Assertive Sexual Communication Research Group

Davis Honors Challenge
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**Introduction**

A significant factor leading to negative sexual situations is a lack of assertive communication. Assertive communication is a skill that encompasses sharing positive feelings of warmth and appreciation; expressing negative feelings from discomfort to fury; setting limits and saying no to demands of others when they go against our internal needs and beliefs; and initiating our own personal desires and goals. Knowing how to communicate assertively in sexual situations is absolutely critical, yet many college students struggle to do so. A lack of assertive communication skills can be problematic for a variety of reasons, including causing regret from an unsatisfactory sexual encounter, contracting a sexually transmitted infection, and experiencing a sexually coercive situation. These situations can result in varying degrees of distress, ranging from anxiety and low self-esteem to body-image issues and severe depression. These negative experiences often interfere with students’ emotional and physical wellbeing, as well as their academic success.

**Charge to the Team:**

Survey and assess trends of students’ sexual communication behavior as influenced by gender, ethnicity, age, and class standing. Research existing models of sexual communication instruction within courses and programs currently at UC Davis. Interview medical professionals to gain insight into students’ sexual communication challenges. Also prompt these professionals to suggest methods for teaching assertive communication. Apply the data to recommend instructional tools to help students become more aware of their communication styles and learn methods for improvement.

**Working Definitions:**

**Sex:** Any intimate situation of a sexual nature including kissing, oral, anal, and vaginal sex.

**Assertive Communication:** Being able to comfortably share positive and/or negative feelings, boundaries, and desires.
Methodology

Background Research

We began our project by exploring existing research on the issue of sexual communication. The research we gathered pertained to gender differences in communication, personal assessment tools for measuring sexual communication skills, and correlations between assertive sexual communication and academic performance, relational satisfaction, and other factors. The information we gathered supported our original theory that sexual communication is extremely difficult and uncomfortable for many individuals, and it helped direct the development of our surveys. We also researched sexual communication education available on our campus and other campuses.

QuickPoll Survey

Our data collection began by collaborating with a variety of individuals, including a sexual health educator, sexual harassment education specialist, sex therapist, medical professional, and clergy to develop a short survey question. This question was distributed via “Quickpoll” on UC Davis student’s main web portal (my.UCDavis.edu), from which students access their email, class information, campus news, and many other useful websites. Quickpoll is an online poll service conducted by Student Affairs and Resource Information (SARI) and is posted on every student’s MyUCDavis homepage. The format of our Quickpoll question is a preliminary question, followed by one of two second questions, depending on the response to the first question.

The preliminary question was “Have you ever been in a sexual situation where you wanted to communicate something but felt uncomfortable?” Respondents then selected “Yes” or “No.” Based on their response, participants were given a secondary question. Those who selected “Yes” for the preliminary question were directed to the question “What issues do you find difficult to communicate? (Check all that apply).” Those respondents who selected “No” to the first question were directed to the question “Which of the following were the most influential factors in defining your comfort level? (Check all that apply).” This Quickpoll question was distributed for five days and received 5,753 responses. SARI provided us with detailed demographic information of our respondents, such as ethnicity, class level, gender, college and major. We ran a variety of cross tabulations between our results and the respondent information, which revealed correlations between communication strengths and weakness among various groups of people. It also provided us with information about the perceived influence of religion, peers, family, and the media on students’ sexual communication skills.
In addition to our QuickPoll survey, we created a detailed twenty-question survey through www.esurveyspro.com. This survey consisted of qualitative questions to gain insight into our QuickPoll results. We advertised our survey to UC Davis students via Facebook and received 300 respondents. This survey specifically pertained to students’ comfort with different areas of sexual communication (“Why might you find it difficult to talk to your partner about sex?) and resources students preferred to utilize (“If available, where would you be most likely to obtain information about sexual communication?).

