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FAKING ORGASM: INTERVIEWS WITH COLLEGE WOMEN ABOUT HOW,  
WHEN, AND WHY THEY PRETEND TO EXPERIENCE ORGASM

by

Lanie Howes

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors  
(Psychology)

The Honors College

The University of Maine

May 2019

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## ABSTRACT

Research shows that many women fake orgasm, but only a handful of studies have been done in regards to the context and reasons why women fake orgasm. This study investigated the context in which today's young women fake orgasm, as well as examined the reasons for their faking of orgasm. The way that sexual scripts and societal pressures influence women who fake orgasm is a key component of this study. Specifically, this investigation involved in-depth interviews with a dozen college women between the ages of 19-22 who have faked an orgasm during sexual intercourse. Interviews were analyzed using established methods of qualitative inquiry. Interviews were coded for common topics and themes were created. Results revealed that college women fake for a variety of reasons and in a variety of contexts. Limitations, suggestions for future research, and recommendations for sexuality education are discussed. It is hoped that this research will add a greater understanding of women's sexual scripts and the influence of society, sex partners, and friends in faking behaviors. This study expands the current body of knowledge on women's experience of faking orgasm and adds to the ever-expanding field of sex research

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## CHAPTER 1

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Faking orgasm, also known as feigning or pretending to orgasm, has been seen in popular media for decades. The 1989 romantic comedy, *When Harry met Sally*, was the first movie to highlight a woman faking orgasm. It starred Billy Crystal as Harry and Meg Ryan as Sally. The iconic scene occurs when Harry and Sally are sitting in Katz's Deli in Manhattan. They discuss Harry's "womanizing" behaviors and Sally tells him he is a "human affront to all women." After arguing back and forth about Harry's sexual prowess, Sally claims that "at one time or another most women have faked it." Harry seems to be in disbelief, so Sally slowly begins moaning louder and louder; this builds to a crescendo of screaming and pounding on the table (Reiner, 1989).

While this movie was the first to portray how a woman fakes an orgasm, there have been other instances in the popular media where this topic has been addressed. For example, a 1993 episode of *Seinfeld*, the popular television sitcom centering on four friends living in New York City, focused on the topic of faking orgasm. One of the friends, George, mentions to Jerry that his new relationship is not going well unless "she's faking." Elaine comes over and mentions that she has faked with lots of guys and that basically every woman fakes. Jerry and George seem baffled by this and make fun of her until she mentions that she faked with Jerry. Jerry's feelings are hurt, as he feels as though he took a blow to his masculinity. He asks, "what about the breathing, the

panting, the moaning, the screaming?” She replies with “fake, fake, fake, fake.” She tells Jerry that it wasn’t his fault and that she just didn’t have them “back then.” Elaine places the blame on herself to ease the blow to Jerry’s ego (David & Seinfeld, 1993).

More recently, in a 2011 episode of the television show *Parks and Recreation*, Ron (played by Nick Offerman) gets re-married to his “crazy, sex-fiend” ex-wife on an accidental whim. At their bridal shower, Ron realizes his monumental mistake when he sees Tammy (played by Megan Mullally) beating up one of his co-workers. Ron ends the fight and their relationship right then and right there. Tammy responds by saying, “You’re a joke. You’re not even a man anymore. Oh, and by the way, last night, I faked four out of the seven” (Daniels, Poehler, Schur, & Wittles, 2011). Not only does Tammy admit to faking orgasm, she reminds Ron that he isn’t manly enough and this is why he was unable to please her.

In a 2016 episode of the reality show, "I Am Cait," newly out transwoman Caitlyn Jenner, formerly Bruce Jenner, receives a lesson in faking orgasm. The implication of a transgender woman learning the intricacies of convincingly faking pleasure was clear: As TMZ put it, “Caitlyn Jenner is learning what it means to be a woman.” (TMZ, 2016).

Aside from solely movies and television shows, other forms of popular media such as magazines have focused on the topic of faking orgasm as well. In the September 1992 issue of *Cosmopolitan*, an article specifically stated that a woman should fake orgasm if she cannot have one in order to keep the relationship happy and free of troubles (Singer Kaplan, 1992). Later articles in this same magazine have covered the topic with a wide range of approaches from, “7 Sad But True Reasons Women Fake Orgasm” (Breslaw, 2017) to “Funny Ways People Faked” (Azodi, 2017). From the examples seen

in current *Cosmopolitan* Magazines, one would think that faking orgasm is taboo and that no women participate in this “sad” behavior. However, as research has shown, many women do fake orgasm and for a variety of reasons.

These examples from movies, television, and magazines reveal that faking orgasm is something some women do. Popular media have capitalized on this phenomenon, and at the same time have raised important questions for researchers about how common it truly is and the reasons why women fake orgasm.

### Prevalence of Faking Orgasm

A handful of researchers have looked into the prevalence of faking orgasm, including how often and why (Bryan, 2001; Caron, 2015; Darling & Davidson, 1986; Ellison, 2000; Fahs, 2014; Hite, 1976; Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010; Wiederman, 1997). It is important to note that the research in this area has not been limited to women faking orgasm. A few researchers have also investigated men who fake orgasm (Braun, Clarke, & Rogers, 2014; Caron, 2015; & Muehlenhard, & Shippee, 2010). However, for the purpose of this literature review, the focus will be on the research about women.

One of the first studies to include information on the prevalence of women faking orgasm was the landmark research by Shere Hite published in 1976. Her book, *The Hite report: A nationwide study of female sexuality* was based on the responses of 3,019 women, ages fourteen to seventy-eight (Hite, 1976). These women were asked a variety of questions such as what an orgasm feels like to them, what they enjoy during sex versus what they don't like, what it felt like to not experience an orgasm during sex, whether or not clitoral stimulation and masturbation were important to them, and to explain their favorite and least favorite parts of their sexual lives. *The Hite Report* revealed that

orgasm can be simple and powerful for women if they are given the right stimulation. Most women experience their orgasm easily during clitoral stimulation (most frequently during masturbation), and these women feel that men's attitudes need to adapt to include the stimulation women want. Important to this current study is her finding that more than half (57%) of women reported faking orgasm (Hite, 1976).

A decade later, in 1986, Carol Darling and Kenneth Davidson published their research specifically focused on faking orgasm (referred to as "pretending orgasm" by the authors). Their sample consisted of 868 nurses from around the United States who had completed at least an Associate's degree in Nursing. Their findings revealed that many of the women had faked an orgasm. Of the 745 women who had engaged in penile-vaginal intercourse, more than half (58%) had pretended to orgasm (Darling & Davidson, 1986). This number was very similar to the earlier finding reported by Shere Hite in *The Hite Report*. Their study also found that women who pretended to orgasm were more likely to masturbate on their own, were older, had intercourse at a younger age, and had a greater number of sexual partners.

Another decade later, in 1997, a study focusing specifically on faking orgasm was published by Michael Wiederman (Wiederman, 1997). His research focused on a sample of 161 college women ages 18-27 from a Midwestern state university. His findings were consistent with the two previous studies discussed above, in that more than half (56%) of the women reported faking an orgasm during sexual intercourse (Wiederman, 1997). Wiederman also asked questions pertaining to sexual attitudes, sexual self-esteem, and physical attractiveness. Like the research by Darling and Davidson (1986), he found that women who pretended to orgasm were older, had intercourse at a younger age, and had a

greater number of sexual partners. In addition, Wiederman found that women who pretended to orgasm had more liberal sexual attitudes, higher sexual self-esteem, and rated themselves more attractive (Wiederman, 1997).

In 2000, Carol Ellison published *Women's sexualities: Generations of women share intimate secrets of sexual self-acceptance*. Similar to Shere Hite, this book reported on the results of her national survey, as well as in-depth interviews, of women. The women were between the ages of 23 and 95 and were asked a range of questions about sexuality (Ellison, 2000). Of the 2,311 women who answered the questions about faking orgasm, 70% indicated they had faked an orgasm at least once with their partner. What is unique about Ellison's research is that she also asked about how frequently the women faked orgasm. Most (75%) of the women said that they had faked less than 50 times; however, 10% of the women claimed to have faked orgasm between "150 and 10,000 times or wrote in another answer such as countless, or a bazillion" (Ellison, 2000). Ellison's findings also revealed that many of the women faked orgasm when they were younger but did not do so currently and "two-thirds of those presently in relationships do not fake orgasm with their current partner" (Ellison 2000).

In 2001, Tamara Bryan's study surveyed 366 sexually experienced college women about faking orgasm (Bryan, 2001). These women were from the University of Kansas and were ages 18-26. Bryan found that 65% of participants faked orgasm at least once during some sort of sexual activity (it may or may not have been intercourse). In addition, 20% faked orgasm during 20% of their encounters. Bryan found that the most common type of pretending was physical (i.e., women would move around, contract muscles, bite things, and tense up), while many of pretenders did so verbally (i.e., women

would specifically tell their partner that they had an orgasm) (Bryan, 2001). Although Bryan did not separate faking during sexual intercourse versus during other sexual activity, she did find that there is a greater expectation for women to orgasm during intercourse than during petting or oral sex (Bryan, 2001).

More recent studies confirm what earlier studies have shown: many women fake orgasm. Charlene Muehlenhard and Sheena Shippee's 2010 study of Kansas University college women from the ages of 18-29 found that two-thirds (67%) had faked during intercourse. Their study also looked beyond sexual intercourse and found that some college women pretended during oral sex, manual stimulation, and phone sex. Interestingly, they also found that while some women said they had not faked an orgasm, these women (23%) described faking enjoyment throughout the sexual experience (Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010). In addition, they found that women who had faked an orgasm were more likely to have experienced at least 6 of the following 10 sexual activities; someone stimulating their genitals, stimulating someone's genitals, receiving oral sex, performing oral sex, PVI, PVI and additional clitoral stimulation, anal sex, orgasming with another person, masturbation, and orgasming through masturbation (Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010).

