

# Emerging Sexual Practices: Choking, Genital Slapping, and Rough Sex

## What Clinicians Need to Know

Debby Herbenick, PhD, MPH

Provost Professor

Indiana University School of Public Health-Bloomington

Email: [debby@iu.edu](mailto:debby@iu.edu)



Indiana University Bloomington

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**Center for Sexual Health Promotion**

# Disclosures

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## Other affiliations:

- Past-President, International Academy of Sex Research

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## **Colleagues & Students:**

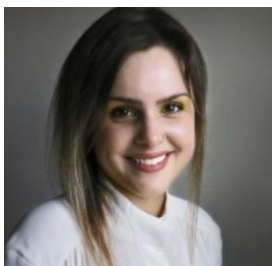
- Jane Fu, Heather Eastman-Mueller, Dennis Fortenberry, Lucia Guerra-Reyes, Supriya Ingle, Rachel Kump, Megan Maas, Angel Muro, Annayelli Pacheco, Kim Nelson, Emily Rothman, Callie Patterson, Bryant Paul, Molly Rosenberg, Yael Rosenstock Gonzalez, Stephanie Sanders, Evan Theis, Sally Thomas, Eva Voorheis, Caroline Wagner, Maddi Whitcomb, Jodi Wilson, Paul Wright, Nelson Zounlome, Anna Randall, Richard Sprott, Kody Brandenburg, Mary Balle, Dasha Carver, Ivanka Simić Stanojević, Jillian Pullen

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# Our Team



# Background

Over the past 15 years, sexual behavior trends have changed in important ways that impact people's safety and wellbeing

These changes have occurred so quickly that many health and sexuality professionals are unaware of them

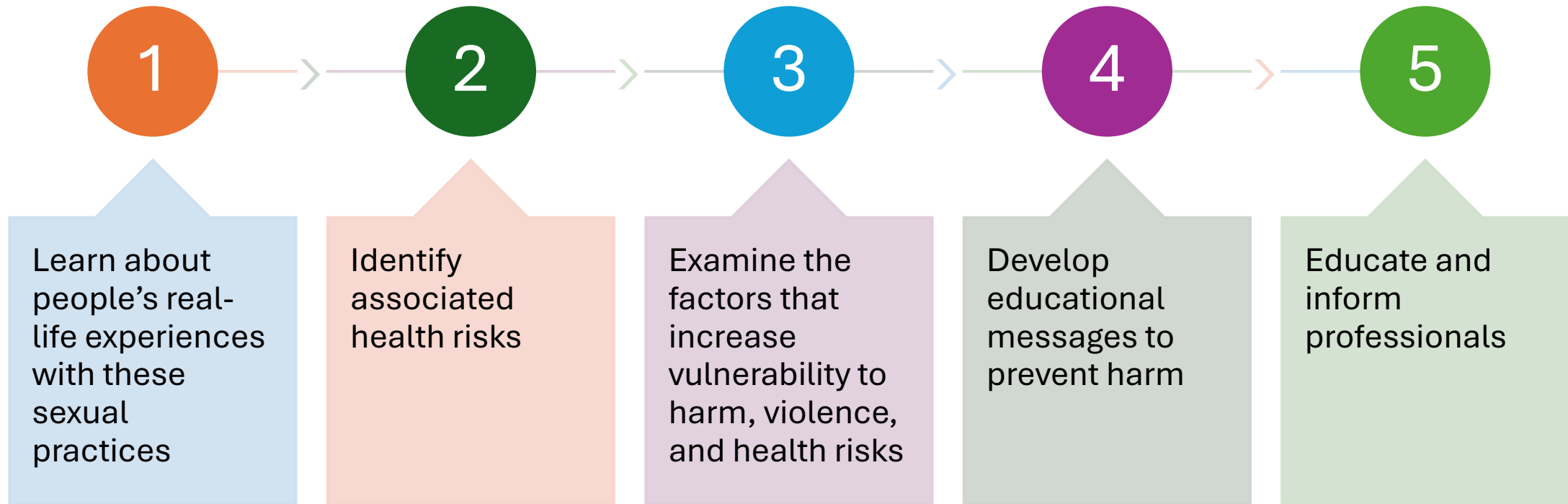
Also, many people are unaware that they might have been exposed to misinformation and have been harmed or risking harming another person.

Our team's research is grounded in a desire to understand what kinds of sex people have, how they feel about it and what shapes their experiences.

We've been working to build an evidence base to support people being able to make more informed choices about their sexual lives.



In my research on rough sex, choking, and related sexual practices, my goals are to:





# How We've Studied Choking and Rough Sex

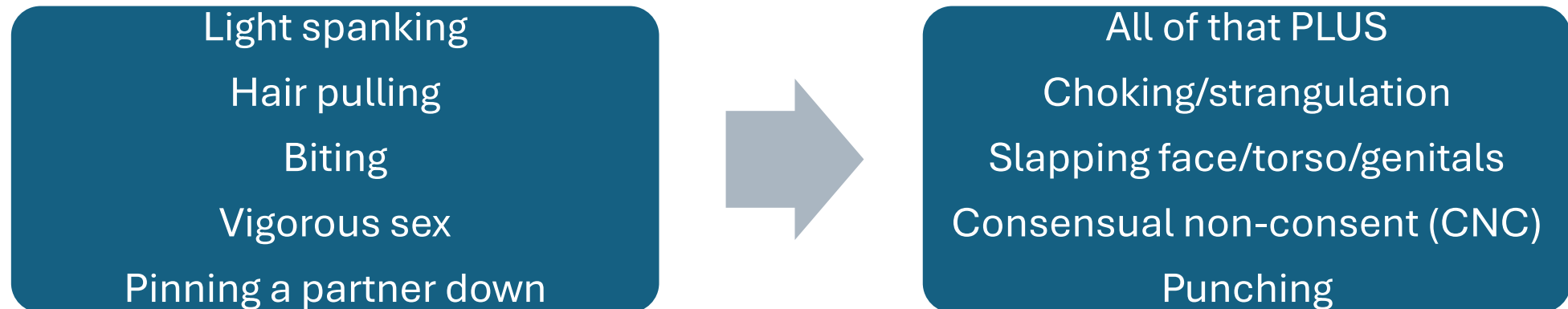
- **Survey Research**
  - Four U.S. nationally representative surveys
  - Four college campus-representative student surveys
- **Interviews** with 93 adults ages 18-45
  - 68+ adults who had experienced consensual and/or non-consensual choking
  - 25 CNC, most of which include choking
- **Content analyses of:**
  - Social media memes
  - Media articles about choking & CNC
  - TikTok videos
- **Neurological research** involving cisgender women who have and have not been choked, led by Dr. Kei Kawata



# What is Rough Sex?

# Ideas About Rough Sex Have Changed

- What young adults think of as “rough sex” has changed
  - First, no clear meaning → Misunderstandings and opportunities for harm
  - Behaviors once thought of as aggressive now considered “rough sex”



Source: Herbenick, D., Fu, T., Svetina Valdivia, D., Patterson, C., Rosenstock Gonzalez, Y., Guerra-Reyes, L., Eastman-Mueller, H., Beckmeyer, J., & Rosenberg, M. (2021). What is rough sex, who does it, and who likes it? Findings from a probability survey of U.S. undergraduate students. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 50(3), 1183-1195.

# Kink vs. Rough Sex

- Kink and BDSM often reflect shared values, norms, principles, and community
- Kink and BDSM tend to involve a focus on processes
  - Education
  - Explicit communication
  - Discussion of limits and boundaries
  - Harm reduction
  - Avoiding substance use
  - Aftercare
- In contrast, rough sex focuses on sexual practices
  - Spanking, slapping, choking, smothering

“Within ‘rough sex’, physical aggression, acts of dominance, and seemingly denigrating acts are woven into sexual scripts that can be enacted by people who may know and care little or nothing about the ethos and ethical frameworks emphasised within BDSM communities. Effectively, this means that, **in contrast to BDSM** – which has been practised within communities that do at least seriously engage with ethics...(albeit imperfectly as noted above) – **‘rough sex’ exists in an ethical vacuum.**”

- Dr. Nicola Gavey

*Gavey, N. (2024). Deconstructing ‘rough sex’ in a New Zealand murder trial: Beyond the modern mythology of everyday kink. Social & Legal Studies, 09646639241292689.*

# What is Rough Sex?

An Online Survey in NZ (n = 567, ages 18-68)

“Rough sex is subjective and can be placed on a continuum between violent and coercive to intimate and loving.”

- - R748, woman, 28, Māori, bisexual



“I do not think there is a definitive answer of what ‘rough sex’ is. What might be considered rough to one person, might not be considered rough by another - or, might be considered much worse than rough.”

- - R287, woman, 33, Tongan, heterosexual



“The lines between rough sex and sexual assault are so blurred that sometimes you don’t really unpack what has happened until ages later.”

