesn't, what are you into, what do you want? Sometimes it's really intense…even erotic. – Coco, 33.*

I probe further about what Coco finds most intriguing about potential partner's profiles or chat sessions. She replies:

> *The best ones are the ones that are clearly trying to hide their relationship status while also trying to impress you with their careers or sexual prowess or what they do or where they've traveled, where they went to school – basically trying to find the hook to reel you in for an in person meeting. And that's when they start sharing revealing information, and well, then, I start looking for them online. They have NO idea that while*

we are chatting I'm usually Googling their first name and occupation or something and BINGO: I've got their Facebook profile or LinkedIn account up, or worse, they're listed on Don'tdatehimgirl.com. Then I'm able to see if they're legit, who they're connected to, how many friends they have on Facebook, their photos on Flickr, look at their Diggs or their Twitter updates. People truly have no idea the extent of their digital graffiti. – Coco, 33

Coco continues:

So at this point, I've pretty much decided if I want to meet up with them or exchange numbers. I don't waste my time with talking on the phone or extensive emails back and forth because, especially if we've been chatting on and off for a few days, I already know if I want to meet them and then we just choose a place to meet that is convenient. And then we'll usually meet. That is unless someone better comes along in the interim, then of course I'll be perpetually "busy" with "work or family stuff". – Coco, 33

And therein is something that was rarely explicated when my informants described their online engagements, but which was revealed time and time again in the narratives: that interactions such as Coco has described are not happening in isolation, with one potential partner at a time, but are happening with many potential partners simultaneously. Because the plethora of potential partners available on the Internet, from the safety of one's home, allows for continued perusal in case something better comes along while foraging and finding.

Hooking up on the Internet: Where to Find Casual Sex Partners

Where do people meet online for Internet mediated casual sex encounters? Surprisingly, the pathways are not always explicitly sexual hook up websites, as one may believe. While there are many different types of websites or online "personals" systems devoted to hooking up and each are differentiated primarily by the mechanism that

enables users to connect and interact with one another, there are also a whole host of other electronic communities and sites where Internet mediated hooking up can be potentially facilitated. With smartphone technology, and GPS based applications which can tap into a phone's geolocation to help users find friends (or potential hookups) who are located close by, the hook up is no longer web contingent, but is increasingly mobile in nature. There are already smartphone applications which harness geographical location with demand for casual sex partners.

 At the time of my informant interviews, however, these technologies were not well established, so I shall describe instead the types of websites that exist for hooking up, be that over a computer screen or one's smartphone. In their work researching online personal ads, Andrew Fiore and Judith Donath describe the different types of online personal sites that are common on the web. Each is differentiated primarily by the mechanism that enables users to connect with one another (Fiore and Donath 2004). These include:

- search/sort/match systems that provide user profiles and private messaging capability such as Yahoo Personals
- personality-matching systems such as E-Harmony (http://www.eHarmony.com) or Match.com (http://www.match.com)
- social networking utilities such as Facebook (http://www.facebook.com).

Search/Sort/Match systems are further subdivided into what the authors term "*Mainstream systems*" (such as Yahoo Personals) or "*Subpopulation systems*" that are created to serve a specific subpopulation (McFarlane, Bull et al. 2000; Leiblum 2002; Brown, Maycock et al. 2005). In addition, there exist community bulletin boards (e.g. craigslist) as well as whole host of websites specifically devoted explicitly to seeking sex

or sexual pleasure, e.g. Adultfriender©, sites serving a particular niche (e.g. The Ashley Madison Agency© for married women or Digiromp© *for lesbian women*), sites for people diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (e.g. Herpetopia©) or sites for people seeking special types of sexual activity (e.g. Bondage.com©).

Since Fiore and Donath's 2004 work was first published, many new ways to connect with others via the Internet have emerged. There are now social gaming sites where one can "bid" and compete against other potential suitors for the privilege of sending a message to and possibly connecting with a potential partner (e.g. *I'm in Like with You*©). There are also sites where location based hooking up via one's mobile phone can be integrated with a website designed to connect one to other potential real time hook ups in the immediate area (e.g. *Grindr*©) Regardless, as technology develops, the possibilities for new partners and sexual experiences seem endless.

craigslist Casual Encounters

All of my study participants reported using the different types of sites described but for many of my informants, as I wrote about in the first chapter, craigslist was often the gateway to exploration of other sites for Internet mediated hooking up. In interviewing Craig Newmark, the founder of Craigslist, I asked about the genesis of Casual Encounters, the specific forum where people can go for the explicit purpose of No Strings Attached (NSA) hook up. Our meeting took place one sunny summer day at one of Craig's local café haunts in the Cole Valley area of San Francisco and Craig told me his story. In 1994, Craig Newmark was working at Charles Schwab evangelizing the Internet. He started craigslist because he "wanted to help people out", so in 1995 he began a local San Francisco email list that listed cool events, art and information about

what was happening in and around the city. In 1995, as the early web formats were being

introduced, Craig decided to switch mediums and rather than spread information through

an electronic mailing list, opted to disseminate information through an Internet site.

Craig explained that the various categories, and Casual Encounters in particular, was

created because:

> *People kept asking for more types of information, more stuff – and started sharing their experiences about specific types of places and such. Eventually, the personals section was created and people were looking for more than just dating, so the more explicit material was separated out into Casual Encounters* - Craig Newmark, Founder, craigslist.org

The philosophy behind Casual Encounters was one of a non-judgmental locals

only forum where people could connect and arrange to meet one another for NSA

encounters. This of course expanded, as the popularity of Craigslist expanded. However,

in addition to being free, the site was simple to navigate and did not require revealing a

real email address, as responses are forwarded to a Craigslist generated response address,

and then on to an individual poster's email account. Only in replying to responses, could

one potentially reveal any semblance of identity, if they so chose.

Jodi describes the first time she used craigslist Casual Encounters (CE) to find a

partner. Previously, she was finding hook ups through regular dating sites. On CE, she

found what she was already able to attain through the dating site – casual sex, but without

all the performance and pretense of wanting more, that she had experienced on Yahoo

Personals. On CE, she was able to determine what she wanted sexually, state the terms,

carryout the transaction (or interaction, as one might say) and go her own "merry" way

afterwards. Jodi describes her first CE experience:

So, I went onto Craigslist Casual Encounters and I found an ad for a sensual massage. The guy sent his picture and I was like whoa, I love massage and this sounds great. He said come to my house, I won't expect anything, I promise, I'll just give you a massage. I jumped into my car at four o'clock, arrived at his house 20 minutes later, knocked on the door, and gave him a hug hello. He took me to his bedroom, where there were lights and candles. This was all in the matter of an afternoon. I had gone online at 1:00 pm and I'm already at his house by 4. I was kind of not sure what to expect because I had never done anything that quick before. Because with the online dating thing you just meet for coffee or something first. So then, um, the massage [sex]. Afterwards I got dressed and left. And I never heard from him again. I thought this is fantastic (laughing). I get home at 8 o'clock and go back online. I remember thinking could this get any better? – Jodi, 32

The "massage" scenario Jodi describes allows people to meet and then carry on to the next level sexually if both parties wish to. The only expectation is of a massage, not sex. Thus, the "massage" provides an inroad as well as an exit strategy for both parties involved in the transaction. And it is a non commercial transaction, carried out without exchanging money, but a exchanging another type of currency. These and other modes of engagement in negotiating the hook up will be further described in Chapter 5. Jodi continues, describing the moment she finally understood how to optimally utilize a community bulletin board forum like Craigslist for arranging casual sex encounters, and in particular, the ads she created in order to efficiently screen and select partners:

So that was when I kind of finally figured out how Craigslist worked. Oh and that I wasn't going to be searching all of the time, and I would put it [post an ad] up and within a matter of twenty minutes to half an hour I would take it down. So, whatever I got during that first half hour was it, because I would have so many responses that I couldn't respond quick enough. I couldn't look at the pictures quick enough so I would always, always be very, very specific about what I was looking for. I'd give the physical description. That I want to meet immediately. I will go to your house. You will have condoms. You will have this and you will have that. You can massage me. You can do that kind of thing but no romancing. It's going to be about two to three hours long then I'm going to leave. That's it. So I was very specific. If you don't meet any of the requirements I'm not

responding. If you do, then you need to send a face picture. The cock picture never really mattered to me much. So I'd probably get like 30 or 35 responses. And I'd sort through all of them. And you need to have a phone number. I'd call them and say email me an address, directions, whatever. Then I'd get in my car and go – Jodi, 32

In this section, I have described the types of sites that exist to facilitate hooking up, where my informants reported meeting their partners and what the rules of engagement were for their hook ups. In the next section, I describe how these sites allow users to market themselves to potential hook-ups, while at the same time, ensuring the experience is structured to be to result in potentially successful hook-ups, but also successful enough to draw the users back to the site to continue looking for more partners.

Creating Personas and Mastering Scripts

Creating an online profile, or posting an advertisement on an electronic bulletin board, is much like marketing a commodity or product. Mastering the scripts of Internet mediated hook up culture requires navigating a new world of symbol systems, rituals and norms. For websites employing Search/Sort/Match systems, creating a profile or membership entails responding to a series of questions describing one's physical characteristics (height, weight, ethnicity, hair and eye color), one's personality and proclivities (self-described demeanor, favorite movie, favorite food, favorite drink, last great book read), relationship status (single, attached, married, in an open relationship), and the type of relationship one seeks (dating, friends with benefits, no strings attached, long term relationship). On some websites, particularly those devoted to sexual encounters, the questions become very specific with respect to the type of sexual activity desired (e.g. cyber sex, voyeurism, threesomes, bondage and submission, etc). These sites

also allow members to upload pictures and write a few paragraphs about themselves that may not have already been addressed in the descriptive questionnaire.

Not unlike the personal ads of the print era, my informants noted that venturing online required mastering of certain "codes" and language in operation to successfully navigate personals and in particular, "free range" environments, such as Craigslist Casual Encounters forum. Acronyms such as NSA (No strings attached) SWM (single white male), W4M (woman for man), HWP (Height Weight Proportionate), MILF (Mom I'd like to F***), DDF (Drug and Disease Free) or phrases such as "420 friendly" (Marijuana friendly) or PNP (Party and play, meaning hard drugs and sex) are commonly incorporated into these types of ads. Electronic bulletin boards such as Craigslist operate much like the classified advertisements one may find in the back of a newspaper, allowing one to create an advertisement outside of a formal questionnaire structure. In these forums, virtually anything goes, and one may choose to write as little, or as much, as one wishes about themselves and what they are seeking.

In addition to the explicit acronyms, the online taxonomy requires a literal reading between the lines. For example, a woman who describes herself as "curvy" can be physically curvaceous or alluding to the fact that she may be considered overweight. A man may emphasize his personality or intellect to compensate for perceived deficiencies in his physical appearance. Advertisements may also be written with a specific purpose that masks the implicitly understood goal of the encounter. For example, meeting for a "foot massage" or "taking erotic photos" is a veiled way of stating that such an interaction would ideally lead to a sexual encounter.

There is a performative nature to the identity a woman creates online that ultimately shapes the encounters which they intend to or will have. It is well documented that visitors to online chatrooms, or even those who place electronic personal ads can easily modify or enhance their identities. Under the seemingly anonymous environment of the Internet (that is very much part of the real world), it is possible to interact with others in ways that would otherwise be highly unlikely or possible in the real, *physical* world (Brown, Maycock et al. 2005). Yet such interactions, real or false, are subject to social rules and norms of engagement that are inherent in the presentation of oneself to another, and subsequent interactions with the another. Following are two ads for Internet mediated casual sex that my informants shared with me:

One participant, Sharon, an articulate hipster-ish 32 year old shared with me her ad seeking another woman to have a good time with:

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px">

A Totally Honest Ad for the

Ever Elusive Smart, Nice, Sexy, Fun Girl - 32

So, I've written these craigslist postings twice before, and I'm guessing that you've read a ton already. The thing is, I never seem to meet up with the right girl. My posts are usually funny and charming and witty and clever (and modest!), but they never attract Ms. Right (or even Ms.Hey-we-get-along-and-we're-attractive-so-let's-date-and-have-sex-for-awhile-and-even-though-it's-great-we-eventually-split-but-stay-friends -- I'd settle for that at this point).

I've even tried a few different angles. My "I'll take you out for a great time" ad... plenty of sex, but no real relationship, friendship or conversation interest in the girls (too honest, eh?). And my "I'm sweet" ad... lots of "nice girls" with very little sexuality. The thing is, I'm not really into one or the other. The demographic that gets me completely hot and bothered is an outwardly nice girl who, like me, is a complete whore (ignore that phrasing) in the bedroom once we get to know each other. Hot. I guess I'm looking for a fun, intelligent, talkative girl for casual dating, or a relationship, or even friendship, and behind closed doors she likes gentle cuddling, plus loud, sweaty, porno sex. Wow, good luck, huh? Hell, I also want a unicorn and to be able to fly.

So that's it. No spin, no marketing. Honesty. Amazing. For your own filtering and so you have some idea of what to expect, I'm blond, blue eyes, white, single (truly), 32 years old, good shape, and around 5'11". I'm attractive (according to girls that slept with me...) and disease-free. I'm fun, clever, talkative and great company. And I know you will never, ever believe this, but I'm not actually "craigslist sketchy". (Yes, I'm trying to pull off a personal ad that includes "porno sex" and "not sketchy". Ta da!)

I'm looking for someone who is also attractive, between the ages of 23 and 35, interesting, intelligent, honest, easy to get along with and, of course, looking for the same things I am. So get in touch, and we can get together for sushi, festivals in the park, Belgian beer, hiking through the city, or just sit at home and watch Arrested Development DVDs with a bottle of wine and laughter.

Please send a picture, because looks are important for attraction, and I'm happy to send one back. If you aren't looking for what I described above, no worries... we won't waste each other's time. Best of luck with your search ladies.

</div>

In this ad, it is clear that Sharon has posted on craigslist previously and she's streamlining her online ad posting efforts by being more explicit about what she's

looking for now, and not wasting anyone's time, especially hers. Further, in this ad that she posted on Casual Encounters, she is clearly open to whatever form the relationship comes in. She's not limiting herself to a hook up, but if it turns out to be one, it needs to be one with someone who meets the criteria specified. In the following ad, Cole, a recent Texan transplant who describes herself as a "punk" with the exterior fashion sense to match, shared with me her ad, in which she very clearly outlined exactly what she was looking for:

Boi-Dyke Seeks Queer Romp - w4w - 28

Hello Sexy Readers.

I would like to be rather dirty this weekend.

I am a boish dyke. 28. A lanky top with a little belly to hold onto. I have long, strong fingers that go forever.

I would love to find a femme to go down on or a boy who wants to bend over in front of me.

I play safe. If you can host, I can bring over my strap-on and some black gloves. Maybe get a beer first.

Let me know when you can host in the city this weekend. Your pic gets mine.

All Queers welcome to apply, but butches aren't likely to be the ticket this time.

w4w, w4m, w4t, w4mm, etc.

While the postings I've chosen to include here happen to be from women looking for women, they exemplify well the range of expectations people bring to their hook up experiences and are expressive of where someone is at a particular moment in time, what they want and how they market themselves to achieve what it is they are looking for in a hook up.

Why Go Online?

Why seek casual sex partners online and not in more traditional venues such as bars or clubs or other social gatherings? In their work investigating gay men's use of the Internet to seek casual sex partners, Brown et al noted that the Internet immediately appealed to gay men seeking casual sex because, as with other marginalized groups, this community had few places to meet without fear of negative social consequences (Brown, Maycock et al. 2005). Accordingly, the Internet has turned out to be a popular venue for exchanging information, placing and responding to personal ads and partaking in erotic discussion in an anonymous fashion (Brown, Maycock et al. 2005).

