

“I Wish You Could’ve Been There”:

College Students’ Experiences of Performative Making Out

By

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## Abstract

People have sex for many reasons (Meston & Buss, 2007). Although most intercourse occurs in private, some reasons for sexual behavior require an audience. For example, some heterosexual women report making out with other women to arouse men (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Fahs, 2009). Some men report that patronizing strip clubs and talking about heterosexual sex makes them feel more masculine (Flood, 2008; Frank, 2003; Pascoe, 2007). The purpose of the present study was to investigate the prevalence, motivations, and outcomes of college students' experiences with wanting to be seen making out. Participants were 349 female and male college students. Thirty-six percent of women and 37% of men reported making out with someone and wanting others to see them. Significantly more women than men reported same-gender performative experiences. We used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify themes in the qualitative data. Participants reported numerous motivations, including enhancing their image, making an ex-partner jealous, demonstrating a relationship, having fun, and sexually arousing men. Men reported that their reputations were enhanced more often than damaged as a result of their performances. Women reported the opposite pattern. These results provide insights into the functions of sexual behavior as a means of communication, as well as highlight important gender differences that are consistent with problematic cultural belief systems like "slut-shaming" and victim blaming.

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## “I Wish You Could’ve Been There”:

### College Students’ Experiences of Performative Making Out

Why do people engage in sexual behavior? On the surface, this question might seem to have a simple answer: People have sex to experience physical pleasure and to relieve sexual tension. A deeper look, however, reveals that sexual behavior has many other functions.

Meston and Buss (2007) identified 237 reasons for engaging in sexual intercourse. Some of the more popular reasons included “I realized I was in love,” “I was attracted to the person,” and “I was ‘horny’” (p. 481). Interestingly, however, some of the reasons involved situations in which they engaged in sex to express themselves to or about another person external to the sexual act. For example, reasons such as “Someone dared me,” “I wanted to make someone else jealous,” and “I wanted to impress friends” (p. 483), among others, all relied on outsiders’ knowledge of the sexual act in order for its purpose to be fulfilled.

Meston and Buss’s (2007) study focused on reasons for engaging in “sexual intercourse.” Sexual intercourse generally occurs in private settings, but other sexual behaviors, such as “making out,” often occur in settings where others are present. Behaviors like making out, sexual touching, and sexualized dancing have become socially acceptable in certain public settings. Just as engaging in sexual behavior privately can serve multiple purposes, so can engaging in sexual behavior where others may observe it. Engaging in sexual behavior in front of others creates an opportunity for one or both of the participants to use such behavior to communicate outside of the dyad. The focus of the present study was to investigate young people’s experiences of engaging in sexual behaviors where others are present.

The terms “perform” and “performative” figure prominently in discussions of contexts where people engage in sexual behaviors in front of others (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Fahs,

2009; Hamilton, 2007; Lannutti & Denes, 2012; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). In some contexts, the word “perform” is a synonym for “do”; used this way, “performing an action” means doing an action, without implying an audience. In other contexts, however, the word “perform” does imply an audience; used this way, “performing an action” means doing that action in front of others, cognizant of being observed. In this paper, we are using “perform” to mean the latter. In doing so, we do not mean to imply that the performed behaviors are necessarily inauthentic representations of the performer. Similarly, a “performative” setting is one in which an audience is implied.

Although some studies have addressed young people’s performing *talk* about heterosexual sexual activity (Flood, 2008; Pascoe, 2007), most studies on performative sexual *behavior* have focused on same-sex sexual behavior. Most often, these studies have focused on situations in which two (usually heterosexual) women make out with one another. We begin this paper with a discussion of the prevalence of women making out with women in front of others. Next, we review the existing literature describing women’s experiences with engaging in this behavior. Then, we consider ways in which men might experience performative sexuality. Finally, we describe the current study and present our research questions.

### **Women’s Experiences of Performative Sexuality**

Several studies have investigated the prevalence of female–female making out in front of others in a variety of ways. Yost and McCarthy (2012) administered an online survey to 789 male and female college students asking questions about whether they had ever kissed or made out with anyone of the same sex at a college party and their beliefs about how often heterosexual women make out with one another at college parties. They found that 33% of heterosexual women in their sample had made out with another woman at a party, and 69% of the entire

sample had witnessed two presumably heterosexual women making out at a party. Further, on a seven-point scale ranging from *never* to *all the time*, 65.2% of the sample reported that they believed this behavior happens at college parties more often than “rarely.”

Esterline and Galupo (2013) used online convenience sampling to survey 219 heterosexual men and women aged 18 to 25. About a third (38% of the women and 34% of the men) reported having witnessed two people engaging in “same-sex sexual behavior (such as kissing or touching)” at the request of others. Responses to open-ended questions in the survey indicated that most often, those engaging in this behavior were women.

Even mainstream media has picked up on the phenomenon, and it is not one that is confined to college-aged women. For an article in *Salon*, Joiner (2006) interviewed 12 high school and college students, asking about their experiences with witnessing and participating in “girl-on-girl action.” Most of these young people described girls making out to impress guys or to facilitate hookups as commonplace at the parties they attended.

Several studies have used qualitative methods to piece together a picture of many women’s experiences of same-sex sexual behavior in performative settings. Consistently, women report that the presence of a male audience is an integral motivator to perform (Diamond, 2005; Fahs, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Fahs (2009) conducted semistructured interviews with 40 women recruited via entertainments and arts listings in two U.S. cities over the course of three years. Fahs asked the women several questions about their sexual histories and practices. She found that heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian women recounted stories of being asked by men to kiss another woman with the understanding that the kiss would be sexually excitatory for the men. Hamilton obtained similar findings in her interviews of 43 undergraduate women who lived in a well-known “party dorm”—that is, a

residence hall that attracted students who wished to maintain proximity to the “party scene” (p. 150). All of the women Hamilton interviewed who had participated in “same-sex eroticism,” which included kissing on the mouth, with or without the use of tongues, and fondling of breasts and buttocks (p. 164), reported doing so for the benefit of a male audience. The women also noted that they were careful to perform this behavior only in contexts where it would be interpreted as heterosexual and to engage only with other women they trusted were heterosexual. It seems that performing for and attracting nearby men is important for some heterosexual women to protect their heterosexual identity. Lannutti and Denes (2012) lent support to this concept with their finding that observers were more likely to label women who kissed women in a bar setting where men were watching as heterosexual than as bisexual or lesbian.

Female members of other species also engage in performative same-sex sexual behavior—that is, sexual behavior in front of others of their species. Shearer and Katz (2006) studied the frequency of ejaculation in male goats that were exposed to female–female mounting. They found that the males that were exposed to mounting females demonstrated a greater number of sexual behaviors, shorter latency periods to first ejaculation, and shorter intervals between ejaculations than the males that were exposed to non-mounting estrous females, non-estrous females, and familiar males. The authors concluded that female–female mounting in goats serves as proceptive behavior for attracting males. Although these findings are not necessarily generalizable to humans, it is interesting that in other species, females’ same-sex sexual behavior had the effect of attracting or arousing males.

In contexts where it is understood that heterosexual women sometimes make out with each other, some women have also reported taking the opportunity to “experiment” with their sexuality (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). Thompson

and Morgan (2008) used a mixed-methods survey to obtain information about 288 undergraduate women's conceptualizations of their sexual orientations. They found that a subset of women identified as "mostly straight," an identity distinct from straight, bisexual, and lesbian identities. The authors found that women who considered themselves mostly straight often manifested this identity through experimentation with sexual behavior like kissing with other women. These women also reported feeling pressure to "choose" among straight, gay, or bisexual identities, as well as a strong discomfort with doing so. A performative setting, including the male audience, may provide an environment in which mostly straight women can express a particular side of their sexuality without being asked to explain it. In some cases, having performative experiences with other women changed women's conceptualizations of their own sexual orientations from "straight" to "mostly straight" (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Rupp & Taylor, 2010).