Breanne Fahs' 2014 research involving in-depth interviews with 20 women found that 75% of women had faked orgasm at least once in their life. These women were ages 18-59 and they were recruited in a large metropolitan Southwestern U.S. city. 45% of these women report that they faked orgasm regularly during their sexual encounters (Fahs, 2014).

In 2015, Sandra Caron published her book, *The Sex Lives of College Students: A quarter century of attitudes and behaviors* based on her annual survey of college students at the University of Maine. Her findings for the 4,685 students ages 18-22 covered a wide range of sexuality topics. In terms of faking orgasm, 70% of sexually active college women in the study said they have faked an orgasm. This is the only study to look at faking orgasm over time. When looking across the 25 years, Caron found that for college women, faking behavior has increased dramatically over time – from less than half to nearly three-quarters of college women today saying they have faked an orgasm (Caron, 2015).

As these studies reveal, the percentage of women who fake orgasm is remarkably high. The prevalence of faking orgasm ranges from half to two-thirds of women depending on the sample, and the percentage of women who fake an orgasm has gone up - not down - over time. Why? Along with research on the prevalence of women faking orgasms, there are a number of studies that have examined the reasons why women might fake an orgasm.

#### Reasons for Women Faking Orgasm

Only a handful of studies have investigated the reasons women give for faking orgasm (i.e., Bryan, 2001; Brau, Opperman, & Rogers, 2014; Fahs, 2014; Kaighobadi, Shackelford, & Weekes-Shackelford, 2010; LaFrance, Stelzl, & Thomas, 2017; Mialon, 2012; Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010; Roberts et al., 1995). These have ranged from concern for a partner's feelings and wanting sex to end, to saving the relationship and pressure to perform in order for her to appear "normal." These reasons are discussed in more detail below.

### Concern for His Feelings

The most common reason researchers have discovered for why a woman fakes orgasm has been out of concern for the feelings of her sexual partner. These studies have found that women reported they faked orgasm in order to preserve their partner's feelings, or in some cases, to give him an "ego boost." In Roberts et al.'s 1995 study, the researchers found that, "what is demanded of women in the technique/work narrative is the proof of the value of the man's work, of the soundness of his technique" (Roberts et al., 1995). The researchers explain that men rely on clues, such as her body movement, vocalization, and communication to "know" when a woman has had an orgasm. Some women in their study explained how their partner felt he had failed in some way or another if she did not orgasm, so faking was a way to ensure he did not feel like a failure. As one study participant, Tracy, explained,

"Like Jeff used to get really upset. Like he used to get so upset all the time...Cause he used to say, "Oh but why, why can't I make you come?" (Roberts et al., 1995)

In the research on women's sexual behavior by Ellison (2000), she also found that some women viewed faking orgasm as important in taking care of their partner's feelings.

A woman named Deborah is quoted as saying,

"He had to think he was a good lover, satisfying me. Basically faking was me taking care of the man. When I later learned my clitoris could be stimulated, I was too embarrassed to tell him at first. I sensed he would feel inadequate if I told him that he had not been giving me an orgasm" (Ellison, 2000).

In Bryan's 2001 study, she further clarifies the implicit assumptions that follow women's orgasms. The women that she surveyed described wanting to boost their partners' egos and not hurt his feelings. The assumption is that her orgasm is what indicates whether or not he is sexually proficient and skilled; it emphasizes that sex is a skilled activity, and a woman's orgasm is the man's responsibility (Bryan, 2001).

The notion that the orgasm is the "end all be all" of sex appears to be quite common in these studies and there is an understanding that men may not feel as though they are "skilled sexual lovers" if they cannot bring their partner to orgasm. Muehlenhard and Shippee (2010) found that 78% of women had pretended orgasm in order to avoid hurting their partner's feelings, while 47% of women faked orgasm to make their partner feel good about themselves (Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010).

Mialon (2012) also found that women who care about their partner's sexual pleasure are more likely to fake; they want to make him happy. And along with protecting his feelings, a woman may want to reinforce her partner's sexual skills. Breanne Fahs found that these were common themes in both her 2011 and 2014 research. Lastly, in Braun, Opperman and Rogers' 2014 research, a common reason women disclosed for why they were faking orgasm was to save the feelings of their most intimate partner.

### Wanting Sex to End

Researchers have found that another common reason some women fake orgasm is because she wants sex to end. In some cases, she fakes because she doesn't care about having an orgasm but knows her orgasm will signal the end for her partner. In Ellison's study (2000) one woman described that she faked orgasm because, "I enjoy sex even

without orgasm. I fake because my partner tries too hard to get me to orgasm and that turns me off” (Ellison, 2000). This woman wasn’t experiencing pleasure and because of this, she faked orgasm with her partner. In Bryan’s 2001 study, many women faked orgasm in order to stop intercourse. Their reasons for why they wanted to end intercourse included feeling tired, bored, nervous, or in pain (Bryan, 2001).

Muehlenhard and Shippee’s 2010 study found that 61% of women in their sample noted that wanting sex to end was their reason for faking orgasm. The women who wanted sex to end in this study claimed that it was because “they were bored, not in the mood, or tired and wanting sleep” (Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010). These researchers also found that some women faked orgasm so that their partner would orgasm, and this would lead to the end of sex (Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010). Other studies examining reasons why women fake orgasm found similar results. In both Fahs’ 2014 study and Lafrance, Stelzl, and Thomas’ 2017 study, women said they very purposefully faked orgasms in order to end sexual encounters. A participant of Fahs’ study said,

“I faked orgasm to get the guy off of me, just because I was done and just wasn’t into it and I didn’t want him there anymore so I did that to get him off of me. He wouldn’t listen to me otherwise” (Fahs, 2014).

### To Save the Relationship

Another reason found in studies of why women fake an orgasm included her feeling that this keeps her partner happy and the relationship intact. Some women described feeling as though they could lose their boyfriend if they don’t fake (Roberts et al., 1995). In Ellison’s 2000 study, she describes this as a common theme. Her

interviewee Deborah explains the reason she fakes orgasm is because she needs to please her partner so that ‘then he won’t leave me and I’ll have a boyfriend’ (Ellison, 2000).

In Bryan’s 2001 study, the researcher found that there were a broad variety of partner-related reasons, and these included, “to maintain the relationship” (Bryan, 2001). And in Kaighobadi, Shackelford, and Weekes-Shackelford’s 2010 study about women faking orgasm in order to retain their mate, they found that women who were more insecure in their relationships and who perceived a higher risk of partner infidelity were more likely to fake orgasm.

#### Pressure to Perform in Order to Appear “Normal”

Some researchers point to women’s belief that they need to put on a show or feel pressure to perform in order to convince their partner that they are normal; otherwise the feeling is that there may be something wrong with her. For example, Roberts et al.’s 1995 study found some women believed there is a need for exaggerated movements or extra noise. As one woman in their study said, “He’d probably love it if I started to, not faking it, but he’d probably like it if I was a bit more vocal about it, what I was experiencing, ‘cause he sort of says I’m a silent achiever” (Roberts et al., 1995).

Bryan’s 2001 study also found that some women were motivated to fake orgasm because they felt embarrassed, ashamed, or abnormal because they were not going to have an orgasm when they thought they should. Bryan’s research found that women “feared appearing inexperienced or naive;” therefore, they felt pressure to experience an orgasm (Bryan, 2001). Along with feelings of abnormality come feelings of guilt or shame. In Fahs’ 2014 research, some women felt her inability to orgasm implied that there was something wrong with her, as one woman explained, “I don’t want him to

know that I'm one of *those* women who can't get aroused from a penis inside of her” (Fahs, 2014).

### Sexual Scripts

As shown in this literature review, faking orgasm is a common phenomenon for many women. Women also indicate a variety of reasons for faking, such as concern for a partner's feelings, wanting sex to end, to save the relationship, and pressure for her to perform in order to appear “normal.” However, the idea that today's young women fake orgasm seems nonsensical when viewed through a modern lens.

In a society that has seen a rise in feminism, discussions of women's empowerment and sexual pleasure, women's marches, empowering television shows and movies, and a myriad of information available online about sexual functioning and women's pleasure, one would think that the number of women faking orgasm would be small or have decreased over the past few decades, not increased (Potts, 2000). On the other hand, sex seems to be everywhere, but seldom talked about honestly and openly; porn is accessible, but too often unrealistic, and sex education rarely includes discussions about female pleasure (Fahs, 2011; Future of Sex Education Initiative, 2012). It is no wonder that, according to Casey, Masters, Morrison, and Wells (2013), traditional sexual scripts for women are still in existence. These scripts include women not desiring sex, having a weak “sex drive,” resisting advances, being more highly valued if she is less sexually experienced, as well as the notion that women should prefer relational sex, want commitment and monogamy, and should seek emotional intimacy and trust with sex (Casey, Masters, Morrison, & Wells, 2013).

These traditional sexual scripts also provide ideas surrounding women's experience with orgasm. According to Maya Lavie-Ajayi and Helene Joffe (2009) in their article *Social Representations of Female Orgasm*, these scripts center on three ideas: 1) women's orgasm as the central indicator of sexual pleasure and the goal of sex, 2) vaginal orgasms are thought of as better than clitoral orgasms, and 3) while it is common for women not to experience orgasm through intercourse, if she doesn't, it is a sign of her deficiency. These orgasm scripts suggest reasons why women might fake during a sexual encounter. Essentially, the message for women is that "we have been taught that orgasms are obligatory" (Weiss, 2017). Women, as well as men, have been socialized to believe that orgasm is the goal of sex, and without an orgasm, sex is pointless. This puts an incredible amount of pressure on both parties involved, and it may be easier to fake an orgasm than to deviate from these social norms (Lavie-Ajayi & Joffe, 2009).

#### The Purpose of this Study

As can be gathered from this literature review, only a handful of studies have been done in regards to the prevalence and reasons why women fake orgasm. This exploratory study investigated the context in which today's young women fake orgasm, as well as examined the reasons for their faking of orgasm. The way that sexual scripts and societal pressures influence women who fake orgasm is a key component of this study. Specifically, this study involved in-depth interviews with today's younger college women between the ages of 18-22 who have faked an orgasm during sexual intercourse.