**Focus Groups**

In order to find more detailed information about the UCD student population, we held both a male and a female focus group. We advertised for these focus groups via Facebook and distributed fliers in many locations around campus. These focus groups were used as means to fill the voids in our data and gain further detailed information regarding reasons for sexual communication discomfort. Our overarching motivation for the focus groups was the question “Why might you find it difficult to talk to your partner about sex?” We asked our focus group participants questions pertaining to cultural upbringing, religion, peer relationships, media usage and partner communication.

**Interviews**

We conducted interviews with various professionals, such as clergy, a sex therapist and a nurse practitioner. We asked these professionals what sexual communication issues they found to be most prevalent in our generation and what, if any, communication practices they recommend to individuals.
QuickPoll Results

Percentage of students that reported feeling uncomfortable communicating something in a sexual situation (5,753 responses)

In the pie chart above; of the no responses, approximately 22% were because students have never been in a sexual situation. This allows us to estimate that approximately 50% of UC Davis students who have been in a sexual situation have felt uncomfortable communicating.
% of students that reported feeling uncomfortable communicating something in a sexual situation, by gender

This graph indicates that almost 42% of females and 34% of males have felt uncomfortable communicating in a sexual situation at some point in time.
% of students that reported feeling uncomfortable communicating something in a sexual situation, by class standing

![Bar chart showing the percentage of students feeling uncomfortable communicating in a sexual situation by class standing.]

- Freshman: 39.87%
- Sophomore: 45.74%
- Junior: 50.23%
- Senior: 48.83%
% of students that reported feeling uncomfortable communicating something in a sexual situation, by ethnicity

Ethnicity - 8 groups
- African American
- Asian American/Pacific Islander
- Latino American
- Mexican American
- White/Caucasian

Have you ever been in a sexual situation where you wanted to communicate something but felt uncomfortable?
% of students that reported feeling uncomfortable communicating something in a sexual situation, by class standing

Have you ever been in a sexual situation where you wanted to communicate something but felt uncomfortable?
What students find difficult to communicate
(check all that apply)

- Making sexual requests: 41.7%
- Changing your mind once sexual contact has begun: 36.7%
- Initiating any level of sexual contact: 35.1%
- Saying no to any level of sexual contact: 33.3%
- Asking about or sharing sexual history: 31%
- Asking about or sharing STI status: 27.5%
- Stating your personal boundaries: 27.2%
- Saying yes, but not now: 23%
- Other situation not listed above: 19.3%
- Using protection: 12.5%
- Sexual orientation: 10.1%

The main issue students report having trouble communicating about is ‘making sexual requests’. The next three important issues pertain to communication directly related to sexual contact. In order of prevalence: ‘Changing your mind once sexual contact has begun’, ‘Initiating any level of sexual contact’, and ‘Saying no to any level of sexual contact’. Nearly 20% of students have difficulty communicating in a situation other than the ones listed. The areas of communication that fewest students report difficulty in are ‘Using protection’ and ‘Sexual Orientation’.
What issues females find most difficult to communicate
(check all that apply)

This graph demonstrates the most selected responses by females.
This graph demonstrates the most selected responses by males.
Significant differences in issues that are difficult to communicate, by ethnicity
(check all that apply)

Ethnicity - 8 groups
- African American
- Asian American/Pacific Islander
- Latino American
- Mexican American
- White/Caucasian

Percent

Yes: Making sexual requests
- African American: 35.6%
- Asian American/Pacific Islander: 34.2%
- Latino American: 34.4%
- Mexican American: 41.7%
- White/Caucasian: 46.4%

Yes: Asking about or sharing STI status
- African American: 18.6%
- Asian American/Pacific Islander: 21.1%
- Latino American: 34.4%
- Mexican American: 27.1%
- White/Caucasian: 30.8%
Significant differences in issues that are difficult to communicate, by class standing
(check all that apply)
Factors that students report as contributing to their comfort with sexual communication
(check all that apply)

- Friends: 52.4%
- Naturally assertive character: 50.4%
- Practice or experience: 46.8%
- Family: 39.1%
- Sex education in school: 23.2%
- Media (T.V., Music, Movies, Books, Magazines): 17.9%
- Internet: 16.2%
- Religious education: 12.9%