One of the first questions I always received when discussing my dissertation research was "*Why are women looking online*?" Why not more "traditional" venues such as bars or nightclubs or even college fraternity parties – the "accepted" locales where people hooked up before the Internet came along? Behind these questions were unspoken cultural assumptions about women who hook up: if you are looking to hook up just go somewhere that you would normally find another person to hook up with, and if you are doing that anyway, you are a slut so why the need for anonymity?

In discussing women's motivations for going online with sexologist Carol Queen, Dr. Queen hit the proverbial nail right on the head in our interview. It was not the simple fact that you *could* hook up that the Internet provides for. *What makes the Internet special as opposed to other more traditional venues is that one can find exactly the type of hook up one is looking for*. Thus, desire precedes the medium. While personal ads, venues and places to hook up existed long before the emergence of the Internet, Internet mediated hooking up is as fast, novel and adventurous as one wants it to be:

One, what did they say about Mount Everest, because it's there. People of all genders, use the Internet because they can, because it facilitates, um, like personal ads did, but in a more, in some ways, in a more precise way. And certainly a faster way. It facilitates someone saying 'this is what I want'....and allows for what that want is to be fluid. To include more diverse experience, whether its different kinds of sex, or sex with different people. It's sort of like sex work and when people ask me about the client base and what do clients want. What I say is, more than anything, they want different kinds of sex and they want it with different people.... and I think that the exact same thing is true of people who troll the Internet for adventure options, whether it's the occasional 'gosh I'm just horny right now" or something that somebody does every weekend because that's their...that's their way of getting sex, meeting people, bypassing first time going out for coffee, um, blind dates types of situations. [And] if its mediated by the Internet you get not only potentially speedy response which you can't ask for when you're thinking about a newspaper based personal ad, say, but you also, um, can have speedy response, speedy experience and you get to boil down what it is that you would want to do. So, having the opportunity to say 'this is what I want' a major, a major way that people have found the Internet facilitates options that are harder if you're dating in traditional ways, to line up. The other thing is that I think some people use this modality in lieu of traditional dating, it's sort of a sexualized variant on speed dating almost. Um, where, they're open to finding their partner this way. But, first they want to see if they're compatible with them sexually. ...I think that one of the things that women want when they want sexual experience like this, sort of diversified sexual experience outside the context of relationships. I think that what women want to do is assuage curiosity. – Dr. Carol Queen

The women I interviewed cited similar reasons for going online to meet casual sex partners. The Internet provides an opportunity to meet new people, explore a realm of varying sexual experiences and gender expression, from the safety of one's own home, office and increasingly, mobile phone that more public venues, such as bars and nightclubs, do not seem to provide.

The perceived privacy allows for the creation of online personas that were not subject to public view or social scrutiny. Further, one can create a persona, or avatar, who augments a "real world" personality, or alternatively create an entirely new persona, who may be completely different from the one presented in the real world. Several of my

informants cited escape from their "real lives" as the primary reason for venturing online. While this was not always the sole motivation, it served as a major driver. The virtual world also offers an opportunity to fulfill emotional or sexual needs that are perceived as otherwise missing from their lives. One informant, Sarah, age 25, told me that going online to meet potential partners (whether for casual sex or to seek a relationship), was simply less harrowing than going to a bar. Going online was also a means to avoid being subject to negative gender labeling:

> *I can't go sit at a bar by myself because I feel weird. I really don't feel comfortable going to bars by myself. Feel very awkward. You just can't sit there and do anything unless it's a sports bar where at least you can watch the TV. I mean guys can do that, and I just have that feeling of "look at that single chick", like you automatically get this kind of either desperate label or loose label or whatever label that everyone wants to give you in the bar.* – Sarah, 25

Annabelle, an engaging, blonde 27 year old graduate student in the social sciences, described how she first ended up online and essentially stumbled into hooking up:

> "*Well, I had a pretty good grasp of Internet, as I'd been using it my whole life practically, but I didn't use it for online dating until I first got out of college in 2006. I'd been with the same boyfriend from the time I was 17 through 23, he was like my high school sweetheart and we went to college together and after we broke up I had no idea how to meet people. I mean, there were people at work, , after college – didn't know how to meet other people her age. I mean, I'd worked with a lot of young people but none that I would ever date. And so I got to the point where I was like, wow I haven't had sex in….wow…so I remember when I went on Nerve.com, I remember when I set up my profile I was very explicit in stating that I didn't want a long term anything because I was like leaving in 2 months for Europe, so it was really sort of to get my feet wet and learn how to date, I guess. And so I was practicing brevity I guess, m profile was really simple, something snarky about hating the Mid-West, and how glad I was to leave, and was just interested in someone who could show me a good time…just very very brief, I guess, so along those lines, very, very brief*". - Annabelle, 27

When probed for why she chose Nerve© and not another site, Annabelle replies:

"I don't even know, to be honest with you. I read the site and um, I noticed….because I had been idly perusing Craigslist and I was like, I could never…there's a certain like seediness level to me about Craigslist…and like the Casual Encounters was like [disgusted expression] made me a little squeamish ….maybe that's what I wanted at the time was a casual encounter but I just couldn't…anyway, so I went and I think I was reading an article on there…and I saw that they had personals and so then made up an account so that I could peruse…and it was actually like smart, cute guys, at least so they portrayed themselves…and I don't have stigma attached to Internet dating, so I was like, I don't care. For me I didn't see the difference between meeting someone in a bar when I'm half drunk as opposed to on the Internet and I was like…mine as well try it". –Annabelle, 27

For a couple of the study participants, the Internet offered an escape. One participant, Jodi, described how the innocent online conversations she was having in AOL and MSN chat rooms quickly turned from the friendly to suggestive and from the platonic to the sexual during the course of an increasingly abusive marriage with a man she had been with since she was a teenager:

The abuse part really started with control [issues]. So I was Christian, we were involved in church, I was going to a Christian University, and I was working for a Christian organization. Little by little he [the husband] started taking things away. So it got to the point where 'you don't really need a car', 'you don't really need the phone', 'you don't really need certain things'. I kind of felt crushed in a way. And then I was starting to want to get out, and that's actually where the Internet part started. So I was kind of locked in this house, so to speak, and I had no transportation and a part time job so I was home all the time. He worked a lot. I started to get online, like AOL was where most people started in chat rooms and stuff like that. So I started meeting people and engaging in conversation and then I realized that perhaps you can actually go meet somebody. Which was kind of scary, but at that point I had never done anything with anyone. I just wanted to meet people. Initially they'd start out as political or religious chat and then kind of turned. And what interested me was just the engaged conversation that I obviously wasn't having at home because my spouse was off working and doing whatever he was doing. And it was

just the very newness because I hadn't dated, I hadn't a lot of friends outside of my small circle at church. So, everything was new and exciting and it was like wow, I'm actually interested in this, in this or that and it wasn't all sexual initially but it turned to that… -- Jodi, 32

Jodi describes how the Internet helped to transport her away from the constraints of an unhappy home life, by giving her an opportunity to create new personae, which led to new and novel types of intimate engagement. About creating new and novel identities, Jodi states:

I could kind of be whoever I wanted to be and I could just you know, be this person as opposed to who I was in a box of what I had to be. And it was the excitement and it was anonymous and it was kind of scary….because I had dated and been married with this one person for so long I'd never really experienced dating at all so it was the whole thrill of it – Jodi, 32

For my younger informants, connecting and communicating on the Internet was simply another form of sociality as they grew into adulthood. Crystal, now 21, described signing up for her first Yahoo email account at the age of 12 and using the account to email chain letters to friends or chat with school friends – not so different from other young teens just now in an electronic format. Essentially, the Internet was the place where she learned to communicate with potential partners – both romantic and sexual; as well as where she learned to build social relationships. It was later, when she was 19 that she discovered the possibilities the Internet held for sexual exploration and sexual development. She describes when she first realized that the Internet could be used to seek casual sex partners:

Um, at first Craigslist was like my first year of college, we were just trying to find books and stuff like that, books for our courses…maybe people that don't want them and then um you see the Personals section and you're interested and you're like I'm curious I wanna see what's in there and

what people write and so you look and you find things that are like…they're interesting to you so you want to know more……I was like…just like the exhilarating feeling of knowing that there are people out there that think the same things that I do and that's what Craigslist is about- Crystal, 21

Without question, there is a wide variation among my informants in their motivations and practices around hooking up, as well as perceptions and discourse around norms concerning sex, intimacy and love; and what constitutes a hookup. However, for all participants, regardless of age or sexual orientation, the Internet served as a place where the women could explore their sexual identities and fantasies. The Internet permitted my study participants to continually explore and act upon their fantasies and desires. This was in combination with ease of access, increased anonymity and filtering capabilities, expediency and the probability that "something" would likely materialize from their online efforts.

A common thread has been that while the Internet provides much choice and selection, as one participant put it, "*it's like being a kid in a candy store*"; my informants remain very much constrained by the "traditional" gender norms and sex roles they have been socialized with since childhood, and which hold reproductive oriented heterosexual pairings situated firmly at the top of the dominant sexual hierarchy. This will be discussed further in subsequent chapters. Regardless, what motivates the women to go online and to continue to seek casual sex partners online is best summarized by Crystal:

Hooking up is having fun…..It's kind of like testing out the waters…you don't know what this person has to offer you so let's check it out….it's just no strings attached and you don't have to worry about the emotion(al) commitment that other people make when you're in a relationship. It's just nice and simple - -Crystal, 21

In this section, I have described the motivations that compel women to go online to seek casual sex partners. In this next section, I shall describe where my informants went on the Internet for partners and what the protocols and "rules of engagement" are for seeking casual sex partners online.

New Modes of Sociality in Engaging the Other

Once a woman becomes comfortable with navigating intimate online communication, virtual communication has the potential to quickly turn to reality; moving from online interactions to the offline world and learning strategies for sorting out how best to proceed, and with whom, becomes paramount. In order to exert some semblance of control over the multiple messages received in response to profiles or ads, women develop strategies for screening responses and criteria for selection of advertisements and profiles. In the following account, Sarah describes the strategies she employs to handle the multiple responses she receives when posting on Craigslist:

> *Well, there's the little things that I weed stuff out on. On age, I have an age limit. That would be the first thing. More than a one liner. You know pictures are great, everyone knows that everyone looks at ones with pictures more often. But that can also be a deterrent. You know, I might read his post, think he's great and then see his picture and be like, oh he's not so cute, where as if his picture wasn't there I might have responded and something more could've happened. In terms of what they write, I look for someone that sounds intelligent, and sounds a little fun and witty and not too ridiculously serious. If they mention marriage or children in any way, shape or form, then I'm not going to respond. One, I responded to because he had a picture on there and he reminded me of a guy that I had a crush on back home forever and he was just really cute and he seemed like a really nice guy and it wasn't all 'I just want to eat your pussy now' – it was very much I want to hang out and be casual and see what happens kind of thing.-* Sarah, 25

In addition to strategies, each participant described the often differing criteria by which they assessed responses. Sarah appeared to be looking for someone to be intimate with physically, but whom she could also relate to on an emotional and intellectual level. She also sought specific personality characteristics. For her, it was important that the potential partner meet some baseline criteria in terms of attractiveness and intelligence, but also not be looking for a serious relationship. For others, the articulateness of the responses or the emotional connections that could be made with potential partners were unimportant. The sexual encounter and the specific criteria with which the encounter would unfold were considered of primary importance and the strategies employed in screening potential partners were directed towards attaining the encounter desired.

Another participant, Ann, took screening to a whole new level. Ann arrived at our meeting looking like a spokeswoman for Talbots, a women's apparel chain known for it's classic, conservative clothing styles. She was a clearly educated and articulate high powered business executive in her late 40's, with a polished countenance and polite demeanor. During our interview, I found her very difficult to "read" until she spoke about her online activities, when she appeared to transform into an entirely new person. Her image very much belied her activities. Eyes lighting up, she shared with me the primary purpose of her online sex seeking, what she coined her "special purpose" – arranging group sex or gang-bangs involving her and up to ten men at one time. Ann described at great length the weeks of time she invested in advertising for, screening and interviewing potential participants for her private gang-bangs:

> *It takes a lot of time. I use one website, Swinglifestyles.com, which is a paid site for single men whom are looking for couples. I advertised there and on Craigslist, and I was very specific. I said that the gang bang would take place on site - that the guys had to be fit, disease free and that there*

were no expectations [but there really were]. For about two months I spend about an hour and a half a day screening. Screening takes a long time. A lot of people contact you, and I want to meet them before the event, but not have sex. I want to make sure that they understand what this was all about. I want to make sure that their partner was good with it as well. I wanted them to make sure that this would not be a spectator event and they would need to participate. They would also need to prove that they were healthy and disease free. – Ann, 48

For Ann, screening required a large investment of time, both on-line and in person, prior to the event, to ensure that that the experience that she was trying to creating would be fully satisfactory. She indicated far less a concern with an emotional connection, with appearance or with intellect. She was ensuring that the men she ultimately selected would perform as she desired and expected.

In the following excerpt, Susie, a tall, married Caucasian woman in her early to mid 40's, dressed in what I categorized as "suburban soccer mom style" (black sleeveless Ann Taylor-ish knit top and khaki pedal pushers), described to me how she handles potential casual sex partners she meets online. As with Coco, Susie does her homework on prospective partners:

Well, if I liked their ad then we'd IM, perhaps talk on the telephone. I'd do some snooping - often times these guys would share their real names, so I could Google them and find out what they did. People just aren't careful sometimes and you can find a lot out on their Internet. And they'd send their pictures, face AND penis shots - along with their real names. Some of these guys are Fortune 500 Executives. I couldn't believe it. I only just recently started sharing my picture about 3 months ago, before that I would never give my picture out and they would have to meet me sight unseen. Also, I was only interested in men that were married, since I didn't want anything more. So then, we'd arrange to meet for coffee.– Susie, 42

When probed about how she screened potential partners, Susie continued:

Well, sometimes people don't follow through because they don't like my interview questions. I'm very direct. I tell them exactly how it is. Or they don't follow through because they feel guilty because I am married. Single guys less so. I'm very direct. I ask them about how often they are having sex in their current relationship. Why they are online looking. Why they are seeking sex outside of their relationship. Certain acts, what their preferences are - for example, if you want to have sex with me while I am hanging from ropes from the ceiling, then it's best that we get that out of the way now and be straightforward about our expectations. I also prefer attached people over single men for my "sex space friendship". Susie, 42

Increasingly, as people develop profiles and leave an Internet trail that can be Googled or followed on Twitter© or further investigated on Facebook©, one only needs a tidbit of information to assessing a potential love or sex interest and their known social and sexual networks. Amassing this information helps online casual sex seekers to determine in advance whether the hook up will be Mr./Ms. Right or *Mr./Ms Right <u>Now.</u>* Increasingly, with Internet mediated hooking up, people and relationships are a commodity, allowing one to historicize the number of people one can interact with and weighing value and worth in the decision to proceed forward or not and the subsequent time investment needed to achieve one's goal.

In this chapter, I have outlined how, why and where women use the Internet to meet their casual sex partners, and have laid the foundation for a discussion of the emotion(al) work that casual sex seeking often entails. While it would appear that women have a sexual freedom unlike women of previous generations, i.e. the ability to seek partners on the Internet, to describe explicitly what they seek, and to act upon their desires, I shall argue in the following chapters that the seeming sexual liberation and incredible emotional work and time investment is limiting in one's understanding and experience of intimacy. Thus begging the question of what the authentic truly is. People

are "free" to have sex, but in order to successfully forage in this forest of potential casual sex partners, one must know how to navigate the trails of code: NSA, FWB, BBW and be discreet. Profiles are a list of features and what one can and wants to do to the other's body. People, intimacy and emotion are relegated to product features.