### **Performative Sexual Behavior in Men**

Although most of the work pertaining to performative same-sex sexual behavior has focused on women's experiences with performative same-sex sexual behavior, Esterline and Galupo (2013) attempted to gain some insight into men's experiences with the phenomenon. They found that if men had had experience with performing or being asked to perform sexual behavior with another man—a rare occurrence—the context was more likely to be a game, a joke, or a dare than a potentially arousing experience for observers. Pascoe's (2007) work supports this finding. She conducted an ethnographic study, using methods like fieldwork and interviews, on sexuality and masculinity in a working-class, racially diverse high school. Pascoe noted, "While girls touched other girls across social environments, boys usually touched each other in rule-bound environments (such as sports) or as a joke to imitate fags" (p. 96).

Evidence suggests that although men are less likely than women to *perform* same-sex sexual behavior, men are more likely than women to *request* same-sex sexual behavior. Esterline and Galupo (2013) found that 26% of men reported having asked or encouraged others to engage in same-sex sexual behavior compared with 5% of women. Men seem to facilitate the behavior by presenting themselves as an audience rather than as potential performers: Only 13% of men in that study reported having been asked or encouraged to engage in same-sex sexual behavior, compared with 54% of women.

Men's performance of sexuality has been explored in broader contexts than that of same-sex sexual behavior. Frank (2003) investigated men's motivations for and experiences of regularly attending strip clubs. She argued that men's experiences in strip clubs served to solidify their heterosexual and gender identities. She concluded that by performing traditional masculine sexual desire, men can publicly display masculinity and increase their own feelings of sexual potency, even without performing physically or sexually.

Flood (2008) conducted semistructured interviews with 17 heterosexual-identified Australian men aged 18 to 26 exploring their sexual practices and how those practices operate in their social systems. The men in Flood's study indicated that competition between men over sexual experience was an integral element of male bonding and that social status was achieved via sexual experience. Flood argued that because heterosexual sex is a pathway to masculine status, men's sexual experiences often incorporate a real or imagined male audience. That is, even in men's private sexual encounters, they anticipate their male friends' approval (e.g., "If the *boys* could see me now!," p. 348). In a similar vein, Pascoe (2007) stated that even simply verbally expressing heterosexual desire is enough to establish a "baseline masculinity" among high-school aged boys (p. 87). In some cases, these methods of bonding through heterosexual

sex and sexual desire may become uncomfortable, coercive, or even threatening to women (Flood, 2008; Pascoe, 2007; Sanday, 2007).

### **Present Study**

In contrast with the growing body of research on performative same-sex sexual behavior for women, it appears that other forms of performative sexuality have been largely overlooked. For instance, it is likely that romantic couples perform sexual behavior, like making out, in front of others for numerous reasons. However, we were unable to find literature addressing this topic. In addition, few studies have addressed men's experiences of performative same-sex sexual behavior (Esterline & Galupo, 2013). The purpose of the present study is to use qualitative and quantitative methods to explore both women's and men's experiences of performing sexual behavior—making out, in particular—publicly, in both same- and different-gender situations. We hoped to identify individuals' reasons for engaging in making out in front of others, as well as more general functions the performance of sexual behavior might serve.

In designing this study, we made some definitional decisions that we thought would increase the richness of participants' responses. First, we decided to use the term “making out” rather than terms like “kissing” or “sexual behavior.” We thought that the term “sexual behavior” would be too unfocused, rendering the responses we obtained difficult to synthesize meaningfully. Further, the term “sexual behavior” might have evoked images of behaviors like oral sex or sexual intercourse, which might have led participants who had not performed these particular behaviors—but had performed other sexual behavior in front of others—to report that they had not had this experience. On the other hand, although the term “kissing” is likely to evoke more similar images from one individual to the next, we thought “kissing” would be too broad and would capture experiences that the participants did not perceive as sexual. Finally, we

thought that specifying sexual behaviors, like caressing or groping of the breasts or buttocks, would be too narrow, limiting the number and types of experiences participants report. “Making out” is a colloquial term most often used to describe a sexual style of kissing. Wikipedia (2013) defined “making out” as, “a euphemism of American origin dating back to at least 1949 ... used synonymously with the terms petting, kissing, and necking, but may also refer to non-penetrative sex acts such as heavy petting.” The Urban Dictionary (2013) defined it as “open mouth kissing usually with tongue, and occasionally groping between 2 individuals.” It appears that making out is generally understood to be sexual without requiring any specific sexual acts and so balances these options nicely.

Second, we decided not to use the phrase “in public,” because performative making out might occur in a context that would not be considered public, such as at someone’s home. Instead, we asked participants to describe behavior that occurred “in front of others.” Third, we chose to use the terms “girl” and “guy” rather than “woman” and “man” because college students typically refer to one another using those terms. Additionally, some of these situations could have occurred when the participants or their partners were younger than 18.

Finally, we chose to ask about this behavior from a variety of perspectives (e.g., the perspective of someone engaging in performative making out, the perspective of someone asking others to make out). In this study, however, we focused on only one of these perspectives—situations in which participants wanted to be seen making out.

We hoped to answer several research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What was the prevalence of performative making out in situations in which participants wanted to be seen? Other studies have focused solely on women’s experiences or have focused on women’s and men’s experiences solely with same-sex

performative behavior. In this paper we included prevalence rates for both men's and women's experiences with both same- and different-sex making out in these situations.

RQ2: What motivated participants to make out in front of others? Existing literature has explored women's motivations for making out with other women in front of men. Our intent was to provide a more comprehensive look at both women's and men's motivations.

RQ3: What are the actual outcomes of making out in front of others? Sometimes people get what they wanted out of engaging in a behavior, but this is not always the case. By asking participants what positive, negative, and neutral outcomes they expected to occur and what outcomes actually occurred as a result of their making out, we hoped to separate function from motivation.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were college students at the University of Kansas who were enrolled in the university's introductory psychology course. By participating in the study, students earned research credit, which was one way to complete a course requirement. Data were collected over the course of the fall 2013 semester. Participants did not know the study's topic upon signing up.

The complete sample consisted of 349 participants, including 155 (44%) women and 194 (56%) men who completed the survey. Originally, 367 students had participated, but 18 were excluded because of excessive missing data. With regard to race or ethnicity, 281 (81%) of the participants identified as European American/White, 21 (6%) identified as Hispanic American/Latino/Latina, 11 (3%) identified as Asian American, 10 (3%) identified as African American/Black, 3 (1%) identified as Native American/American Indian, 10 (3%) identified as biracial/multiracial, and 13 (4%) did not identify their race or ethnicity. In terms of sexual

orientation, 334 (96%) identified as heterosexual (straight), 9 (3%) identified as homosexual (gay/lesbian), 3 (1%) identified as bisexual, and 3 (1%) chose the “other” option. Participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 35 years, with a mean age of 18.81. Participants under 18 were required to provide parental consent before participating in the study.

### **Procedure**

Participants were provided with a link that directed them to an information statement (see Appendix A). The information statement informed them that the purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of young people’s sexual behavior. They were informed that they could end their participation at any time, as well as skip questions without penalty. They were also informed that although we asked for their names for the purpose of assigning research credit, their names would not be associated with their responses. After they provided informed consent, they were provided with a link to the questionnaire. After participants completed the questionnaire, they were directed to a debriefing statement that gave them more information about the study’s topic and informed them about how to contact the researchers, the IRB, and counseling services if the study had raised issues that they wanted to discuss (see Appendix B).

### **Questionnaire**

Participants completed an online survey (see Appendix C). After a brief set of demographic questions, participants were asked to respond to a number of open-ended questions about their experiences with engaging in or witnessing making out behavior in settings where others could observe the behavior. The questionnaire described eight situations. If participants had not experienced a particular situation or preferred not to answer regarding their experience, the branching logic skipped over the follow-up questions and presented them with the next situation.

The first two situations involved the participants' experience with making out with someone where they wanted others to see (Wanted to be Seen with a Guy, Wanted to be Seen with a Girl). The next two situations involved the participants' experience with making out with someone where they did not mind if others saw. The fifth and sixth situations involved the participants' experience with having been asked to make out with someone in front of others. Each participant—regardless of sexual orientation—was asked about making out with a guy and a girl because previous research has showed that performative sexual behaviors were not limited to partners that might be expected based on individuals' sexual orientations (Esterline & Galupo, 2013). Follow-up questions for all six of these situations asked for more information about the event including who the partner was, who else was around, and what the participant was thinking or feeling at the time. Participants were also asked about positive, negative, or other outcomes of each situation. Follow-up questions for situations in which participants had been asked to make out with someone included additional questions about the requester and the perceived benefits or consequences of agreeing or declining to participate in the requested behavior. We also asked why participants thought the requester had asked them to engage in the behavior, as well as why they agreed or declined, depending on their response.