- - R862, woman, 28, Bi Racial, heterosexual

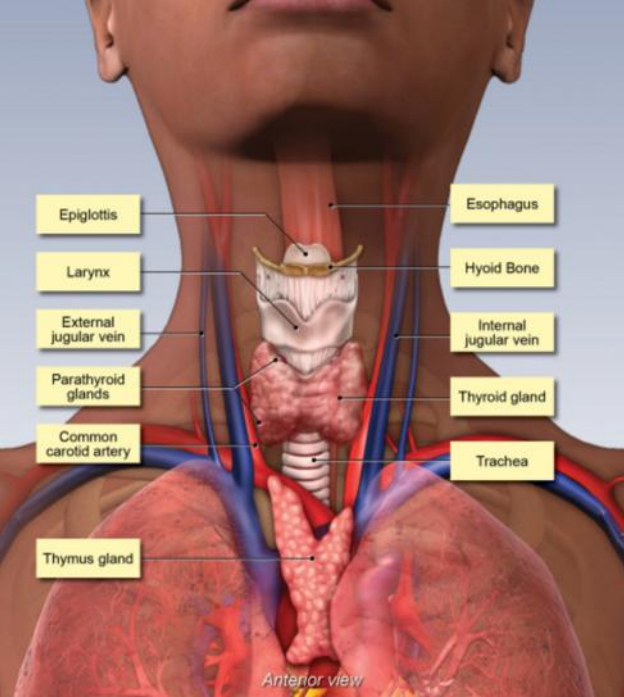
Source: Gavey, N., & Brewster, O. (2025). Is “Rough Sex” a Thing? A Survey of Meaning. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 1-17.



## 2022 NSSHB: % of Women Reporting that a Partner Ever Did This to Them (with Consent)

Behavior	18-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69
Hair pulling	38%	56%	56%	48%	28%	13%
Slapped face	11%	13%	12%	6%	3%	2%
Slapped genitals	10%	25%	24%	19%	12%	6%
Choked	32%	41%	30%	17%	5%	1%
Punched	2%	3%	4%	3%	<1%	<1%
Called names	12%	21%	19%	13%	10%	5%

# What You Must Know About Sexual Choking



Public

# 1. What People Mean By “Choking”

- Usually described as consensual, but may not have discussed it first
- Using hands, limb, or a ligature (tie, cord, belt, collar) to press or squeeze the neck
- May press anywhere along the neck
  - Some sides, some front, some tops/middle/bottom
- May intend to restrict blood flow or air flow, but 1/3 are unsure what they’re doing
- Various intensities are reported, from light pressing/holding to very intense/aggressive
- External pressure to the neck that may restrict air flow and/or blood flow is technically strangulation
  - Internal blockage of the airway is technically choking.
- Yet, in the context of sex, people tend to call strangulation “choking.”
  - Social media, pornography, TV shows, popular songs



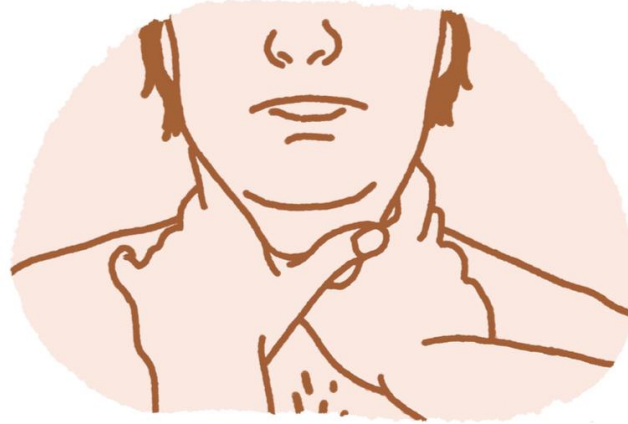
Choking Girls in Public

Images: “Choking Girls in Public” // YouTube

# Sexual Choking: Main Methods



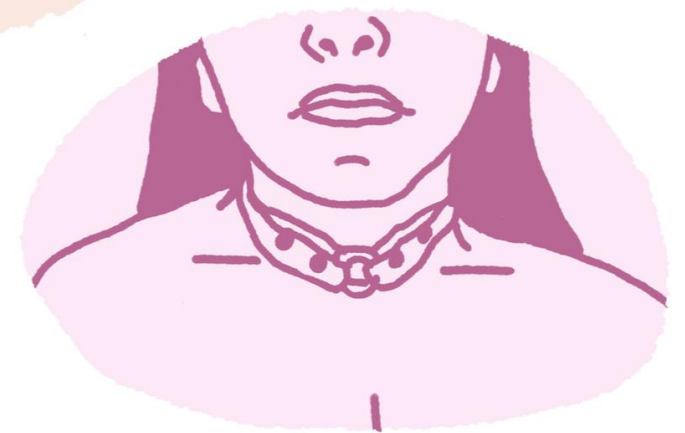
**One Hand**  
(*Most common*)



**Two Hands**



**Limb**



**Ligature**  
(*Greatest risk*)

Source: Herbenick et al.  
(2022). Frequency, method,  
intensity, and health  
sequelae of sexual choking  
among U.S. undergraduate  
and graduate students.  
*Archives of Sexual  
Behavior*, 51(6), 3121-3139.

## 2. Sexual Choking Used to Be Rare...

2 LGBTQ+ Events in NYC

- 5% of LB women & 8% of GB had ever engaged in any form of “asphyxiation/breath play”

2003–2004

2011–2012

Online Convenience Survey (1606 heterosexual adults, mostly college students)

- 13% of women and 9% of men had been choked (with hands) by a partner

Sources:

Grov et al. (2010).

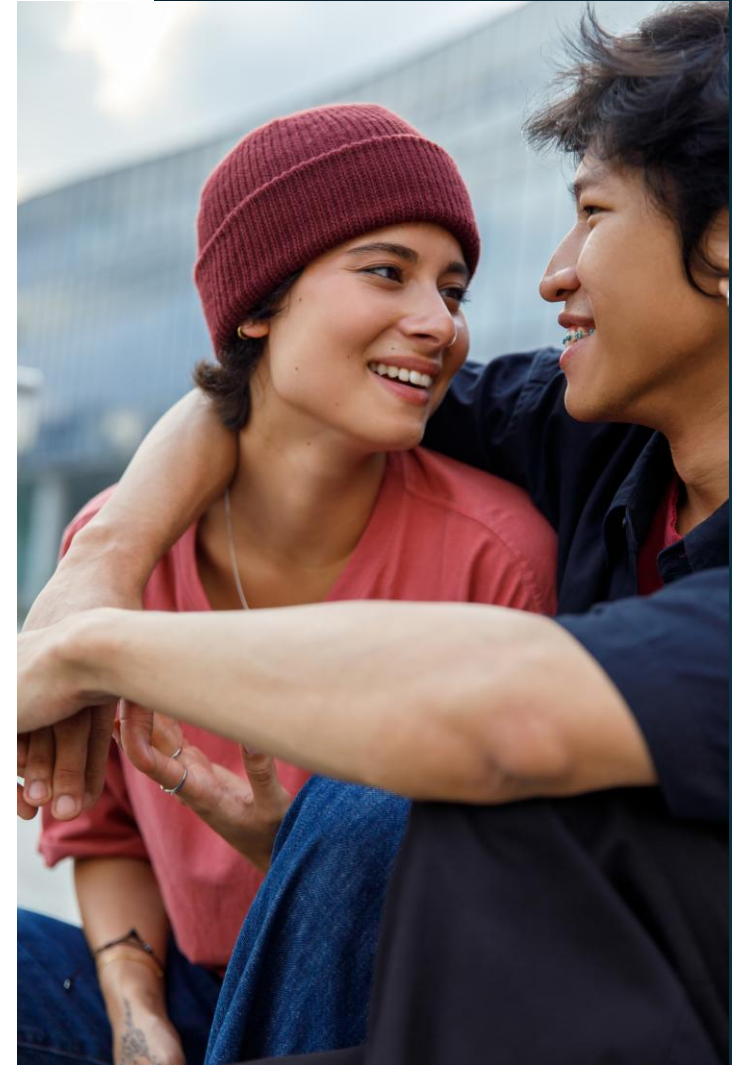
Tomassilli et al. (2009

Bridges, et al. (2016).