CHAPTER FIVE

Of Time and Space and Sex and Selves

"The Internet provides a perfect medium for the virtual mirror, where people can summon up their own ideal partne….and projects an ideal self."
-Albright and Conran, 2003

Introduction

In Chapter 4, describing the first phase of Internet mediated hooking up, I illustrate the mechanics of the hook up, i.e. the *hows*, *when's, where's* and *whys* of the hook up. I show the realm of possibility that exists on the Internet for potential partners. In this chapter, I shall focus more explicitly on the second phase of Internet mediated hooking up – the hook up itself, and the reflections moving the engagement from the Internet to in person meetings it induces in my informant narratives. Separately, I will show how time and space play an integral role in the hook up – before in the search for the partner, during the hook-up and for a very long time after.

Hooking up or casual encounters are constructed in the popular media, and approached by my informants, as sex without emotion and without attachment. While this phenomenon constitutes a move for women to be emotionally detached from the sex act, my ethnography illustrates how very heavily contested and complex this space remains. Accordingly, this chapter addresses the variability and personas and places and spaces my informants traversed to find and engage with casual sex partners, and the very real impact a seemingly benign virtual interaction ultimately has on everyday lives.

For many of my informants, hooking up was a secret and transgressive act known to very few people within each of my informant's social circles, if at all. I was curious,

how does a secret life get made? In each profile, in each ad, in each person, there was a piece of identity, but perhaps not the kind of identity that is shared in more public realms.

For the purposes of this discussion, I argue that in seeking casual sex via online mediums, my informants present themselves in a specific manner, towards a specific objective, and that often, how they present themselves is very different than the image conveyed to others in their normal, everyday social worlds.   Increasingly, researchers who study cultures and communities online assert that the virtual (how one represents themselves online) is very much the real. There is no artificial separation between the two. Tom Boellstorff argues in his work, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*, that in the virtual space that is Second Life©; cybersociality and the construction of subjectivities and social relationalities is very "real" (Boellstorff 2008). Rather, not having a physical body while immersed in Second Life© does not equate to absence of physical presence or lack of corporeality. Separately, in a time and place where people can assume new identities and roles with relatively anonymity, what constitutes "authentic" becomes more debatable.

Advances in computer technology are changing the pace of relationships and relationship development more generally, and the scripts associated with Internet related relationships are still being developed. What are the meanings and practices in relation to these new forms of sociality? The old sexual scripts (Gagnon & Simon, 1973) are being reconfigured with new Internet etiquette scripts and hook up culture scripts. Woven through these new types of scripts are the very gendered ways in which humans communicate, particularly around love, sex, and articulating desires and needs.

In coming to terms with their hook up activities, my informants, particularly my older informants; those who remember the women's liberation movements of the 1970s, struggled with the cultural baggage that comes with "sex" and how the baggage they carried ultimately shaped their hook up experiences, and even what they conveyed to me during the course of our interviews. Before *Foraging and Finding*, before *the Hook Up*, and before engaging in the various scripts, my participants carried within them highly variable expectations accorded S-E-X – reconciling past messages, i.e. what they've been taught, what they know, what they feel, and what they've experienced – with present day activities - all of which fed into how they ultimately felt about the hookup.

I realized very early on in my fieldwork that the only women willing to speak to me, were the ones that were willing to share their stories, and that there was ostensibly a whole community of women struggling with these multiple identities and practices that would not want to speak to me. I had many more inquiries than interviews, and even though I would speak with prospective participants over the phone and allow them to fully "vet" me, and ensure that I was legitimate, many would back out. Although I had the web survey as an option, and several participants elected to go this route, rather than meet with me in person, I remain curious if the experiences of the women who did not speak to me are significantly different from my informants. I suspect not.

In both the web survey and during the informant interviews I asked my participants what kinds of messages they received around sex, both growing up, as well as today. Among the responses representing the range of experiences and perspectives they have towards romance, sex and dating:

Now, sex is expected after a first date. Chivalry is dead. My chances of securing a traditional style date is minimal. So, instead of becoming vulnerable and wasting my time dating, I pursue sex casually and privately. Anymore, that's what the current generation wants and the only way I can achieve any gratification is by playing the game – Anonymous Survey Respondent

As I've gotten older, I really feel like I've heard two messages really clearly and loudly: 1. Women should wait to have sex if they want to keep a man's interest; 2. Sexual attractiveness in women is a commodity that can "land" women richer husbands or boyfriends. The shocking thing is that I don't remember hearing these messages when I was growing up. Maybe I was oblivious to them, or maybe they were kind of non-issues because I wasn't of "marrying age" yet. But, it feels like I was allowed to do whatever I wanted sexually until my late 20's and then "the rules" hit. I used to be very sexually permissive, but I became less so, once "formal dating" began – Anonymous Survey Respondent

I think that I get really mixed messages as a queer girl who has had a lot of sex, especially as a fat person, which I don't think can be divorced from my sexuality at all. Sometimes I definitely feel "slutty" in a way that feels hard. I think that for everyone--but especially for people socialized as girls in our culture of misogyny--there is very limited ability to actually feel good about your sexuality, and I think that really limits how accurately and fully sexual desire can be expressed. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

There's obviously a double-standard... generally these days there is supposed to be equality -- women can have all the same sex men have -- but this is not quite true. Generally girlfriends talk about all manners of sexin', but oftentimes they are judgy about really slutty behaviour.

-Anonymous Survey Respondent

There are very mixed messages about female sexuality. I don't really think we're making progress in sexual equality. I think we have taken a few steps back in the last decade. Female role models today are pretty pathetic. Who are girls looking up to? Brittany Spears? Even when there are strong women in positions of power we vilify them and dismiss their accomplishments by pointing out their age or looks. We're bombarded more than ever with images of how to look and how to act "sexy". Yet, it doesn't really seem to be about making sure a woman is respecting herself or understanding what she does or does not get from a sexual exchange. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

The media bombards me with the idea that as a woman, I should always give the *appearance* of sexual promiscuity, but not take any physical action that could be considered promiscuous behavior, such as dancing suggestively with someone in public, or talking openly about my sexuality or having sex with many partners. I am encouraged to look and act feminine. I still get the message that my version of sexuality (which includes bisexuality, transgenderism, polyamoury, and BDSM/fetish play) is morally wrong and dirty. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

I think sex is generally taboo in America - while sexual imagery is very much everywhere. I think the problem with this paradox is that somehow we're taught that sex is bad, but buying things or having things in order to become more "attractive" is very good. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

My in person interview informants struggled with who they were in their everyday lives (a PTA mom, a pharmaceutical company executive, a lawyer, an activist), with who they wanted to be when they were performing a different kind of self online (e.g. sexually confident, dominant, a slut) in seeking casual sex. While modernity and late capitalism has certainly allowed for the creation of a compulsive confessional sexual culture (one need only Google "Sex" and "Blogs" for an infinite number of search results directing one to many a blog devoted to explicit, and not always anonymous details about sex lives), for my informants, hooking up remained a structured secretive and transgressive activity.

It is important to note here that behavior does not equal identity or intentionality. While all participants responded to my advertisement for research participants with a very clear definition of hooking up – how they actually described their experiences to me and how they situated themselves was equally complicated. All of them situated themselves along a continuum of sexual appropriateness and opprobrium that was pivotal to impression management – be that how they wanted to look to me during our interview,

look to potential casual sex partners or how they did not want to look to friends, family members and co-workers. There existed multiple selves as well as multiple interpretations of actions, experiences and rationalities. In her book, *I Love You Let's Meet: Adventures in Online Dating*, Virginia Vitzhum writes about how online love and sex seekers create their profiles and the tension between "creative self expression" and "honest self description" (Vitzhum 2007). In the following excerpt, an anonymous survey respondent describes the pros and cons of using the Internet to meet potential sexual partners. We begin to see here a type of emotion(al) work required for the creation of one's "mask" that is set into motion from the moment the online encounter begins.

> *On the positive side, it's nice to experience a lack of ambiguity about why you're interacting with someone. Both people know there's some interest in pursuing a romantic and/or sexual connection. That's a lot nicer than the "real" world, where you have to figure out: does he like me as a friend, or is there something else going on? On the negative side, Internet "dating" is very formal, and people are always trying so hard to make a good impression, so it's nearly impossible to sustain. At some point, one or the other person realizes that one or the other is acting kind of fake, and then, the relationship either ends or it has to undergo a transition in which people "get real*." - Anonymous Survey Respondent

In a 2009 Wall Street Journal article about how websites are struggling to balance creativity with identity and accountability, "*Putting Your Best Face Forward*", the author describes the fall out amongst Friendster.com users when the website discouraged its members from creating profiles that weren't their actual selves. A revolt ensued, and a "Fakester Manifesto" was created – the very first line of the first declaration, and which is particularly salient to the creation of selves within the hook up context: "*Identity is provisional. Who we are is whom we choose to be at any given moment, depending on personality, whim, temperament, or subjective need*." (Angwin 2009). I wonder, what

constitutes honest self description in an era of multiple selves? Can we really know someone? Can they really know us? Rather, we wear different masks to serve different purposes (Berreman 1962).

The Seminal First Experience

As Jodi described in the massage scenario, or as Ariana described her first encounter in the opening chapter, the first hook up experience was often a seminal experience, shaping subsequent encounters. In this next excerpt, Christina, age 28, a recently divorced Catholic Chinese American woman with a solid middle class upbringing, describes the first time she posted an ad on craigslist Casual Encounters and followed through with an advertisement for a hook up:

> *Well, I was very naïve. I mean, SUPER naïve to this. So when I posted an ad, I didn't expect all of the responses. A lot of men showed naked pictures of themselves and I just deleted those right away. And prior to this I was only with my husband for 9 years so this was totally new to me. I went to a conference in another state and was just saying (to the potential hookup), let's just meet up for drinks or whatever and see what happens. Understand that I'm married and this is just going to be totally, non-committal sex or whatever. And I got plenty of responses, and it happened so fast [with the one guy]. There was definitely some correspondence for about a week before we actually met. But we didn't even talk [on the telephone], we didn't even exchange pictures. Next thing I know, I get on the plane, he picks me up at the airport and we had a great time, that's all I can say.* – Christina, 28

It is clear from this excerpt how amazed she was by how rapidly the whole encounter had moved and also by what happened. Through this encounter, Christina discovered a new kind of self. It wasn't just a performance, but an identity that was free from any previously known social constraints, providing insight into a side of herself that she did not know existed. It wasn't picture perfect. It was fast. It was risky. And it was fun.

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Nearly all of the study participants shared with me that 'going online' (read: going online and engaging in hooking up) boosted their ego and self esteem to varying degrees, whether this was a confidence boost from the numerous responses that a woman would receive to a personal ad she had placed, the secret knowledge that they carried about their activities, the power they felt in walking away from the sexual encounter, with no intention of ever seeing that partner again, or simply the attention they received online. In the following excerpt, Jodi described how the confidence she gained from engaging with others in the online world helped her through a divorce and a weight loss regimen, increased her sexual confidence and ultimately achievement of a perceived 'normalcy'.

> *So growing up I was really overweight. During the course of 6 or 7 years I have lost over 100 pounds. So my self- image was very different when I was overweight versus the way it is now that I'm more normal. Around that time I was going through my divorce and kind of branching out a little bit and trying to find myself. I didn't want a relationship, I started to want to explore my sexuality a little more, and experience sexuality a little more. I had only had sex with two people in my entire life. So now I'm like in my mid twenties, I felt very inexperienced and my first two [sexual] experiences were not that great. But obviously from the conversations online, the emails, I was like wow, I can get more, maybe I want to experience more. And as I was still kind of struggling with my self-esteem I was getting positive feedback. I'd take a picture, put it online, and people would go like 'oooh, you're hot'. I wasn't getting that feedback in real life because I wasn't outgoing enough. So obviously my confidence was starting to build.* – Jodi, 32

Internet mediated hookups plunged my informants into intimacy not only through intimate sexual acts, but through new ways of being, doing and representing. Hooking up online was a way that women could explore sexual selves that were novel, possibly kinky, and always on the fringes of their existing social worlds.

Time Investment and Dispensability

Throughout all of my informant narratives, time has played an important role. The Internet has changed time and space and location, particularly when it comes to relationship forms and norms. There is no question that online, time is incredibly fluid. One wonders, if Anthony Giddens were to revisit the pure relation at this moment concerning contemporary women's sexuality, how it could continue to reside outside of a construct of time (Giddens 1991). Confluent love laid the groundwork for a *pure relationship* no longer inextricably tied to sexuality, because the pure relationship was a relationship of equals and one founded upon the autonomy of both parties and their ability to relate to each other as separate, functional and emotionally competent adults who exist within a framework of intimacy(Giddens 1991). In many ways, those whom engage in hooking up, bring to their relationships *cum* engagements an ability to relate to one another within a specific type of intimate framework, yet time is not addressed in this formulation, only that in its plasticity, one reserves the right to leave the interaction if a need is not being met. The temporality of the relationship is assumed to be universal and secondary across and to these relationship/engagement forms.

However, in hook up culture, time is an important component in many ways. There are a variety of moments where time is explicitly at stake – in the time one spends foraging and finding for partners, in the time that one is quickly connected to new people, in the time one chooses to invest in meeting people and ascertaining chemistry, in the time that is taken away from other life activities and in the way time hastens an attitude of dispensability towards partners who are felt not to serve the purpose desired.

The pacing and timing of the way a hook up encounter progresses, was repeated throughout my informant narratives. Behind this however, while not explicitly stated, were understood "norms" around how fast or slow a hook up should take place, as well as how time structures and determines sexual experiences. All of the participants seem to attempt to locate their bodies and sexual practices in relation to time – whether that is pacing of an encounter or duration of time investment in a particular person, in relation to intimate expectations. Several of my study participants, and many whom I have had conversations with about my dissertation research, commented about how fast the Internet dating speeds up the "courtship", or the pace of relationships, such that the that expectations when you meet in person are to consummate the relationship – truly blurring the lines between hooking up and dating.

In the following excerpt, Annabelle discusses her approach to time – meet fast and keep it organized. Note her reference to "date" as opposed to hooking up.

> *I was generally not very hesitant about giving my phone number or my email…um I was okay with that….if I was interested and we had a good 2-3 emails exchange, I would rather have a date right away as opposed to drawing out contact and then meeting in person to find out that there's no sparks. I would like find that was a big waste of my time, so I generally try to facilitate having a faster first date. I also keep a dating spreadsheet…..listing how old the guys were, what their profession was…um, I had just quit smoking so I was like are they a smoker or not, cool things about them, what was their screen name…just because when you meet up with them you're double checking what they've said…like how tall a guy is, guys always give themselves 2+ inches and then when I came back from the date I'd do a little write up on them…did they lie about their height etc. – Annabelle, 27*

Annabelle's approach is useful because research has shown that because fewer social cues are available online, potential partners may selectively self present in ways that are socially desirable (Albright and Conran, 2003). Accordingly, selective self-

presentation, idealization due to projection, and outright deception can lead to the creation of false or inaccurate schemas or impressions and to offline heartbreak when the 'real' offline person is encountered (Albright and Conran, 2003). Annabelle continues by explaining how time is not only a consideration in managing and vetting her chosen dates, but also in establishing a power dynamic:

> *At some point in the conversation we would talk about the process of meeting people online and we'd talk about how weird it was when you were with someone you are like "meh" or the misrepresentation of photos….most of the time I worked hard to get there before they got there, so they'd have to recognize me so I established a power stance, like I'm already at the bar drinking but I got there after this guy and I walked right by him because he was so good looking I assumed he couldn't be my date and I was like whoa, okay. hellloooooo…so that was a nice surprise.* - Annabelle, 27

In addressing time, it is important to comment on time and generation. In my fieldwork, I noted a significant difference between the experiences of older women in (usually in their forties and older) and younger participants (often twenty somethings) in their views on hooking up, love and intimacy. Put simply, the younger participants are more comfortable using the Internet to hook up for casual sex, but that dating and developing relationships require an adherence to unspoken rules and norms which are more constraining than meeting someone at a party or bar, taking them home and trying to remember their name the next morning. Separately, the older participants find the Internet to be a liberating mechanism in terms of sexual exploration, but struggle with the dating norms that they have been socialized with.