The seventh situation involved participants' experience with asking or encouraging two people to make out in front of others. Follow-up questions included those described above, as well as a question about the genders of the two people. We also asked participants why they had asked or encouraged the two people to make out and why they thought the two people had agreed or declined.

The last situation involved participants' experience with observing two people making out in front of others. In the follow-up questions, participants were asked to describe the

situation, who else was around, and the genders of the two people. Participants were also asked why they had noticed or watched the two people, why they thought the two people were making out in front of others, and whether or not they thought the two people wanted to be seen.

If participants did not answer “Yes” for any of the above situations, they were asked to describe a situation they had been in that was the most similar to one of the situations described. They were asked to include details such as who was involved, the setting, what led up to the situation, and what happened during the situation.

### **Coding the Qualitative Responses**

The qualitative data were analyzed using the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We took an inductive approach, creating themes to fit our data instead of analyzing our data within an existing theoretical framework. Along with a group of five undergraduate research assistants, we read the narratives and developed coding categories that reflected important themes. We focused particularly on participants’ responses related to their motivations and their anticipated and actual outcomes. After themes were identified for each situation, we coded the data according to the themes. We then met to discuss any difficult or confusing themes we encountered and agreed on ways to clarify those themes. Once we agreed upon a final set of themes for each situation, we coded the data for the final time.

We obtained kappa values using data from the primary coder and one assistant coder, whom we chose before calculating kappa values. Kappa values ranged from  $-.01$  to  $1.00$ , with a median value of  $.86$ . Eighty-four percent of the kappa values were greater than or equal to  $.70$ , and 95% of the values were greater than or equal to  $.50$ . Disagreements between coders were resolved by discussion. These codes were used in all subsequent analyses.

## Results

### Prevalence of Performative Making Out

In this paper, we chose to focus on two situations: Wanted to be Seen with a Guy and Wanted to be Seen with a Girl. Table 1 shows prevalence data for participants' responses for each of these situations. Overall, about a third of all participants reported having made out with someone in a situation where they wanted others to see it. As would be expected in a largely heterosexual sample, more women than men wanted to be seen making out with a guy, and more men than women wanted to be seen making out with a girl. Focusing on same-sex making out, a binomial logistic regression showed that significantly fewer men (2%) than women (8%) wanted to be seen making out with someone of the same gender,  $e^{\beta} = 0.14$ ,  $p = .003$ .

Table 2 presents sexual orientation data for these participants, participants' reports of when these situations occurred, and information about setting and the presence of alcohol. Although alcohol is often present at college parties, our participants described situations from college, high school, and middle school/junior high, so we could not conclude that alcohol was present at parties unless the participant explicitly mentioned it. Other settings participants mentioned frequently were bars and clubs, where alcohol is usually present.

### Motivations in Performative Making Out

A number of themes emerged when we asked participants to describe why they wanted to be seen making out and what their expectations were for the outcomes of their experiences.

Table 3 shows the motivation themes we identified in each of the situations, and the numbers of men and women who reported each theme.

Table 1

*Prevalence of Performative Making Out in the Complete Sample: Numbers and Percentages of Women and Men Who Reported Wanting to Be Seen Making Out*

Situation	Women ( <i>n</i> = 155)	Men ( <i>n</i> = 194)
Wanted to be Seen with a Guy <sup>a</sup>	44 (28%)	3 (2%)
Wanted to be Seen with a Girl <sup>b</sup>	13 (8%)	69 (35%)

*Note.* Table entries are the numbers and percentages of women and men in the total sample who reported having experienced each situation. Percentages do not add to 100% because some participants reported having experienced more than one of these situations, and some reported having been in none of these situations.

<sup>a</sup> “Have you ever made out with a *guy* in front of others where you *wanted others to see you?*”

<sup>b</sup> “Have you ever made out with a *girl* in front of others where you *wanted others to see you?*”

Table 2

*Characteristics of the Performative Making Out Situations*

Characteristics	Wanted to be seen with someone of the other gender		Wanted to be seen with someone of the same gender	
	Women ( <i>n</i> = 44)	Men ( <i>n</i> = 69)	Women ( <i>n</i> = 13)	Men ( <i>n</i> = 3)
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>				
Heterosexual (straight)	43 (98%)	65 (94%)	12 (92%)	0 (0%)
Homosexual (lesbian/gay)	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	3 (100%)
Bisexual	1 (2%)	1 (1%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
Other	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Time during which this occurred</b>				
Middle School/Junior High	14 (32%)	30 (43%)	3 (23%)	2 (67%)
High School	28 (64%)	31 (45%)	9 (69%)	1 (33%)
College	1 (2%)	6 (9%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
Other	1 (2%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Setting/presence of alcohol</b>				
Alcohol was mentioned	16 (36%)	27 (39%)	6 (46%)	1 (33%)
A party setting was mentioned	21 (48%)	29 (42%)	11 (85%)	1 (33%)

*Note.* Percentages are based on the number of women and men who reported having been in each situation. Sexual orientation and time during which the situation occurred were assessed with multiple choice questions. Data about the setting and the presence of alcohol were derived from thematic coding of the qualitative responses; they reflect the numbers and percentages of participants who mentioned alcohol and/or a party setting.

Table 3

*Motivation Themes for Participants Who Wanted to be Seen Making Out*

Themes	Wanted to be seen with someone of the other gender		Wanted to be seen with someone of the same gender	
	Women ( <i>n</i> = 44)	Men ( <i>n</i> = 69)	Women ( <i>n</i> = 13)	Men ( <i>n</i> = 3)
<b>Enhancing their image</b>	<b>13 (30%)</b>	<b>41 (59%)</b>	<b>8 (62%)</b>	<b>1 (33%)</b>
To look better to others	12 (27%)	31 (38%)	5 (39%)	1 (33%)
To prove they could do it	1 (2%)	10 (15%)	3 (23%)	0 (0%)
<b>Causing jealousy</b>	<b>24 (55%)</b>	<b>3 (4%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>1 (33%)</b>
To make their ex jealous	16 (36%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
To make their partner's ex jealous	3 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
To make others jealous	5 (11%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)
<b>Demonstrating a relationship</b>	<b>15 (34%)</b>	<b>14 (20%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
To show that their partner was unavailable	10 (23%)	9 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
To make someone back off from partner	5 (11%)	5 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Having fun</b>	<b>4 (9%)</b>	<b>8 (12%)</b>	<b>10 (77%)</b>	<b>2 (67%)</b>
To have fun	3 (7%)	5 (7%)	5 (39%)	1 (33%)
It was a game/dare/bet	1 (2%)	3 (4%)	5 (39%)	1 (33%)
<b>Facilitating sex and relationships</b>	<b>2 (5%)</b>	<b>10 (14%)</b>	<b>1 (8%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
To facilitate sex	0 (0%)	6 (9%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
To start a relationship	2 (5%)	4 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<b>Turning men on</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>3 (23%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>9 (20%)</b>	<b>17 (25%)</b>	<b>1 (8%)</b>	<b>1 (33%)</b>

*Note.* Table entries are the numbers and percentages of women and men in each situation who reported each theme. Percentages do not add to 100% because some participants reported multiple motivations.

**Enhancing their image.** Many participants reported that they wanted to be seen making out because it would make them look better to others or to prove that they were capable of making out with a particular person or with anyone at all. Both men and women reported this motivation; however, men reported it much more frequently.