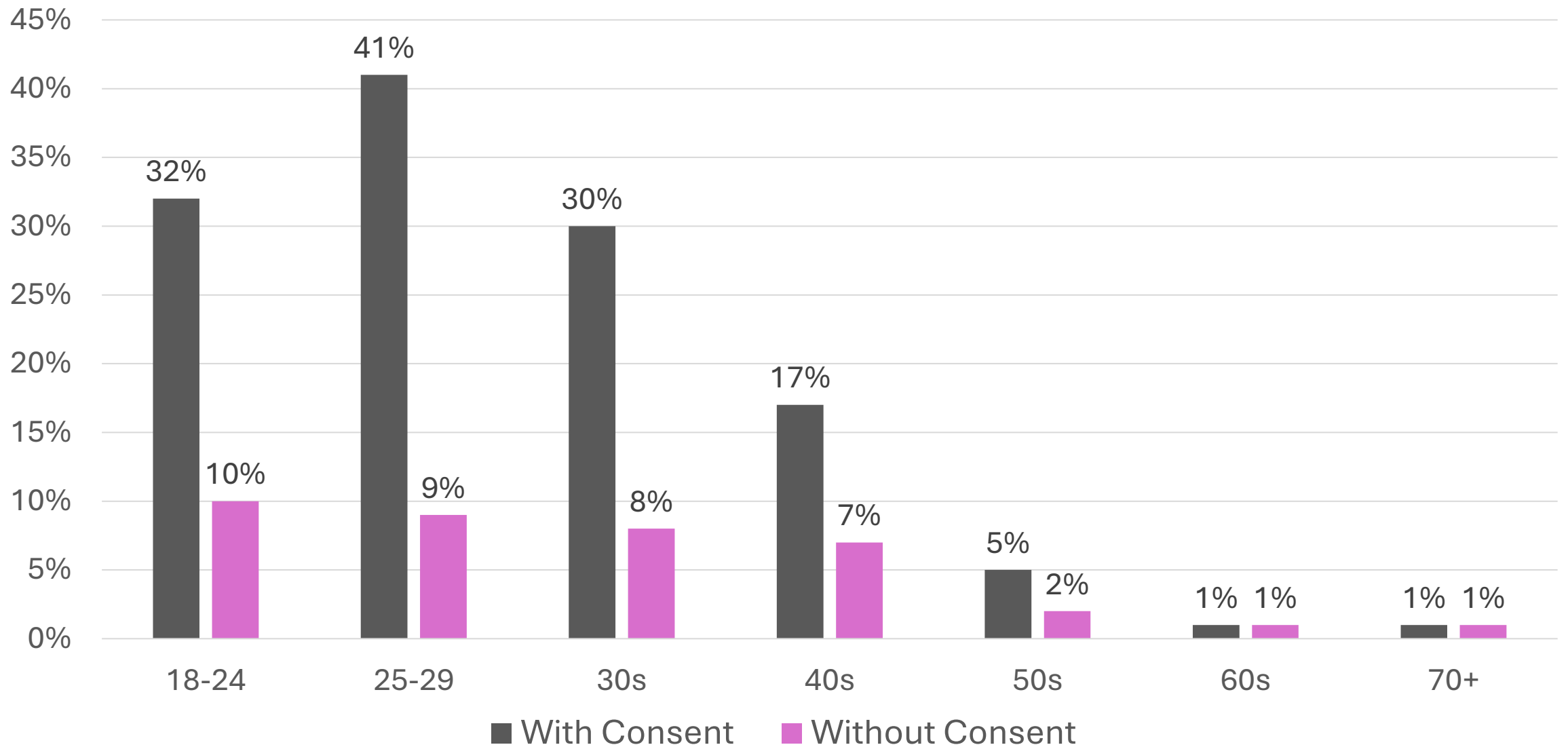


# Yet, Choking Has Become Highly Prevalent Among Young Adults

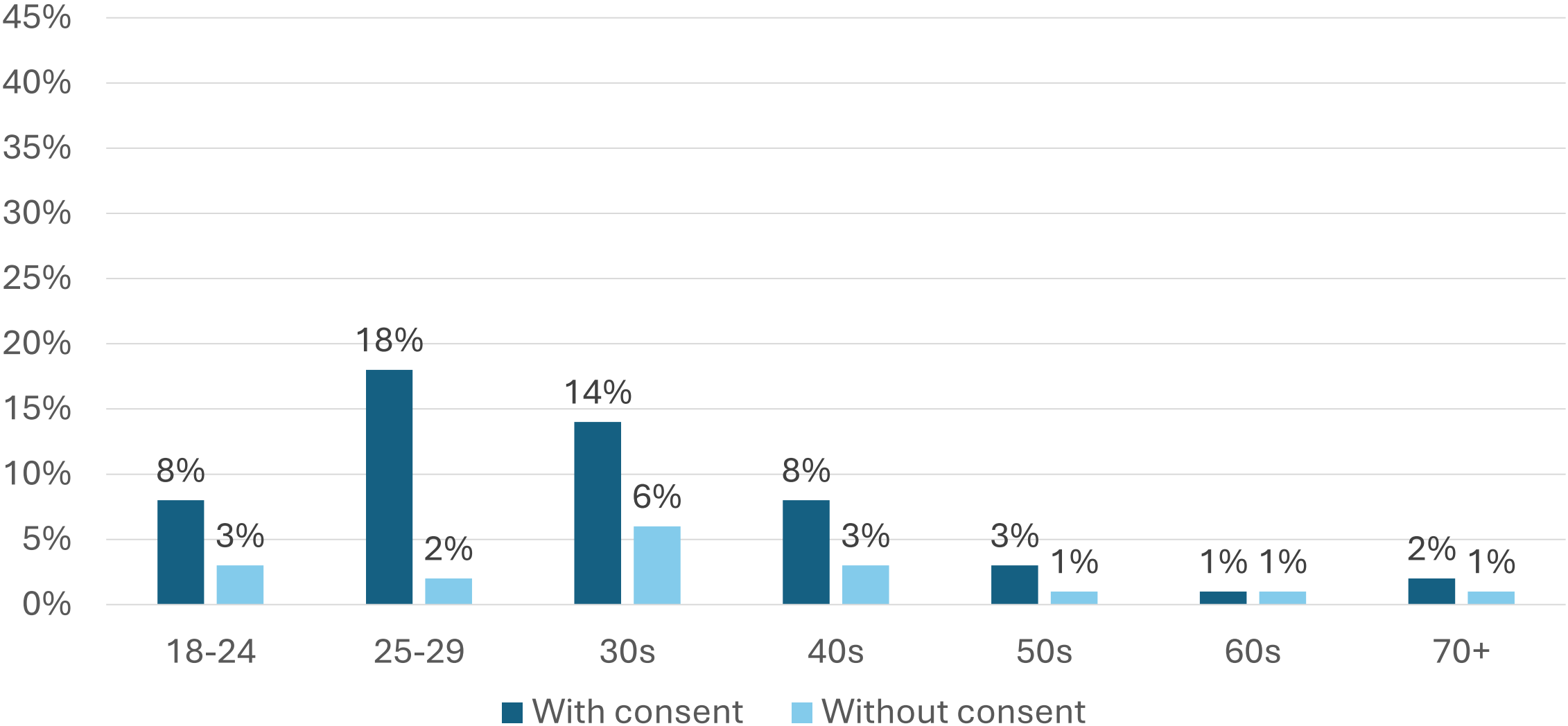
- **Among 3000-5000 randomly sampled university students:**
- 64% women, 29% men, 63% TGNB students with any partnered experience had ever been choked with consent.
- **18% women, 7% men, 11% TGNB students had been choked without consent.**
- **ANY choking: 67% of women, 31% men, 65% TGNB**



# % US Women Ever Choked - With & Without Consent



# % US Men Ever Choked With & Without Consent



# Who Is Most Affected by Choking?

- Teens & Young adults (< age 45)
- Girls and women
- Transgender, gender nonbinary, and gender non-conforming people
- Sexual orientation minorities
  - Bi women, bi men, and gay men are more likely than heterosexual people and lesbians to be choked though rates are high across the board
- People with histories of sexual victimization

# Sexual Choking/Strangulation Around the World

## Italy

(Pavanello et al., 2024)

- 39% bi women, 17% lesbian women had tried choking



## Australia

(Sharman et al., 2024)

- 64% women, 46% men, 67% of nonbinary college students had ever been choked/strangled during sex



## Iceland

(Vihljalmdottir & Forberg, 2023)

- 70% of those ages 18-24 had engaged in choking
- 62% of those ages 25-34
- 11% of those ages 45-54



## United Kingdom

(IFAS, 2024)

- 35% of 16-34 year olds had been choked during sex
- 16% of those ages 35-54





3. Sexual choking has become a regular and often routine part of sex.

In our 2023 campus survey, 22% of students had been choked 25+ times.

# Choking is Common Even in First-Time Sexual Encounters

**20% of women and 6% of men** whose most recent sexual partner was someone they had just met that day (e.g., at a party, bar, or through an app) were choked/strangled by that person during their sexual encounter/hook-up

# US Nationally Representative Data: Choking at Most Recent Consensual Sexual Event

	Women	
Age Group	Were Choked*	Had Choked Partner*
18-24	35%	5%
25-29	11%	9%
30-39	11%	3%
40-49	3%	1%
50-59	1%	<1%
60+	<1%	<0%

Herbenick, D., Fu, T. C., & Patterson, C. (2023). Sexual repertoire, duration of partnered sex, sexual pleasure, and orgasm: Findings from a US nationally representative survey of adults. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 49(4), 369-390.

## 4. Choking has become so common and normative that many people often don't even discuss it first.

---

“I was hooking up with someone and they, like, kind of did it and like asked if I liked it or something. And like, that's like the first time that I had like done it. And then after that I just kind of was into it.”

- Woman, white/Caucasian, age 19, heterosexual

Source: Herbenick, D., Guerra-Reyes, L., et al.. “It was scary, but then it was kind of exciting”: Young women's experiences with choking during sex. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 51(2),1103-1123.



# Choking and Consent

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In a campus-representative survey of 4998 college students, we found that:

---

One-third (32%) said that their partner(s) had sometimes asked them for consent or if it was okay prior to choking them

---

21% reported that they had never been asked for consent/if it was okay—their partner had just choked them.



# Reports of Sexual Assault Involving Non-Fatal Strangulation and Genital Injury Have Increased in the US and in Sweden

Received: 9 September 2019 | Revised: 30 October 2019 | Accepted: 18 November 2019 | First published online: 03 December 2019

DOI: 10.1002/ijgo.13058

## BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

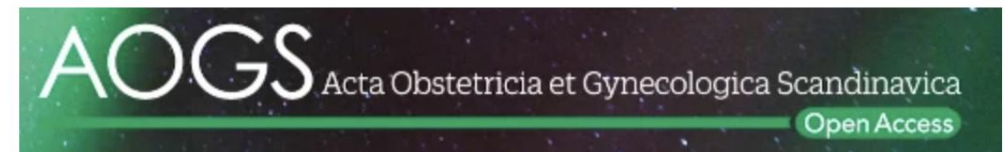
### Gynecology

WILEY



## Examining trends in non-fatal strangulation among sexual assault survivors seeking Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner care from 2002 to 2017

Lindsay M. Cannon<sup>1,2,\*</sup> | Joanne M. Bailey<sup>3</sup> | Susan D. Ernst<sup>4</sup> | Amanda St. Ivany<sup>5</sup> | Kristin G. Bevilacqua<sup>6</sup> | Lisa Scheiman<sup>3</sup> | Michelle L. Munro-Kramer<sup>7</sup>



ORIGINAL RESEARCH | Open Access |

## Changes in physical violence and injury during sexual assaults over time among females 16–29 years

Frida M. Larsson , Anna Nielsen, Zangin Zeebari, Mariano Salazar, Anna Mia Ekström, Anna Möller

First published: 14 July 2025 | <https://doi.org/10.1111/aogs.70012>

## 5. Choking Often Begins in Adolescence

In 2020, 1 in 4 students who had ever been choked were first choked between ages 12 and 17; 56% by age 18.