Of the students that selected “no” to the question “Have you ever been in a sexual situation where you wanted to communicate something but felt uncomfortable?”, the question “Which of the following were the most influential factors in defining your comfort level?” was presented. Students could select as many factors as they wished; 52% cited friends; 50% cited having a naturally assertive character; and 47% cited practice or expertise as a helpful factor.
Significant differences in helpful factors, by gender
(check all that apply)
A higher percentage of Asian American and African American students reported the media as an influential factor in their sexual communication skills. A higher percentage of Asian American and Mexican Americans reported the Internet as an influential factor, and fewer Latino Americans reported the Internet as helpful.
Significant differences in helpful factors, by class standing
(check all that apply)
### eSurveysPro Results

Total Responses: 300

1. **Which gender do you identify with?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>68.12%</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31.21%</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>0.57%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 298

Number of respondents who skipped this question: 2

2. **Have you ever participated in any form of sexual activity (including but not limited to kissing, dry sex, oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse)?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>94.61%</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5.39%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 297

Number of respondents who skipped this question: 3

3. **If you had a question concerning sex, who would you ask? (check all that apply)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your partner</td>
<td>20.48%</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>23.59%</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent or guardian</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>1.60%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Professional</td>
<td>14.59%</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor/Therapist</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Leader</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The internet</td>
<td>23.78%</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wouldn’t know who to ask</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one</td>
<td>0.90%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 298

Number of respondents who skipped this question: 2

Analysis: Respondents tend to utilize the internet, peers and their partner(s) as resources when posed with a question about sex.
Analysis: Approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of respondents have hesitation when confronting their partner about sexual desires/boundaries.
### 9. Why might you find it difficult to talk to your partner about sex? (check all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing which words to use</td>
<td>21.73%</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing enough about the topic</td>
<td>7.42%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It might “turn off” my partner</td>
<td>21.55%</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is disrespectful</td>
<td>4.06%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s too uncomfortable to discuss</td>
<td>19.08%</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s inappropriate to talk about</td>
<td>1.94%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous negative experience</td>
<td>7.24%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable – I find it comfortable to talk to my partner about sex</td>
<td>16.96%</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of respondents** 296  
**Number of respondents who skipped this question** 4

### 10. Do you typically initiate a conversation about sex with a sexual partner(s)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in a non-sexual situation</td>
<td>59.11%</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, right before engaging in sexual contact</td>
<td>17.57%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, immediately after sex</td>
<td>7.43%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, not at all</td>
<td>16.89%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of respondents** 296  
**Number of respondents who skipped this question** 4

### 11. In a sexual situation, which statement would you most identify with:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have sex without a condom or other barrier (dental dam, female condom) if my partner doesn’t like them, even if I want to use one.</td>
<td>8.77%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make sure my partner and I use a condom or other barrier (dental dam, female condom) when we have sex.</td>
<td>44.56%</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I insist on using a condom or other barrier (dental dam, female condom) if I want to, even if my partner doesn’t like them.</td>
<td>21.05%</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I refuse to have sex if my partner refuses to use a condom or other barrier (dental dam, female condom).</td>
<td>23.51%</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am uncertain what options are available to me regarding ‘safe sex’ practices.</td>
<td>2.11%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of respondents** 285  
**Number of respondents who skipped this question** 15
12. How do you feel asking your sexual partner(s) about their sexual histories?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very comfortable</td>
<td>29.05%</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td>40.54%</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncomfortable</td>
<td>22.97%</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very uncomfortable</td>
<td>4.73%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would never ask</td>
<td>2.70%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents 296
Number of respondents who skipped this question 4

13. Have you asked your most recent sexual partner(s) if they have been tested for STIs (Sexually Transmitted Infections)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60.02%</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>39.18%</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents 291
Number of respondents who skipped this question 9