Many men reported wanting to be seen making out with a girl to show off to their male friends. Men said that engaging in this behavior made them look like a “player” and a “champion,” and that they expected “friends to give me credit” (M, #137), “mega bragging rights” (M, #126), and “a few high fives at minimum” (M, #127) to result from the situation. A few men also suggested that more intimate emotion was associated with this behavior, indicating that their friends would be “proud” to see them making out with an attractive woman. Some men reported showing off for their fraternity brothers as a way to “gain more rank” within the fraternity, particularly with older fraternity members. These men wanted to prove that they could “pull” (i.e., attract or seduce) attractive women. For example, one man said, “I was at a bar and she was a very pretty girl, and i wanted to show my fraternity brothers that i could pull” (M, #279). Another man described his thought process: “If I get with her I’ll gain respect from my brothers. ... I would be seen as a guy who can get girls. ... The next day I was complemented [sic] by a few guys about my intimate moment with the girl” (M, #63). Another man captured the desire to promote bonding among male friends. When asked who he wanted to see him making out with a woman, he said, “My bros so they thought I myself was a bro. ... I would be accepted into a new state of brodomo [sic]” (M, #210).

Women’s responses that were coded for this motivation for making out with a guy were often also coded for the “Causing Jealousy” theme, described in the next section. These participants indicated that if observers (usually female) were jealous of the participant’s

relationship with her make-out partner, the participant would be perceived as more attractive or desirable. For instance, when asked who she wanted to see her making out with her partner, one woman responded, “other female peers, particularly ones who thought the guy I was with attractive” (W, #71). She went on to say that she expected, “girls to be jealous, and me to feel better about myself.” Some women also reported that similar effects came from making an ex-partner jealous. One woman reported thinking, “I would make myself seem desirable” (W, #239) when she made out with someone in front of her ex-boyfriend. These performative acts seem to have the dual purpose of causing jealousy in others while simultaneously enhancing the female participants’ images.

Women who wanted to be seen making out with a girl to enhance their image frequently reported wanting to impress male observers. One woman said, “I wanted the guys to see that im [sic] fun” (W, #362). Another reported, “I was interesting [sic] in impressing the boys” (W, #324).

Finally, both men and women reported wanting to prove that they could make out with someone in a particular situation. One man said that he wanted his friends to see him make out with his soon-to-be girlfriend because “they didn’t think I had it in me” (M, #3). A woman said that she made out with a girl in front of a large group of male and female friends “so they knew i was comfortable kissing a girl and other things” (W, #164).

**Causing jealousy.** Over half of the women in our sample who reported wanting to be seen making out with a man reported that they had wanted to elicit jealousy in one particular onlooker or in many onlookers. Most often, they reported wanting to make an ex-partner jealous, although some reported wanting to make their partner’s ex-partner jealous or wanting to make female peers jealous. No women reported this motivation for wanting to be seen making out with

a girl. Men overall rarely reported this theme. Only two men reported wanting to make their ex-partner jealous by making out with a girl. One man reported that he had made out with his current girlfriend because she had wanted to make his ex-partner jealous, but because causing jealousy was not the participant's motivation his response was not coded for this theme. Only one man who made out with a girl and one man who made out with a guy reported wanting to make others (i.e., someone other than their ex-partner) jealous.

Participants described varied motivations for wanting to make ex-partners jealous. Several women described hoping that the act would “trigger” old romantic or sexual feelings in those ex-partners and make them want the participant back. One woman said that she kissed someone in front of her ex-partner because, “i wasn't over him” and that she expected him to “confront me about it and say something so i would know he was still interested” (W, #58). Another woman said that by making out with another guy in front of her ex, “I would make myself seem desirable” (W, #239). A third woman wanted her ex “to see I didn't need him anymore” but also said that she “hoped he would have wanted me back” (W, #183). In contrast, a few women reported making out with a guy as a means to make their ex so jealous that they would leave the area (e.g., “I expected him to be upset and as a result, he would leave the party,” W, #150). It appears that, for some women, causing jealousy was closely tied to enhancing their image, whereas others hoped to use jealousy to influence their ex-partners' actions or to gather information about their ex-partners' emotions. Men rarely reported this motivation for making out, indicating that they derived enhanced image simply from the act of performing heterosexuality and that causing jealousy in others was not a salient motivator for men in our sample in general.

**Demonstrating a relationship.** Both men and women often described wanting to be seen making out with someone to demonstrate their relationship with that person. Consistent with our mostly heterosexual sample, this motivation was only reported when participants described wanting to be seen making out with someone of the other gender. Often, participants who reported this motivation described situations in which they were concerned that others might approach their partners with romantic or sexual intent. Participants also described situations in which they wanted to announce the existence of a relationship or to show their partner off to others.

Several women who wanted to demonstrate a relationship with their male partner by making out with him described negative emotions and motivations associated with the situation. They reported feeling “bitchy,” “manipulative,” and “controlling,” and one woman said, “It was an immature, jealousy-motivated act” (W, #140). The negative emotions women described were not always their own, however. There was some overlap between women who associated causing jealousy in others with looking more attractive and desirable and women who associated inducing negative feelings in other women with positive feelings for themselves. One woman said that she expected “girls to be jealous, and me to feel better about myself” (W, #71) when she made out with her male partner. In a few instances, women reported simply enjoying being with their partners and wanting to show others that the relationship existed. One woman said, “I like him and hes [sic] showing affection on me with everyone seeing” (W, #362).

Some men in our sample also reported wanting to demonstrate a relationship with their female partners. In contrast to the women who reported this motivation, men usually described feeling positive emotions like “confident,” “happy,” “excited,” “lucky,” and “proud” related to making out with their partners. Many men described feeling love and affection for their partners.

Some men regarded their ability to make other men back off from their partners as a positive element of the situation. One man implied that he demonstrated a relationship with his girlfriend for her comfort and safety, saying, “my girlfriend didn’t have to worry about that guy hitting on her” (M, #27) after he made out with her. This difference in the way that men and women described the emotions attached to demonstrating a relationship with a partner echoes the difference in the way they described wanting to enhance their images or cause jealousy in others. Women seemed to use performative making out as a means to avoid or counter negative emotions more often than to enhance positive emotions, whereas men seemed to use this behavior as a means to enhance positive emotions more often than to avoid or counter negative emotions.

**Having fun.** One of the most prominent themes in our data was one of feeling carefree, spontaneous, and adventurous when engaging in performative making out. Many participants, both male and female, simply stated that they were “just having fun” when asked why they chose to make out. Also common were feelings of excitement and humor—many participants stated that making out with someone in front of others would be “funny.” Desire to be spontaneous, especially in college settings, was mentioned frequently. Multiple participants invoked the currently trendy saying, “you only live once” (commonly abbreviated “YOLO”), such as the man who wrote, “im a yolo monster,” (M, #80). Some participants indicated that they simply wanted to make out, so they did. Others took more of a “why not?” attitude toward their performances, emphasizing that their behavior was “carefree” and “harmless.”

Also included in the theme of having fun and feeling spontaneous was the existence of some kind of game, dare, or bet as a motivator for making out. Both men and women reported this element in the situations they described. Most commonly mentioned were games such as

“Truth or Dare” and “Spin the Bottle.” Many of the participants who described playing one of these games said that they agreed to make out simply because it was “part of the game.” Other participants emphasized the casual nature of their situation, saying that it was “merely a game” (W, #35), or, “we just kissed on a dare” (M, #312).

Most of these responses suggest a lighthearted attitude toward making out in front of others. Some participants, such as the woman who said she “did the dare to not have to do a worse one” (W, #267), did have such a carefree attitude. Although performative making out can result in negative outcomes, it appears that many college and high school students consider this behavior a source of low-risk fun.

**Facilitating sex and relationships.** Some participants reported using performative making out as a first step to a potential relationship. Four men and two women reported having this motivation. Colloquially, the phrase “I like him/her” is generally understood to mean that a romantic interest exists. Some participants used this phrase when describing their reasons for making out with someone. For example, one woman said that she wanted “One of my guy friends that I liked” (W, #292) to see her making out with someone so that he would start a relationship with her. She said, “I wanted to make him interested in me. ... To start dating him” (W, #292). The other woman said, “I foolishly expected a relationship from that one kiss” (W, #261). Men who reported this motivation said that they expected things like “to get her number” and to “become closer” with their make-out partner.

Other participants reported using performative making out as a first step to sexual arousal or further sexual behavior. Six of these participants were men; only one woman reported having this motivation for making out. Some common reasons men gave for engaging in the behavior were, “I was horny” (M, #168), “I wanted to get it in” (M, #56), and “I wanted her really badly”

(M, #305). Some expectations men provided were, “I figured I would ‘get lucky’” (M, #5), and “For the both of us to get aroused and want to go have sex” (M, #172). These findings suggest that although men and women both used performative making out to pursue romantic relationships, it may be less acceptable for women to use the behavior to facilitate sex.