While in Internet time, the pace at which the hook up can occur can be head spinningly fast, underlying the potential for speed is a progress narrative that ties value (time is money) to anticipated return on (time) investment and in turn a dispensability to

potential partners based on social evaluation and calculable futures, and unforeseen consequences or unanticipated returns.

In Katherine Franks' ethnography, *G Strings and Sympathy: Strip Club Regulars and Male Desire,* Franks describes the subject positions of herself as a stripper and her clients, but in so doing is cautionary about trying to overcome binaries (Franks 2002). She writes "Theoretically, the answer is thus not a matter of trying to overcome binaries – public and private, body and mind, reality and fantasy, cultural and personal – but of understanding the way each of these oppositions are mutually constitutive, entangled with each other in complicated ways, and, in fact, are created because they are somehow useful for making sense of the world (Franks, 2002).

I close with this as a cautionary moment, bringing attention to the issue of binaries because while in this chapter, I have attempted to outline how time and self factor in the hook up experience, it is not about binaries (fast or slow, private or public). Rather, there is an emotion(al) continuum that is traversed as a result of the performance of multiple selves and the investment in time that hooking up entails, and this emotion(al) continuum - sometimes even an emotion(al) toll -cannot be dichotomized. In the next chapter, addressing the last of the three phases of Internet mediated hooking up, in the *Morning After*, I shall attempt to delve more deeply into the subject position of my informants, and transformation of themselves as well as their vision of their own Internet mediated hook up practices.

CHAPTER SIX

The Morning After: Emotion(al) Work for Sexual Pleasure

Because I know how to keep myself looking good to my more opinionated and less open minded friends - I play that "secret game" we all play - which means, wearing the mask I need to wear WHEN I need to wear it. Life is like that. We say one thing and do another. It is true now just as it was a century ago.

-Anonymous survey respondent

Introduction

What do these informant narratives reveal about sexuality, about intimacy and about utilizing the Internet to meet casual sex partners? There is a misconception that surrounds hook up culture – that hooking up is easy and seamless because there's no emotion involved, and it is not about love or having a real relationship. I argue the opposite. That in fact, such temporally brief casual sex encounters require much more time and investment – what I am terming "emotion(al) work for sexual pleasure".

The term "emotion(al) work is loosely based upon Arlie Hochschild's research of emotion and the laborer who is asked to provide a particular feeling with a service – for example the flight attendant that greets you with "*Welcome aboard*" and a big cheery smile when you board a plane (Hochschild 1979). Hochschild suggests that all emotion is governed by social rules, whether that is what we do privately or what we do as part of a job -- and in this scenario, what a woman does in engaging in a practice that may be construed as taboo by her larger social circle or society as a whole (Hochschild 1979).

Separately, while brief and casual serve as hallmarks of Internet mediated hooking up, the encounter often induces much more reflection about one's self than may have been originally anticipated. The emotion(al) work extends far beyond the sexual encounter. Hooking up is *work*. And part of the temporal framework required for hooking

up is a type of emotion(al) work, an organization of emotion(al) labor exerted in the pursuit of casual sexual pleasure -- for engagements and interactions that really are never going to be that casual.

In this chapter, I will elucidate the many facets of emotion(al) work associated with casual sex encounters for my informants, and which takes place in the third phase of hooking up, and which I've termed "*The Morning After"*.

The Morning After

Internet mediated hooking up is not just about sex, nor is it about emotion free or emotionally detached sex. Perhaps what is most troubling about current pop culture "analyses" around hook up culture, is the *a priori* assumption that encounters need to be incorporated into neatly defined categories such as those that Sessions Stepp and other authors of hook up culture, have defined it (Sessions Stepp 2007). While useful for examining the exotic other, I found such rigid classifications to be very differently interpreted among my own study participants when describing their lived experiences, and constituted a sort of emotion(al) work in and of itself.

The first place the emotion(al) work became evident was during the interviews as my informants were describing and interpreting their hook up experiences to me. In hearing their stories, the Levi-Straussian theory of the human imperative for categorization and classification emerged, particularly in the ways in which my informants employed specific terms to describe their casual sex encounters.

One interview stands out in particular. Emma, was a straight 34 year old woman of mixed Asian and Caucasian descent. Soft spoken and articulate, she worked as an

insurance underwriter for a large corporation, which required navigating a fairly conservative day to day existence in the finance industry. During my interview with her, I was quite struck by the words and terms that she employed to describe her experiences using the Internet to hook up. When she spoke of communicating with men online she referred to her communication with them as "interactions". She described her casual sex encounters as "private" knowledge and "private" acts. Her narrative was very much peppered with a bounded existence that required categorization and classification of the multiple selves she moved between –her work, her social milieu and her hooking up experiences. She discussed "sharing space" with casual sex partners, the "little box" in her psyche that contained her sexual fantasies and about "being proper" at work, so that no one would know how she chose to spend her evenings and weekends. In a way, distancing and separating these interactions from the larger fabric of her life. Her discomfort with even discussion of hooking up became evident when, during the interview, her face turned bright red and she stumbled when revealing to me that when she was surfing craigslist, she searched for ads that contained the words "big dick" because she preferred her partners to be well endowed.

Emma's discomfort with discussing her hook up experiences and with the terms she employed was not uncommon among my informants. During my interviews, women would sometimes interpret their hook up experiences as "play" or "dating". Other women who "dated" on mainstream sites or met people through sites that were not explicitly about casual sex, but who ultimately hooked up, did not see themselves as hooking up. And on the other end of the spectrum, some women simply just "hit it" and

hooked up, although at times their "hook ups" would want more in terms of an emotion(al) engagement.

Regardless, what these classifications and categories often don't account for is the fluidity that exists between them. By fluidity, I mean the movement between these categories that produce the complicated, murky, gray areas that my participants, sometimes found themselves embroiled within when trying to define their interactions with sexual and/or romantic partners. No matter where a participant may have situated themselves on the dating to hooking up continuum, the "emotion(al) work" that is required – be that screening for partners, managing dates, concealing identities, risking discovery or confronting shame and guilt - beyond the encounter or the relationship with the potential sex partner/hook up - often trumped the fleeting pleasure of sexually intimate experiences.

Hook up experiences were framed within and labeled with terms that ensured that hook-ups remained outside of the realm of a participants everyday life, i.e. "*Sex Space Friendships*" (e.g. Susie in describing her hook up partners) or "*Special Purpose*" (e.g. Ann in describing her gang bangs) served to maintain the separation between the multiple selves. This applied to how partners were perceived and could potentially fit into an informant's life as well – thus - the notion of finding a Mr. or Mrs. "Right" was often and easily interchanged with Mr. or Mrs. "Right Now", depending upon how the women framed the experience and navigated the subsequent emotions the hook up would induce.

Casual Definitions of Casual Sex

In addition to conducting interviews with my informants, part of my fieldwork experience, as I described in Chapter 1 in the methods section, took place on the Internet

and required staying abreast of hook up websites, blogs, and other virtual locations where hooking up was discussed. I came across the following posting in craigslist's "*Best-of-craigslist*" page. On this page, are listed postings that the community of craigslist readers has nominated as particularly interesting, amusing, or worth nominating. craigslist is careful to note that these postings are nominated by craigslist readers, are not necessarily endorsed by craigslist staff and may be explicitly sexual, scatological, offensive, graphic, tasteless, and/or not funny – and just like Casual Encounters - are not meant for anyone under the age of 18. I include it here because although it is tongue and cheek, overwhelmingly hetero-normative and employs some borderline offensive gender stereotypes, it explicates quite well popular attempts to define casual sex:

Casual Definitions Of Casual Sex - Date: 2007-01-14, 7:54PM PST

Far be of it for me to intrude upon our illicit activities here on CL (I am indulging too, there's no need to get uptight now, is there?), but after a few crossed wires in my (and all of our) effort to find a warm, willing someone to touch our soft parts, I find a need. Only us overeducated and neurotic San Franciscans can fuck up something simple as casual sex, and all over definitions.

So, as a public service, here follows the definitions of some (some is key here) of the sexual liaisons available to the discerning urbanite:

Sex With No Strings.

Pretty simple, and to the point - humping. Lots of it. Usually in one session - thus, no strings. In other words, no expectations of future humping, unless a new relationship is negotiated. SWS means I will not a call you later, I will not meet your parents, and no, you can't sleep over (in my t-shirt no less). This is the traditional One Night Stand, folks, it just doesn't have to start in a bar, nor do you need to be drunk.

Guys: There are manners. You do not ejaculate, and instantly ask when the next bus runs outside, a smatter of small talk costs you nothing and might reward you with an upgrade to fuck buddy status. Also, this is one you DO NOT call later, drunk, horny, and confused. This is one that is "use once, throw away". Unless it's so good, you have to go back...usually you can decide this 30 seconds after you cum...then it's upgrade time.

Gals: This is NOT A RELATIONSHIP. STOP telling your girlfriends about the awesome guy you met last night, he's not calling you again. Yes, he used you. You used him right back. Enjoy the power. These are hook ups you don't talk about, nor do you take them around to meet your pals for drinks the next day. You hump, they leave. Simple.

Booty Call

This is someone you've SWNS'ed, or dated. Maybe you were married. Or she is, and you work together. Or you both are. This is someone you can call anytime, day or night, and chances are, you will get laid. You have one or two of these, right? Everyone does. Anyone who's dating someone else, and it's the first year, dreads these. We all know who are they. We have ours.

Guys and Gals: these happen FROM previous relationships. Stop asking for them, you're putting the horse before the cart. One of the important things here is, A., you know calling them is okay, and vice versa, and B., you know what they're like in bed, they're acceptable to you, and there will be no uncomfortable "surprises" at the door if they come over. Slow it down, Speed Racer, and try SWNS first. And finally, these are the super, super secret ones. Nobody ever knows. Ever. If you tell your current girlfriend/boyfriend, you destroy the relationship AND the bootycall.

Fuck Buddy

These are the fun ones, and the most dangerous. It's about sex - lots of it, and all the time. After work, before work, all weekend, in Tahoe on a ski weekend (fireplace sex is the BEST), and they're allowed to stay over. Can be ongoing, like a booty call, and will be dusted off between relationships. "Funny, I never met HIM the 3 years we dated? Oh, he's one of THOSE." You might even date, go out, show each other off, but once things get personal, you both know it's time to split up, for now. They're the one person who won't get upset if you say "I met someone..." because they did, too.

Guys and Gals: Warning. These relationships are treacherous. They CAN and do sometimes get real, and the other person rarely agrees it's time to start sharing the bureau and bathroom. Be open, honest, and make sure you're BOTH on the same page, and the kingdom is yours.

However, for the meek at heart, beware. These are the relationships where fetishes, fantasies, and pure unadulterated hedonism occur, and it's expected. This is the time for her to try drinking the blood from a wound on your lower belly while she jerks you off, because those bloody vampire movies turns her on in a way she's not ready to deal with. This is the time he'll be into trying threesomes, or more. Do not be offended if he wants to share you, you are his favorite toy, and it's a mark of honor that he's comfy with it. Indulge. But if they rock your polite, vanilla ideas of what sex is a little too hard, be aware you are in far, far over your head, and

you need to back off and either date (foolish exercise that it is) or dabble with SWNS, so you can at least escape his/her chamber of horrors. Yes folks, this is the one where you get your stories. Love them, live them, respect them. You'd both worked hard.

Friends With Benefits.

Yes, that one. Okay, some blunt truth. Women tend to abuse this one to try and trap a guy into a relationship, and guys generally confuse this with Fuck Buddy, Booty Call, and Sex With No Strings - and generally all in one night. Guys, these are going to be tough for you, for one reason: the word "friends". These relationships have a very good shot of turning into a real relationship. See "When Harry Met Sally". This is someone you'd probably be dating, anyway, and the only difference is no sex. Adding sex can be tricky, as it moves the relationship into a grey area, of where you're not sure how you feel.

OR

It's someone you trust utterly, who can share this intimacy with you without freaking out on you, and it'll be your shared secret, one that means something. Yes, guys, sex can be meaningful.

This is one where friendship needs to be present first - a strong friendship that can survive the rocky shore of sexual relations. If your friendship is rocky, chaotic, inconstant, and does not have solid communication skills on both sides, mutual trust and respect, it's just a bad idea to begin with, and it will kill your friendship - one that you generally want to cling to, as they count for far more than fleeting sex. Of all the women I've had offer this to me, very few of them could handle it, and were confusing the intimacy of friendship with something else. Two I accepted, one worked, one didn't, and horribly. The three I offered it to, I knew could, and it was a warm, enjoyable experience we still smile about and hint at when our SO's aren't around. These are good for times of stress or tragedy, for the lean times between relationships, and while they tend to be more about married sex than the wild, unbridled fuck buddies, it's very, very good - you know each other, it's that much deeper.

Gals: this is a bad way to find a boyfriend. If he's already a friend, that means you don't want to date him, or you're not sure. Make up your mind before plunging in. If you have any feelings for him, and don't admit it up front, it won't go well. Don't dupe a guy - we hate that. Don't lie. You cannot ASK for this on CL - they are bred during real friendships that happen outside of your nasty little weekend adventures. (You nasty little girl. Bless you.) Asking for a Friends With Benefits on CL screams one thing to me; someone who cannot be honest about what they're looking for, and is using his/her sexuality, or the lure of it, to bypass the hard work of actually meeting someone, getting to know them, and actually relating to them on various levels. You belong in Casual Encounters, but you need

to get real - what you need and all you can handle is a SWNS or a fuck buddy, stop trying to trick people with the lure of sex.

(Misconception that work only exists when there is a real relationship)

Guys: This is trouble for you, for that "friend" word. Yes, it means you have to be a friend, and all that implies. That means she CAN in fact call you when she's weepy, and you have to listen. That means you're NICE to her, and do nice things for her. It may have even occurred to her that you really like her, which is why you're friends with her. This is one you introduce to your family, if they don't know her and adore her already, but as just friends - they'll understand later if that changes. It also means that you won't be having sex all the time - you're friends, remember? That means doing things with her, like going to the store with her, getting her medicine and soup when she's sick, driving her when her car is in the shop...you know the drill. if any of this irks you, you're not being honest about her, and you need to figure out what you're doing, or negotiate for a different status.

So, that's all for now. Please post with care, about what you want and are looking for, chances are there's plenty of someone's to fill your every - and I mean every - need, here in the wilds of CL. But be honest, and get your terms rights. If you want a boyfriend, post in WSM, not casual encounters talking about friends with benefits. Don't agree to a night of SWNS sex and old black and white films, and then start acting like a girlfriend later, and demanding attention. It's a waste of time, and that's time you could be humping.

Hope this helps! Feel free to rebut, reject, or rejoinder!

Pasted from <http://www.craigslist.org/about/best/sfo/262749422.html>

Ordering of Selves and Ethical Actions

Another place where emotion(al) work took place among my informants was in how they rationalized their activities to themselves and to me during the interview beyond terms and relationship goals and how the rules and rationalization served to help keep emotions in check.

For example, several of my informants claimed that while cheating on their spouse or partner may not be viewed as moral or ethical or acceptable by societal

standards, they carried out their activities in a moral and ethical way, by following established rules of hook up etiquette/scripts. This would include would include being straight forward with potential partners about what was wanted want from the hook up, establishing boundaries around the engagement, and ensuring in advance that there were no misunderstandings or expectations, an attempt in advance to minimize drama.