The following research questions were explored:

1. *How often and in what context do college women fake orgasm? (e.g., sexual intercourse, oral sex, genital stimulation; in one night stands vs. dating relationship)*
2. *What are college women's reasons for faking orgasm?*
3. *How do college women feel about faking and what is their sense of how their partner(s) and friends feel(s) about women faking orgasm?*
4. *What do the college women's accounts of faking orgasm reveal about their sexual scripts?*

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

This study used an exploratory, qualitative methodology to investigate the experiences of college women who have faked an orgasm during sexual intercourse. Faking orgasm is common among college-age students. As previously noted, Caron's 2015 study found that around 70% of college women at the University of Maine have faked orgasm during penile-vaginal intercourse. However, few studies have examined the reasons (and implications) for faking orgasm.

#### The Sample

Those involved in the study were college women ages 18-22 from the University of Maine who have faked an orgasm during sexual intercourse. The participants were recruited using a snowball sampling technique. Participants were identified through friends and acquaintances of the researcher, word-of-mouth, announcements made in classes, and e-mail announcements sent to several university discussion boards and conferences. *See Appendix A.*

The final sample included 12 women (see Table 1). Pseudonyms were assigned in an effort to best protect the identities of the participants. The overall age span of the participants ranged from 19 to 22 years old, with the average being 21 years old. All 12 of the participants were Caucasian. Ten of the participants identified as heterosexual, one identified as bisexual, and one identified as queer. The number of sexual partners each participant had ranged from 1 to 35 ( $M = 11.6$ ;  $SD = 11$ ). The number of sexual partners

each participant faked with ranged from 1-20 ( $M = 6.4$ ;  $SD = 6.8$ ). Most women reported faking orgasm with most of their sexual partners. The percentage of partners faked with ranged from 14% to 100% ( $M = 65.4\%$ ;  $SD = 26.3$ )

Table 1 Demographics of Participants

Participant Pseudonyms	Age	Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	Number of Sexual Partners	Number of partners they faked with	Percent of Partners Faked With
Abigail	22	White	Straight	1	1	100%
Bella	21	White	Straight	6	4	66%
Charlotte	21	White	Straight	7	7	100%
Delilah	21	White	Straight	1	1	100%
Emma	22	White	Straight	27	20	74%
Faith	21	White	Straight	3	2	66%
Grace	21	White	Straight	5	3	60%
Hannah	22	White	Bisexual	9 (all male)	2	22%
Irene	19	White	Straight	3	2	66%
Jasmine	22	White	Straight	22	3	14%
Kaylee	19	White	Queer	20 (all male)	12	60%
Lily	22	White	Straight	35	20	57%

### Interview Procedure

The interview was comprised of a series of questions focusing on the experience of faking orgasm. This interview protocol had been approved by the Human Subjects Committee of the university. *See Appendix B.* Interviews began with basic demographic questions (i.e., age, ethnicity, number of sex partners). The subjects were then asked a series of questions that centered on how often and the context for faking, what their reasons are for faking, and how they and their sexual partner(s) and friends feel about women faking orgasm.

### Interview Technique

College students who met the criteria and expressed interest in participating in the study were provided with a copy of the consent form before an interview was scheduled. *See Appendix C.* Consent was implied when they agreed to arrange an interview after reviewing the consent form. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private space or conference room on the university campus (i.e., Memorial Union). Participants were assured that any and all responses would be kept confidential. No names or identifying information was included in the data report; a pseudonym was assigned to each student, and any names of partners or friends mentioned in the interview were changed. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were taped and extensive notes were taken. At the end of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to review the notes with their responses for omissions or clarifications. The taped interviews were transcribed and afterwards, the content from the taped interview was deleted.

## Interview Analysis

This was an exploratory study and involved interviews with a small number of college women (12 participants) who have faked an orgasm, in order to allow for an in-depth examination of their experiences. Interviews were analyzed using established methods of qualitative inquiry, including coding and categorizing processes that make use of both deductive and inductive approaches (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interviews were coded for common topics and themes were created. These analyses looked at what today's young women's accounts of faking orgasm reveal about their sexual scripts. Specifically, in collaboration with Sandra Caron, an expert in research on sexuality, a coding list was developed of words that would represent a coding category related to each of the research questions. Code words for this analysis included "frequency," "context," "reasons," "feelings," and "scripts." When reading through the interviews, these code words were placed next to interview responses. For example, a response that encompassed a woman's reason for faking orgasm would have the code word "reason" placed added next to it. Next, all responses in a coding category were examined for common themes. A specific topic was considered a theme if at least half (six women) of the women included it. For instance, under the responses coded "reasons," if six or more women mentioned that the reason she faked an orgasm was because she worried about her partner's ego and/or did not want to hurt his feelings, this was categorized under that theme.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

This chapter will provide a comprehensive portrait to answer four research questions:

1. *How often and in what context do college women fake orgasm? (e.g., sexual intercourse, oral sex, genital stimulation; in one night stands vs. dating relationship)*
2. *What are college women's reasons for faking orgasm?*
3. *How do college women feel about faking and what is their sense of how their partner(s) and friends feel(s) about women faking orgasm?*
4. *What do the college women's accounts of faking orgasm reveal about their sexual scripts?*

Within this chapter, each of the four research questions will be answered in the following sections: frequency and context, reasons, feelings, and scripts. Themes that emerged from the interviews in each of these areas are discussed and direct quotations from the interview transcriptions are included throughout the chapter. Names of the women interviewed were changed, and any names they mentioned during their interview of partners and friends were changed to maintain anonymity. See Table 2. Each section concludes with a summary that highlights the main findings to answer that research question. Finally, a chapter summary highlights the main findings.

Table 2 Themes for the Frequency and Context, Reasons, Feelings and Scripts

**RQ #1: Frequency and Context of Faking Orgasm**

- How often: It depends
- How she faked: I was a great actress and lied
- When she faked: It was always with intercourse
- Who she faked with: When I didn't know him well

**RQ #2: College Women's Reasons for Faking Orgasm**

- I did not want to hurt his feelings
- I was uncomfortable being with him
- I felt I was taking too long
- He did not know what he was doing
- It's expected

**RQ #3: Feelings about Faking: Hers, Her Partner(s), and Her Friends**

- It seems pretty normal
- I feel guilty but it was necessary
- I knew he would feel deceived
- Yup, we do that too

**RQ #4: Sexual Scripts**

- Media messages of what "normal sex" looks like
- Her orgasm assures him he is competent
- Her orgasm signals that sex is complete

## Frequency and Context of Faking Orgasm

The first research question asked, “*How often and in what context do college women fake orgasm?*” The 12 college women were asked a series of questions to understand their experience of faking orgasm. Four unique themes emerged from the in-depth interviews, including how often she faked, how she faked, when she faked, and who she faked orgasm with. These are described below and are listed in Table 2.

### How Often: It Depends

When asked how often they had faked an orgasm, responses from the 12 women ranged from only a few times to hundreds of times. For many college women, it depended on a range of factors from how inexperienced she was or how inexperienced her partner was, to how well she knew him or how much pressure she felt. While some women said they had faked an orgasm only a few times in one relationship, others had faked hundreds of times in most relationships. Examples of how college women described how often they faked an orgasm are included below:

*“I would say that it only happened like 2 times, and I don’t think that it will ever happen again. We were exclusively dating, and I just wasn’t feeling it. He had gone down on me, I didn’t have an orgasm then, I definitely wasn’t going to have one during sex. It’s probably important that I mention that I was drunk both of the times, they happened pretty close together too.”*

(Abigail)

*“I did it more at the beginning of our relationship, and then less later into the relationship because I think that we both started learning more what we liked in the bedroom. I would say almost the majority of the time at the beginning of the*

*relationship and then almost not at all as the relationship progressed forward.”*

(Grace)

*“When I was with Wayne, I faked for a majority of the time, yeah definitely more than half of the time. I didn’t actually ever have an orgasm with him. It was different than when I was with Alex, with him I faked maybe like 25% of the time.”* (Hannah)

*“With Austin [a one night stand] I faked each [of the two] times we had sex. I would say that every one-night stand that I have had, I pretty much faked with. Like when I have a one-night stand, I would say it’s a guarantee pretty much that I am going to fake. It’s usually different than when I’m with someone that I’m emotionally close to.”* (Lily)

#### How She Faked: I Was a Great Actress and Lied

The majority of women (n=9) described faking orgasm through their actions (i.e., body movement and sounds), and most (n=7) also said that when asked by their partner after sex if they had an orgasm, they said they deliberately lied to him. Many not only described being good at faking, but also discussed getting better overtime with more sexual experiences (n=9). Some sample quotes describing how she faked include:

*“I’ll verbalize, like moaning and get more grabby. Definitely working myself up kind of thing and then heavy breathing afterwards that was always a definite was like “oh my God” ((panting)) kind of thing. I would say that usually I didn’t say anything though, just used my muscles and I would scratch their back too.”*

(Kaylee)

*“I guess heavy breathing and I guess saying words. Saying ‘Yes,’ and sometimes I will say dirty stuff I guess. I will also move around more so that way it sells it a little bit more. I feel like I don’t really do that much extra, but they have always believed me, so it seems to be working.”* (Bella)

*“And then with Edward, that would be the case for one of the times when I didn’t use just my body. He was like, ‘Did you get it?’ and I just said ‘Yes’ even though I didn’t, so most of the time it’ll be like physical and moaning except for the two times that I straight up lied out of my mouth.”* (Charlotte)

*“I never physically displayed. I only ever confirmed that I had orgasm. I don’t like thrashing around or making a big deal by making noises or whatever, so I would always just say ‘Yeah, I had an orgasm’ whether or not I actually did. And they always believed me, which I think was weird because I feel like it wasn’t very convincing. They should know whether or not a girl has an orgasm, I feel like it should be obvious, but I guess it wasn’t. I wasn’t very convincing. I don’t know why they believed me.”* (Faith)