**2020**

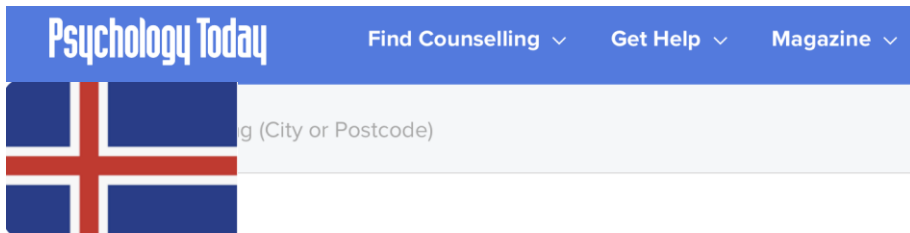
**2023**

In 2023, 36% were first choked by age 17; 62% by age 18

# Teens Are Asking About Choking.

BBC

Watch Live



Yvonne K. Fulbright Ph.D., MEd  
Mate, Relate and Communicate

SEX

3rd party ad content

## Should Sex Educators Talk About Choking During Sex?

Young people have questions and concerns about choking and other kinks.

Posted January 29, 2022 | Reviewed by Vanessa Lancaster



## Ministern: Unga tjejer frågar om strypsex

28 februari 2020 21:54



Home News US Election Sport Business Innovation Culture Arts Travel Earth Video Live

## Boys asking teachers how to choke girls during sex

5 June 2024

Gemma Dunstan  
BBC Wales Live

Share Save



TT Nyhetsbyrån  
Text



## 6. Most Common Reasons for Engaging in Choking are About Novelty, Not Harm.

- It's not always a choice:
  - About half report that they have sometimes or never been asked for consent/if it was okay prior to being choked.
- Most common reasons for engaging in choking:
  - Seemed exciting (74%)
  - Seemed kinky or adventurous (62%)
  - I thought it would arouse the person (30%)
  - I thought it would make it easier for me to have an orgasm (22%)
  - I'd seen it in porn and wanted to try it (13%)
  - A friend had told me they liked to be choked and I wanted to try it too (13%)
- Yet, some people do feel scared or harmed by being choked – especially if not discussed first or if don't harder than expected or enjoyed.

## 7. Choking is pervasive in media that are popular among young people.

Friends

Partners

Pornography

Magazines & their websites (Cosmo, Women's Health)

Fanfiction

Mainstream TV shows

Mainstream movies

Social media – TikTok videos, memes

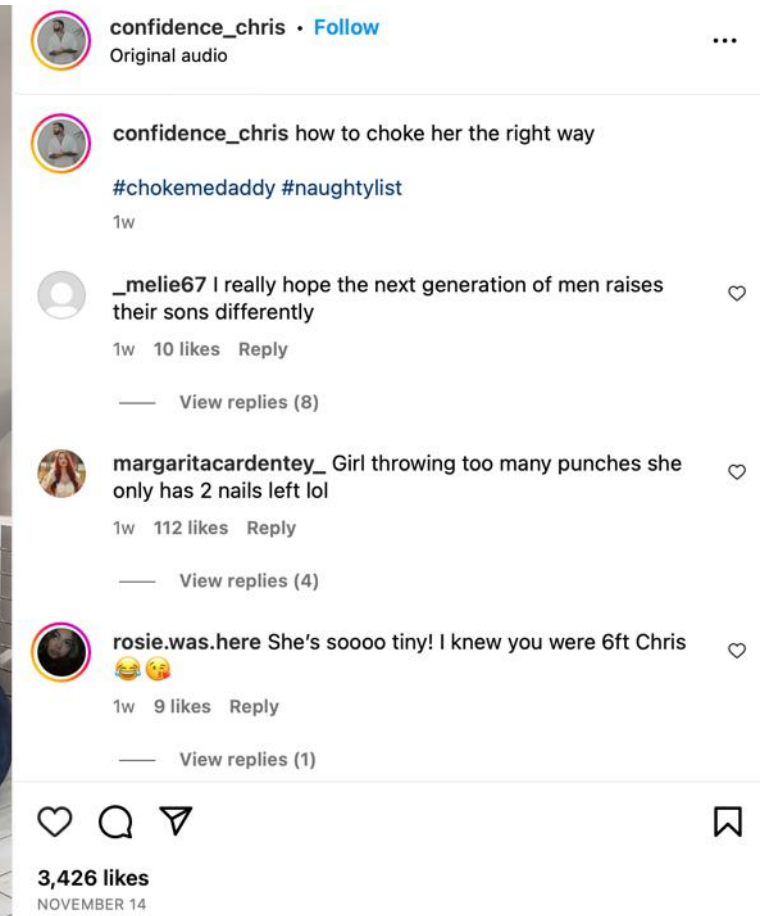
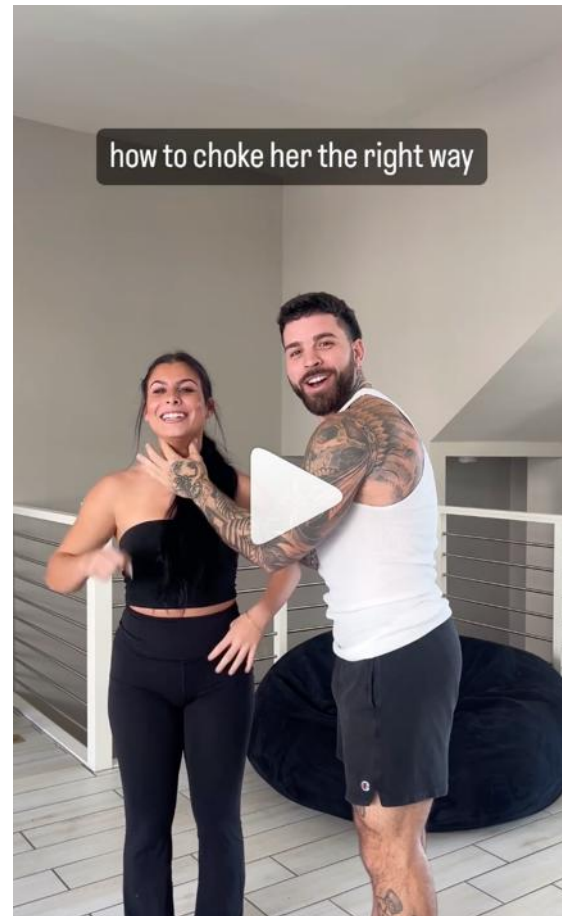
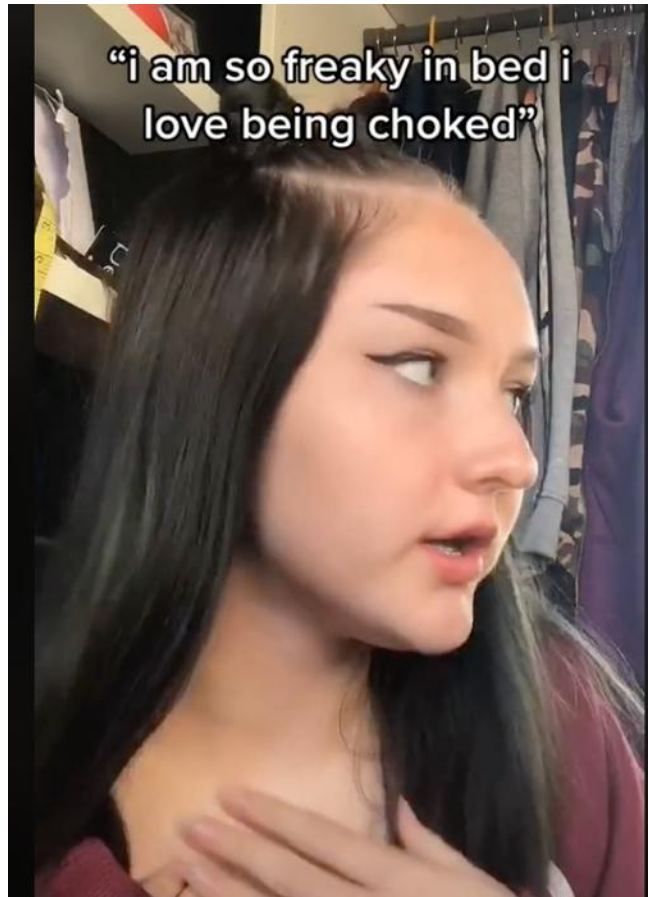
Stand Up

"I don't want to die... But I also don't want to be sure I'm going to live".

