

K.S. Anthony  
STAT 1001.002  
Fall 2012/Columbia University  
Final Project

*Columbia Seniors and Bwog's Oral Sex Vs. Cheese Question: An Inquiry.*

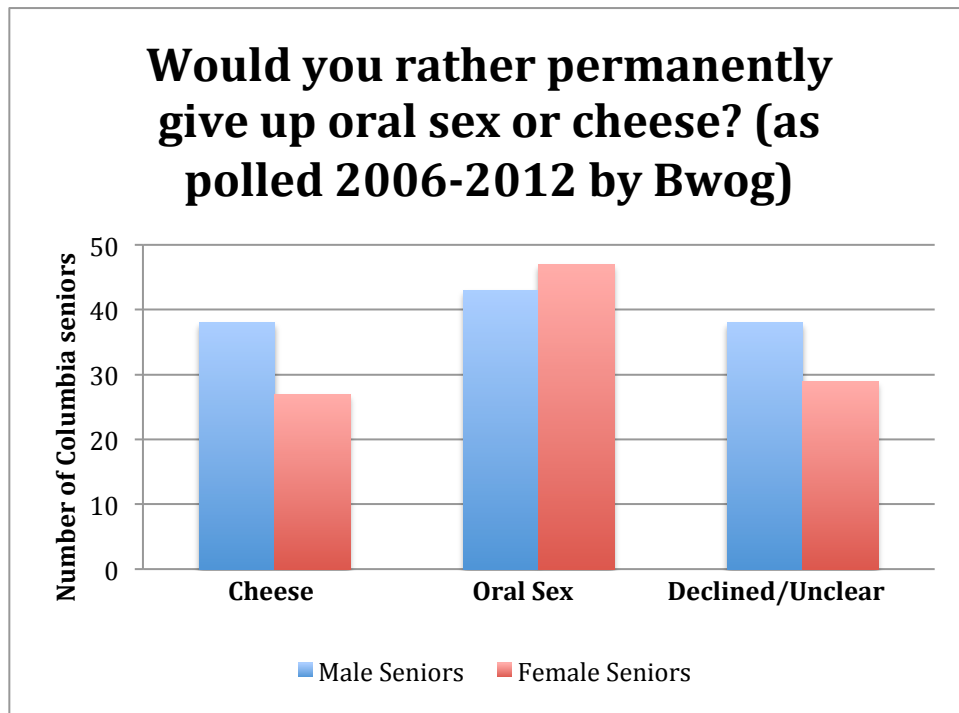
At the end of every school year, the Columbia community website/blog Bwog solicits nominations from its readers for their graduating friends or acquaintances from any of Columbia's four undergraduate schools to answer questions in short interviews called "Senior Wisdom." The editors at Bwog then contact these nominees and those who agree submit their answers to a series of questions about their experiences at Columbia. The interviews ask questions like "Where are you going," "(List) three things you learned at Columbia" and asks for advice for the incoming first-year class. Bwog has been running the Senior Wisdom interviews every year since 2006 and has collected over 200 responses. They are not, as far as I can ascertain, intended to be scientific.

One of the questions that is frequently criticized is "Would you rather give up oral sex or cheese?" which has been a staple question since the surveys began. My hypothesis is that Columbia/Barnard senior women are more likely than their male counterparts to say that they'd rather give up oral sex than cheese. *Any* sexual activity in a heteronormative collegiate (I assert Columbia *is* heteronormative, though that may be up for debate) environment serves as social capital for men more than women. This is evidenced by various sexual tropes and their accompanying social disparity and moral double-standard: a sex-positive woman is a "slut" or pegged as promiscuous, while a man of the same inclination is thought of as virile or a "stud." Aside from whatever pleasure might be gained, sex of any kind does not really serve the same purpose of social capital for a woman as it does a man in a heteronormative environment, so it makes sense that oral sex would be something of less importance to her if she were asked to pick between

that and, say, a nice brie. Again, this is a debatable point, but for the purposes of my hypothesis