14. Do you usually initiate a conversation about STIs with a partner(s)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation Type</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, in a non-sexual situation</td>
<td>56.70%</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, right before engaging in sexual contact</td>
<td>12.03%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, after sex</td>
<td>2.06%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, not at all</td>
<td>29.21%</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents 291
Number of respondents who skipped this question 9

15. Someone who brings up a conversation about STIs with their partner(s) is: (check all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respectful of their sexual partner</td>
<td>29.90%</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promiscuous</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably infected with an STI</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned about their health</td>
<td>34.07%</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brave</td>
<td>19.36%</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced</td>
<td>11.89%</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paranoid</td>
<td>2.33%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents 294
Number of respondents who skipped this question 6
### 16. What is your current student status?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>18.79%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>33.56%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th year</td>
<td>23.15%</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th+ year</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of respondents** 298

**Number of respondents who skipped this question** 2

### 17. Are you involved in a Greek organization?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, a Pan-Hellenic or IFC</td>
<td>23.31%</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, a non-affiliated organization</td>
<td>5.41%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>71.28%</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of respondents** 296

**Number of respondents who skipped this question** 4

### 18. Which sexual orientation do you most closely identify with?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>83.05%</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay/ Lesbian</td>
<td>5.42%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>11.53%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of respondents** 295

**Number of respondents who skipped this question** 5

### 19. How would you describe your relationship status?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>41.08%</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends with benefits</td>
<td>7.74%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monogamously relationship</td>
<td>44.78%</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polyamorous relationship(s)</td>
<td>3.37%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a relationship and cheating</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>1.68%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0.67%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of respondents** 297

**Number of respondents who skipped this question** 3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A brochure or flyer</td>
<td>6.16%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A short video online</td>
<td>5.48%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A website</td>
<td>60.96%</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A workshop or program on campus</td>
<td>5.51%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>6.85%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A one-on-one session with a professional (therapist, nurse practitioner, etc.)</td>
<td>8.56%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A one-on-one session with a trained peer</td>
<td>5.48%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents: 292

Number of respondents who skipped this question: 8
Focus Group Results

Female Focus Group

- General Assumptions/Cultural Generalizations
  - Boys are always in control, girls are more passive
  - Girls can say no, but guys who say no are viewed in a negative light
  - Mormons only have sex to procreate
  - Catholic school girls go crazy in college
  - A veil can actually provide sexual freedom because it disguises the woman
  - Europeans are more “sexually free” because they experience sex earlier

- Is it difficult to talk? Why?
  - Raised in a family situation where sex conversations are uncomfortable
  - Liked to be open with partner because the tension made the experience uncomfortable
  - Anxiety from not knowing the other person’s response
  - Wording is difficult because it can’t be too cheesy or too derogatory
  - If too open, it could imply too much experience and bring up awkward conversations/questions about the past
  - A partner’s religion made the conversation uncomfortable because he wasn’t supposed to have premarital sex, and felt guilty for partaking in it
  - A partner’s inability to talk about sex cause an otherwise comfortable person to feel uncomfortable

- Protection
  - Partner was open first, so the conversation wasn’t awkward
  - Haven’t had to have the conversation because they have had limited partners

- What could make conversations better?
  - People need to understand that intimacy is a normal part of a relationship
  - Establish an open channel of communication at beginning of relationship
  - Write down thoughts and then give it to them or read it to them
  - Voice is necessary to break the boundary (text messages are not good because you can’t read the other person’s tone)
  - Email/text message is there forever and can be very misleading
  - Face-to-face allows us to read the nonverbal communication…often says more than the words
  - Start with a joke, humor is good
  - Being open with friends makes it easier to be open with your partner
  - Older siblings can give info to younger siblings
  - Media only plays a small role
  - Peers are the ones we want to emulate/impress so they dictate more of our behavior
• When wanting to talk…
  o Don’t want to be the stereotypical corny, emotional, cheesy girl
  o Emotional is sometimes seen as crazy
  o Male is stereotypically the stone cold member of a heterosexual relationship
  o Don’t want to let partner see her get emotional