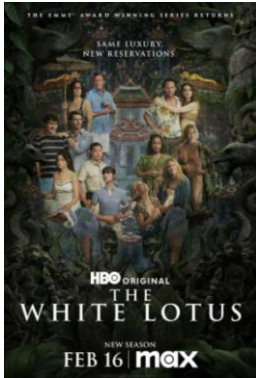
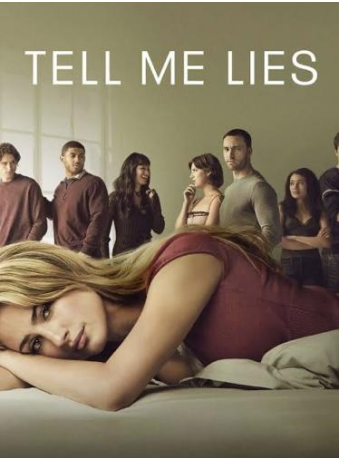
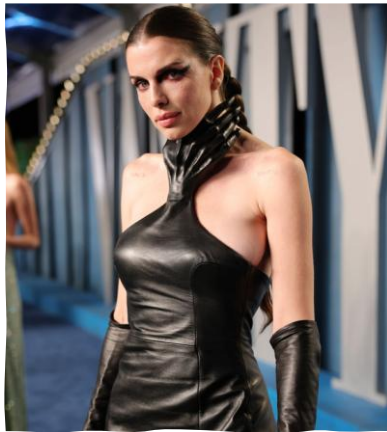
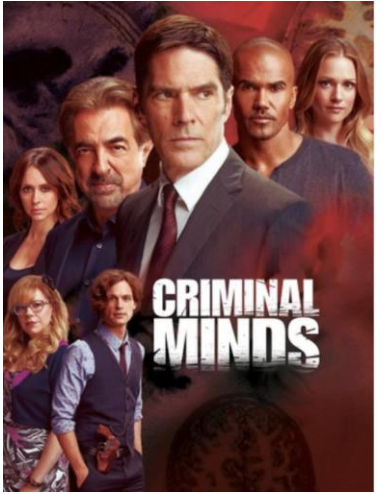
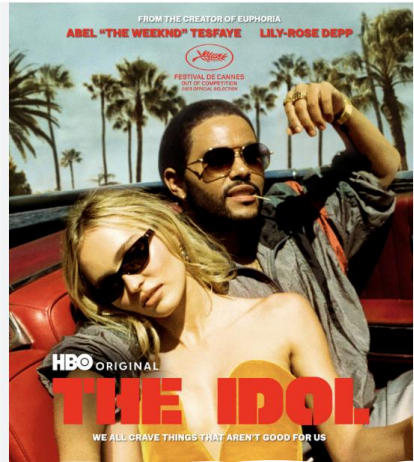
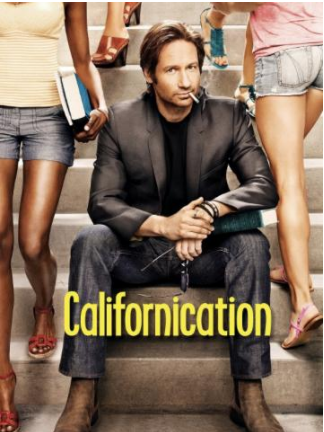
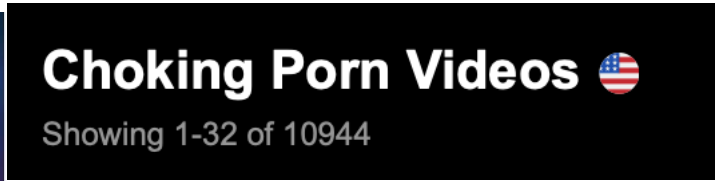
– Comedian Ali Wong



# TikTok







Julia Fox photo credit: Rich Fury/VF22/Getty Images





### Jack Harlow - Lovin On Me [Official Music Video]



Jack Harlow  
2.75M subscribers

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65,331,824 views Nov 10, 2023 [#2 top music video](#)  
Jack Harlow - Lovin On Me  
Stream/Download: <https://JackHarlow.lnk.to/LovinOnMe>

65 million views in 2 months  
146 million views in 10 months

# 1

## Lovin On Me

Jack Harlow



STATS

NEWS

SHARE

LAST WEEK

# 1

WEEKS AT NO. 1

# 6

WEEKS ON CHART

# 14

”I’m vanilla, baby. I’ll choke you but I ain’t no killer, baby.”

# Social Media Memes

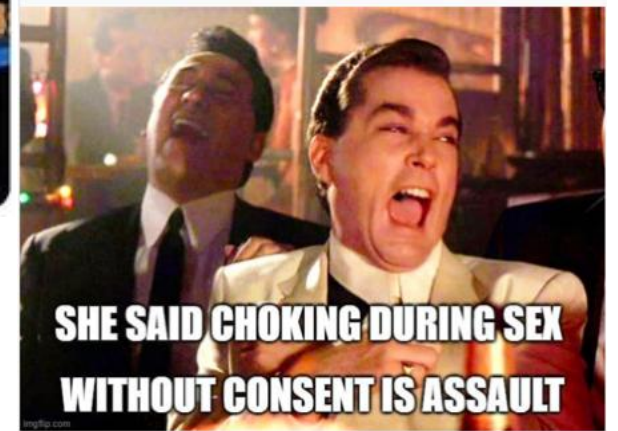
When you made him angry earlier just so he can choke you with both hands during sex



When the choking went a bit too far but you're happy she opened her eyes again



girls who like to be choked, tied up, and slapped during sex are also the ones who cry when you yell at them



Herbenick, D., Guerra-Reyes, L., Patterson, C., Wilson, J., Rosenstock Gonzalez, Y. R., Voorheis, E., Whitcomb, M., Kump, R., Theis, E., Rothman E. F., Nelson, K. M., & Maas, M. K. (In press). #ChokeMeDaddy: A content analysis of memes related to choking/strangulation during sex. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

## 8. There is inaccurate information and problematic depictions of choking in these media.

- Descriptions of choking being “safe”.
- Depictions where conversations/consent for choking are not shown (i.e., the person just chokes without first discussing).
- Lack of information about health risks or legal consequences if a person is injured or dies.
  - Important, given that some people may be motivated by this information to avoid choking/strangling others

### Safe Choking 101

Mar 5, 2018 — In order to properly choke your partner, you have to **apply pressure to the carotid artery**. The carotid artery runs down the throat to the chest.

3rd party ad content

# Why Some People Are Turned on by Choking During Sex—and How to Do It Safely, According to Experts

Let our experts teach you the proper technique.



## GONE NECKIN': THE PROPER WAY TO CHOKE SOMEONE IN BED

Sexual choking can be incredibly hot and sensual when done correctly, but there are a few things you need to know before you get there

HOW TO CHOKE YOUR PARTNER IN BED WITHOUT KILLING THEM, EVEN IF THEY REALLY WANT TO DIE

*November 8, 2017 / Dustin Mark*

## 9. Health Risks of Being Choked/Strangled

# Well Known Risks of Being Strangled

- In research on partner violence, physical assault, and police trainings, there are a number of well-documented effects of being strangled. These include:
- Brain injury
- Carotid artery dissection
- Cardiac arrest
- Stroke
- Hyoid bone fracture
- Death

# Physical Responses to Being Choked During Sex\*

\*The vast majority of these experiences were described as consensual

**Table 4** Lifetime experiences of physical responses from being choked by gender

Responses	Total	Men	Women	Trans* and gender expansive	<i>p</i> value
	% ( <i>n</i> )	% ( <i>n</i> )	% ( <i>n</i> )	% ( <i>n</i> )	
Difficulty swallowing	38.9 (559)	25.8 (109)	44.0 (427)	51.7 (24)	< .001
Watery eyes/eyes teared up	37.2 (535)	27.1 (115)	41.0 (398)	78.2 (22)	< .001
Could not speak	37.6 (540)	27.0 (114)	41.9 (406)	44.2 (20)	< .001
Felt like I couldn't breathe	43.0 (617)	32.9 (139)	46.7 (452)	58.0 (26)	< .001
Gasped for air	33.4 (478)	19.3 (81)	38.5 (373)	52.8 (24)	< .001
Neck hurt/neck pain	18.5 (266)	14.0 (59)	19.8 (192)	32.4 (15)	.004
Coughed	25.7 (369)	21.8 (92)	27.0 (262)	33.9 (15)	.068
Neck swelled up during or shortly after being choked	3.6 (52)	3.6 (15)	3.5 (34)	7.9 (4)	.331
Bruises on neck	14.8 (211)	10.4 (43)	16.5 (160)	18.6 (8)	.015
Peed/urine leaked out, without meaning to	1.4 (20)	1.6 (7)	1.3 (12)	2.0 (1)	.831
Felt a head rush	43.8 (626)	38.1 (161)	45.6 (440)	56.9 (26)	.011
Other responses*	1.8 (20)	2.8 (9)	1.4 (10)	2.9 (1)	.256
<i>Alterations in consciousness (AIC)</i>					
Vision got blurry	11.9 (171)	6.8 (28)	13.6 (131)	24.9 (11)	< .001
Lost vision/couldn't see	4.0 (58)	2.7 (11)	4.4 (42)	9.1 (4)	.078
Felt dizzy or lightheaded, like I might pass out	15.2 (217)	11.6 (49)	16.1 (156)	26.9 (12)	.012
Lost consciousness/pass out	2.6 (38)	1.5 (6)	3.1 (30)	3.3 (1)	.216
Any AIC	18.8 (268)	13.7 (57)	20.3 (196)	33.4 (15)	.001
Total number of physical responses, mean (SD)	3.3 (3.4)	2.5 (2.7)	3.6 (3.6)	4.7 (4.2)	< .001