**Turning men on.** Three women who made out with other women reported wanting to look attractive to male onlookers. Consistent with the literature on sexual performativity in women (Diamond, 2005; Fahs, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012), some described wanting to sexually arouse those onlookers. One woman reported an expectation that, “boys think its hot” (W, #55), which was echoed by another woman who said she expected “the guys to think it was ‘hot,’” (W, #273). The third woman who reported this motivation said she wanted the “boys i liked” to see her making out with her female friend “because i knew it would give them satisfaction to see it” (W, #295). Although not many women in our sample reported this motivation, it did motivate same-gender performative making out for some.

### **Functions of Performative Making Out**

Although our participants listed a number of motivations for engaging in performative making out, the results and the consequences of the situations were not always what the participants had intended. We used a few different questions with the hope of capturing participants’ perceptions of how their decisions to engage in performative making out actually turned out. We asked participants to describe positive, negative, and other outcomes of the situation, and the coding team also evaluated whether it seemed each participant had gotten what they wanted out of the situation. Table 4 shows the outcomes of performative making out participants reported and the numbers of men and women who reported each response.

Table 4

*Outcome Themes for Participants Who Wanted to be Seen Making Out*

Themes	Wanted to be seen with the other gender		Wanted to be seen with the same gender	
	Women ( <i>n</i> = 44) <sup>a</sup>	Men ( <i>n</i> = 69) <sup>b</sup>	Women ( <i>n</i> = 13) <sup>b</sup>	Men ( <i>n</i> = 3) <sup>a</sup>
Positive outcomes				
Image-related outcomes				
I looked better to others	0 (0%)	13 (19%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
Sex- and relationship-related outcomes				
We became friends/closer	3 (7%)	9 (13%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
We started dating	2 (5%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
It led to further sexual behavior	1 (2%)	3 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
General positive outcomes				
I felt good/had fun	4 (9%)	6 (9%)	0 (0%)	2 (67%)
It happened (positive in and of itself)	0 (0%)	6 (9%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
I had a novel experience	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (33%)
Total positive outcomes	12 (27%)	39 (57%)	3 (23%)	3 (100%)
Negative outcomes				
Image-related outcomes				
My reputation was/could be damaged	5 (11%)	0 (0%)	2 (15%)	0 (0%)
I was made fun of	0 (0%)	2 (3%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
My sexual orientation was questioned	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (15%)	0 (0%)
Sex- and relationship-related outcomes				
I hurt someone's feelings	3 (7%)	3 (4%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
It led to a fight	3 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
General negative outcomes				
I felt awkward	2 (5%)	4 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
I felt guilty	1 (2%)	1 (1%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)
I was embarrassed	3 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total negative outcomes	17 (39%)	10 (14%)	7 (54%)	0 (0%)
Other outcomes				
Other outcomes	6 (14%)	6 (9%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)

*Note.* Table entries are the numbers and percentages of men and women in each situation who reported each response. Percentages do not add to 100% because some participants reported multiple outcomes, and some participants reported no outcomes.

**Did they get what they wanted?** Because participants did not always explicitly say whether they got what they wanted out of the situation, we coded whether it seemed as though the participants got something that they wanted out of the situation. Of the participants who wanted to be seen making out with someone of the other gender, 57 (50%) reported that they got what they wanted from the situation, and 9 (8%) reported that they did not get what they wanted. Of the participants who wanted to be seen making out with someone of the same gender, 6 (38%) reported that they got what they wanted from the situation, and 1 (6%) reported that they did not get what they wanted. In both of these situations, many participants reported other outcomes that they had not explicitly anticipated.

**Image.** Similar to the finding that the participants who reported engaging in performative making out for the purpose of looking better to others were mostly men, the participants who reported actually looking better to others were almost exclusively men. Men reported that their friends were “impressed,” gave them “props” and “respect,” and “complimented” them. One man said he was “known as a baller” after making out with a “really hot girl at a party” (M, #94), and another man indicated that the situation elevated his social status, saying, “People remembered me after the event” (M, #272).

No women described looking better to others as a positive outcome of making out with a guy. Of the 13 women who reported having made out with a girl, only one reported looking better to others as a positive outcome of making out with a girl, saying, “boys were turned on towards me” (W, #295).

Conversely, the majority of participants who reported suffering damage to their reputation or worrying about their reputation as a result of making out with someone in front of others were women. Five of the women who made out with men mentioned damage to their

image—either hypothetically (e.g., “People could think I’m easy,” F #45) or actually (e.g., “I was now thought of as a slut,” F #239). Women who made out with women had similar concerns about appearing “slutty,” and one woman counted the fact that “its on my ‘record’ i have made out with a girl” (W, #267) as a negative outcome. A few women expressed concerns that, by making out with a girl, their sexual orientation would now be misinterpreted by the onlookers. Responses from these women included, “People could think I was a lesbian” (W, #45), and “I appeared to be a lesbian” (W, #295).

**Sex and relationships.** In our sample, performative making out worked as a bonding activity in a few different ways. Some of the men and women reported that the making out experience was the beginning of a new friendship. They said things like, “I made a new friend” (W, #231), and, “The girl and I became good friends” (M, #107). Other men and women reported that the experience was the start of a new romantic relationship. One woman responded, “We started dating a month later and have been together for almost three years now” (W, #45). A man said, “I dated that girl for a couple years, it was a good relationship” (M, #270). Still other women and men reported that the encounter led to further sexual behavior between the participant and the make-out partner.

In other cases, performative making out strengthened preexisting relationships. Both men and women reported becoming “closer” with their romantic partners after making out with them in front of others. One woman who made out with a female friend reported that the experience strengthened their friendship, saying, “We bonded as friends with a strong trust between each other” (W, #6).

Other participants reported that performative making out had harmful effects on various kinds of relationships. Some women and men reported that this behavior hurt someone else’s

feelings. A woman who made out with a girl at a party said that “girls were mad” (W, #55) as a result, although she did not offer any speculation as to what made the girls mad. Another man said, “My [female] best friend got angry with me” (M, #326) when he made out with an ex-partner, although he also did not explain why she was angry. Some of these participants reported wanting to be seen in order to make someone jealous. One man who made out with his girlfriend at her request to make another girl jealous reported “the other girl got upset” (M, #7) as a negative outcome. A woman reported making out with her partner in front of her ex-boyfriend to make him jealous but listed, “My exboyfriend was mad” (W, #105), as a negative outcome. It appears that even when participants intended to induce jealousy in someone else, they sometimes regarded that person’s hurt feelings as a negative outcome. Other participants said that the event resulted in the dissolution of relationships. One woman said, “I hurt more than one person. ... It ruined a friendship” (W, #155) when she tried to make a friend jealous by making out with someone she “didn’t really have much interest in.” Another woman said she made out with a close male friend who offered to help her make her ex-partner jealous. She explained that a negative outcome of this situation was, “I ruined a good friendship by making it awkward” (W, #328).

**Overall experience.** Many participants also gave an overall impression of how their experience making out in front of others made them feel. Similar to the outcomes participants reported related to image, sex, and relationships, participants reported both positive and negative outcomes related to their overall experience.

With regard to positive experiences, participants reported outcomes such as having a fun or novel experience. One man said, “It was fun and we both enjoyed it” (M, #21). Participants said things like, “i got to kiss a beautiful girl” (M, #86), indicating that the experience of making

out with someone was positive in and of itself. Other participants reported novel experiences like having their first kiss, and one woman said that she gained the “experience of kissing an English man” (W, #35).

Participants’ negative overall experiences most often included feelings of awkwardness, embarrassment, and guilt. One man, describing making out with a new girlfriend in front of his friends in middle school, wrote, “It was really awkward after” (M, #254). A woman reported having “feelings of embarrassment afterwards” (W, #261) because she had expected the experience to result in a relationship. Another woman said that by making out with a girl she had been “impulsive” and “did something i regretted the following morning” (W, #295).