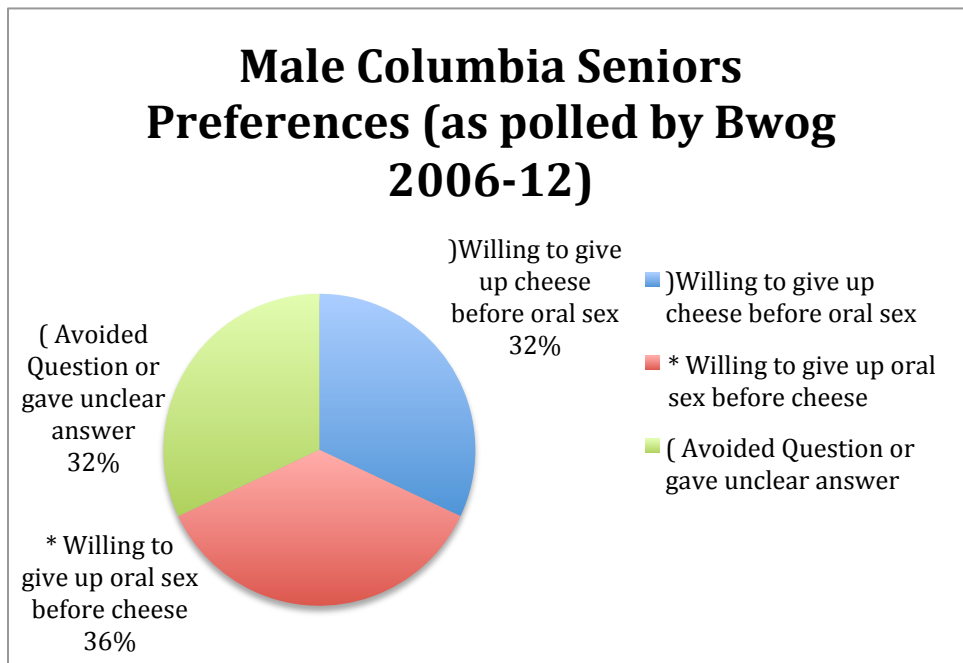
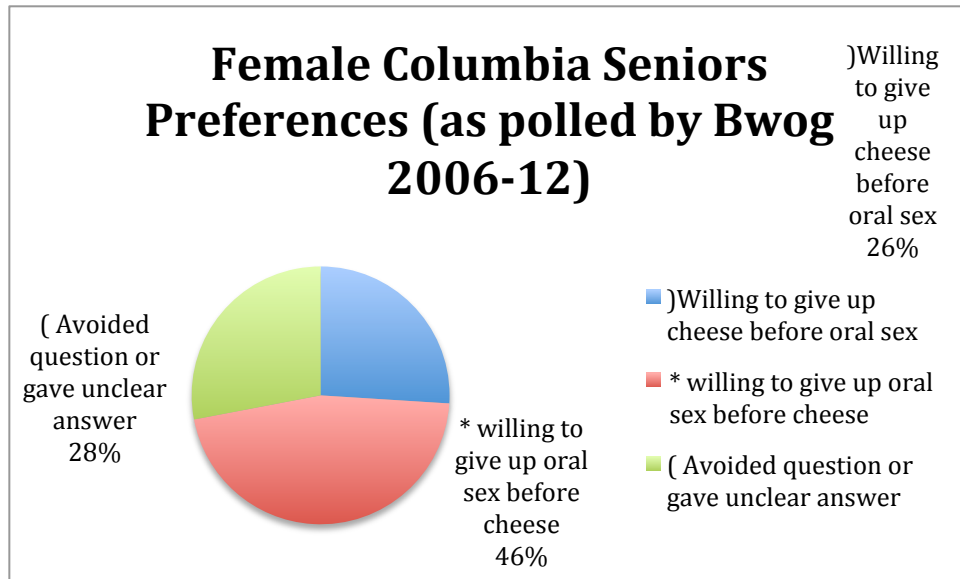
### METHOD:

I reviewed 222 Bwog interviews dating from 2006 to 2012 via their website and noted the preference for oral sex or cheese as well as the gender of the person answering. If the answer was unclear or if they refused to answer, I marked that as "no answer/unclear." 119 men's answers were recorded along with the answers of 103 women. Men represented 54% of respondents while women represented the remaining 46%. This roughly corresponds to U.S. News and World Report's demographic of Columbia as being 53% male and 47% female. Each undergraduate class has approximately 1500 students. Despite a relatively large size, I will discuss problems with the sample later. I compiled the results, broke them down into graphical presentations and then determined a confidence interval for a 95% confidence rate: approximately  $\pm 9\%$ .