# Examples of Body Responses:

---

Couldn't breathe (43%)

---

Couldn't speak (38%)

---

Neck pain (19%)

---

Involuntary loss of urine (2%)

---

Euphoria or other pleasurable sensations (80%)

# Immediate Responses:

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## **Alterations in consciousness:**

---

Blurred vision (12%)

---

Vision loss (4%)

---

Dizzy or lightheaded, like I might pass out (15%)

---

Lost consciousness/passed out (3%)

---

**Any of these: 19%** (20% women, 33% trans\* + nonbinary, 14% men)

## Responses Noticed in the Hours or Days After Being Choked

---

Neck hurt (18%)

---

Neck bruising (15%)

---

Sore throat (12%)

---

Voice sounded different, like hoarse or raspy (11%)

---

Ringing in the ears (9%)

---

Headache (8%)

---

Memory loss related to the event (5%)

---

Neck swelling (4%)

# Although rare, people do die.

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### Four-year-sentence for man who strangled woman to death during sex branded 'outrageous'

Chris Parsons and Rebecca Speare-Cole  
7 September 2021 · 7-min read



### Warning after dancer fatally choked during sex

15 May 2024

David Spereall  
BBC News



Share Save



CRIME

## Attorneys continue talks that could lead to plea deal in 2019 Bergen sex choking death

 **Kaitlyn Kanzler**  
NorthJersey.com  
May 2, 2025 | Updated May 4, 2025, 8:06 p.m. ET



## Judge admits sentencing error and jails former RAAF corporal over girlfriend's death

By Isadora Bogle ABC Riverina Women

Sun 28 Mar 2021



# 10. Emerging Research on Sexual Choking/Strangulation and Brain Health

- Collaborative research led by Dr. Keisuke Kawata at the IU School of Public Health
- Pilot study with 41 women (20 choked recently/frequently, 21 never choked)
- Using blood biomarkers & fMRI, differences were observed between these two groups in terms of:
  - Patterns of connectivity
  - Verbal and visual working memory tasks during fMRI
  - Cortical thickness across multiple regions of the brain
  - Elevation of S100B

## Association of Frequent Sexual Choking/Strangulation With Neurophysiological Responses: A Pilot Resting-State fMRI Study

## Frequent and Recent Non-fatal Strangulation/Choking During Sex and Its Association With fMRI Activation During Working Memory Tasks

Megan E. Huibregtse<sup>1</sup>, Isabella L. Alexander<sup>1</sup>, Lillian M. Klemsz<sup>1</sup>, Tsung-chieh Fu<sup>2,3</sup>, J. Dennis Fortenberry<sup>4</sup>, Debby Herbenick<sup>2,3</sup> and Keisuke Kawata<sup>1,5\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Kinesiology, School of Public Health, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, United States, <sup>2</sup>Center for Sexual Health Promotion, School of Public Health, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, United States, <sup>3</sup>Department of Applied Health Science, School of Public Health, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, United States, <sup>4</sup>Department of Pediatrics, School of Medicine, Indiana University, Indianapolis, IN, United States, <sup>5</sup>Program in Neuroscience, College of Arts and Sciences, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, United States

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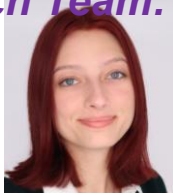
ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Brain and Behavior  
Open Access WILEY

Structural brain morphology in young adult women who have been choked/strangled during sex: A whole-brain surface morphometry study

# Acute Sexual Strangulation Effects

## Research Team:



Sage



Claire



Harper



Bella



Volume 23, Issue 1  
January 2026

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## JOURNAL ARTICLE

### Clinical characteristics of acute sexual strangulation/choking: a randomized cross-over study [Get access >](#)

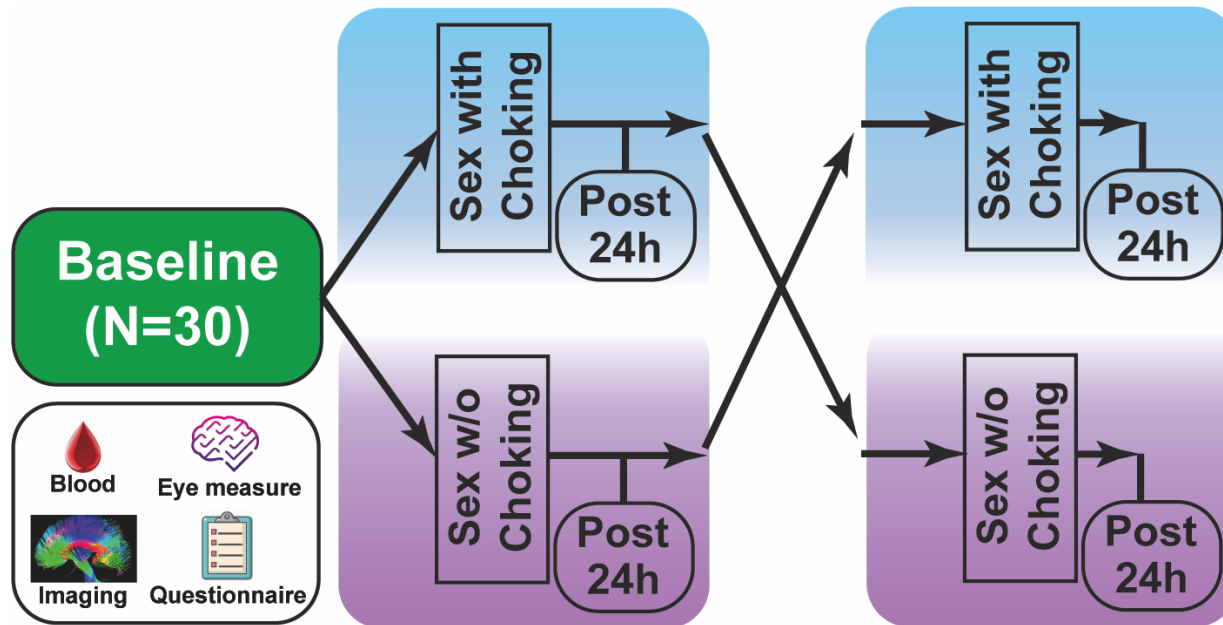
Sage H Sweeney, BS, Megan E Huibregtse, PhD, Harper Day, BS, Claire V Buddenbaum, Grace O Recht, MA, Bella Buehler, BS, Debby Herbenick, PhD ✉, Keisuke Kawata, PhD ✉

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## Aim:

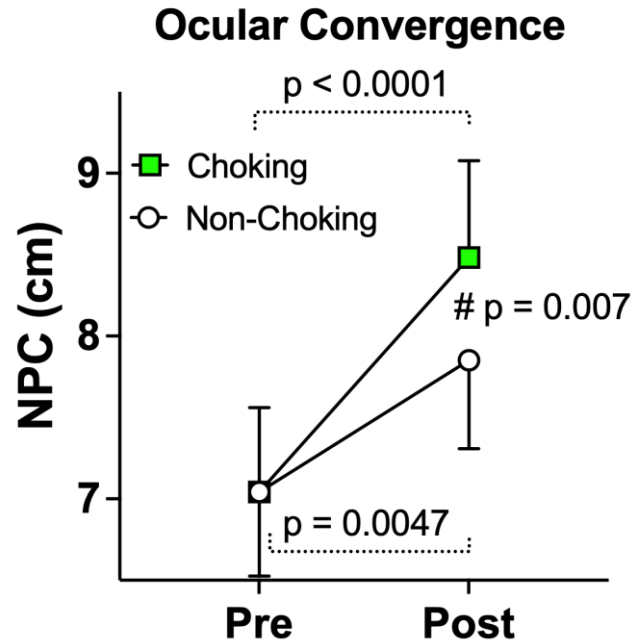
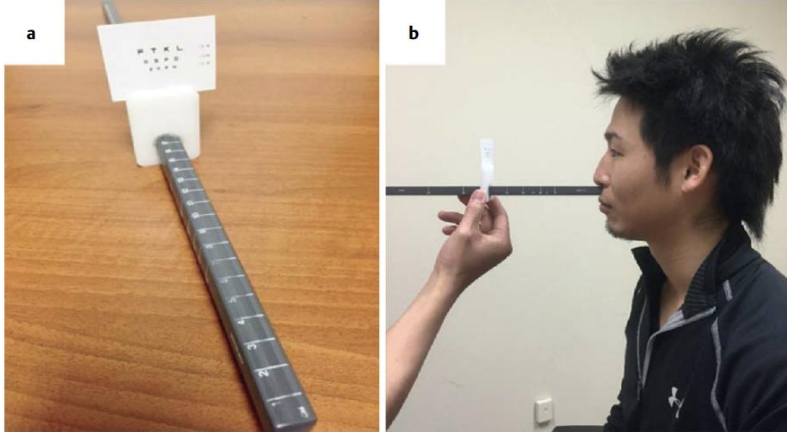
Explore the acute neurological effects of sexual strangulation through mental health assessments, advanced neuroimaging, and blood biomarkers