Some would even take a moral stance, or sort of judgmental position on hooking up with people who a) misrepresented themselves as being single or b) were cheating on their partners using the Internet to hook up. While others, would just prefer that their potential hook ups be truthful about what they seeking. In the following excerpt, Victoria, a 28 year old aerobics instructor, describes how she navigated between the truth tellers from the liars:

> *Well, I always used Match and Yahoo Personals for my online experiences. I could never be on one of those other sites…so I never searched for men but waited for men to respond to my profile. I'd always ask what they were looking for, and most would say that they were looking to casually date and have a good time. It was hard to really know a lot of the time because they lied a lot. Guys that were just looking for hookups were lying and saying they wanted a relationship. Even though I didn't want a relationship I actually liked the guys that were honest about their intentions better, and then I could be also. While it was hard to tell who was really truthful and who wasn't, it became obvious pretty quickly. So if they just wanted to hook up, then I would have more respect for them. I'd know what it was and I wouldn't be frustrated wondering where this would go, and I could relax and not worry. – Victoria, 28*

In this way, my informants kept their activities private and self-sanctioned by establishing boundaries and ordering selves. But even with such boundaries around casual sex activities set in place, emotion(al) work crept in, and served to allow my informants to transgress the boundaries outlined by social norms as well as by themselves

in unanticipated ways. Victoria, despite her desire to be straightforward in hooking up, employed variously shifting morals and ethics and situated herself quite differently when it became to being involved with married men:

> *I will admit that I do kind of like married guys, as long as they aren't pretending to want a relationship. It's more exciting to be the other woman than to be the girlfriend whose boyfriend was cheating on me. I liked it. I didn't mind.* – Victoria, 28

Alternatively, those who were married or partnered preferred others with similar marital situations so that the partner would be equally as discreet – the assumption being that the other would have equally as much to lose if they were "caught".

Desire, Fantasy and Borrowed Time

In the following excerpt from Wong Kar-wai's 2004 film 2046, about a writer's complicated relationships with women, two of the main characters: Bai Ling (a prostitute) and Chow Mo Wan (the writer and Bai Ling's object of desire), play out the following scene:

> *Bai Ling*: "I don't get it. Where does all that fun get you? If you find the right person, why waste time on the others?"
>
> *Chow Mo Wan*: "If I find the right person? A man like me has nothing much except free time. That's why I need company."
>
> *Bai Ling*: "So people are just time fillers to you?"
>
> *Chow Mo Wan*: "I wouldn't say that. Other people can borrow my time too".
>
> *Bai Ling*: "And tonight? Are you borrowing me, or am I borrowing you?"
>
> *Chow Mo Wan*: "No difference. Maybe I borrowed you earlier, now you're borrowing me."
>
> *Bai Ling*: "Ridiculous".

This scene from the film resonated with me, because I believe that the concept of borrowing time and borrowing someone, particularly within the context of a sexual engagement was relevant to my experiences of my informants. The concept of time applies not only to the time investment of the emotion(al) work or the temporal component accorded an encounter, but to the fact that in a hook up, the time engaging with that person is borrowed. They don't belong to you. You don't belong to them. It is only in that moment (ideally) that each participant is intertwined and transacting in that time and in that space.

Through the parameters of time, through the establishment of a particular desire, and through the negotiations associated with partner seeking, my informants ultimately had to reconcile their stated desires with the stark reality of a casual sex encounter. Given the specificity of what they were seeking in these engagements, a question I asked my informants was "*Was it what you expected*"?

Often times, hooking up on the Internet for my informants was about realizing a sexual fantasy or desire, shaping a particular sexual subjectivity or experiencing something new and novel. In writing about feminism, psychoanalyses, women and popular culture – and specifically female "slash" fandom, Constance Penley asserts that theorists of women and popular culture automatically turn to Nancy Chodorow's object relations model of female subjectivity to describe how women interpret and consume popular culture, particular in the seeking of fantasy (Penley 1992). Separate from her critique of a reductionist interpretation of female subjectivity is a focus on fantasy that I believe is relevant to this ethnography. Penley writes about fantasy as able to "describe how the subject participates in and restages a scenario in which crucial questions about

desire, knowledge and identity can be posed, and in which the subject can hold a number of identificatory positions (Penley 1992).

When I posed the question of "*was it what you expected*" to one informant, Christina, she paused for a few moments, thinking silently, then looked me directly in the eye and said that anytime she interacts with someone, she learns something about herself. I asked her if she could give me an example and she replied:

> *Well I mean sometimes I learn I'm not going to do that again. Depending upon what the situation is or who the person is, um, I guess it's kind of hard to describe what I've learned about myself other than, you know kind of pushing limits of where girls automatically were trained to think about sex and love because if you have sex with someone it's obviously because you must care about them. Pushing that for me, because I knew that I didn't believe that and I guess it's kind of my way of saying yeah, I don't believe that. To be able to meet a guy and sleep with him and not talk to him and be okay with that, you know. I'll always think back to them and they'll make really good stories and they're good people, but it's never….I kind of like being able to say that's part of my sexuality because that's what girls are not supposed to be.* – Christina, 28

As discussed in Chapter 4, a common thread amongst my informants has been that the Internet has provided much choice and selection, aka "*like being a kid in a candy store*". Despite such opportunities, however, my informants also note they remain very much constrained by the "traditional" gender norms and sex roles they had been socialized with since childhood, which places reproductive oriented heterosexual pairings at the top of the dominant sexual hierarchy. Adrienne Rich, in her provocative piece, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, explicates exactly how family and institutions are involved in the shaping of sexual selves and how a compulsive heterosexuality undergirds the notion of heteronormativity which permeates contemporary society (Rich 1980). She writes:

> *"we are taught and coerced into adopting conventional gender identities…individuals learn what is acceptable sexuality through romanticizing of heterosexual relationships and through marginalization of those that are considered "deviant"* (Rich 1980).

If one challenges proscribed gender roles, she then is also challenging the hierarchy. As with the terms they employed to describe their hook up experiences, my informants frequently incorporated value laden terms like "normal", "slut", and "promiscuous" to describe their sexual selves, situating themselves along a continuum of sexual behavior. In the following excerpt, Sarah describes how engaging in hooking up introduces conflicted feelings that she experiences from societal expectations around love, intimacy and "appropriate" sexual behavior, in contrast to what she enjoys sexually:

> *I guess one part of it is kind of rebelling against that idea that I'm not allowed to do that. There is that lingering guilt that is 'wow, I'm a little bit of a slut' which is corny because I don't believe in the word slut, or the meaning of the word slut or even the negative connotation of it, but still that all goes through my head. So it's kind of a mixture of like pride and guilt. And sometimes, being, I don't know if this is because I'm a girl, but kind of feeling of being used, even though I totally went into this consensually, even though I knew the rules, I knew what was going on, you could still kind of be like 'he totally used me'. And it's like why do you feel that victim thing? You know, that's part of being a girl that you're supposed to cherish your sexuality and not let anyone in and use you. –* Sarah, 28

Emotion(al) work was often about situating oneself in relation to others in their social network. Ariana told me about how her female peers would blatantly ask other men out and how she could never do that. The closest she would ever get to being so bold, was to respond to a posting on Craigslist with three succinct lines. For Ariana, the emotion(al) work arose in that which was unanticipated or unexpected about her encounters. She describes one such experience that developed into a long term

companionate arrangement, but which began with three succinct lines of prose over email. She said:

> *I'm not looking for a relationship but the most interesting things about the nature of interaction…it's the details that emerge verbally…or in fact the opposite..the strangest long term connection came out of a exchange of complete brevity. I went to his place, went upstairs and met him, I didn't talk to him for the first hour..we just went straight to the bedroom…we just knew enough about the context and there were literally like 3 lines of text each back and forth prior to this…but it was so succinct and so clear what was expected and how little was said and it was a rainy Sunday afternoon …it was really special and it is someone I still see occasionally.*
>
> – Ariana, 39

For another of my informants, Melissa, emotion(al) work was directly tied to an identity within her social milieu. Melissa, a self identified lesbian athlete in her mid forties - who when asked to describe herself, looked me directly in the eye and said "*I'm a gay man trapped in a lesbian's body*" – told me she enjoyed hooking up but found herself continually frustrated by the perpetuation of restrictive gender stereotypes even in a seemingly open place like the area of the country where she lives and especially among the lesbian community itself. She says:

> *I've been using Craigslist to date and hook up since 1998 for online dating, because really, it's the only game in town, but now I use other lesbian or gay dating sites, but it's so frustrating because the lesbian community here is so….cliquish and everyone knows everyone, or had dated everyone. So, recently I've been gravitating towards women who are, maybe, more, um, sexually inexperienced when it comes to women (like bi-curious or straight women) because the pot is just not so incestuous.* – Melissa, 45

Sighing, Melissa continues...

> *The truth is being a gay male in this town is simply so much easier. I love the friendliness that gay men give towards one another say in the gym. It's like they're dogs sniffing each other's butts… just being friendly and*

checking each other out. Whereas women are much different. For men, there's a friendliness and comradery to the whole experience, and either you get positive responses or not. For women, lesbian or not, sex is shame based, but not for guys. – Melissa, 45

In rare cases, the Internet mediated casual sex encounter left an emotion(al), and physical, impact not expected. In the following account, Natalie, a 26 year old African American female, describes the aftermath of and the long physical and emotion(al) recovery associated with a hook-up that resulted in a near fatal motorcycle accident while they were out together. She did not know his real name, and had met him through a community of sex club attendees she had discovered online In this first excerpt, Natalie describes why she went online to begin with:

> *Well, I was going through a break up…and that's how I got into it. You can suggest your own things analyzing it, but that's how I got into it. I've always been sexual. I started having sex really early, at like age 14, and I've always been in a monogamous relationship. Like my first boyfriend, my first "love", we'd been together for like two and a half years, you know I've always been monogamous, right? From one to another…and, um, this time, we were together for two and a half years, we should have been married already. And two and a half years, in a long distance relationship is really hard…and um, he was in New York and I was here. He was going to school there and I was going to school here, so we wouldn't see each other for a long time. And we just broke up.* – Natalie, 26

She continues to how she ended up on the site, the accident and describes how her friends, both casual sex partners and real, responded following the accident:

> *So I decided to use this one website to meet people for sex and I hadn't been there for that long…only six weeks, or six months or so. I suddenly realized that…who were my friend that people that were my friends. I mean that people that I knew….I had one guy that I was fuck buddies with basically. And the day that I woke up in the hospital I didn't have anything on me, like literally nothing and I needed my computer and I needed my purse. So I'm calling him and I'm like "Dude"…this is Thanksgiving night and I'm like "Dude, can you bring my stuff?" and he was like, "I'm busy". I was like, "you're kidding me". And then there was my roommate,*

who I never got into, who is my roommate. I love him to death, he's a really cool guy, but there was never anything…nothing romantic, nothing sexual…in there. And he came, with no license, no insurance, with his car to the hospital to bring me my stuff. And it was like, you know, and people from the site, people that I just chatted with on the forums, that came up to the hospital just to say hi to me, and to show their support. One of the people, one of the guys, was actually involved in an accident…a serious accident as well… so that's why he felt like he should come. But like most of the people that you have casual sex with…there's nothing more than that…and they came up. And a friend of mine, who I thought of as a good friend, was there for years beforehand, never showed up." – Natalie, 26

Natalie learns that while her previous engagements with this community of sex club attendees were casual, there was actually more to some of these relationships than first appeared. In fact, she discovered that the people with whom she engaged in casual encounters could be more reliable than her real "friends". Natalie continues the story, not explicitly referring to the motorcycle accident on which she was a passenger.[7] In the following excerpt, she describes how the accident led to a confrontation by the pregnant girlfriend of the man she was with, how she has been impacted by the accident, and how it has shaped her views on hooking up.

The person who I was with on the bike…he had a girlfriend. And the girlfriend showed up at the hospital, and didn't know didn't know anything about the scene. So he was basically fooling around…pretending to be a single guy. Like damn, that's wrong, and she was like….I knew about her, but I didn't know what her position was in his life. I don't care…you do whatever you want…it's none of my business, uh, but umm, she was…came to see me, and was ballistic, and was like "You know that I'm pregnant?". And it was like 5 days after the accident and I…if I got into her shoes…because if I had a boyfriend that was like cheating on me, I felt really bad for her. And I was like, oh my god, I almost started crying and stuff. Taking all the medication and everything into consideration….I started like crying and getting into her position: "Oh please can I help

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[7] Her physical injuries from this accident were extensive. She was wearing a helmet, but was thrown from the motorcycle for over 100 yards, across the road, and over a guard rail, landing in grass and gravel - shattering her pelvis in multiple areas, breaking her back, ruptured her bladder and required multiple surgeries and intensive care required for nearly two years.

you". Now that I think about it, this is ridiculous…what the fuck is she doing? You know what I mean? And it's just like, uh, damn, this isn't what I need on top of everything. – Natalie, 26

While in this chapter I have focused on the *Morning After*, it is clear that the emotion(al) work starts long before the morning after and can in some circumstances stay for long after. The definition of hooking up does not stay constant. It changes dynamically based on where it is located, what the goals are, and what one wants. It changes over time and for the individual. The multiple selves and situations aren't attempting to harness a certain kind of authenticity, but rather a certain type of perception at a given moment in time.

The myriad classifications and terms employed to define experiences, the multiple selves performed to enact fantasy, and the emotion(al) labor exerted to carry on different types of casual sex engagements are an important consideration for thinking about how new media technologies reinforce, inform and offer possibilities for pre-existing social categories such as the physical/emotion(al), infidelity/fidelity. It is not an either or. Rather there is a messy gray area full of complexity that shapes perception and action, agency and embodiment. In describing my informant's activities through the three phases, I have attempted to delineate the subject position of my informants through the varying forms of emotion(al) work they engage in and through the multiplicity of selves they perform. In the next chapter I will map intimacy through their practices.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Economies of Intimacy: The Cultural Work of Sexual Identity and Practice

Love can be the exception for one thing but also the vehicle that makes something else entirely possible

– Classmate, Anthropology Graduate Seminar in Sex and Gender, Spring Semester 2008, University of California, Berkeley

Introduction

In Professor Lawrence Cohen's Spring Semester 2008 Graduate Seminar on Sex and Gender at the University of California, Berkeley; the discussion topic of the day was love. A group of mostly anthropology doctoral students were discussing the subject - specifically how love is captured, exacted, and personified in myriad forms. One colleague, during our discussion of love deconstructed, remarked on love in the quote cited above: *love can be the exception for one thing but also the vehicle that makes something else entirely possible*.

At the time, upon hearing it, and to this day, I remain still, very much struck by the observation. I felt that it resonated with my fieldwork and my informant interview narratives. For some of my informants - love – was circulating behind the emotion(al) work. A search for love, or something like it, served as the catalyst for engaging in Internet mediated hooking. Alternatively, other informants made sure their casual sex encounters were carried out in a manner that was wholly antithetical to ideals of love.

While love was not explicitly articulated in my interviews, it remained inextricably tied to narratives of hook up experiences, with intimacy or intimate moments often interchanged with love and other forms of endearment, conducted in borrowed time. By illuminating my informant stories and narratives, I have sought to write about intimacy as a stand-alone - equating physical intimacy introduced in the casual Internet

mediated hook ups as one window into intimacy today. What I did not anticipate were the many factors with which intimacy is entangled. Love is one of them.

Again and again, the intimacy accorded Internet mediated hooking up was held in relation to love. My informants used the Internet to hook up to find love, or to find ideals of love. They used the Internet to escape from the forms of love with which they were embroiled within or enduring in their everyday lives. They used the Internet to hook in up in revolution, retaliation or rebellion against normative cultural ideals of love and sex. And they used the Internet to shield themselves from love. Ultimately, in all cases, intimacy served as the actant moving between forms of love, forms of caring and forms of detachment.

Ideals of Love and Sex

What do we talk about when we talk about love, desire, lust and sex? It is what is not explicitly stated that becomes most compelling. Despite the incredible amount of emotion(al) work that goes into the hook up; the physical encounter and sexual intimacy it manifested are fairly straightforward for my informants. It was the complexity of emotional intimacy accorded the hook up, the consequent expectation and the (subsequently) unexpected which made discussions of love and intimacy a murky area for my informants.