• What are people concerned about?
  o Having an orgasm
    ▪ Being able to convey what they want when they want it
  o Desires are more difficult than limits
  o Getting tested

• Effective Media:
  o Yes:
    ▪ Dorm floor talks
    ▪ 2-5 min YouTube video
      • Weekly episodes posted via Facebook
    ▪ Skit before or during intermission of ArrowJam
    ▪ Pop-up on school computer
  o No:
    ▪ Classroom to classroom
    ▪ Fliers

**Male Focus Group**

• Cultural Stereotypes about sexual communication:
Family upbringing: some families allow early relationships, some don’t, some kids keep their parent’s morals, some will rebel

Where you live: socialization outside of the family, people from self regulated communities uphold different stereotypes
  - In Berkeley and Santa Cruz polyamory is more accepted
  - In small towns sexual actions can have more repercussions, but some people do not care about their reputation

Greek: more sexually active, bad at sexual communication, just want one night stands and then let the girl do the walk of shame girls in sorority girls: DG loose girls some girls or sororities get a reputation, juicy campus website.

Why might it be difficult to talk to your partner about sex:
  - One person can be more experienced than the other, trust and confidence are big issues
  - People communicate in different ways (body language or hand signs verses vocalizing)
  - Non- verbal could be less offensive and more “gentle”, more subtle, not as confrontational or shutting someone down as much
  - Verbal communication could take one out of the moment depending on the relationship and the level of trust
  - Lacking knowledge: really awkward if they are both virgins
  - Vocabulary: start with gentler more poetic words then go to straight forward
  - Not looking like man- slut: if the man is more experienced it might be more strange and bad, worried about your reputation have you slept with too many or too few
  - Not looking to aggressive: non- verbal can be a way to deal with this

Is it easier or harder to communicate boundaries or desires?
  - It depends, based on whether communication is verbal or non- verbal
  - Difficult to discuss polyamory, how jealous people will get
  - Sexual history can be a mixed bag

Which of the following issues do you find difficult to communicate and why are they difficult?
  - Sexual health:
    - Talk about it when people are comfortable
    - Ask about being clean up-front
    - Women generally more concerned about sexual health
    - Greek systems are more likely to ask about sexual health because it is more likely to be a problem
  - Protection:
- Should not be too hard; the person suggesting sex should provide or introduce the idea of protection, might create a formal mood shift and states to the partner that yes we will have sex.
- People are more likely to use protection in a one night stand rather than in a longer term relationship.
- Taking out a condom may look to aggressive on the guy’s part because he does not want to look like he assumes sex would happen.
- Fight for a condom even if intercourse could not happen, might suggest something else, you would want to talk about it outside the moment.
  Condom every time
- Communicating sexual desire:
  - Might be strange to ask for a strange sexual desire (fetish) in a one night stand.
  - Might be easier in a relationship where the line of communication is already open.
- Where and how would you like to learn about sexual communication?
  - Yes:
    - Internet
    - Aggie, for information or advertisement
    - Health center
    - Hotline if someone wants info fast
    - A campus event, it attracts a fair amount of people
    - Tabling
    - Hyping it on the quad
    - Informing and getting the Greek community involved through philanthropy events
    - Blog. People follow them, and they might not get something for them every week but you would be more likely to follow it an archive would be good.
  - No:
    - Classes, it would require an extra step of courage
Interview Results

Sex Therapist (Source: Julianne Bentley, MFT)

- Clientele generally fall into two ages groups: college/professional school students (20’s) and late middle age (40-50’s)
- The student age group is far more likely to request couple’s therapy sessions
  - Most couples are heterosexual
- Common reasons for engaging in sexual therapy include:
  - Women experience difficulty feeling sexual after a birth or abortion
  - Couples have great relationships, yet fading sex lives
  - Couples find that they have different levels of interest in sex
- Recommend honest and open communication between partners
- Tools and practices for sexual communication:
  - Make complete statements “When you___, I feel___.” Or “If you___, I promise___.”
  - Find a place other than the bedroom for uncomfortable sexual discussions
  - Rename emotionally loaded words to make conversation more comfortable