# Clinical outcomes

## Near Point of Convergence (NPC)



## NPC results:

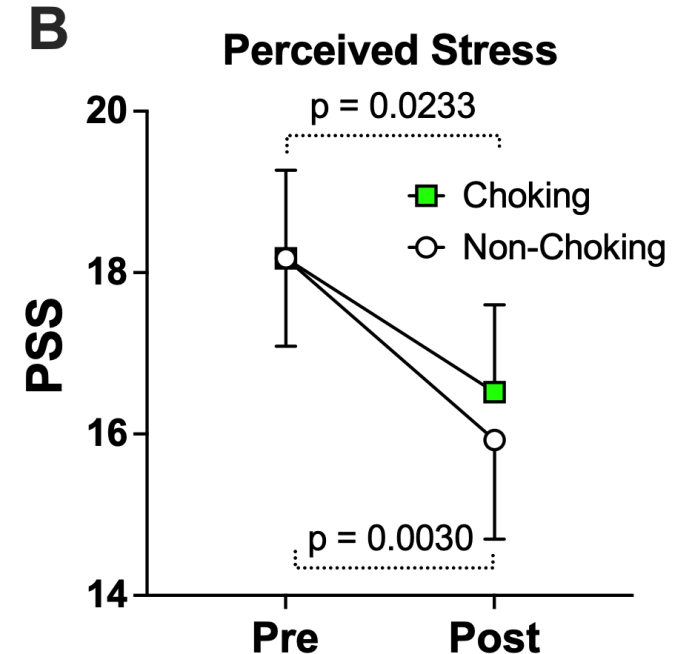
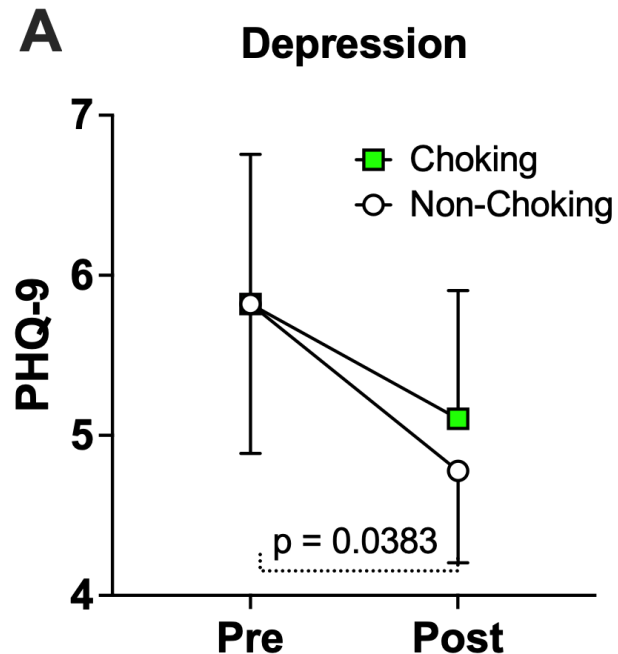
Significant NPC increase in both choking and non-choking exposure, but the magnitude was slightly amplified after post-choking.

Does sexual choking/strangulation impair ocular-motor function?

## Mental health results:

Depression and stress scores were improved after both sexual events, but less pronounced after post-choking.

Beneficial effects of sex maybe blunted by strangulation?





# Acute Blood Biomarkers

- Neurofilament light (NfL) significantly increased after choking-involved sex but remained unchanged after non-choking
- Among inflammatory markers, CCL-2 and VEGF-A demonstrated a similar
- No significant differences in other parameters
- These findings show transient axonal stress and hypoxia-related inflammatory signaling from being choked/strangled during sex.
- These findings indicate that sexual choking/strangulation, even in consensual contexts, may have subtle, yet detectable cellular burden.
- Future studies with larger samples are needed to clarify short- and long- term implications.

## Acute blood biomarker responses to consensual sexual choking/strangulation in young adult women: a randomized crossover study

Sage H. Sweeney<sup>1</sup>, Grace O. Recht<sup>1</sup>, Giselle Lima-Cooper<sup>2</sup>, Dibyadyuti Datta<sup>2</sup>, Claire V. Buddenbaum<sup>1</sup>, Harper Day<sup>1</sup>, Bella Buehler<sup>1</sup>, Megan E. Huibregtse<sup>3,4</sup>, Debby Herbenick<sup>5,6\*</sup> and Keisuke Kawata<sup>1,2,7\*</sup>

So.... Choking is prevalent, risky, but  
also mainstream and almost vanilla.  
Now what?



# Education

- Many adults are (understandably) uncomfortable talking about choking and rough sex
- Yet, these are a part of young people's social and media landscapes, that we need to step into these conversations and share accurate information
- Among 973 randomly sampled college students:
  - They were **15.3 years old**, on average, when they learned about choking
  - They felt that information about choking and its risks should first be given to young people in middle school (22%), high school (61%), or college (6%)

# Where College Students Want to Learn About Choking & Health

## They value expertise

- Videos included in sexual assault prevention programs (78%)
- Campus-wide health education media campaign (78%)
- Sex education workshops in residence halls (72%)
- One-on-one conversations with healthcare providers (82%)
- College-level health courses (82%) and sexuality courses (87%)
- Videos on the Student Health Center website (70%)
- First aid courses (71%)

~60% selected social media and peer-led programs

# Who did they trust to share such information?

College  
healthcare  
providers

College faculty  
teaching  
sexuality courses

College  
counselors

College faculty  
teaching health-  
related courses

Peer sexual  
health educators

# Examples of Educational Test Messages

- 1) **CONSENT:** “In a 2020 survey, 21% of college students who had been choked during sex said that they had never been asked for consent to be choked. Just because a person has consented to hook up or have sex does not mean that they have consented to be choked. Choking a person without clear consent may be considered sexual misconduct.”
- 2) **LEGAL CONSEQUENCES:** “Nearly half of college students have been choked during sexual activities. However, even when choking during sex is consensual, if a person is accidentally hurt or killed from being choked, the person who choked them may be held legally and criminally responsible for their injury or death.”
- 3) **HEALTH:** “Choking during sex decreases blood flow, and thus oxygen, to the brain. Recent research shows that people who have been choked during sex are at greater risk of depression and anxiety. Safer ways to play include role-playing, spanking, and sex toy use.”

# Educational Test Messages

- We created educational messages about choking in relation to health, consent, and legal consequences
- We randomized students to receive:
  - All messages (health + consent + legal consequences)
  - Consent + health
  - No messages
- Our messages were all well received
  - Rated as feasible, acceptable, new information to them
- Preliminary evidence of efficacy, with those who saw the messages being less likely to report that they would choke/be choked in the next 6 months
- The legal consequence messages were especially influential for men



# Implications: Campus & Community Sexuality Education

- College students want to learn about choking, health, and consent
- Also: they trust college health professionals
- Support people in learning about diverse sexual practices, but make sure that the presenters are reputable and providing medically accurate information
  - Avoid speakers/workshops claiming to teach “safe” choking
- Pay attention to language – most young people tell us that they do not connect with words like “strangulation” or “strangle”
  - Most use the word “choke” but connect with your community to learn more

# Clinical Care

- **Anticipatory guidance, including to pregnant patients**
  - “You might have heard about choking during sex, which has become more common among young people. There’s a great deal of misinformation about choking and I want to make sure you have accurate information.”
- **Intake forms**
  - In addition to assessing assault, intake forms for mental health care might ask:
  - “Has anyone ever done something “rough” to you during sex (e.g., choked, slapped, smothered, etc.) that you either did not consent to or that you consented to but was rougher than you expected?”
  - In a recent study, we found that a similar question was able to successfully identify people who were not picked up by standard measures of sexual coercion or assault that focus on oral, vaginal, and anal sex

**Be curious about bruises or “rashes” on the neck or bruises on the genitals**

# Example: IU Student Health Center Website

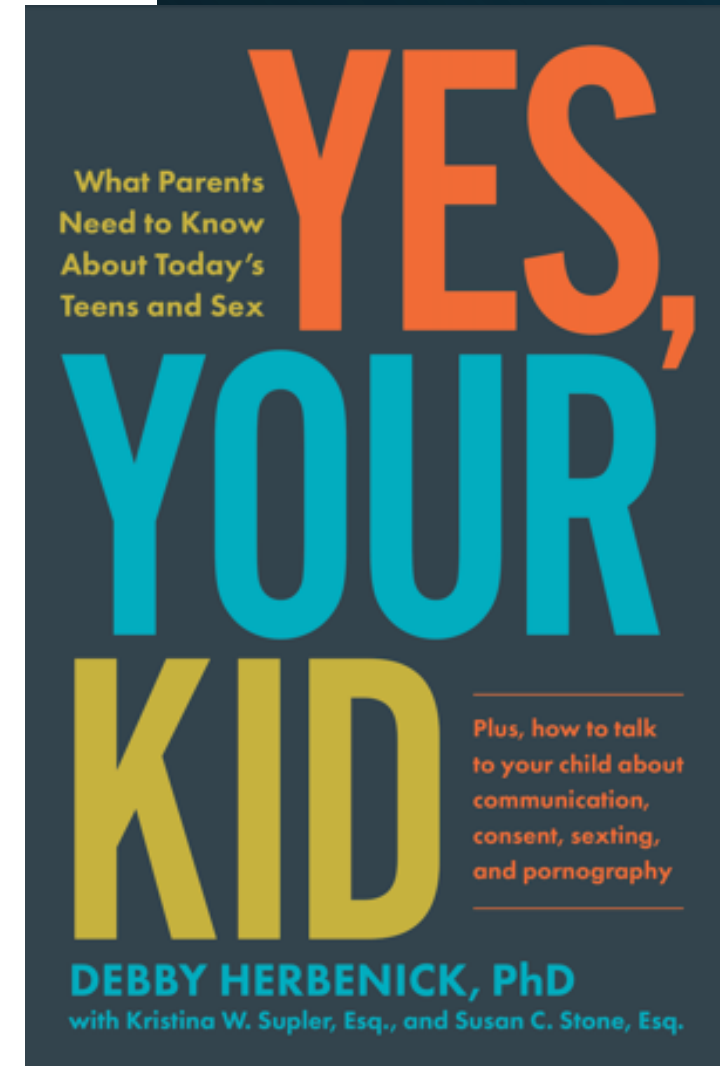
doing this repeatedly can cause cumulative brain damage that can be permanent.