How can we understand all that the Internet mediated casual encounter reveals, particularly when it comes to love and intimacy? In helping to think through this, I turned to Annemarie Mol's work "*The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice*" and specifically Mol's concept of praxiography of atherosclerosis, in which she investigates how atherosclerosis is "done", practiced and enacted (Mol 2002). My ethnography has

sought to describe how for some, modern forms of love and caring are "done", by articulating the multiple realities and masks and conditions that exist within the realm of Internet mediated casual encounters for women. In the search for norms that rule the intimacies of modern lives, and loves, I have sought to describe how personhood and identity is shaped not just by Internet and communication technologies, but by the specificity of the Internet milieu. Through this, I have illuminated how Internet mediated hooking up has become relevant to the various conditions that come to produce in my informants a particular kind of sexual subject.

What then, is love? In both my in-person interviews and online survey, I asked women to define love, to define sex and to define intimacy, within the context of the types of questions I was interested in around their hook up experiences. Their responses were varied and they highlighted the continued tensions around these topics that women continue to subject themselves to. This is not to say that some don't navigate the love/sex dichotomy very well. They do. However, the interview narratives often introduced reflections on love that weren't anticipated. And accordingly, it became clear that love was an important facet of my project, because of the inherent linking and association of love with sex for women. My informants situated themselves along social norms regarding sex, and through that, love.

In Chapter 2, citing Evans, I described how humans often invoke the word love when expressing an emotional state - feelings for objects, situations, ideas and for many, love for another (Evans, 2003). How does the tradition of love help us to think about the emergence of pedagogies of intimacy? While there are many forms of love that shall not be addressed here, e.g. love for a family member, or love for nation - within the context

of hooking up, my informants describe in their own words, the many forms of love that exist for them. Such description provides insight into the contemporary, changing nature of love. Indeed, hooking up is one mechanism by which love is attained, and increasingly for my younger participants, it was the norm for relationship development within the boundaries, constraints and allowable deviations away from the hetero-normative gold standard of marriage/partnership tradition.

But with love comes risk. In their work *Individualization*, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim describe how in modernity, individuals are released from social constraints in unprecedented ways, but with such release comes a life marked with high uncertainty, and with uncertainty, high risk (Beck 2002). An attachment to love remains a normative force for navigating intimate partnerships, no matter how temporally brief. I would argue that this extends to hook up culture as well. Thus, as Lawrence Cohen writes "romantic love lives on in the present through currently imagined sovereignty of the individual overburdened with freedom and risks of neoliberal regimes….thus not for us to commit to a *given* partner but a need to commit to a partner that is *the one*". (Lawrence Cohen, 2008 personal communication).

How did my informants talk about love? In the following excerpts we can see the implicit love imaginary at play in their statements and which serve as a proxy for how love has stabilized, evolved and is idealized within the context of my informants' lives. For them, love is….

> *There are different kinds of love. I believe that all are important and can help with creating a happy and meaningful life. Platonic love, familial love, romantic love, all are very important and equally deep and meaningful.* – Anonymous Survey Respondent

"Love" means respecting someone, being there for someone, wanting to see them happy. "Love" is not confined to a romantic relationship. When I think of "love," I think of my friend's infant squealing and reaching out to me to be picked up when I walk in the room. I think of curling up with a friend on her couch and holding her in my arms to comfort her. I think of love's ability to defeat fear, ignorance, and violence. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Genuine affection for someone. Feelings of selflessness when it comes to opening yourself to someone you love. Can be passionate or platonic. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Love is a feeling of emotional intimacy and closeness between or among people. A strong bond, a connection that goes beyond physical location or circumstances. - Anonymous Survey Respondent

Love is finding your counterpart in another person, finding someone that makes you feel good about yourself in a healthy and productive way. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Love is the transfer of emotion and energy between two people. It is a bond formed that can never be broken. When I think about love understanding, affection, caring, and attachment come to mind. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Love means when you constantly have someone in your mind and heart. Love is when you can't live a day without seeing or being with the one you love. Love is an unexplainable feeling that is so hard to describe just because you feel that it was meant to be. Love is what i learned from my husband. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Love is wanting to be with someone and feeling accepted and feeling that they want to be in your company. Love is being committed to each other, to share each other's life regardless of (this sounds tacky but true) sickness and health, rich or poor, in bad times and good. - Anonymous Survey Respondent

Love to me means a point in any relationship where there is acceptance of all good and all shortcomings, the ability to both criticize and accept criticism, letting go of small things, and being able to forgive any wrong

doings and at the end of it all still be able to look one in the eye and say i love you and mean it. it also means knowing when to put oneself first and when not to without feeling bad about it. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Love means to care about something more than you care about yourself. To be honest and loyal to that other person. To trust and respect someone else's feelings and emotions. To cherish and hold true to your word.- Anonymous Survey Respondent

Love is never forgetting the sound of someone's voice when they talk to you, and always hearing that in their voice no matter what. Love is caring for someone deeply and fully, and over many years and a long period of time. It is also understanding someone and wanting to get to know them over many years and a long period of time. Attraction and physical chemistry can be related to this, but not always, as in the case of parents and grandparents. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Love is about sacrifice and compromise. A deep admiration and passion mentally, physically, and spiritually with another person. Deep connection, in sync with each others' feelings, lifestyle, goals. help each other prosper and grow. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

*When we say it as "I love you" then it means more than just "I like you" or "I want you" or "I admire you." Sometimes we just cluster a whole bunch of positive emotions together and put them under the umbrella word - love.   * three magical words.* - Anonymous Survey Respondent

Actually I'm jaded when it comes to the word love. for real true love means: trust, no cheating, unconditional, one to one, respect, I connect with you and you connect with me, my heart beats with yours, if I'm in trouble you help me, vice versa, you are my husband, you are my provider, i am your nurturer, i love you like no other, you accept me for who i am, you are my rock, my savior, my one and only, no cheating, nothing, you and i are one, however, i am 100 percent, and you are 100 percent, we are not co dependent on each other, we are smart enough to hold our own, be companions and rely on each other, we love each other's body spirit and mind not to mention we love to touch feel intimate and be soul – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Safety. Love allows me to let down my guard and be accepted and vulnerable. - Anonymous Survey Respondent

How then, if we know how love is defined, is it attained or found amongst my informants? Within the context of Internet mediated hooking up, my informants strive for sex without emotional attachment. But love or ideals of love, manage to infiltrate the process. In the following excerpt, Annabelle describes and echoes the approach to relationships that Kathleen Bogle found amongst her college age informants in her work on *Hooking Up, Dating and Relationships on Campus* found investigating hook up culture amongst college students, that relationships don't develop until long after physical intimacy has begun (Bogle 2008) . Unlike the older generations, and particularly my older informants (30+), emotional intimacy can be held separate from physical intimacy. (Bogle 2008) Annabelle says:

> *I feel like my generation doesn't really date, and we never really dated.. whereas even though I had a boyfriend for a long time, we were apart a lot or we'd take breaks so I ended up hooking up with people I wasn't really dating, and so I've always had experiences other than the one long term boyfriend I've known since I was 10 or…hooking up with other people, or meeting them randomly and knowing that there's no relationship, and maybe being friends and hooking up, or being friends with benefits and hooking up…these kinds of things…and sort of this is what I know from my friends, this is what we are all sort of comfortable with…so when it comes down to dating, it's like what the fuck because none of us really knows what that means and…I don't know how to act, I don't know what to say….I feel like there's definitely a difference between hooking up and dating but you know…growing up for me and like coming of age in my 20's they were sort of synonymous.* - Annabelle, 27

As is evident from this excerpt, for my younger informants, hooking up be that on campus, or over the Internet, is an integral component to finding and developing relationships and has been documented elsewhere in the literature, is often the first

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towards having a relationship (Bogle 2008). Thus, going online to meet partners is part of the normative process of dating for younger women. Alternatively, for my older participants, meeting partners online, both romantic and casual, is a revisiting of "dating" with new rules and scripts that facilitate a fall back or return to ideals of justifying hookups in the name of, or in defiance of, love.

Of Intimate Citizens and Emotion(al) Work Labor

How is the practice of Internet mediated hooking up that my informants describe, in conversation with scholars of intimacy? In his work *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds,* Ken Plummer describes a new kind of intimate citizenship, a citizenship that is:

> "*concerned with all those matters linked to our most intimate desires, pleasures and ways of being in the world…for many people in the late modern world there are many decisions that can, and increasingly have to, be made about a life.*". Further, "*increasingly in the future, people may have to make decisions around the control (or not) over one's body, feelings, relationships, public spaces, etc; access (or not) over one's body, feelings; and socially grounded choices (or not) about identities, gender experiences, erotic experiences.*" (Plummer 1994)

A theory of intimacy particularly salient to this ethnography, Plummer portrays intimate lives transforming markedly in a time of massive social and technological change, with an increasingly public character rife with much personal choice. Accordingly, Plummer argues that intimate citizenship does not imply one model, one pattern, or way of being. Rather, in an attempt to shift the content of the stories of modern citizenship, he signposts the kind of new stories that are being made around bodies, relationships, identities , sexualities and representation.

Scholars of intimacy have offered theories of intimacy based on connection, friendship, forms of sociality, organization and marginalization, on alliance, kinship and on the partnership and couple form. In a more practical application, Skyler et al created a framework of intimacy which is used for teaching students and couples about intimacy in educational and therapeutic settings (Skyler 2009). Labeled the "*The Eight Spheres of Intimacy: A Classification*" Skyler divides intimacy into the following classifications: 1) *Aesthetic intimacy* refers to sharing something beautiful together; 2) *Affectional intimacy* embodies sharing affection. 3) *Emotional intimacy* includes sharing emotions verbally and/or nonverbally and allowing oneself to be vulnerable in another's presence; 4) *Intellectual intimacy* is a cerebral connection, often a conversation on intellectual matters; 5) *Physical intimacy* signifies doing physical activities together 6) *Social intimacy* denotes doing social activities together; 7) *Sexual intimacy* consists of exploring and sharing sexuality together; and 8) *Spiritual intimacy* entails sharing a spiritual or religious connection. (Skyler 2009).

Separately, sociologist Jacqui Gabb has suggested that people create meaningful intimate relationships that often fall outside of or are marginalized within the sociology of intimacy, including activities which provide emotional comfort noting that some people form practices of intimacy that cut across the categorical modeling of intimacy and familial affinities and in so doing open up the conceptual field (Gabb 2008). In this chapter, I share more rigid definitions of intimacy, because I seek to consider how Internet mediated hooking up pushes beyond these more established boundedness of intimacy and interpersonal relations.

As with the terms love and sex, I asked my informants and survey respondents to share with me how they defined intimacy. The examples I have chosen to include here fall into one of three typologies. These are as follows:

1. Intimacy as emotional closeness, connection and bonding with another

   Sharing thoughts feelings problems and issues with another person. I have had intimate conversations with members of the same sex, being intimate with a man for me is the same idea. Although we might touch each other, lay in the bed together and just talk. I like to think of intimacy as time spent just being honest with one another, as honest as possible. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

   Sharing of acts, words, feelings in trust that you wouldn't necessarily share with acquaintances. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

   Similar to love- an emotional bond with strong connection and caring – Anonymous Survey Respondent

   Intimacy is closeness, when you are able to be open and honest with all aspects of your life with another person. As well as feel fully comfortable being that open with that person. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

   To me, intimacy is a combination of two sets of ideas. The first is a knowledge of another person: their personal history, habits, likes and dislikes, a sense of their ethics or morals, some understanding of their decision-making processes, and of their thought processes. The second is a genuine emotional connection between two people, an affection and appreciation of their characteristics, and a wish to spend time and attention on/ with them. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

   Intimacy is a close connection, a high level of trust that results in two people sharing thoughts and actions that they wouldn't normally feel comfortable sharing. Intimacy creates a "safe space" where I feel accepted and comfortable. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Intimacy is a deep emotional connection, freely expressed and unabashed. It has very little to do with sex, though the two are often concurrent. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Intimacy is knowing someone in a way that is revealing. - Anonymous Survey Respondent

Intimacy is when you have formed a friendship, deeper than any other. this person knows you inside and out. I think intimacy has to come before there can be love...first is sex, then intimacy and then love. Kind of backwards...sex should come after you love someone, but that is how it is!-Anonymous Survey Respondent

Intimacy is interpersonal bonding. Intimacy brings people closer together, intensifies relationships, and magnifies emotions. Sex can, at times be an expression of or catalyst for intimacy but is by no means necessary. One can be intimate with a person without considering them in a sexual light. - Anonymous Survey Respondent

2. <u>Intimacy as vulnerability</u>

The state of being vulnerable to another person and feeling safe to share oneself with that person, and the mutuality of that state. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Also, it is wanting to risk letting someone see you, all of your personality, all of your vulnerabilities, all of your joy and pain, knowing that they will probably hurt you, at some point, but being willing to stand there and let them in, so that you might grow closer to that person - I guess that, too, is love. Risk is involved. To not risk is worse.-Anonymous Survey Respondent

As with the other 2, I defined intimacy as losing boundaries. But, intimacy is vulnerability, whereas love and sex can be very protected, isolated experiences. Intimacy is closeness. It's inescapable. Intimacy is spontaneity and messiness and sensitivity and responsiveness to another. Intimacy is the inability to shut out the undesirable. Intimacy is being known by another person.- Anonymous Survey Respondent

3. <u>Intimacy parsed into various forms of the physical and the emotional</u>

*One can be intimate physically - allowing another to see, touch, taste genitalia; skin to skin contact. One can be intimate mentally - sharing one's deepest feelings, needs, desires, secrets, dreams etc with another.-*Anonymous Survey Respondent

Physical closeness and being as emotionally unguarded as possible. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Intimacy to me can take various forms. You can be intimate with a friend and never have sex with them. Intimacy has more to do with the type of bond you have with a person instead of what kind of physical relationship you have with them. I guess a high level of openness is a sign of intimacy. - Anonymous Survey Respondent

Emotional intimacy -- the ability to share and discuss feelings and thoughts about the world. Physical intimacy -- the ability to be naked with another person and to explore that person's body. Both entail a certain amount of vulnerability. They often occur together, but not necessarily.- Anonymous Survey Respondent

When you can connect with someone on such a deep emotional and/or physical level. You feel like you are one mind, one body, one soul. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

Definitions of intimacy provide insight into the perspectives people may bring to the casual sex encounter. All of my study participants had experiences with intimate relationships that supported these definitions. Sometimes, their relationships occurred or were desired within the context of Internet mediated hooking up. Sometimes it was the relationship they returned to after a hook up. Thus, for my informants, casual sex was not always about fulfilling intimate needs that weren't being met elsewhere, although the practice was often fraught with this. It would be essentialist to state otherwise. In the

following excerpt, a survey respondent describes how hooking up equates to intimacy in her mind:

> *I agree, sex should *not* be the litmus test for a relationship's potential. And that when it comes to sex, one should never stop learning what sex is, what it can be....with someone you love, or have the potential to love, and how it can be enhanced, if at all.   However, for some -- sex -- no matter when it takes place, or where, or under what circumstances, remains of paramount importance. It may not be the most intimate way of sharing oneself, but it can be a component of intimacy that matters, alot.* – Anonymous Survey Respondent

For my informants, the subjective experience of intimacy and the characteristics that constitute it occur both outside of and within the practice of Internet mediated hooking up. However, within the context of hooking up, the evolution of the subjective experience is highly variable and is further operationalized through the organizing of emotion via emotion(al) work. To stop simply at the conclusion that there exists a dichotomy or contradiction for women when it comes to love, sex or hooking up is to remain insufficient in this analyses of my informants experiences. To say simply that love and intimacy are also held in some relation/fashion to the hookups in very different ways is also insufficient and overlooks the many different multiplicities, experiences and expectations that emerge when it comes to casual sex, marriage and partnership and hetero-normative frameworks surrounding ideals of love and intimacy. In the next sections, I shall discuss how the continued tensions of love and sex, in concert with globalization, have produced a particular economy of intimacy.