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate college students’ experiences with making out in front of others. Our findings contribute to the literature describing the multitude of reasons for why people engage in sexual behavior. Much other research on this behavior has focused on women making out with women (Diamond, 2005; Fahs, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Lannutti & Denes, 2012; Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012) or on same-sex performativity (Esterline & Galupo, 2013). In this study, the inclusion of both same- and different-gender pairs in our study allowed for a broader understanding of performative making out in college culture.

#### **Motivations for Sexual Behavior**

The results of this study indicated that college students engage in performative making out for a variety of reasons. For men, the most common motivation overall was that of wanting to enhance one’s image or reputation by making out in front of others. Men reported this motivation more often than women did. Most often, men expressed that they wanted their male friends to see them making out with a woman so that they would get compliments, approval, and

improved social status. Some men specifically mentioned wanting their fraternity brothers to see them making out, and one man said that he hoped to “gain more rank throughout the fraternity” (M, #240). Recent news reports have linked fraternities with rape, including gang rape, on college campuses (Steinhauer & Pérez-Peña, 2014)—a connection that has been made before in scholarly research (Sanday, 2007). One possible reason for this relationship is that gang rape could be conceptualized as a form of performative behavior that might help men gain status within fraternities or avoid losing status by refusing to participate or attempting to stop the activity. Our findings highlight some of the dynamics that might underpin this link between fraternities and rape.

The most common motivation that women reported was that of causing jealousy in others, usually an ex-partner. This motivation and the motivation to demonstrate a relationship, which was reported approximately equally often by women and men, indicate that some college students believe that making out in front of others is a way of communicating or sending messages about relationships to observers. For example, someone who makes out with someone else to make their ex-partner jealous might intend to send the message that they have “moved on” from that partner. Someone who makes out with their current romantic partner in front of others might be communicating that a romantic relationship exists and warning others not to approach their partner with romantic or sexual intentions. Because performative making out is more common among young people than among older populations, it may be that young people use sexual behavior as a form of communication more often than older populations as well.

A prominent motivation for both genders across same-and different-gender pairings was that of making out in front of others to have fun, to be spontaneous, or as part of a game. These results suggest that many college students consider sexual behavior, and particularly performing

sexual behavior like making out in front of others, a way to “blow off steam” or to feel carefree. However, these games are not always lighthearted and can sometimes even be coercive. Participation in games like “Truth or Dare” or “Spin the Bottle” often involves an expectation to perform that some participants experienced as negative pressure, which may result in a negative experience with performative making out overall. This could be an example of a type of situation in which young people can feel pressured to engage in sexual behavior without anyone in particular doing the pressuring. It is possible that in some cases, neither participant in the sexual behavior wanted to do it, but they felt pressured to by the situation.

Three of the 13 women who made out with other women reported doing so in order to sexually arouse observing men. Previous research has found that in many cases the presence of a male audience is a strong motivator for women who engage in this behavior (Diamond, 2005; Fahs, 2009; Hamilton, 2007; Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). The women in our sample who reported this motivation supported these findings. However, this was not the most common motivator for women who wanted to be seen making out with another woman. Eight women in this situation reported wanting to enhance their image, and ten reported wanting to have fun. There are a number of possible reasons for why our findings differed from previous studies’ findings. For example, substantially more women in Yost and McCarthy’s (2012) study reported having kissed another woman at a college party (33%) than in our study (8%). They asked, “Have you ever kissed or made out with someone of the same-sex at a college party?” (p. 10). In contrast, we asked “Have you ever made out with a girl in front of others where you wanted others to see you?” It may be that by asking women if they had ever “kissed or made out” with other women, they were asking about a broader set of behaviors than we were—not all kissing would be considered to be making out. The higher prevalence of this behavior overall in

Yost and McCarthy's study could have contributed to a higher prevalence of the motivation to sexually arouse men or elicit male attention. In addition, it is possible that women in our study who reported making out with a girl in order to enhance their image or to have fun and be spontaneous also considered the presence of a male audience integral to their decision to make out, even if they were not explicit in mentioning that motivator.

These findings indicate that college students do use performative making out for a variety of purposes. Often, these performances serve to communicate information about the performer or the relationship the performance represents, making the presence of observers essential.

### **Gendered Experiences of Performative Making Out**

There were many commonalities among women's and men's experiences of wanting to be seen making out; however, there were some interesting gender differences as well. When we examined women's and men's motivations for making out in front of others and their perceptions of the outcomes of those experiences, an interesting pattern emerged. When men described their motivations for making out with someone in front of others, they tended to report more positive thoughts, feelings, and expected outcomes than negative ones. They wrote about wanting to look better to others, feeling "happy" and "proud" to have someone to make out with, and anticipating greater closeness with their male friends as a result of their performance. Conversely, when women described their motivations for making out with someone in front of others, they tended to report more negative thoughts, feelings, and expected outcomes than positive ones. They described wanting to induce jealousy in others, feeling "immature" and "insecure," and worrying about their reputations being damaged. Particularly with regard to image enhancement, men experienced positive outcomes more often than negative outcomes, and women experienced negative outcomes more often than positive outcomes. It appears that making out in front of

others often really works to enhance men's images, whereas for women the same behavior often results in damage to or increased worry about their reputations.

This pattern could be indicative of a sexual double standard in which women are negatively evaluated for performing the same behaviors for which men are positively evaluated. Sexual double standards like this one exist in numerous contexts (Crawford & Popp, 2003; Muehlenhard, Sakaluk, & Esterline, in press). Sexual double standards can contribute to problematic cultural belief systems like "slut-shaming" and victim blaming. "Slut-shaming" is a belief system wherein women experience negative social backlash if they are perceived as pursuing too much sexual behavior—particularly casual sexual behavior—or enjoying sexual behavior too much (Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, & Seeley, 2014; Ringrose & Renold, 2012). Victim blaming is a practice wherein women who are victims of sexual assault are held responsible for inviting or facilitating that assault (Allred, 2007; Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Loughnan, Pina, Vasquez, & Puvia, 2013, Schult & Schneider, 1991). In our sample, some women worried about "looking like a slut" in a way that was not paralleled in men's responses. Our data supports a double standard in which it is more socially acceptable for college-aged women to associate sexual behavior like performative making out with negative emotions than with positive emotions to avoid looking "slutty," whereas it is acceptable for college-aged men to associate this behavior with positive emotions because performing this behavior actually enhances their images to others.

A concern about reputation damage that was specific to women who made out with other women was worry about their sexual orientation being misinterpreted as a result of their decision to make out. This concern contrasts with Lannutti and Denes's (2012) finding that women who make out with other women in front of others are more likely to be labeled as heterosexual than

as bisexual or lesbian. Both of the women who reported this outcome explained that they had agreed to make out with another woman at the request of observing men, so it appears that having a male audience does not always protect against the possibility that women's sexual orientation might be misinterpreted when they make out with other women. Also, the fact that the two women who reported this labeled it as a negative outcome suggests that the assumption that two women making out will look better or more sexually attractive to men can be ambiguous.

Of course, this gender-based pattern was not absolute. Some men reported negative thoughts, feelings, and expectations about making out with someone in front of others, and some women reported positive thoughts, feelings, and expectations about the behavior, although these responses did not fall into any particular pattern. With regard to outcomes, a few men reported damage to their reputations, and one woman reported improved image as a result of making out. However, the trend we identified is indicative of how, despite increased sexual permissiveness in younger populations, the ways that college students engage in performing sexual behavior (e.g., men giving their peers approval for engaging in sexual behavior; women engaging in sexual behavior for the benefit of male audiences) can perpetuate traditional gender norms and belief systems that are harmful to women.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Limitations of this study included the use of convenience sampling from a relatively homogeneous population of college students. Using this population limits generalizability to other age groups, to other geographic regions, and to non-college students. However, because research has shown that performative making out frequently occurs in college settings (Hamilton, 2007; Lannutti & Denes, 2012; Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Yost & McCarthy, 2012),

there is value in sampling from a pool of college students. Drawing participants from the university's introductory psychology course limited the age range of participants even within the college population—most participants were traditional first-year college students. It is possible that the prevalence of wanting to be seen making out with someone may have been higher with a sample that included more representative numbers of sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Further, participants who have spent more time in college might think differently about their experiences with performative making out than first-year participants. For instance, it is possible that older participants might be less concerned about possible damage to their reputations or less likely to use performative making out as a way to facilitate sex and romantic relationships. Different response patterns resulting from using a more age-diverse sample could yield different conclusions about the existence of a sexual double standard and how it manifests in performative making out.