#### When She Faked: It Was Always With Intercourse

All 12 college women described faking orgasm during penile-vaginal intercourse. Only two women also added that they had faked an orgasm during oral sex. Some women described that they began faking before they had ever had a real orgasm (n=6), but once they experienced an orgasm and knew what it felt like, they got better at faking. Some examples of women explaining when they faked include:

*“I fake during intercourse because I don’t even have a reason. Oral depends, I don’t know, I fake during both of them, but most commonly during intercourse,*

*um just cause like I said, I don't orgasm just by intercourse alone, so, uh, it is to make him feel better.” (Delilah)*

*“The one night stands I think were a little bit less likely to go down on me, so I didn't have to fake during oral sex with them because it just didn't happen. And I feel like the guys that I had that were friends with benefits actually knew how to make me cum, so I didn't have to fake during like oral stimulation.” (Emma)*

*“I emphasized more when I was faking and we were having sex, or got more convincing I guess. I think that because I knew what the orgasm was supposed to feel like because of Will, I was better at faking when I was doing stuff with Alex. I think I kind of changed what I was doing to make it look like I was orgasming, and I think that it probably like seemed more real” (Irene)*

#### Who She Faked With: When I Didn't Know Him Well

All 12 college women talked about how they faked orgasm with someone they did not know well, either in the context of a one-night stand or in the very beginning of the dating relationship. It was described by many as “*easier to get away with*” if they faked an orgasm with someone whom they did not know and would never see again. Most (n=11) described faking at the start of a relationship that eventually evolved into something long-term. As their partner got to know their sexual needs, there was no need to fake anymore. Some examples describing who women faked with include:

*“We were dating for less than a year, I only did it like a couple of times in the beginning 'cause I kind of almost felt bad 'cause it's like obviously you're putting a lot of effort in, you really are trying. It was just sometimes it was not going to happen and also that was one of my early relationships so I wasn't as comfortable*

*talking openly about it so I didn't feel okay asking him to try something different.”*

(Jasmine)

*“I only dated Charlie for like 3 months, it was a stupid relationship. We didn't have sex very many times, so this is kind of awkward, but I faked every single time with him. We only had sex like 3 times. This is so sad. I never even had an orgasm with him.”* (Bella)

*“My relationship with Edward is that he is a very serious partner. I've been dating Edward for 2 and a half years. It's like a more serious relationship where we are not just having sex, we very much care about each other. We talk about being married and having a family one day, so it's an entirely different relationship from anyone else I have been with. I faked with him a solid two times and it was at the very beginning because we still didn't know much about each other's bodies.”* (Charlotte)

### Frequency and Context of Faking Orgasm Summary

Across all the interviews, four common themes emerged when women discussed the frequency and the context in which they faked orgasm. When college women described how often they faked, the theme that arose was that this number varied widely depending on the woman, her relationship, and the partner. Women mentioned that they were likely to utilize their body and noises to convince their partner that they had experienced an orgasm; other women stated that they would simply tell their partner that they had an orgasm when they did not. All of the women discussed how they had faked almost exclusively during intercourse (there were only two women who faked during oral sex as well). Many of the women mentioned faking orgasm when they did not know

their sexual partner well. This may have been the beginning of a long-term relationship or with a one-night stand/casual relationship.

### College Women's Reasons for Faking Orgasm

The second research question asked, "*What are college women's reasons for faking orgasm?*" A series of interview questions explored their most important reasons and what their rationale was for faking orgasm. Five themes emerged for the reasons women say they fake orgasm, including, not wanting to hurt his ego, experiencing uncomfortable emotional and physical feelings with him, worrying she was taking too long, feeling like the guy wasn't doing anything that was stimulating her, or she felt it was expected that she reach orgasm as part of sex. Each woman had many reasons for faking and their reasons varied based on the context of the sexual experience. These five themes are described below and listed in Table 2.

#### I Did Not Want to Hurt His Feelings

Most of the college women (n=10) described faking orgasm at some point out of concern for his feelings. They were worried about his ego and whether or not he would feel like he was not a good sexual performer. Examples of things women said included:

*"I guess mainly I was just trying to make my partners feel better about themselves and that's why I would never say 'Hey I've been faking the entire time we've been sleeping together' because that would take away all that validation too. Plus, I feel like it's kind of a waste of time to be faking quite a bit and then tell the partner that you were faking. Their feelings are really going to get hurt that way."* (Hannah)

*“Um, honestly I fake not to hurt their ego because men are babies. Todd, Dan, and Charlie couldn’t handle rejection, so I would basically just fake with them because I didn’t want to hurt their feelings or anything. Men need to feel strong, needed, and important. So, I think that giving a girl an orgasm is very important to their self-esteem; if they are unable to give a girl that orgasm it hurts their self-esteem and makes them feel like they aren’t as sexually powerful as they should be.” (Bella)*

*“He is a little self-conscious of his size, so he thinks that he doesn’t give me an orgasm through intercourse because of his size instead of the fact that I can’t orgasm that way. I don’t think that guys realize that a lot of girls can’t orgasm that way, and they think it’s their fault because they don’t have a massive penis. I don’t think that’s true though.” (Delilah)*

*“Usually, I mean in the situations I can think of, it’s someone I like or care about and I want them to feel okay and I want them to know that I appreciate their effort and they did their very best, so you know, I just like fake it to maybe make them feel a little bit better.” (Jasmine)*

### I Was Uncomfortable Being With Him

Many women (n=7) said they faked orgasm because they were really uncomfortable being with their sexual partner and knew it was not going to lead to orgasm. They described being uncomfortable in terms of not being able to relax with him, they didn’t feel an emotional connection, or they felt self-conscious. A few mentioned feeling physically uncomfortable and faking orgasm in order for the sex to end. Examples of what women said included:

*“I think with Shawn and Aaron ‘discomfort’ would be the one-word summary of why I faked. I think with the more casual relationships I never was emotionally close to them so I was emotionally uncomfortable with the situation. I felt like, ‘I don't like that you're seeing my boobs right now and I hardly know you.’ With Shawn it was probably more like this is my first partner ever, I don't know what I'm doing, I'm self-conscious, that's why I'm uncomfortable and also when you don't really know what you're doing. I think physically that's uncomfortable too.”*

(Charlotte)

*“Honestly, because I was ready for the sex to be over and because in my experience it gets to a certain point where I wouldn't be into [sex] anymore so I was kind of a little uncomfortable, like not painful by any means, but when you're hitting me from behind and keep going, it just doesn't feel good after 5 minutes.*

*That's not going to feel good for a constant amount of time, like I'm over it. And my body sometimes is just like ‘Yeah, okay, I'm done.’”* (Jasmine)

*“It definitely has to do with discomfort in like length because I know the longer that I like have sex the more discomfort I get. But it also has to do with discomfort as well. If I like realize like halfway through, like this was an awful decision and I probably should not have had sex with this person, it's just definitely not the right match and so like then I'll probably end it a little bit faster.”* (Kaylee)

### I Felt Like I Was Taking Too Long

Many women (n=6) said the reason they faked orgasm was because it was taking them too long to reach a real orgasm. They were worried that their partner would think something was wrong with them or they felt pressured by their partner continually

asking, “*Have you come yet?*” Some examples of quotes from women describing how they felt they were taking too long included:

*“I think I was faking most of the time because I felt like I had to. I wanted to have an orgasm, but it wasn’t happening very fast. Many people feel like, ‘Who doesn’t love having sex like? It’s the best!’ I don’t know. I think that’s generally the idea. So I was like if I’m not enjoying this and I feel like I should be at least like making it look like I am.”* (Charlotte)

*“It’s more like I felt that I should reach an orgasm, more than because he wasn’t going to give me one cause he’s doing the same things he usually does [when I have an orgasm] but sometimes it’s just not as fast. I feel like sometimes it takes me a lot longer to have an orgasm but I don’t know why. I think that my vagina is picky, it doesn’t always want to have an orgasm, and I don’t really feel like I have much control over that. I feel bad when it takes a long time ‘cause then I think he feels bad too.”* (Delilah)

*“I was faking because I felt like I should reach an orgasm. I would have eventually reached an orgasm in another several minutes probably but I was really tired so, it was also a possibility that I would fall asleep before I actually reached the orgasm. It was just happening so slow, I sped the process up.”* (Abigail)

*“I feel like the guy is going to think that something is wrong with me if I don’t have an orgasm. I don’t want him to think that he just had sex with a weirdo after he finishes. Charlie would ask me if I had orgasms, and I hated that. He did it all the time during sex, it made pleasure really difficult to focus on.”* (Bella)

## He Didn't Know What He Was Doing

Most women (n=11) described situations where they faked an orgasm because the man they were with did not seem to know what he was doing in terms of stimulating her. They were sure they would not be reaching a real orgasm with him and therefore felt their only option was to fake an orgasm. Examples of this included:

*"I think with the other guys [one night stands] it was different. They didn't really know what they were doing. If I was going to be in a long-term relationship, it would be different, but I had no confidence in the men that I slept with. I would always be like 'Eh, they're never going to get it,' so I would fake because I'm pretty sure that I just wouldn't have ever have an orgasm in those encounters.*

(Emma)

*"Most of the time no, I wouldn't have an orgasm, and I just would have felt self-conscious like guiding them to a different route so that's why I would just like get it over with in a sense. I think also, to a point I was ending the sexual stuff because I just was done and I didn't think that anything was going to come of what they were doing."* (Irene)

*"I feel like Charles was inadequate, but at the time when I was dating him I didn't want him to feel bad. He had no idea how to please me and it was like pretty awkward in bed, so I think with him it was just a lot easier to fake. He literally could not get me off, I cringe thinking back on it."* (Faith)

*"I think that the majority of the time I fake because they are not doing anything and I'm not getting very stimulated throughout the whole thing so I just don't feel like it's going to happen no matter how long it goes. They aren't doing their job.*