Pagan View on Sexuality (Source: Rev. Fey Cooper, High Priestess)

- The governing rule of the religion is “and you harm none do what you will”
- In the Charge of the Goddess, a central creed, the Goddess says, “All acts of love and pleasure are my rituals.”
- Many Pagan clergy offer weddings, counseling and letters of recommendation for adoption to all manner of partners based solely on the stability and health of their individual partnership(s)
- Pagan clergy advocate deep thought and self-knowledge before engaging in sex and equality between sexual partners
- Sexual education and assertiveness training are a part of the Pagan religious teaching

Catholic View on Sexuality (Source: Anonymous, Seminarian)

- Sex is a beautiful expression of love that is reserved for marriage
- All sexual activity should be set aside for marriage because any sexual activity could temp an individual to engage in premarital intercourse
- Marriage is for a man and a woman
- The Catholic Church advocates honest and sincere communication between sexual partners
- Equality and respect between partners is crucial for a healthy, satisfying relationship

Nurse Practitioner (Source: Lisa Yamauchi)

- Common issues presented by students:
  - How to discuss recently diagnosed STI with partner(s)
  - Asking partner to get tested
• What type of contraceptive to use
• When a partner wants to have more sexual activity than the other
• Women worried about how to orgasm

• Students need tools:
  • Don’t know when the timing is appropriate
  • Void for words
    ▪ Women do not understand their own body. They need words to describe their anatomy and what they want from their sexual experience.

• Students don’t feel “safe” talking to their partners
  • Worried about partner reaction
  • How they will be viewed by their partner

• In general, students tend to have a more difficult time with “sex positive” issues
• “New” relationships tend to have a more difficult time with “sex negative” issues
• “Old” relationships tend to have a more difficult time with “sex positive” issues

• Recent trends:
  • More people are using contraceptives like the NuvaRing
  • More individuals are in monogamous relationships than 5-10 years ago
Discussion

All of our results are consistent with our hypothesis: students are having trouble communicating assertively about sex. Of UC Davis students who have been in a sexual situation, approximately half reported experiencing discomfort communicating in a sexual situation. The female UC Davis students experience more trouble with basic assertiveness skills, while male students exhibit more difficulty with specific topics of sexual communication. It would be worthwhile to investigate which sexual situations males find uncomfortable because a significant portion of males stated that they felt discomfort in sexual situations not listed among our survey options.

Our student focus groups and professional interviews revealed that students are in need of specific guidelines for communicating. Students find difficulty identifying effective sexual terminology and deciding what the most appropriate time is for discussing sexual issues. They also worry about their partner’s reaction if they bring up sensitive topics, such as sexual requests and Sexually Transmitted Infections. There is clearly a need for an easily accessible resource to teach assertive communication skills to the UCD student population.

Our study was limited by the methods in which respondents participated. Participants were self selected and recorded their own responses. The sensitive subject matter of our study may have caused discomfort in potential respondents and thus skewed our data. Students who have never been in a sexual situation or have had trouble communicating may be less likely to take a survey concerning sexual communication. The esurveyspro survey permitted respondents to skip questions; thereby skewing our results in the direction of topics that our participants may have been more comfortable with or found more personally applicable. Our survey was distributed and directed to UC Davis students, thus our findings may not necessarily be generalized for all college students.

Recommendations

Our team feels that the most effective way to improve student’s communication skills is through a series of short entertaining videos demonstrating assertive sexual communication. In addition to being available online, possible venues for airing and promoting these videos include the UC Davis Summer Advising program, Residence Halls, the Student Health Center, Counseling and Psychological Services, and a special event on campus. We would also like to facilitate a meeting with members from campus and student organizations related to sexual health and communication. At this meeting we would present our findings and allow the group to collaborate and discuss possible strategies and policy changes to help improve student’s sexual communication skills.