In addition, our sample was comprised mostly of participants who identified as heterosexual. We were therefore unable to make meaningful comparisons or contrasts between the experiences of participants who identified as straight and participants who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. For instance, it is possible that some gay, lesbian, or bisexual (GLB) students might have wanted to be seen making out with someone of the other gender to hide their sexual orientation. Alternatively, making out with someone of the same gender could be a way of “coming out” for these individuals. Situational factors such as setting (e.g., did the situation happen in a gay bar, in a mainstream bar, or in someone's home?) and social factors such as stigmatization (e.g., some sexual minority populations, particularly gay men and bisexual men and women, are labeled as overly sexual and experience discrimination as a result; Israel & Mohr, 2004) might also influence GLB individuals' willingness to engage in performative

making out and the expectations they have for the experience. Future research would benefit from oversampling gay, lesbian, and bisexual participants to get a better sense of how these populations experience performative making out.

As the literature on performative making out expands, it would be interesting to explore other types of situations in which this behavior occurs. Past research has indicated that this behavior is sometimes requested, particularly of women (Esterline & Galupo, 2013; Fahs, 2009). Future research might investigate individuals' reasons for and experiences of agreeing or declining to make out in front of others upon being asked in both same- and different-gender pairs. It might also explore the experiences of those who have requested this behavior of others. In studies that ask about these experiences, it would be important to explore the motivations and qualities requestees attribute to requesters as well as the motivations and qualities requesters make to requestees who agree and requestees who decline to make out. It is likely that interesting gender similarities and differences will arise for people who have experienced these situations, especially when it comes to the attributions people make. It would also be interesting to explore the kinds of situations in which people are more likely to agree or to decline to make out upon being asked to see how things like peer pressure and desire to look better to others operate in people's decisions to engage in sexual behavior in front of others. Exploring possible gender similarities, gender differences, and situational factors in situations where performative making out is requested could add interesting and important insights into how performative sexual behavior is used in college populations.

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## Appendix A

### Information Statement

The Department of Psychology at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting this study to better understand young people's sexual behavior. This will involve filling out a survey online. It will probably take about 30 minutes. The content of the survey should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life.

Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of how people use sexual behavior to communicate and express themselves to one another. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. At the bottom of this page, you will be asked to enter your name so that credit may be awarded to you. You will then be forwarded to the main survey. The main survey will not ask for your name, KUID, or any other identifying information and will not be attached to your signature here. It is possible, however, with internet communications, that through intent or accident someone other than the intended recipient may see your response. Be aware that because no identifying information will be attached to your responses, we will be unable to discard your responses upon request.

The data collected in this study will be used by graduate student Kate Esterline, Professor Charlene Muehlenhard, and Professor Muehlenhard's students to better understand people's sexual experiences. The data collected in this study could be used at any time in the future.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone or mail.

Completion of the survey indicates your willingness to take part in this study and that you are at least 18 years old. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email [irb@ku.edu](mailto:irb@ku.edu).

Sincerely,

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## Appendix B

### Debriefing Information

The questionnaire asked about sexual experiences that occurred in front of other people. It specifically asked about experiences with “making out.” The purpose of this study is to explore young people’s experiences with “making out” in front of others. Many studies have investigated heterosexual women’s experiences with “making out” with other women at the request of male peers. These past studies have raised several questions, such as:

- How often does this happen?
- What do the individuals involved think and feel about it?
- What do observers think and feel about it?
- Do people ever feel pressured to engage in such behaviors?
- What happens when someone is asked and refuses?
- Etc.

There could also be other reasons why people might make out in front of others. Maybe they want to express their feelings for one another, or maybe they want to make someone else jealous. In this study, we want to explore both men’s and women’s reasons for making out in front of others in many types of situations. This study will help us understand the complex reasons for – and outcomes of – sexual behavior. Because the study is qualitative, asking open-ended questions, the possible findings are limitless.

Some studies on this topic have been quantitative, providing information about *how often* this kind of behavior occurs, or comparing the percentages of men and women who have had that experience. In contrast, the current study is mostly qualitative, investigating people’s experiences in their own words. We are asking respondents for their own thoughts and impressions about their experiences with the situations in the questionnaire.

We will analyze the data we collect from this questionnaire with the intent of locating themes that may be present in the experiences people report. Themes could be reasons that participants mention for why they engaged in a behavior or outcomes of their experiences. The themes we find will contribute to a greater understanding of people’s motivations for and the functions of this kind of sexual behavior.

**Thank you** for your participation in this study!

**If you have questions about this study**, you can contact the graduate student conducting this study or the faculty advisor:

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**If you have questions about your rights as a research participant**, you can contact the HSCL: Human Subjects Committee, Lawrence; University of Kansas; 2385 Irving Hill Road; Lawrence, KS 66045-7568  
(785) 864-7429, [hscl@ku.edu](mailto:hscl@ku.edu)

**If this study raised any personal issues that you would like to discuss with a counselor**, you can contact:

- KU Psychological Clinic, 315 Fraser Hall, (785) 864-4121. Small fee per session.
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Watkins Health Center, (785) 864-9580. Small fee per session.
- Headquarters Counseling Center, a telephone counseling service, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for any concern: (785) 841-2345. No charge.

## Appendix C

### Demographics:

#### Gender:

- a) Female
- b) Male
- c) Gender Variant \_\_\_\_\_
- d) Prefer not to answer

#### Age:

\_\_\_\_\_

#### Race/ethnicity:

- a) African American/Black
- b) Asian American
- c) European American/White
- d) Hispanic American/Latino/Latina
- e) Native American/American Indian
- f) Biracial/Multiracial
- g) International Student
- h) Other \_\_\_\_\_
- i) Prefer not to answer

#### Sexual Orientation:

- a) Homosexual (gay/lesbian)
- b) Bisexual
- c) Heterosexual (straight)
- d) Other \_\_\_\_\_
- e) Prefer not to answer

#### Has your sexual behavior been: (check one)

- a) Only with females
- b) Mostly with females
- c) Equally with females and males
- d) Mostly with males
- e) Only with males
- f) Not applicable/no experience
- g) Other \_\_\_\_\_
- h) Prefer not to answer

**Indicate whether you have engaged in the following behaviors:**

Kissing:	Yes/No
Making out:	Yes/No
Having someone stimulate your genitals:	Yes/No
Stimulating someone else's genitals:	Yes/No
Performing oral sex:	Yes/No
Receiving oral sex:	Yes/No
Penile-vaginal intercourse:	Yes/No
Performing anal sex:	Yes/No
Receiving anal sex:	Yes/No
Masturbation:	Yes/No

**What best describes your current relationship(s)?**

- a) Never dated anyone
- b) Not dating anyone now
- c) Dating one person casually (i.e., with no agreement to be exclusive)
- d) Dating more than one person casually (i.e., with no agreement to be exclusive)
- e) Dating one person exclusively
- f) Engaged
- g) Other \_\_\_\_\_
- h) Prefer not to answer

**Have you ever made out with a *guy* in front of others where you *wanted others to see you*?**

**a) Yes.**

Please describe the experience that stands out most in your mind.

Without giving names, who was the guy? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

At what stage of your life did this happen?

- a. college
- b. high school
- c. middle school/junior high
- d. other

What was the setting?

Who else was around?

Who, in particular, did you want to see you engaging in this behavior, and why?

What were you feeling or thinking at the time?

What did you expect to happen as a result of this experience?

Comments, if any:

What, if any, were the positive outcomes of the situation?

What, if any, were the negative outcomes of the situation?

Were there any other outcomes you'd like to mention?

How might this situation have been different if it had happened in private?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

Comments, if any:

**b) No.**

Comments, if any:

**Have you ever made out with a *girl* in front of others where you *wanted others to see you*?**

**a) Yes.**

Please describe the experience that stands out most in your mind.

Without giving names, who was the girl? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

At what stage of your life did this happen?

- a. college
- b. high school
- c. middle school/junior high
- d. other

What was the setting?

Who else was around?

Who, in particular, did you want to see you engaging in this behavior, and why?