*No matter how long we like had sex or he did whatever, I wasn't going to have an orgasm. I think it also depends on whether or not they are going down on me too. Like I said before, a lot of the guys I only sleep with once don't necessarily like go down on me, so I am faking more because I cannot have an orgasm just by intercourse.” (Lily)*

### It's Expected

All 12 women felt there was an expectation and pressure to have an orgasm with intercourse. All of them said they believed it was what needed to happen in order for sexual intercourse to be complete. Not only should *he* orgasm, but she needs to orgasm as well. Women described this expectation and pressure in the following examples:

*“Guys just think we should have an orgasm, so that's how it happens. I think there's probably a huge amount of pressure on many women to have an orgasm, so they end up faking. I wouldn't say anyone is happy to fake orgasms because normally the situation that you find yourself in is not ideal, like in my case less so because I just wanted to go to sleep but in another woman's case, they may just want sex to be done with which is a much more intimidating feeling than what I was feeling.” (Abigail)*

*“It's something that we all talk about quite a bit. It isn't a taboo subject or anything, it's something that we can all relate to and there are actually some pretty funny nights where we all just sit around and talk about each other's stories of faking orgasm. Like I mentioned before, I think that it is expected as a woman to have an orgasm, so I feel like faking comes naturally from that assumption. I've definitely faked because I felt like I had to, so I feel like it's*

*super common. And I feel like most women do it to make the men feel fine and not shitty about themselves because that is always what happens in my opinion. But I feel like when I talk to my friends about it, they easily admit that they have faked without feeling ashamed at all, like it was no big deal. It's expected.” (Bella)*

*“I feel like guys expect you to orgasm, but among girls I feel like it's an understanding that having an orgasm during sex is not quite so common. I kind of think that's where faking comes from because girls all understand how difficult it can be to have an orgasm, but guys just don't seem to get it. I think that they kind of like originate the pressure, but sometimes I feel like I internalize that and then like I feel like I need to have an orgasm. Even though I know that's not always like the norm for me. Guys always want you to have an orgasm, I think it makes them feel better and more accomplished and then they get the added bonus that their partner is having a good time too.” (Emma).*

#### College Women's Reasons for Faking Orgasm Summary

When women were asked about the reasons why they faked orgasms, five themes emerged. The first theme was that women were likely to fake orgasm in an attempt to protect their partner's feelings. For example, these women knew that many men place worth in being able to give women orgasms, so the women faked in order not to hurt their partner's confidence. The second theme that arose was that women fake in order to deal with discomfort. These women either experienced physical or emotional discomfort and faked orgasm in order to end sex. The third theme was that some women felt like they should orgasm faster. Many of the women implied that they did not want to be viewed as odd by their partner and that they should be able to have an orgasm quickly and with

ease. The fourth theme found was that many women claimed that they would never be able to reach an orgasm with their partner because their partner didn't know what he was doing. The fifth and final theme that was prevalent was that when women thought back to their intimate moments, they believed that it was completely expected to have an orgasm. College women had a wide variety of reasons for faking, and these themes represent the most prevalent reasons that they discussed.

### Feelings About Faking: Hers, Her Partner(s), and Her Friends

The third research question asked, *“How do college women feel about faking and what is their sense of how their partner(s) and friends feel about women faking orgasm?”*

The 12 college women were asked a series of questions to explore their feelings about faking, as well as the feelings of those around them. Four unique themes emerged from the in-depth interviews, including many women and her friends feeling it was typical or normal behavior. Most never discussed faking with their sexual partner because they knew his response would not be good. These are described below and are listed in Table 2.

#### It Seems Pretty Normal

When asked about her feelings about having faked an orgasm, half of the women (n=6) shrugged their shoulders and indicated that they felt this was very normal behavior within a sexual encounter. Women seemed to be un-phased and okay with faking orgasm, and saw it as a useful tool in many sexual encounters. Examples of women's description of their feelings include:

*“I kind of feel neutral. I don't think I'm doing anything bad. A part of me feels guilty when he doesn't know. Just kind of like neutral, I think it's pretty normal*

*though, and I don't think that many women feel bad about faking, especially because they are faking to not hurt their partner's feelings. It's weird because I do feel like a lot of women fake so that they don't hurt their partners' feelings, but I feel like a lot of guys would be hurt more if they found out that their girlfriend was faking. It's pretty screwed up.” (Delilah)*

*“I mean I'm not really embarrassed about it. I guess the only thing is that now that you are asking me these questions, I'm kind of confused as to why I faked, I haven't thought about it before. But I'm not embarrassed or ashamed or anything, it's just something that I do and I don't know why. I do think it's really interesting to think about it, that I don't know where that came from exactly.”*

*(Grace)*

*“It's so normal, almost like, it shouldn't be so normal, it shouldn't be something that I have to do, I just don't even think about it. I feel like it's become like I'm used to it, it is what it is. No one really puts any thought into it. I don't care that I have done it personally, but it's probably something that I should change at some point.” (Emma)*

*“I mean don't really feel bad or good. It is what it is. You don't like lose sleep over it by any means. I'm not trying to make a habit of it. I don't think I am going to do it again just because of where I'm at. I mean you never know, so I don't know what my situation will be in the future, but I don't think I'll be faking again just because I feel like I don't need to at this point in my life.” (Jasmine)*

## I Feel Guilty, But It Was Necessary

Half of the women (n=6) expressed some feelings of guilt, embarrassment, or shame for faking. However, these women also qualified these feelings by saying that faking is necessary in many situations in order for the sexual encounter to be considered a success. Some quotes from college women about these feelings include:

*“I feel bad that I didn't address it, I mean lying is really what I feel bad about but I didn't want to make either of them feel bad. Going back, I would definitely talk more about it 'cause that's super important, but going back I was just too shy at the time to discuss it.”* (Irene)

*“It's definitely discouraging. When I'm having sex, most of the time the goal is to have an orgasm so faking is the exact opposite of what I'm doing all this stuff for. But I wouldn't say it bothers me when I don't get off. It's not like, ‘Oh my God, I should have gotten off.’ It's so frustrating because I feel like I have to fake and they obviously aren't learning how to make me actually feel good. It just really sucks.”* (Kaylee)

*“It is disappointing to fake cause I didn't feel like my needs were important enough to tell the guy about. It is always hard for me to say, ‘That wasn't good for me.’ I am also okay that I didn't make them feel bad, but also I was lying so then you kind of feel guilty anyway. I think in a situation like that it's hard for both people to come away from the experience happy and satisfied.”* (Faith)

*“It's kind of disappointing to fake all the time because I know it's a self-confidence thing on my part but also I don't want to hurt his confidence either.”*

*It's also because I've slept with people that I wasn't emotionally connected with so faking didn't really benefit me in the end anyways.” (Lily)*

### I Knew He Would Feel Deceived

College women were also asked how their sexual partner felt about her faking. Over half of the women (n=7) indicated they were not willing to tell their sexual partner about faking. All of the women described how they were sure he would respond in a negative way - in terms of him feeling lied to or deceived. This was confirmed by the women who did tell their sexual partner (n=5), and his response was that he felt lied to and deceived. Sample responses included:

*“No! I haven't ever talked about that with any of my sex partners. That would be so awkward and embarrassing for both of us because he would feel like he couldn't get me off, and I think he would also think that I was weird for not being able to get off.” (Bella)*

*“No, I haven't even discussed the topic, and I don't want it to come out that I have faked in the past, so it's not something that I ever bring up. I don't want to hurt my partner's feelings, so I would not want to talk about it. I guess if he brought it up, I might talk about it in general terms, but I don't think I would want to admit to a guy that I had faked with him. Plus, I don't think that guys like to think that anyone has ever faked with them because that would hurt their confidence, so they probably don't want to bring it up either.” (Kaylee)*

*“When I actually did talk to him, he was a little hurt and a little confused about why I would fake. I didn't feel like I could really explain everything to him, so I kind of brushed it off, but that probably wasn't the best thing to do. I feel like it's*

*kind of like a complex subject, so even though we are close, I don't think he would realize the differences that we face in the bedroom based on like the fact that he is male and I'm female.” (Faith)*

*“I've talked about it with some guys and I think it's the guys that I have like been close enough with that actually care so they're like, ‘Oh well like don't fake it with me, just like tell me and I'll like do something about it.’ No guy has ever told me that I should fake orgasm. I told a guy this summer that I faked. He was just like, ‘Oh my God! Why would you do that? You know that I would have gotten you there.’” (Lily)*

### Yup, We Do That Too

When asked how her friends felt about her faking orgasm with a partner, the overwhelming response from her friends (n=10) was that it is perfectly normal behavior and not surprising. Women talked only about their female friends' response; none of the women discussed how male friends would feel about her faking orgasm with a partner. Only two women said their female friends would be judgmental. Examples of the friends' responses to finding out she fakes orgasms included:

*“So I talked to my friends, actually when you first asked me to do the interview. I texted everyone who lives here. I was like, ‘The only requirement is you have faked an orgasm, so if you have, consider doing Lanie's study.’ And one of my roommates responded back, ‘Have I faked an orgasm? Do you mean am I a woman?!’ We all just laughed because it's so regular. I feel like with my friends it's the norm, and that's what a lot of women unfortunately do.” (Abigail)*

*“The one friend that I just talked to, I think I told her a couple times, and she asked me how my partners could improve. Yeah, I don’t think that any of my friends would judge, they would try to find out why I was doing what I was doing, and maybe how I could find a solution if I was like feeling upset or something about it. They would want me to talk to the guy about it, because the friends that I know that have faked all talked to their partners, and they said things got better. Overall, I think that my friends would be pretty cool about it.”* (Irene)

*“So the only people I’ve ever talked about this with were my current roommates because we knew that you were doing this study. We talked about it and all of us kind of joked like, ‘Oh girl have I faked? Hell yes I faked, who hasn’t faked?’ But it never went really beyond that. Like I said before, I think it’s kind of a joke that women fake, which kind of is part of the problem. If there is some pressure for us to fake then that exists but then we also can’t like treat it like a joke. I assume that it’s very normal, but I don’t think it’s talked about in a serious way often enough. They didn’t have any specific reaction when I told them that I personally had faked. I think that most women just assume that all other women are faking, too.”* (Charlotte).