Sexual Liberties and Sexual Tensions

People instrumentalize sex for a particular goal. In a time of unprecedented sexual liberty, sex is more than just physical engagement reduced to genital intercourse. In the

pursuit of desires and pleasure that are ultimately intimate, there arises a tension of not being able to separate love from sex, and the quintessential enactment of lust very often, as my informant narratives have illustrated, reinforce the longing for partnership.

In a recent Valentine's Day *New York Times* Modern Love column, the editor, Daniel Jones, wrote of the prevalent trends he sees around love, based on the many letters, emails and phone calls he receives as editor of the column (Jones 2010). One such question he answered was

> "*What happens when you're in a no-strings-attached sexual relationship, and you start to fall in love*?"

The fact that this is even a question speaks to the prevalence of these types of relationships in America today. His response to the question?

> "*Maybe the better question is: How do you incorporate feelings into a relationship that is founded on a premise of no feelings*?"

His answer to the question:

> "*Luckily, you needn't rage or cry as if you were at the end of a real relationship; you simply squash the love, along with the disappointment. The rationalization goes like this: I knew the rules going in, and it is not fair to change them midstream. It is not fair, in other words, to fall in love. So I won't. I'm not even sure I did.*"

No matter the rules laid out ahead of time, humans continue to assert a claim for love if so desired. Thus, these new forms of attachment, if only temporally brief require a renegotiation of expectations, yet very few words, terms, or socially acceptable classifications exist to name them. Ultimately, the nuances and forms being forced upon

relationships that are predicated on sex and emotional detachment become more interesting that the sexual encounter itself.

At the close of my online survey, I left room for open commentary, for participants to add anything they felt hadn't been covered in the survey. A couple of respondents commented explicitly on the love and sex dichotomy:

In my experience and viewing what's going on around me, it is really difficult for women in particular to separate between 'just sex'/lust with love. So if you're going to embark in the 'hook-up' only relationship, you have to be really careful, because emotion can play into it very easily once you 'gave in' – Anonymous Survey Respondent

People think that loving freely is anti-monogamy but it's not. It's often about loving the person and people you want as freely as possible, that may be one and that may be many. Online my biggest problem is that people say they just want a casual non serious relationship but really what they want is something deeper and then they get mad when you pull out. – Anonymous Survey Respondent

In the following excerpt, Sarah describes how engaging in casual sex introduced more complex questions about love, sex and intimacy and the conflicted feelings that she experiences around societal expectations around love and appropriate sexual behavior and what she enjoys sexually. Sarah describes the conflicted feelings she experiences:

I guess one part of it is kind of rebelling against that idea that I'm not allowed to do that. There is that lingering guilt that is 'wow, I'm a little bit of a slut' which is corny because I don't believe in the word slut, or the meaning of the word slut or even the negative connotation of it, but still that all goes through my head. So it's kind of a mixture of like pride and guilt, um, but sometimes it's just really bad sex. Because in my experience sex is, can be better with someone that you've been with multiple times. And sometimes, being, I don't know if this is because I'm a girl but kind of the feeling of being used, even though I totally went into this consensually even though I knew the rules, I knew what was going on, you could still kind of be like 'he totally used me'. And it's like why do you feel that victim thing? You know, that's part of being a girl, that you're supposed to

cherish your sexuality and not let anyone in and use you. So but that is only a small part and I get over that pretty easily. Because I'm in the same boat, because I'm using them. Because we're in the same boat.- Sarah, 25

Some of my informants navigated the love/sex divide more easily, as illustrated in the next excerpt:

I have been shocked that more people aren't able to have truly casual, platonic sexual encounters. I have always found it easy to fuck different people, and respect them as people, but not anticipate a relationship, or a relationship outside of a sexual one. It seems like a lot of people either try and have casual relationships and fail, due to their wanting more, or they try and make a relationship out of nothing. I am in a monogamous committed relationship now, for the first time, and I really enjoy it, but I am glad that I spent the first 10 years of my sexual life exploring different people and different ways of having sexual and intimate relationships.- Anonymous Survey Respondent

Emotion(al) work, and tensions of love and sex although often gendered, are not experienced only by women. A discussion I had with one informant underscored this point well. Katrina is 38 year old woman of Japanese descent, and who used craigslist Casual Encounters to meet both men and women. An attorney by vocation, she kept separate her professional life and personal activities.

At first, our meeting was like an awkward first date, making small talk, discussing how I embarked upon my research trajectory, our ethnic backgrounds, perusing the menu while trying to decide what we would order for lunch. The interview took place in a hotel renowned for its British tea service and lunch offerings, and while in the midst of all things appropriate and Victorian era, we discussed sex and hook ups while sharing Devonshire clotted cream and raspberry scones. I found her to be a thoughtful, reflective and articulate informant, who was easily able to follow my probing around relationships, intimacy and the state of modern love. She was also the first informant who explicitly

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stated that she behaved differently according to whether or not her object of desire was a man or woman, and that for her, always circulating in the background are expectations she has of herself, as well as what she is willing to share or expect, based on if her casual sex partner is a man or a woman.

In the following excerpt, Katrina, describes an Internet mediated hookup that progressed into a more serious relationship trajectory, and the feelings, confusion and emotion(al) work that ensued for both partners.

> *One thing that I wanted to discuss with you after reading your stated research goals, was your definition of casual sex – you write that people go into it with the intention of it being casual but I think that's untrue. I think that there is an assumption that women might say that they have that intention, but they're actually trying, they're hoping, they're thinking to themselves that 'I'll sleep with this guy and perhaps he'll become my husband'. And when it comes to men, that is actually something that I can attest to, if I really like the guy, if I happen to have this great connection, there's that little train in my head that is like hmmm…perhaps he's the one. I don't ever envision myself in a romantic relationship with a woman, so that will always remain casual. But if it's a man, it's definitely a possibility, but for the most part if I know the rules of the situation I don't let that go anywhere.* – Katrina, 38

Katrina continues:

> *However, one time there was a man on Casual Encounters, whom I really liked. We ended up meeting up multiple times and I definitely developed a crush on him and I was beside myself when he wasn't communicating with me, when I didn't have any messages from him. I would have to forcibly remind myself what our situation was. Finally, as the relationship progressed, we discussed it. He was experiencing a lot of turmoil, he's a good man, wants all of the traditional accoutrements of relationships and was struggling with the sex without love thing. Even when I reiterated that he wasn't hurting me, and I was fully aware of the boundaries. With him I behaved differently because I hoped for something more. And in general, I won't bed someone so quickly if I like them, because if they happen to view women with the whole Madonna/whore dichotomy – as most men do -, then I want to be perceived as a Madonna on the exterior but a whore in the bedroom…just not right away.   It's kind of my way of trying to keep*

that from happening, how long I wait is my way of being in control. – -Katrina, 37

Even within the context of casual encounters and outcomes which can no longer be secured, my informants conform to the actions and conventional exchange relations of mating. Even within the ambivalent desires of casual sexual encounters, certain norms and forms of relationships are reproduced and reinscribed and structure these types of relationships, even in borrowed time. In the following excerpt, Dr. Queen describes the ambivalence that women feel, even with the sexual liberty the Internet has helped to facilitate:

> *It's just really interesting to me that one of the things that the culture very much wants to believe….ultimately, that's what the controversy around sexual behavior in the human female is all about. How could women - men are dogs - everyone know men are dogs - how could women be doing all of these things? Any really good reason that a given women might have from then to now, for saying I want to have my sexual adventures outside of the context of a relationship is buried. It's just buried. It's more okay to say women have clitorises, let's teach everyone about where they are, not that everyone's figured it out yet, may I say, but that's much more acceptable to say. And then, though, the question of okay, if we've managed to teach men where all the clitorises are, then why wouldn't you just want to find one and settle down? Which begs the question of, did he learn adequately, can you find one that you feel compatible with on all levels, that maybe you're a lesbian if you don't want a man in the first place. Maybe you just want to be alone…..what is it about this overarching belief that people have to be in a relationship? And how many people's lives are circumscribed or shaped because that's what the belief is…so, you know I want it both ways. I want to be in a relationship and be able to act as independently as I want, and of course I'm part of a generation of women made that be one of our life challenges, to try and figure out how to do that. And, every day I see evidence that there are people who went ahead and got involved in relationships, and often also had kids, who, it would have been nice if they had been able to think twice about whether or not that was a good thing for them. I don't think this is a true easy choice even for women now. And I personally believe that it should be, and it doesn't surprise me at all that one of the elements of women's sexual choices right now involves using this tool, it just doesn't surprise me in the least. – Dr. Carol Queen*

Often, during the course of interviews, informants would struggle to articulate in words, and with specific examples, what we both understood to be the many contradictions that surrounded Internet mediated hooking up and online dating in general when it came to relationship norms and expectations for women. Very often, if not in a relationship, the same participants who sought casual encounters were also online seeking more permanent relationships as well.

Thus, their experiences online fostered a type of imagined future, which may or may not have been fulfilled, but was acted on through the clicking of their keyboard and pointing of their mouse on the computer screen. The whole experience of being online searching for partners, be they romantic or casual, is a rather undefined discourse on courtship and an expectation that courtship moves at a certain pace depending upon its situatedness. When you first meet someone, and you instrumentalize sex for a certain goal, things might look good, even promising, at the onset. But then reality kicks in and much can get in the way of one's perception of the potential a relationship can be, and the possibilities that such an engagement introduces.

Why is this so? As I described in Chapter 2, Giddens believes that globalization and the rise of expert systems have wrought changes in every type of personal relationship, and in particular intimate sexual relationships (Giddens 1992; Gross et al. 2002). Further, today's increasingly globalized world is a radically new social configuration that demands a new order of relationships which (purportedly) values equality and a balancing of gender relations (Gross and Simmons 2002). Accordingly, in an increasingly complex technologically driven existence, ideologies of love and

romance are enduring. Unexpectedly, my informant narratives support this, despite the casual encounter framework within which they occur.

An Economy of Intimacy Fueled by Love, Desire Hope, and Detachment

> "*What, first of all, practically concerns producers when they make an exchange, is the question, how much of some other product they get for their own? In what proportions the products are exchangeable? When the proportions have , by custom, attained a certain stability, they appear to result from the nature of the products, so that, for instance, one ton of iron and two ounces of gold appear as naturally to be of equal value as a pound of gold and a pound of iron in spite of their different physical and chemical qualities appear to be of equal weight. The character of having value, when once impressed upon products, obtains fixity only by reason of their acting and re-acting upon each other as quantities of value. These quantities vary continually, independently of the will, foresight and action of the producers. To them, their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them.*" (Marx 1977)

In the final section of this chapter, I carve out a new position on an economy of intimacy specific to my informants' experiences. The conditions of economic and intimate inter-relation are critical to these narratives of hooking up. In this economy of intimacy, the computer mediated technology serves as the instrument by which the raw material (the subject) is produced. Intimacy is the value created by the labor of emotion(al) work. The transactions – the hook ups – serve as the forum for which intimacy is borrowed, bartered and traded among those deemed worthy of exchange relations. Capital is the value which all parties bring to transactions, and serves as the motivator for continued investment. Within this capitalist framework of intimacy, commodity fetishism extends economic value beyond use or exchange, allowing the commodity to take on a life of its own within and to adapt to changes in modes of production (masks). The many possible relationship configurations that women face now

are controlled through an economy that shapes presentation of the self, that forces a production of a certain type of emotion(al) labor and incorporates capitalist tropes and economy as a way of organizing emotion and creation of calculable futures.

In the Introduction to *Gender of Globalization: Women Navigating Cultural and Economic Marginalities* (Gunewardena and Kingsolver 2008), the authors note that contemporary processes of globalization in their cultural and economic manifestations can well be considered the most formidable forces of the 21st century, with the widespread influence of neoliberal logic and ensuing cultural and economic transformations, women's well being and autonomy have suffered. While the authors reference a different type of impact on women's well being as a result of globalization, it is useful to extend this to costs globalization and gender division have wrought on a different type of economy, an economy of intimacy, and women's perceptions of their positioning in this type of economy, and how they have organized their social relations and social selves in response to this.

Towards this end, I return to Giddens and the pure relationship. Gross and Simmons write that:

> "*In Giddens' account, the rise of the pure love relationship is related, in complex ways, to globalization and the growth of expert systems. First, insofar as the decontextualized knowledge on which expert systems rest undermines the authority of tradition – while globalization, simultaneously, brings people into contact with a wide variety of cultural practices – lifestyle choices, i.e., the choices individuals make between competing practices of everyday living, become the "very core of self-identity (1991:81). Individuals, faced in these circumstances with the cultural mandate to achieve self-understanding by weaving together coherent narratives of self-development from the threads of their past, present, and anticipated future lifestyle choices – what Giddens calls the "reflexive project of the self" – gravitate toward relationships that center on authenticity and self-disclosure, on the pursuit of a similar lifestyles,*

and that are sufficiently contingent that they do not threaten to block unanticipated lines of personal development" (Gross and Simmons 2002)

I highlight this passage because I believe that the pure relationship and all that it entails: plastic sexuality, a relationship of equals, and opportunities for dissolution or escape when a relationship is unsatisfactory, is useful for understanding a particular type of intimate relationship. But I find it insufficient to explain the changing nature of modern relationships that frequently fall outside the pure relationship form, i.e. the transient nature of casual encounters, even in borrowed time.

I suggest that while seemingly empowering on the exterior (i.e. taking control of one's sexuality), the amount of emotion(al) work invested and required for the hook up to transpire may also serve to make the experience equally as disempowering. While my informants are free to choose who they want to hook up with, where they want to hook up and exactly how they want to hook up, the seeming agency they are accorded remains limited by the external social and environmental constraints they are forced to operate within.

Gunewardena and Kingsolver posit that "women's agency may often be restricted by the cultural, social and economic constraints and contradictions that undermine its potential for enactment, particularly in ways in which current processes of globalization yield a gendered impact" (Gunewardena and Kingsolver 2008). Society and scholars in particular, tend to view such constraints and restraints occurring in and among the exotic other. But in fact, in the most capitalist of societies, where seemingly extraordinarily levels of agency are accorded women socially and economically, women remain constrained. The way in which most of my informants are forced to maintain "separate

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selves" and don multiple masks around their Internet mediated hooking up, explicates this well. Thus, with globalization comes an uncertainty, a type of new risk that produces a pure relationship that is increasingly contingent.

What circulates in these practices and narratives of Internet mediated hooking up is an economy of intimacy that holds love, lust, and other capitalist tropes as the currency, value and commodity. That is melded and shaped by market demands, by supply and demand. That sometimes is fantasy, that sometimes is lust, that sometimes meet needs that are continually being articulated and negotiated. But is never the same at any one moment. When we think of intimate exchanges – we resort to the known labels of love, sex, the physical, etc. When we think of intimacy and economics, we think of locales and environs where money is exchanged, or relationships of dependency such as commercial sex workers. These things get framed, named under a rubric of love, or hope, or expectation. But I argue that the way that they are framed is limiting, particularly in the realm of Internet mediated hooking up. Love may be the labels used, but really these aren't what the hook ups are about.

New forms of economy organize around a theory of capitalism, exchange relations, forms of monetization, value generation and relatedness. Casual sex is about exchange and use value and borrowing and transacting in a particular kind of economy of intimacy. In the absence of adequate language to describe the hook up experience of my women going online, I seek a way to describe these experiences for my informants.