What were you feeling or thinking at the time?

What did you expect to happen as a result of this experience?

Comments, if any:

What, if any, were the positive outcomes of the situation?

What, if any, were the negative outcomes of the situation?

Were there any other outcomes you'd like to mention?

How might this situation have been different if it had happened in private?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

Comments, if any:

**b) No.**

Comments, if any:

**Have you ever made out with a *guy* in front of others where you *did not mind* if others could see you?**

**a) Yes.**

Please describe the experience that stands out most in your mind.

Without giving names, who was the guy? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

At what stage of your life did this happen?

- a. college
- b. high school
- c. middle school/junior high
- d. other

What was the setting?

Who else was around?

What were you feeling or thinking at the time?

What did you expect to happen as a result of this experience?

Comments, if any:

What, if any, were the positive outcomes of the situation?

What, if any, were the negative outcomes of the situation?

Were there any other outcomes you'd like to mention?

How might this situation have been different if it had happened in private?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

Comments, if any:

**b) No.**

Comments, if any:

**Have you ever made out with a *girl* in front of others where you *did not mind* if others could see you?**

**a) Yes.**

Please describe the experience that stands out most in your mind.

Without giving names, who was the girl? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

At what stage of your life did this happen?

- a. college
- b. high school
- c. middle school/junior high
- d. other

What was the setting?

Who else was around?

What were you feeling or thinking at the time?

What did you expect to happen as a result of this experience?

Comments, if any:

What, if any, were the positive outcomes of the situation?

What, if any, were the negative outcomes of the situation?

Were there any other outcomes you'd like to mention?

How might this situation have been different if it had happened in private?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

Comments, if any:

**b) No.**

Comments, if any:

**Have you ever been asked or encouraged to make out with a *guy* in front of others? (This request or encouragement could have come from the guy himself or from another person.)**

**a) Yes, and I agreed.**

Please describe the experience that stands out most in your mind. Is this the same experience you described before?

Without giving names, who was the guy you were asked or encouraged to make out with? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

At what stage of your life did this happen?

- a. college
- b. high school
- c. middle school/junior high
- d. other

What was the setting?

Who else was around?

Without giving names, who asked or encouraged you to engage in this behavior? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

What words or actions did they use to communicate their request to you?

What were you feeling or thinking at the time?

What did you expect to happen as a result of agreeing to this request?

What did you think might happen if you had declined?

Comments, if any:

What, if any, were the positive outcomes of the situation?

What, if any, were the negative outcomes of the situation?

Were there any other outcomes you'd like to mention?

Why do you think they asked you to engage in this behavior?

Why did you agree?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

**b) Yes, and I declined.**

Please describe the experience that stands out most in your mind. Is this the same experience you described before?

Without giving names, who was the guy you were asked or encouraged to make out with? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

At what stage of your life did this happen?

- a. college
- b. high school
- c. middle school/junior high
- d. other

What was the setting?

Who else was around?

Without giving names, who asked or encouraged you to engage in this behavior? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

What words or actions did they use to communicate their request to you?

What were you feeling or thinking at the time?

What did you expect to happen as a result of declining this request?

What did you think might happen if you had agreed?

Comments, if any:

Why do you think they asked you to engage in this behavior?

Why did you decline?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

Comments, if any:

**c) No.**

Comments, if any:

**Have you ever been asked or encouraged to make out with a *girl* in front of others? (This request or encouragement could have come from the girl herself or from another person.)**

**a) Yes, and I agreed.**

Please describe the experience that stands out most in your mind. If your experience is the same as the experience you previously described, you may indicate that here.

Without giving names, who was the girl you were asked or encouraged to make out with? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

At what stage of your life did this happen?

- a. college
- b. high school
- c. middle school/junior high
- d. other

What was the setting?

Who else was around?

Without giving names, who asked or encouraged you to engage in this behavior? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

What words or actions did they use to communicate their request to you?

What were you feeling or thinking at the time?

What did you expect to happen as a result of agreeing to this request?

What did you think might happen if you had declined?

Comments, if any:

What, if any, were the positive outcomes of the situation?

What, if any, were the negative outcomes of the situation?

Were there any other outcomes you'd like to mention?

Why do you think they asked you to engage in this behavior?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

Why did you agree?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

**b) Yes, and I declined.**

Please describe the experience that stands out most in your mind. Is this the same experience you described before?

Without giving names, who was the girl you were asked or encouraged to make out with? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

At what stage of your life did this happen?

- a. college
- b. high school
- c. middle school/junior high
- d. other

What was the setting?

Who else was around?

Without giving names, who asked or encouraged you to engage in this behavior? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

What words or actions did they use to communicate their request to you?

What were you feeling or thinking at the time?

What did you expect to happen as a result of declining this request?

What did you think might happen if you had agreed?

Comments, if any:

Why do you think they asked you to engage in this behavior?

Why did you decline?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

Comments, if any:

**c) No.**

Comments, if any:

**Have you ever asked or encouraged two people to make out in front of others?**

**a) Yes, and they agreed.**

Please describe the experience that stands out most in your mind.

Without giving names, who were the two people? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

At what stage of your life did this happen?

- a. college
- b. high school
- c. middle school/junior high
- d. other

What was the setting?

Who else was around?

What words or actions did you use to communicate your request to the two people?

What were you feeling or thinking at the time?

What did you expect to happen as a result of this experience?

Comments, if any:

What, if any, were the positive outcomes of the situation?

What, if any, were the negative outcomes of the situation?

Were there any other outcomes you'd like to mention?

In case you did not indicate this already, the two people you asked or encouraged were:

- a) both guys
- b) a guy and a girl
- c) both girls
- d) other \_\_\_\_\_

Whether they agreed to or declined your request, why do you think the two people made the decision they did?

Why did you ask or encourage the two people to engage in this behavior?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

Comments, if any:

**b) Yes, and they declined.**

Please describe the experience that stands out most in your mind.

Without giving names, who were the two people? (If you describe a partner or an ex-partner, please specify what your relationship was AT THE TIME.)

At what stage of your life did this happen?

- a. college
- b. high school
- c. middle school/junior high
- d. other

What was the setting?

Who else was around?

What words or actions did you use to communicate your request to the two people?

What were you feeling or thinking at the time?

What did you expect to happen as a result of this experience?

Comments, if any:

In case you did not indicate this already, the two people you asked or encouraged were:

- a) both guys
- b) a guy and a girl
- c) both girls
- d) other \_\_\_\_\_

Whether they agreed to or declined your request, why do you think the two people made the decision they did?

Why did you ask or encourage the two people to engage in this behavior?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

Comments, if any:

**c) No.**

Comments, if any:

**Have you ever been present when two people were making out in front of others (*whether or not* anyone had asked or encouraged them to do so)?**

**a) Yes.**

Please describe the experience that stands out most in your mind.

Without giving names, who were the two people?

At what stage of your life did this happen?

- a. college
- b. high school
- c. middle school/junior high
- d. other

What was the setting?

Who else was around?

In case you did not indicate this already, the two people making out were:

- a) both guys
- b) a guy and a girl
- c) both girls
- d) other \_\_\_\_\_

Comments, if any:

Why do you think the two people were making out in front of others?

Did it seem that the two people making out wanted to be seen? Why or why not?

Why do you think the people watching were interested?

What were some reasons you noticed or watched the two people making out?

Is there anything else you'd like to add to help us understand this situation?

Comments, if any:

**b) No.**

Comments, if any:

**Even if you haven't been in any of these situations, what situation have you been in that is most similar to any of the situations we asked about? Please describe that experience. Be sure to include who was involved (without giving names), the setting, what led up to the situation, what happened during the situation, and anything else about the situation that seems important.**

Comments, if any:

**Are there any other situations you'd like to tell us about, or anything else you'd like to add?**

**Earlier, we asked a question about sexual behavior either in public or in private. For this question, we are asking specifically about your sexual behavior IN PRIVATE.**

**Has your sexual behavior IN PRIVATE been: (check one)**

- a) Only with females
- b) Mostly with females
- c) Equally with females and males
- d) Mostly with males
- e) Only with males
- f) Not applicable/no experience
- g) Other \_\_\_\_\_
- h) Prefer not to answer