### Feelings About Faking Summary

When women were asked about their feelings around faking orgasms, as well as their partners’ and friends’ feelings, four themes emerged. The first theme was that half of the women didn’t feel guilty about faking orgasm. Rather, they felt as though it was normal and not something to worry about. These women did not use self-deprecating language and they felt justified in their actions. The second theme that arose was that the

other half of the women felt guilty for faking orgasm, but at the same time they felt as though it was necessary. These women used more self-deprecating language and they were more likely to feel bad for their partner. The third theme was that most of the women did not tell their partners about faking because they knew that the male partner would feel deceived. The women who did tell their partners about faking orgasm confirmed this belief, as their partners had a negative reaction. The fourth theme found was that the women's friends found faking orgasm normal and often engaged in the practice as well. The friends were likely to be nonjudgmental and even supportive in the matter. College women had various feelings in regards to their own faking; their partners and friends had different feelings as well, and these themes represent the most prevalent feelings that they discussed.

### Sexual Scripts

After reviewing the themes for the first three research questions, an examination of the college women's transcripts revealed three overarching sexual scripts women internalize to explain their faking orgasm behavior. These sexual scripts include: 1) media messages of what "normal sex" looks like, 2) her orgasm assures him he is competent, and 3) her orgasm signals that sex is complete. These sexual scripts are discussed below. Sample quotes are included to highlight these scripts.

#### Media Messages of What "Normal Sex" Looks Like

Many of the women didn't know exactly where their reasons for faking orgasm originated from, but they were able to cite the media in general as playing a very important role. Women discussed movies, television shows, and pornography. Women found these various types of media to be influential in their sex lives and to offer them an

understanding of what “normal sex” should look like. Some sample quotes describing women’s experiences with media are below:

*“I think in my experience the way that men and women act has a lot to do with porn and when they watch it. Like the women through the whole entire thing are having orgasms, multiple orgasms. I mentioned Red Sparrow before and in that movie she was having orgasms in like 2 minutes. So I think it's just expected that that's what sex is supposed to be. When in reality, I like to have one orgasm and I'm good. I think that porn plays such a big role in the expectations today, and it used to be upsetting to me that I felt like it was expected that I also act that way. Especially because most of the stuff they do wouldn't be stuff that I would be up for. When we first started dating I was super anti-porn. And then throughout dating, I realized that as long as like both partners know that it's like, more of a fantasy most of the time than a reality, then it's fine. But if you have a partner that looks at porn and always thinks it's going to be the reality of sex, then that's going to cause a lot of problems in the relationship.” (Delilah)*

*“I haven't really thought about where I learned about faking orgasm before. Um yeah I don't know. I mean maybe like ((sighs)), maybe like, I don't want to say TV shows because that's cliché, but you know how sometimes on TV you might see stuff like that, I don't know, but I feel like the women on the TV fake it. It's not like I've ever really given it thought though I guess, I think I would say TV was a pretty big influence.” (Grace)*

*“I think that porn is a big reason why women fake, the way that sex is shown makes men think that sex in real life is going to be different than it actually is.*

*Even in movies and stuff, sex is like this amazing thing that everyone wants to have, like in American Pie, but in real life it's not ever really that interesting. I think sex can be really boring, especially if the guy has no idea what do to with your body.” (Faith)*

*“I don't know how I learned to fake, nothing off the top of my head from when I was younger, but recently like the 50 Shades of Grey series. She is always having orgasms basically just from having sex, so I think it sets up some unrealistic expectations there. But also, he goes down on her like a lot, so maybe she could have orgasms, but I still feel like it's pretty fake.” (Lily)*

#### Her Orgasm Assures Him He is Competent

Nearly every single woman interviewed had faked orgasm because they didn't want to hurt their partner's feelings. This sexual script suggests sex is about him; it's about assuring him of his abilities, his sexual prowess, and his manhood. All women described the pressure from their partner to orgasm in order to assure him of his competency. Some examples of this can be found below:

*“I think that a lot of women probably feel like they are disappointing their partner if they don't have an orgasm all the time, that's probably why most women fake. They feel like their partner needs the ego boost, so they fake. I'd say it's pretty expected to have an orgasm because the guy wants to feel good about himself.” (Faith)*

*“With my boyfriend I would fake because I didn't like want to make him feel bad. And I think the other two guys, I mean, maybe it was just kind of, I guess the best reason would be like societal expectations. I don't know, I always kind of feel like*

*it's something that should happen during sex. Even if they didn't make me orgasm, they did make me feel good in at least some way, and faking was kind of my way of like showing even if they really didn't make me orgasm, they were doing something good.” (Grace)*

*“I think that men get their feelings hurt easily and they're very sensitive when it comes to sex and they always want to protect their ego and I think that there's at least in some way pressure on women to fake orgasms so that they protect the feeling of their male partner.” (Abigail)*

*“I think that men kind of originate the pressure to have an orgasm. Sometimes I feel like I internalize that and then like I feel I need to have one. Guys always want you to have an orgasm. I think it makes them feel better and more accomplished and then they get the added bonus that their partner is having a good time too.” (Emma).*

### Her Orgasm Signals That Sex is Complete

Another common theme that women noted was that they felt like sex was not complete until they experienced an orgasm. Not only did they feel this way, many also proclaimed that their partners feel similarly. Some sample quotes about women feeling as though their orgasm is the end of sex can be found below:

*“The first time that I had sex, I just remember that we were both so inexperienced. It was painful, I wanted it to be over, so faking the orgasm was how I decided that I wanted to end the sexual encounter. I learned that if I wanted to end sex, then I could fake orgasm because that was a signal to him that he should be finishing up soon.” (Charlotte)*

*“Ummm, I think I faked because it's kind of expected to have an orgasm. Like there's that expectation from your partner because it's kind of classically the end of sex. So then it's depending on how long they last, I guess. I want to at least get one in. It's harder to have an orgasm when I'm with someone I don't have as much of a connection with, because I feel like I have to orgasm to end sex, and when I have less of a connection it's harder to have one.” (Hannah).*

*“At the time I felt like an orgasm was supposed to happen and then that was sort of like the mark of the end of the experience so I should basically have one to finish things up.” (Irene).*

### Sexual Scripts Summary

An examination of the women's responses to the interview questions revealed three overarching themes about the sexual scripts that women internalize and follow in regards to the female orgasm/faking orgasm. The first theme was that many women gather from the media what “normal sex” is supposed to look like. These women cited watching pornography, television, and movies; each of which imparted upon the women what sex is “supposed” to look like. The second theme found was that sex is about him; it's about assuring him of his abilities, his sexual prowess, and his manhood. Many women cited their main reason for faking orgasm was to not hurt their partner's feelings. The third theme was that the female orgasm is the signal that sex is complete. Many of the women utilized faking orgasm as a way of saying “we can stop now” to end sex.

### Chapter Summary

This study sought to investigate the experiences of college women who have faked orgasm. The interviews revealed many common themes related to the frequency

and context of faking orgasm, the reasons behind faking orgasm, the women's feelings along with their friends' and partner's feelings about faking orgasm, and the scripts about faking orgasm that women internalize.

As described above, the women who were interviewed shared similar experiences with faking orgasm in regards to the context and frequency. There was a wide variety of frequency among the women. Whether or not they faked an orgasm depended on their partner, their sexual experience, and themselves. The majority of women discussed that they used their body to fake orgasm and many of the women also said that they would lie if their partner asked if they had an orgasm. They also mentioned that when they faked orgasm, all had done this during penile-vagina orgasm. In addition, women noted that they were much more likely to fake an orgasm when they didn't know the person well (in a casual relationship or at the beginning of a long term relationship).

The majority of women faked orgasm because they did not want to hurt their partner's feelings. They often also described faking orgasm because they were physically or emotionally uncomfortable. Many women would fake because they felt that they were taking too long to have an orgasm and wanted to speed the process up. The women who were interviewed also said that they would often fake because their partner didn't know what he was doing, and if they didn't fake, they knew they would never have an orgasm. The last reason that women were likely to fake was that it is expected for them to have an orgasm and there is pressure to be able to have an orgasm during sex.

In terms of feelings in regards to faking orgasm, around half of the women felt as though it is normal behavior and didn't experience any negative feelings. The other half of the women felt guilty for faking orgasm. However, they also felt as though it was

necessary. In addition, women were not likely to tell their sex partner about faking orgasm because they didn't want him to have a negative reaction; this was shown to be accurate by women who did tell their partner and found that he, indeed, had a negative response. When women told their friends about their faking behavior, their female friends were likely to disclose that they not only felt this behavior is normal, they fake orgasms as well.

The women's interviews revealed three sexual scripts that many women internalized about sex and orgasms. Many of the college women felt as though the media played into their perception of what "normal sex" should look like. Many women also described that sex is about the man; it's about assuring him of his abilities, his sexual prowess, and his manhood. There is pressure to fake an orgasm to make sure that their partner feels sexually competent. Also, there were many women who felt as though their orgasm was a way to signal the end of sex, and therefore if they were unable to have an orgasm, they would fake to end sex.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

This study sought to explore the experiences college women have in regards to faking orgasm. Currently, there is some research on women who fake orgasm, however much of it is several decades old. In addition, many of the previous studies included both men and women, were not specifically focused on the topic of faking orgasm, or they had a very broad age range of participants. This study focused exclusively on faking orgasm and involved a younger cohort of educated, college women. The goal of this study is to add to the existing body of research by understanding more about contemporary young women who have faked orgasm, including the context, reasons, feelings, as well as the sexual scripts that are influencing young women's behavior.

