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Great Sexpectations: Sex and Symbolic Capital in the Age of Raunch

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For much of this decade, there has been academic and popular interest in “hooking up” and “raunch culture”, broadly characterised as casual sex and cultural sexualisation, respectively. These discourses have been shown to be inadequate in their representations of young men and women’s sexual experiences (Bogle 2008, Kimmel 2008, England and Thomas 2006), but there has been little research into the impact of this disjuncture on young adults’ sense of sexual self. Based on interviews with 25 young Australian adults aged between 18 and 29 years, this paper investigates the relationship between sex, the self and social status. Using as a framework Bourdieu’s (1984) theories of cultural capital, it discusses how young adults use sex as means to architect their social and internal identities and maps the terms under which sexual capital is created and reinforced.

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