While in many cases, the emotion(al) work is in the forefront for my participants, the insidiousness of the economic value, economic exchange, and capitalist valuation, running through these exchanges is often obscured by the dichotomous and normative

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labeling and assemblages of transactional relationship configurations (FWB, hook up, etc). An economy of intimacy is one lens by which one can begin to understand how internet mediated hook ups are transacted beyond the tropes of relationship forms that are typically invoked. And in this new economy of intimacy, as with capitalism, one is free to take their investment – their time, their money, their words, their affection, and their lust, elsewhere if they are unsatisfied with the service or product, or form of intimacy received.

In Giddens' view of plastic sexuality, intimate relationships require work. And when the work in an intimate relationship is not producing said desired result, one partner in the established "couple" unit is allowed to opt out when they perceive their relationship needs aren't being met – be that sexual, emotional or otherwise. In contrast, the temporally brief hook up arrangement is predicated upon a limited investment of time that does not require the same kind of work that ostensibly a truly intimate "real" relationship does. The prevailing manta in such an arrangement is that the hook up is meeting a need - *right here, right now*. As for anything longer term or more intimate? If it is you, that is great. If not, then the grass is always greener. There's more candy in the candy store, and there shall always be someone easily available for another tryst, another hook up, another encounter. What is often not considered, calculated or accounted for is the incredible amount of emotion(al) work that a "grass is always greener" mentality entails.

In this chapter, I have attempted to historicize my project by describing how Internet mediated casual sex encounters among women has created an economy of intimacy such that the labor associated with "hooking up" labor and emotion(al) work is

contingent; and whereby new media and its tools are providing unprecedented mobility among transient relationship configurations. Conventional localized socialities around sexual practice and fantasy remain constrained by specific regimes of normalcy and normality that my informants, the actors are expected to move within. In so doing, they utilize established terms of economic trade and exchange in order to facilitate or enact love or sex and, where the texts, images and fantasies that are being created are mediated not only by electronic tools, but by unspoken norms, strategies and etiquette. And just as with exploitative economies, there are winners and losers, profit and loss.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

When the first encounter with some object surprises us, and we judge it to be new, or very different from what we formerly knew, or from what we supposed that it ought to be, that causes us to wonder and be surprised; and because that may happen before we in any way know whether this object is agreeable to us or is not so, it appears to me that Wonder is the first of all the passions. It has no opposite, because if the object which presents itself has nothing in it that surprises us, we are in not in the least moved by it, and regard it without passion.

-Rene Descartes, The Passions of the Soul, Article 53. Wonder 1650 (Descartes and Voss 1989)

Introduction

What do these narratives reveal about sexuality, about intimacy and about utilizing the Internet to meet casual sex partners? Clearly, among my informants, there exists great variation in Internet mediated hooking up motivations and practices. The type of encounters described by the women I interviewed do not conform to the dominant trope of hetero-normative sexuality - one which is based upon reproduction, monogamy or considered economically useful to an individual or society. Therefore, how can we begin to understand the practice of women seeking casual sex via the Internet, as well as the power of the moral code ascribed to it? What does Internet mediated hooking up mean for the public health enterprise, women's sexual liberation, and ideologies accorded modern love, social norms and intimate relations?

In this project, I have attempted to critically evaluate and reflect upon the many ways in which people, specifically women, are relating through, by and with the new media technologies when it comes to the topic of casual sex and hooking up. As I have demonstrated throughout this ethnography, the narratives represent a range of variability in motivation and experiences around hooking up on the Internet, yet underlying these seemingly disembodied voices is a consistent portrait of time investment and emotion(al)

work that cannot be separated from cultural ideals around love, sex and intimacy which are being re-inscribed by these same technologies.

While on the surface casual encounters or hooking up may seem to be all about *not* developing a relationship of any kind, the narratives reveal that hooking up is very much fraught with the nebulousness of more "traditional" relationship forms. A casual encounter can easily turn into a relationship, a love affair, an ongoing engagement, or can remain true to its ideal form: a brief sexual interaction between two (or three, or four) people at a given moment in time, with absolutely no strings attached. Regardless of the temporal framework accorded a given encounter, hooking up is anything *but* casual, and for my informants, made demands upon entrenched notions of sex, intimacy and love that must always be navigated before, after and during their casual sex encounters.

Time, Transgression and the Ubiquitous Double Standard

These narratives reveal that women who engage in Internet mediated casual sex are having and performing sex in a manner that is rapidly de-gendering hetero-normative sexual roles. Given the multiple messages accorded women's sexuality in American society today, by virtue of their activity, these women are breaking away from sex as purely reproduction or sex as love, by assuming an approach to sexual experience – the seeming ability to be physically intimate without emotionally intimacy - that has historically been claimed by males.

Women hook up, but they ultimately want the things that young girls are often conditioned to have – the house, the husband, the domestic partner, the family unit. The popular press is rife with the conflict around this. At one end of the spectrum one can easily find books and blogs that instruct women on exactly how to hook up. Conversely,

there exist a number of publications to balance out the "how to hook up" information genre, whereby social pundits and the media continue to marginalize those whose behavior are considered deviant or outside of societal norms.

My study participants reiterated these double standards and conflicts repeatedly throughout their narratives, even while subverting social norms through their hooking up activities. Hooking up was almost always a private activity set outside their normal work and social lives. For example, Jodi maintained a professional, almost prudish demeanor in the workplace, but would post on Craigslist and meet men during her lunch hour. Ariana navigated pleasure and danger by meeting strangers with whom she had not exchanged more than three words. Christina developed an incredibly open attitude towards sexuality as a result of her experiences, yet remained completely under constraints of secrecy and shame as a result of her Catholic upbringing. Situating themselves in a world of conflicting standards and expectations required a continuous evaluation of experiences and potential with a given partner. Katrina summarized it best in the following excerpt. Ultimately, women want more, not less intimacy, but not with everybody, and not all the time:

> *One thing that I wanted to discuss with you after reading your stated research goals, was your definition of casual sex – you write that people go into it with the intention of it being casual but I think that's untrue. I think that there is an assumption that women might say that they have that intention, but they're actually trying, they're hoping, they're thinking to themselves that 'I'll sleep with this guy and perhaps he'll become my husband'. And when it comes to men, that is actually something that I can attest to, if I really like the guy, if I happen to have this great connection, there's that little train in my head that is like hmmm…perhaps he's the one. I don't ever envision myself in a romantic relationship with a woman, so that will always remain casual. But if it's a man, it's definitely a possibility, but for the most part if I know the rules of the situation I don't let that go anywhere.* – Katrina, 37

Emotion(al) Work, Masks and Transformation of Selves

No matter the degree of emotionally intimacy desired with a hook up, the temporally brief casual sex encounter requires much more time and investment, and the experience induces much more reflection about one's self than may have been originally anticipated. For example, when asked what they found "satisfying" about their experiences – from creation of the online persona to completion of the encounter, what they chose to share in the interview was not about sexual gratification per se, but rather how their practices provide a boost to self confidence and pleasure to their ego, and an opportunity to transgress the defined sexual roles ascribed women in American society, which is one of conventional marriage or partnership, enduring relationships, family and monogamous sexual practice.

For all the study participants, going online allowed an "escape" from the pressures of the real world, from real relationships and of an existence conducted in accordance with proscribed social roles. Online mediated sexual encounters provided an escape from the pain of a break up, the lack of physical intimacy in a marriage, or the frustration of working in a chauvinistic male dominated work environment. Going online provided an opportunity for entry into a realm where women could explore, discover and learn about their (sexual) selves and don new masks.

However, underlying all of the reasons for going online, and for making it a plausible avenue to find partners, an opt-in apparatus is in operation. As such, these women could comfortably venture online, with some degree of security and anonymity, knowing that they could, at their option, turn off the computer and sever the virtual engagement. In other words, they traded some risks of "regular" real world connections

(e.g. meeting in a seemingly controversial public place such as a sex club, or later being stalked by someone whom they've rebuffed) for risks of a different kind: hooking up anonymously.

All of the participants alluded in some form or another, to the transformation of selves that occurred as a result of seeking and engaging in Internet mediated casual sex encounters, or transgressing normative sex roles. Transformation, and personal growth, occurred in myriad ways. In the following excerpt, Ann describes how meeting casual sex partners opened her eyes to new ways of looking at the world:

> *There was a woman I met online, she advertised herself as bi-curious and black. We ended up meeting and hitting it off spending some time together. It was a really wonderful experience, but we also learned a lot from each other. We had such different upbringings. I remember that one time she came to my neighborhood, and we were walking outside, and nobody was around. She asked if I felt safe….in fact I felt very safe, but it turned out that she felt very scared that there was no one around. For her, it was comforting to have lots of people and activity going on, where I felt that it was potentially dangerous.* – Ann, 48

Melissa viewed hooking up and the sex she engaged in as a way of defining who she was, noting that "*Sex is being truly free…..within my skin and body…and is [about] pursuing my own personal liberation through my body.*"   For Christina, the transformation she experienced was based in sexual exploration and in new ways of separating love from sex. When asked what she walked away from the experiences with, she responds:

> *I walked away with a lot. I mean I learned a lot about myself. I mean I grew up Asian. My parents didn't talk to me about sex. I mean I was taught, if you're married you make it work no matter what. It has kind of ventured me in other directions too as well, you know even sexually….even just experimenting. I mean I had my first threesome. I*

never thought I would be with another woman or be with two men, but that's happened now. It's just been…I can't pinpoint why it is the way it is…And when my friend told me what happened to her…there was a reason for what happened. I firmly believe it. Because I don't know what…I don't know how my life would have been if she didn't come and tell me about Craigslist or anything because I knew nothing about it. I used to say was if someone had an affair or strayed from my marriage because of sex it's completely unforgivable. Just completely unforgivable. Completely. Now I understand why it happens. I do. I'm not going to say that I would excuse it in my next relationship but I do understand why it happens now. Whether it's just a physical part or just kind of like a need that needed to be met. I do understand it now. And I do understand that sex can just be that. –Christina, 28*

A Note on "Risk"

As I described in the Introduction, much of the research on sexuality and the Internet, particularly public health literature, focuses on whether or not meeting casual sexual partners online is linked to putative increased incidence of sexually transmitted infections and the risk of hooking up to the public's health.

Not surprisingly, for my informants, "risk" often meant something entirely different. Risk was not about being at risk for a sexually transmitted infection, e.g. HIV or HPV; or risk of date rape or violence; but was about *social risk*. When probed about what risk meant, it became clear that any discussion around risk I had with my informants was about risk to selves. Risk was about risk to self, harm to self and risk to reputation. The risk was firmly situated in getting caught or having others discover what they were doing online – by partners, by family members, by social peers, and by colleagues and co-workers. It should be emphasized here that the meanings my study participants ascribe to their Internet mediated hooking up activities are likely not widely shared throughout society. Thus, as pioneers in this new realm they are forging and crafting a widely

accepted set of meanings for this particular sexual practice that cannot be more widely disseminated or applied to society until such meanings become more stabilized.

That said, the activity itself was not viewed as inherently risky until social opprobrium was considered. The tremendous amount of time women often spent screening mediated risk for disease. Often, some of the sites they utilized facilitated discussion of STI's by allowing participants to passively screen for partners who stated in their profiles that they use condoms or only have safe sex. The more experienced participants were comfortable stating that they used condoms or actively discussed STI status with their hook up partners. However, condoms were less likely to be used when my informants were romantically interested in a long term relationship with their hook up partners.[8]

Unheard Voices

There are of course, several potential limitations to the current study design that merit consideration. Among these are self-selection bias (i.e. I have only obtained the narratives of those women that chose to participate in the study and share their stories with me - I imagine that many more exist than are willing to discuss). There is also the issue of accessibility to the Internet and the clear demarcation of socio-economic variables that influence the women that have the means to engage in a practice that requires use of the Internet for social connectivity. Additionally, for reasons that are as yet unclear and require further research to elucidate, it should be noted that this project

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[8] A recent study by Mustanski et al (2010) found that among young men who have sex with men, hooking up with partners on the Internet, condoms were less likely to be used when the sexual partner was viewed as a potential long term partner, and further that one of the goals of meeting partners online was to have a long term relationship Mustanski, B., T. Lyons, et al. (2010). "Internet Use and Sexual Health of Young Men Who Have Sex with Men: A Mixed-Methods Study
" Arch Sex Behav.

lacks ethnic diversity. Thus, these experiences are not representative of all American women using the Internet to hook up online.

Economies of Intimacy: Where the Old is New, and the New is Old

As I described in the previous chapter, what circulates in these practices and narratives of Internet mediated hooking up is an economy of intimacy that holds love, lust, and other capitalist tropes as currency, value and commodity. Women who engage in Internet mediated hooking up adopt the tropes of a capitalist system to maintain a semblance of social stability around their subversive practices. They thereby ensure that that the heterosexist model of intimacy and personal relationships are not ruptured. However, through their participation in this economy of intimacy, my informants experience hooking up in ways that not only have served to form new identities, norms and engagements with sex, but with which they have been forced to reconcile lingering *old* norms around love, sex identities and relationships utilizing a technology that allows for greater sexual freedom, expression and experience.

Scholars have written extensively about how old messages are reiterated and re-inscribed in the new (Forsythe, Clark & Moore). Thus, considering the ubiquity of technology in our lives, I sought to understand not only how technology is relevant to the production of a sexually intimate subject, but *specifically* how my study participants have produced themselves as sexually intimate subjects operating within these realms. There is much here that is new, but the old norms linger as well.

Despite the endless possibilities that exist for women seeking casual sex on the Internet -- the desire for a long term partner -- an ideal partner is still very much present in my informant narratives. However, this desire to find "*Mr. or Ms. Right*" is further

complicated by the seeming array of choice of partners available on the Internet, and a mentality rooted in the "grass is always greener", and accordingly the possibilities for love and sex are endless and ever changing. One is always on the lookout for something better which, on the Internet, can happen unexpectedly, at any time.

While a few of my study participants were very clear that the casual sex they were engaging in was simply sex as the physical act, several others alluded to conflicted feelings about what they do; and how they and others (particularly their casual sex partners) see themselves as a result of their hook up activities. In response to socially proscribed sexual roles, the women who engage in Internet mediated casual sex are making decisions and taking their relationship choices and sexual choices into their own hands in a way that they had not done before and because of a very specific empowering technology, the Internet.

The production of sexual selves within this new economy of intimacy has come about not shaped by the technology per se but by the emotion(al) work that it enables to come to pass and the socialized constraints my informants operate within. The technology may be a facilitator, but it is how my informants have situated themselves along norms in a world where sexuality is often depicted and dominated along a spectrum from the naïve to the scandalous, and where women are increasingly rejecting hetero-normative frameworks while also seeking to situate themselves in a comfortable space whatever their normative practices may be or are shaped by.

The only thing new about Internet mediated hooking up is the technology. Despite some popular culture rhetoric to the contrary, for the most part, for my informants, casual sex is still construed as a stigmatized activity through which socially encoded ideals of

sex, love and gender roles are being contested. Through this work, I discovered that what is old and what is new wasn't as interesting as how the women organized themselves around the intersection of the two when it came to Internet mediated hooking up. It was not the fact that the Internet provided a new opportunity to engage in casual sex. It was not that some media provided guidance in how to do so. Rather, it was how my informants organized themselves and their emotions around a practice that is inherently, or ideally, without emotion, that revealed far more about intimacy and interpersonal relations in mediated form among American women today.

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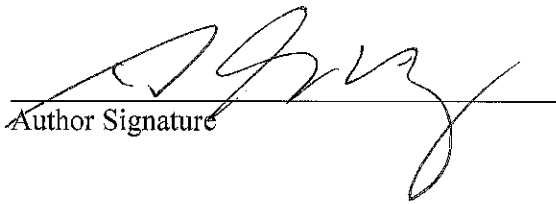Young, R. M. (2002). "Sexuality and the Internet." <u>Science as Culture</u> **11**(2): 215-234.

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