This study included interviews with 12 college women between the ages of 19-22 who were asked to describe their experiences with faking orgasm (See Table 1). Each woman had faked orgasm at least once in the context of a heterosexual encounter. As part of the interview, each woman was asked about the frequency and context in which she faked orgasm, her reasons for faking orgasm, and feelings surrounding faking from herself, her friends, and her sex partner(s). Many themes emerged, which lead to a greater understanding about the sexual scripts around faking orgasm that these women have internalized. These themes were described in detail in the previous chapter. They offer insight into the complexities that surround women and faking orgasm (See Table 2).

Within this chapter, the findings of this study will be discussed in light of previous

research on faking orgasm. In addition, limitations of this research, suggestions for future research, and suggestions and recommendations for education will be discussed.

### Comparison of Findings to Previous Research

#### Frequency and Context of Faking Orgasms

Every single woman had a different experience when it came to how frequently she faked orgasm. Some women faked every time they had sex, others had only faked twice in their life. This is similar to previous research such as Bryan's 2001 study where she found that 20% of women faked orgasm during around 20% of their encounters (Bryan, 2001), Fahs found that 45% of women report that they faked orgasm regularly during their sexual encounters (Fahs, 2014), and in Ellison's study (2000), she saw that most (75%) of the women said that they had faked less than 50 times; however, 10% of the women claimed to have faked orgasm between "150 and 10,000 times or wrote in another answer such as countless, or a bazillion" (Ellison, 2000). These researchers also found that there was a wide range among various participants.

In terms of how they fake, nine of the 12 women discussed using their bodies to fake orgasm and additionally, seven of the women said that if their partner asked them about having an orgasm, they would actively say that they had one even if they did not. This was a finding described in other studies surrounding women faking orgasm (Bryan, 2001). Many women utilized one or both techniques to convince their partner that they experienced an orgasm. Many women described, "putting on a show" for their male partner so that they would not suspect anything. Related to this was the unique finding in this study that women reported that they got better at faking over time.

In addition, all 12 of the women discussed how they faked orgasm during

intercourse. Two of the women cited also faking during oral sex sometimes, but they concluded that they mostly faked during intercourse. Earlier studies (i.e., Darling & Davidson, 1986; Wiederman, 1997; Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010) also specifically explored women who faked orgasm during intercourse. One of the studies (Bryan, 2001) did not delve into separating faking orgasm during intercourse versus other types of sex.

Additionally, all 12 of the women described faking orgasm at the beginning of relationships and not continuing on throughout the entirety of the relationship. This finding was unique to this study and was not discussed in previous research. The women faked when they were “less close” with their partners and had “less emotional attachment.” For some women (those who had only one night stands), this pattern continued, but for those who had long-term boyfriends, they stopped faking as the relationship progressed forwards.

#### College Women’s Reasons for Faking Orgasm

Collectively, almost every woman interviewed agreed that they faked orgasm in order to save their partner’s feelings. The women were more concerned with their partner’s ego than with their own pleasure during the sexual experience. This finding was similar amongst nearly all of the previous research (Braun, Opperman, & Rogers, 2014; Bryan, 2001; Ellison, 2000; Fahs, 2011; Mialon, 2012; Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010; Roberts et al., 1995). These former studies also discussed how women often faked orgasm in order to save their partners’ feelings and confidence. For many women, it was reported that it was easier to fake and “protect his feelings” than to tell him the truth and deal with an uncomfortable conversation. In addition, many of these previous studies found that a common reason women faked was in order to keep the relationship. The

current study did not identify this to be a reason cited by the college women for faking orgasm.

Another finding that was unique to this study was a theme that many of the college women stated that the reason they faked orgasm was because they were uncomfortable with the partner. They were experiencing physical discomfort or emotional discomfort. They faked orgasm in order to end the sexual experience because they didn't want to be having sex anymore, and did not feel they could tell their partner why they did not want to continue to have sex. Only one previous study (Bryan, 2001) found that some women would fake orgasm because of physical discomfort; but no study found women that reported faking due to emotional discomfort. The college women in this study felt self-conscious and cited that they would not be able to have an orgasm during that sexual experience.

Additionally, something that many women noted was that they felt as though they were taking too long to have an orgasm. These women mentioned that they most likely would have been able to have an orgasm eventually, but they felt pressured, rushed, and as though they would be viewed as "weird" if they didn't have an orgasm more quickly. Other researchers (i.e., Bryan, 2001; Fahs, 2014; Roberts et al., 1995) have also found this to be a reason why women fake orgasm. These women did not want to inconvenience their partners and keep them waiting, so they faked an orgasm.

A unique theme noted by college women in this study to explain their reason for faking was because their partner did not know what he was doing. The women who discussed this felt as though they would never experience an orgasm with their partner and therefore faked orgasm. These women were faking orgasm in order to end the

encounter, and this is where there are similarities to the other studies ( Bryam, 2001; Ellison, 2000; Fahs, 2014; Lafrance, Stelzl, & Thomas, 2017; Muehlenhard & Shippee, 2010). These studies found that women would fake orgasm to end the sexual encounter, however it may have been for a variety of reasons, not simply that the male partner didn't know what he was doing. This could be due in large part because of the young age of the female respondents. They most likely have inexperienced partners who do not know what is pleasurable for a female.

The final theme that arose under the "reasons" category was that women felt as though having an orgasm at the end of sex was "expected." This ties into feeling "weird" about not being able to have an orgasm, however it goes a step further and ties into societal and partner expectations about sex. Other studies mentioned this expectation (Bryan, 2001; Fahs, 2014), and it became clear that many of the women who fake orgasm do so because they feel obligated to. The college women talked about the expectation from society, self, partner, and friends for them to have an orgasm.

#### Feelings about Faking: Hers, Her Partner(s), and Her Friends

One unique aspect of this study is that it not only delved into the frequency and reasons for faking, but also examined feelings associated with faking. Previous studies have not asked about how women feel about faking orgasm, or how partners and friends feel. In this study, the college women were evenly divided into two groups. The first group of women felt as though their behavior was normal and nothing to worry about. The other group of women felt guilty about faking orgasm, but they also felt as though it was necessary. These women knew that faking may not have been the right thing to do, but they continued the behavior.

Additionally, previous studies have not asked about how women imagine their partners would feel to know they are faking orgasm. Most of the college women mentioned that they didn't tell their partner about faking orgasm because they did not want him to have a negative response.

Another theme that arose was that women's female friends tended to have a non-judgmental view of faking orgasm. Many of the women exclaimed that they do the same thing and that they also believe faking orgasms is normal behavior. This finding was also unique to this study because previous studies did not ask about the friends' prevalence of faking orgasm or their friends' feelings surrounding faking orgasm.

### Sexual Scripts

The finding that many college women discussed the role of the media in defining what "normal sex" is and what female orgasm is supposed to look like was unique. Most previous studies did not examine women's sexual scripts or the variety of societal pressures that are placed on women. All the women in this study described the important role of the media in shaping their understanding of sex and orgasm. The college women participating in this study mentioned either learning about orgasms or faking orgasms through some sort of media such as movies, pornography, or television. These women mentioned having a fantasy version or unrealistic idea of what "normal sex" is "supposed" to look like due to the media influence in their younger years.

The second script that arose from the interviews with college women is the notion that her orgasm serves as an assurance to her partner that he is competent. Previous studies have also described this need for women to assure her partner of his competency. Weiss (2017) and Lavie-Ajayi and Joffe (2009) discuss how it becomes obligatory for

women to have an orgasm. A large goal of her orgasm is not about her pleasure; rather it is about making sure her male partner is happy and confident about his own sexual abilities. Other studies (Bryan, 2001; Fahs, 2014) found that many women faked because they felt that they needed to show their partner that he is doing a good job and give him the impression that they are enjoying sex as much as he is.

Finally, the third script to emerge from the interviews was the notion that female orgasm signals that sex is complete. Many of the women discussed faking orgasm in order to end the sexual experience. This is similar to a previous study by Lavie-Ajayi and Joffe (2009) in which they noted that the woman's orgasm is the "goal of sex." Similar to the current study, the female orgasm is seen as what needs to happen for the sex to be complete.

### Limitations

As with all qualitative studies, the findings of this study cannot be generalized. There were several limitations to this study beginning with a small sample size, and limited to participants who were willing to be interviewed for the study. I completed in-depth interviews with college women who volunteered, and they were recruited via the snowball method. The interviews relied on the participants' ability to recall as well as their perceptions of events, which could not be verified. This study was limited to students who attend the University of Maine and all shared the same ethnicity.

Factors such as women's ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, or religious orientation could all play into women's propensity towards faking orgasm, along with their willingness to discuss such matters. The women who were interviewed were all similar in these regards. As a result, they may not have had a great deal of variability in

their experiences with faking orgasm. It is difficult to speculate how groups of women who vary in their demographic characteristics might respond. However, based on the present study and many others, it is clear that many women do fake orgasm.

Another key limitation of the present study was that only the author coded the interviews. In future research, it is important that inter rater reliability be established to increase confidence regarding the utility of the coding system. Specifically, there should be at least two people who learn the coding system and apply it to the interviews, and their level of agreement should be determined.

#### Future Research

Few studies have investigated women faking orgasm. The research in this area could be greatly expanded upon. In relation to the current study, it would be beneficial for future studies to conduct more in-depth investigations focusing on just one of the aspects of the current study. Future studies could focus solely on the context, reasons, or feelings a woman might fake orgasm. It would also be beneficial to look at the deeper meaning of faking orgasm in terms of the sexual scripts.

It is important to note that all of the participants in this study ranged from 18 to 22 years old. This specific sample was chosen due to the highly concentrated amount of easily accessible young women on campus. However, young women's sexual scripts may be different than older women's sexual scripts, so it was important to examine a small age group and analyze how society, media, self-image, and male partners all affect their faking behavior. Other studies could be conducted to look at specifically older women, or to combine younger and older women to see which age groups are most likely

to be open to having in-depth conversations about orgasms and to examine what sexual scripts are held by each group.