Additionally, if a person has difficulty breathing or speaking while being “choked” – or if they are starting to feel dizzy or disoriented – they may not be able to let you know if the choking has become uncomfortable, painful, or if they wish to stop. (Which could mean they cannot withdraw consent.) Many people who have been choked in sexual situations report feeling scared while it’s happening to them, but either being unable to tell their partner or else not telling their partners due to fear of upsetting them. If you are being choked during sex, it is OK to ask your partner to stop choking you. If you are choking your partner during sex, it is a good idea to stop choking them, and to explore other, less risky ways, to find pleasure. If a person loses consciousness from being choked during sex, they should let their nurse or doctor know. Also, if you experience any swelling on your neck from being choked during sexual activities, seek healthcare right away as this can be a potentially life threatening situation. If you have been choked without consent (even if the sexual activities themselves were consensual), you can speak with a confidential victim advocate or sexual assault counselor.

# Resources

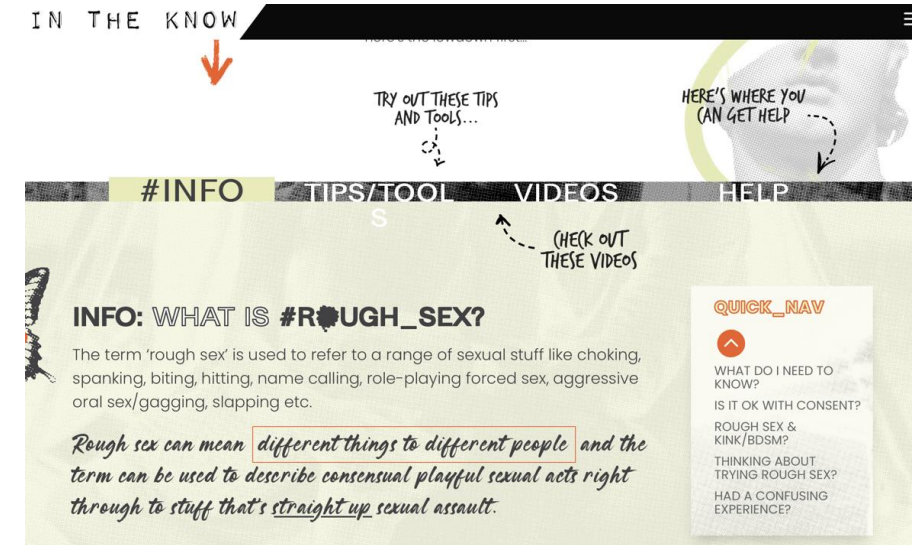
# 1. Yes Your Kid: What Parents Need to Know About Today's Teens and Sex

- Includes an entire chapter on rough sex and choking
- Scripts to talk with teens, college students, and other young adults about choking and rough sex
- Scripts people can use if they don't want to choke their partner(s)
- Scripts for if they don't want to be choked



## 2. Fact Sheets from In the Know

- New Zealand-based youth organization
- Free online fact sheets about rough sex and choking
- InTheKnow.co.nz



# 3. Professionals and Community Members

- <https://www.itleftnomarks.com.au/>
- Mostly resources related to violence but some now added related to sexual choking as well

### Sexual choking

Sexual choking is where someone applies pressure to your neck that partially or completely restricts airflow or blood flow to your brain during sex.

#### Why do people do it?

People generally engage in sexual choking to increase endorphins (the body's feel-good chemicals) and to intensify orgasm.

#### Is sexual choking risky?

Sexual choking is a high-risk sexual activity. There is no risk-free way to engage in sexual choking. Every time you choke someone, or you let someone choke you, you risk serious injury, brain injury and death.

#### What about consent?

Informed consent is a person's decision, given voluntarily, to agree to an activity after they have been provided with accurate and relevant information about the activity.

NSW laws relating to sexual consent have changed recently to require affirmative consent. Affirmative consent means everyone participating in a sexual activity enthusiastically agrees to take part in that specific sexual activity.

#### What is harm reduction?

While there is no completely safe way to choke or be choked, some people who engage in sexual choking use harm reduction strategies to help reduce the risk.

Harm reduction strategies can also include making a plan of action together for what to do if something goes wrong. **Ask yourself:** Do you know what to do if your partner stops breathing?

### Who can I talk to about sexual choking?

If you would like to discuss sexual choking all women's health centres across NSW have staff who have been trained to support you to navigate risk, set boundaries, or help you engage harm reduction strategies relating to sexual choking.

or

**Find your closest women's health centre here:**  
<https://whnsw.asn.au/womens-healthcentres-nsw/>

**Useful information can be found here:**  
[www.itleftnomarks.com.au](http://www.itleftnomarks.com.au)

women's health nsw

It left no marks  
[itleftnomarks.com.au](http://itleftnomarks.com.au)



# Reinforce that sexual choking is never risk-free

When a person is choked, there is a period of time when oxygen supply and blood supply to their brain is cut off or reduced. Each time this happens there may be damage to brain cells, and this damage can build up over time, and lead to problems with brain function.

There is legal risk for the person doing the choking, even with consent. People may argue whether there was consent or not, especially if they have suffered injury. Alongside the risk of criminal charges, there is also a risk of civil legal claims, particularly if the person being choked suffers long-term impacts like a brain injury.

The timeline between sexual choking and fatal strangulation is measured in seconds rather than minutes, and the consequences of getting it wrong are extreme.



*I say, there is no safe way to do sexual choking. I encourage them to consider the impact if they do cause damage. I drop in the likelihood of her losing control of her bowels or urine, which makes the men reel back.*

Men's behaviour change practitioner

- Women considering sexual choking
- Women actively engaging in sexual choking
- Young people
- LGBTQ+ people
- Men considering sexual choking
- Men actively engaging in sexual choking

# Build capacity to identify and redirect to alternative sexual activities

Workshop potential ways to redirect to other sexual activities without saying no – for example, moving a partner's hands from throat to hips and saying, "I like being held here".

Discuss a continuum of risk and redirect to lower risk ways to explore sexual choking that do not involve putting pressure on the neck. This might include the person holding their own breath, playing with role-play/fantasy without applying pressure to the neck, or making sure sexual positions mean the choking partner can always see the face of the person being choked.

Help the person develop boundaries relating to when it's not okay to choke. This might be when either partner is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, as it's harder to control pressure or notice signals; or when they are alone and using a ligature (autoerotic asphyxiation), as the risk of injury in both cases is high.

*I might say, and apprec information today about me sharing, could take h it with your*



*As a sex worker, when I agree to sexual choking, I make it clear that I mean one hand around my throat but no pressure. Role-playing choking lets you explore the fantasy of choking without risking your health and safety. Sex workers aren't seeing more random sexual choking because they negotiate and set boundaries before sex happens..*

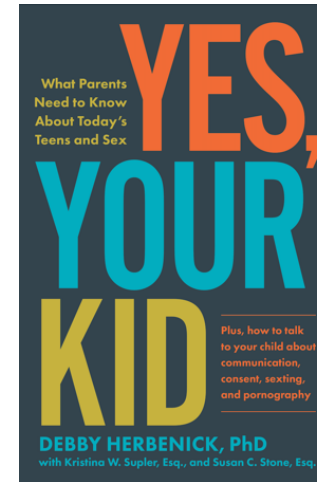
Peer outreach officer

*We are a sex-positive organisation, so we discuss a range of sexual behaviours that are all completely valid, as long as there is informed consent. Reinforcing for young people that sexuality is a smorgasbord of delicious and not so appealing things encourages them to prioritise exploration and pleasure rather than what porn, and their friends, and pop culture is telling them.*

- Women considering sexual choking
- Women actively engaging in sexual choking
- Women reluctantly engaging in sexual choking
- Young people
- LGBTQ+ people
- Men reluctantly engaging in sexual choking
- Men considering sexual choking
- Men actively engaging in sexual choking

# Thank you and Resources

- Book: Yes Your Kid: What Parents Need to Know About Today's Teens and Sex
- In the Know Fact Sheets (NZ)
  - [InTheKnow.co.nz](http://InTheKnow.co.nz)
- It Left No Marks campaign  
[ItLeftNoMarks.com.au](http://ItLeftNoMarks.com.au)



Contact: Debby Herbenick  
Email: [debby@iu.edu](mailto:debby@iu.edu)



INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
**SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH**  
Center for Sexual Health Promotion

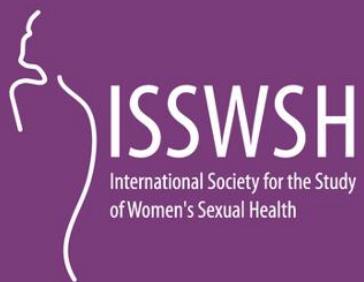


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***Save the  
Date!***