As noted before, further research could be conducted upon women in different SES groups, of different ethnicities, with different cultures, or of different religious statuses. It is difficult to know how any of these groups of people would respond because of the major lack of research in this area currently. Therefore, further research could be conducted in order to examine these different groups of women and how their orgasm scripts differ or are similar to the women interviewed in this study.

The participants for this study were all women who shared their experiences of faking orgasm with male partners. Further research could examine how trans women experience faking orgasm and how societal roles of male and female play into that. Also, studies of women who have faked orgasm with other women would add to the body of knowledge and the understanding of sexual scripts behind faking orgasms.

In addition, future research could look at his understanding of and feelings about the meaning of the woman's orgasm in the sexual relationship. Finally, few studies have looked at how men fake orgasms. This body of knowledge could be expanded on and more in-depth interviews with men could take place to understand their context, reasons, feelings, and scripts surrounding faking orgasms.

### Suggestions and Recommendations

The frequency with which women fake orgasm, and the pressure she feels from her partner to reach orgasm provides several suggestions and recommendations for sexuality education. It is clear that two important things need to happen. First and foremost, there is greater need for education of basic anatomy and discussion of what the

purpose of sex is. It appears for many of the women interviewed in this study, sex involves feelings of pressure, and involves an act or performance in order to prove (mostly to the male partner) that the sexual encounter was a success and that she is normal and okay. Better sex education is needed for both men and women in order to have a more realistic understanding of sexual function and the role of pleasure.

Second, there is a need for greater permission for couples to talk about their sexual response, their desires, what feels good, and what is needed. The college women interviewed for this study made it clear that sex is not something you can or should talk about with even your most intimate partner. Better role models for communicating and greater emphasis in sexuality education classes is needed to give both women and men permission to talk with their partner.

### Conclusion

Among various circles of women, faking orgasm is considered commonplace. Faking orgasm is not a new development; the first study conducted asking women about faking orgasm (Hite, 1976) found that 57% of women reported faking orgasm. This number has not decreased over time, rather the opposite has happened. Today it is possible that more women are faking than in prior generations. It is also likely that women could have a greater willingness to report faking orgasm. However, what is most likely is that women are simultaneously faking more frequently as well as more eager to report their sexual activities for research purposes. For college women, faking behavior has increased dramatically over the past thirty years – from less than half to nearly three-quarters of college women today saying they have faked an orgasm (Caron, 2015). This increase in faking seems nonsensical as the emergence of the third wave of feminism has

worked to empower women, and women are becoming much more aware of their own pleasure and their own bodily autonomy. There are a wide variety of reasons women give for faking, and by delving into these reasons, the sexual scripts that women are raised to believe can be better understood. By deciphering these scripts that lead to faking orgasm, researchers can further understand societal pressure, self-pressure, and partner pressure, and work to change that.

This study was unique in that it used a qualitative methodology to investigate the experiences of college women who had faked orgasm in the context of heterosexual relationships. Women faking orgasm is very common behavior and appears to be normalized amongst their peer group. Interviews with these 12 college women revealed many themes and suggested that women have similar experiences when it comes to faking orgasm and their sexual scripts. By understanding the scripts that women who fake orgasm hold onto, along with the context and reasons for faking orgasm, we can further deconstruct the societal implications tied to what “normal sex” is “supposed” to look like and help them have a more honest and pleasurable sexual experience.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### RECRUITMENT LETTER/ANNOUNCEMENT

#### Faking Orgasm: Interviews with College Women about How, When, and Why They Pretend to Experience Orgasm

Hello, my name is Lanie Howes and I am a student in the Honors College at the University of Maine. I am working under Dr. Sandra Caron and Dr. Cynthia Erdley, my faculty advisors. I am doing a research project about women faking orgasm. More specifically, I am interested in speaking with University of Maine women between the ages of 18- 22 who have ever faked an orgasm during sexual intercourse.

I am currently looking for college students to interview. The interview will be confidential. No names will be included in my report; no names will be attached to the interview notes. The interview will take place at a mutually determined location. The interview will be about an hour long, and will consist of gathering some background information (e.g. age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, number of sexual partners), followed by questions related to faking orgasm. College women will be asked to describe how often and in what context they fake orgasm, what their reasons for faking orgasm are, and how they feel about faking orgasm, as well as how their partner(s) and friends feel about women faking orgasm.

If you or someone you know meets the criteria for participation and would consider participating in this research study, please contact me at [lanie.howes@maine.edu](mailto:lanie.howes@maine.edu). Email will be used to recruit, however, it is not secure. Any email correspondence with participants will be deleted after the completion of the interview. Thank you.

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Demographics:**

1. Age and year in college
2. Ethnicity
3. How many sex partners have you had?
4. What is your sexual orientation?

#### **Research Question 1: How often and in what context do women fake orgasm? (e.g., sexual intercourse vs. oral sex vs. genital stimulation; one night stands vs dating relationship)**

1. How many partners have you faked orgasm with?
2. Did you fake orgasm the first time you ever had sex?
3. Do you expect to continue to fake orgasm?
4. For each sexual partner you have faked an orgasm with:
  - a. What was the relationship with this person? (e.g. one night stand, casual, long-term relationship)
  - b. How often did you fake an orgasm with this person?
  - c. In what situations would you fake? (i.e., during oral sex, genital stimulation, sexual intercourse)
5. How do you fake? (i.e., use sounds, moaning, tensing to give your partner the impression you faked, or actually say you had an orgasm when you did not).

6. How did you learn how to fake? And had you ever practiced faking before you did it? And do you think you have gotten better at faking with experience?
7. Do you think your partner(s) knew or ever found out you faked? (e.g. did you ever tell him, do you think he suspected, or did he ever ask you if you had faked an orgasm?)

**Research Question 2. What are college women's reasons for faking orgasm?**

1. What would be the best way to describe why you have faked an orgasm?
2. What do you think are some of the most important reason you have faked an orgasm? (e.g. concern for his feelings, wanting the sex to end, to save the relationship, because I felt I should be able to reach orgasm and didn't want to appear there was something wrong with me)
3. Did you fake because your partner was not doing things that would lead you to orgasm or were you faking because you felt you should reach an orgasm?
4. What would have happened if you had not faked an orgasm?

**Research Question 3: How do college women feel about faking and what is their sense of how their partner(s) and friend(s) feels about women faking orgasm?**

1. How do you feel about the fact that you have faked an orgasm?
  - a. Do you think the reason(s) you fake differ(s) from other people's reasons?
  - b. Do you think there is a lot of pressure (or expectation) on college women today to reach orgasm within a sexual encounter?
2. Have you ever discussed the topic of faking orgasm with a sexual partner and what was their response? If you ever told any of your partners that you faked orgasm, what was their reaction?

3. Do you know if your friends have faked orgasm? How do your friends feel about this topic? Do you know how they would react if you told them you have faked orgasm?

## APPENDIX C

### INFORMED CONSENT

(to be given to those who contact me to be interviewed for this study)

#### **Faking Orgasm: Interviews with College Women about How, When, and Why They Pretend to Experience Orgasm**

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Lanie Howes, a student in the Honors College at the University of Maine. Her faculty advisors are Dr. Sandra Caron, Professor of Family Relations and Human Sexuality and Dr. Cynthia Erdley, Professor of Psychology. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of college women who have faked orgasm. The criteria for the study will be college women ages 18-22 who have faked orgasm during sexual intercourse.

**What will you be asked to do?** If you meet the criteria and decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed about your experiences faking orgasm. Nothing will link your name to the interview. Interviews will be taped whenever possible, but due to the sensitive nature of the study, it is understood you may not be willing to be recorded. In that case, extensive notes will be taken. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete and will take place at a location decided and agreed upon by both the interviewer and interviewee. My study will ask you questions about your experience with faking orgasm. You will be asked a series of questions on the context of faking orgasm, the reasons behind faking orgasm, and feelings you, your partner(s) and friends have toward women faking orgasm.

**Risks** – There is the possibility that you may become uncomfortable answering these questions. You may decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or discontinue the interview at any point.

**Benefits** – While this study may have no direct benefit to you, this research will increase understanding of faking orgasm behaviors, including the reasons why young women today feel the need to fake orgasm.

**Confidentiality** – Your name will not be on any documents for this study. A pseudonym will be assigned to each interview to protect your identity. Nothing will link your name to this interview. Interviews will be taped whenever possible, but due to the sensitive nature of the study, it is understood you may not be willing to be recorded. In that case, extensive notes will be taken. If you are willing to be taped, your interview will be transcribed and the content from the taped interview will be deleted within one week of the interview. The notes from the interview will be kept indefinitely in a locked office. Only the investigator and her faculty advisors will have access to this information. All email correspondence will be deleted after completion of the interview.

**Voluntary** – Participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time during the interview. You may skip any questions you do not want to answer.

**Contact Information** – If you are interested in being interviewed, or if you have any questions, please contact the primary investigator, Lanie Howes, by emailing:

[lanie.howes@maine.edu](mailto:lanie.howes@maine.edu)

You may also contact the faculty advisors of this study:

Dr. Sandra Caron, phone 581-3138 or email her at: [scaron@maine.edu](mailto:scaron@maine.edu)

Dr. Cynthia Erdley, phone 581-2040 or email her at: [erdley@maine.edu](mailto:erdley@maine.edu)

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Gayle Jones, Assistant to the University of Maine's Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, at 207-581-1498 or email her at [gayle.jones@umit.maine.edu](mailto:gayle.jones@umit.maine.edu)

## AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Lanie B. Howes was born in Waterville, Maine on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1997. She was raised in Athens, Maine and graduated from Maine Central Institute in 2015. Majoring in Psychology, Lanie also has a minor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality studies along with Child Development and Family Relations. Lanie has actively involved in related groups on campus such as SHARE, The Feminist Collective, and SASH. Lanie has spent her final two semesters interning for Planned Parenthood to gain more knowledge about reproductive health and advocacy.

Upon graduation, Lanie plans to attend graduate school in order to become a licensed counselor. Her goal is to blend her knowledge of psychology, human sexuality and gender studies.