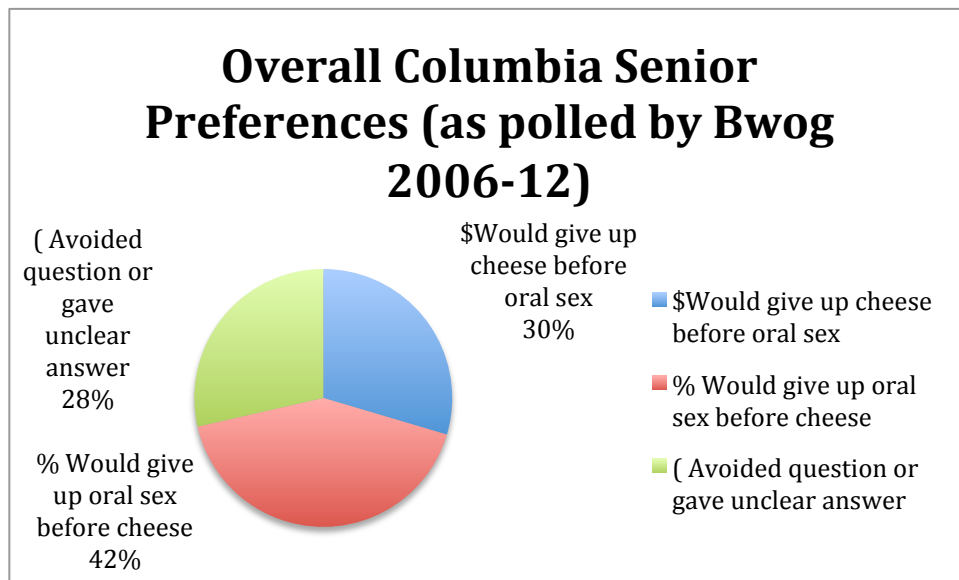
### RESULTS

The results were as I hypothesized, though because little to no information as to *why* graduating women at Columbia were more likely to state a preference for cheese than oral sex, it cannot be said that the aforementioned "culture of awkwardness" or availability of cheese contributed to the results. 46% of women would rather give up oral sex than cheese, while 36% of men reported the same attitude.



Over all, a fromage-centric attitude prevailed through the sample, with a full 42% of seniors who answered the question reporting that they'd give up oral sex before giving up cheese. For those who said they'd give up cheese, lactose intolerance was commonly cited, as were other dietary restrictions.

The percentage differences between the sexes don't change much if non-respondents and unclear answers are removed. Of those who answered the question directly, 64% of women and 53% of men said they'd prefer to give up oral sex in favor of cheese: 58% of seniors overall, then, would seem to prefer cheese to oral sex.



#### DISCUSSION

The purpose of my conducting this as a formalized version of a survey was to avoid having a small sample size. Unfortunately, I cannot say that even a sample of 222 people is a representative sample, despite numerically representing 15% of an average class size of 1500. There are a few problems with this sampling method. Firstly, although the respondents have to be nominated, they are still a volunteer sample whose names and pictures appear in the interviews. Those who respond are likely to be relatively popular

(hence their nomination) and may be playing to an audience or avoiding an honest answer to the question for fear of a loss of what Erving Goffman calls "face" or an upset in social capital. Despite the diversity of this sample, then, it is not truly a *random* sample.

Another problem is that this data was gathered over six years. It is possible that social attitudes regarding not only the subjects of this question, but the questions themselves have changed. 2006-12 covers the end of a Republican presidency and the beginning of a Democratic presidency. It also covers the years that a vegan (vegans don't eat cheese) book--*Skinny Bitch*--was on the New York Times bestseller list. Six years is enough to make a difference: these results, because of the methodology cannot be said to represent Columbia seniors as a whole. They *might* only represent the last six years of Columbia graduating classes. Yet another problem is the GS factor. The School of General Studies is not counted in the "average class size" due to the fact that they often enter as part-time students with transfer credits. They easily account for another 200-300 graduates every May and are interviewed for Senior Wisdom, but their numbers are not included in the average class size. They are often older than traditional students and, therefore, may have different ideas about oral sex and cheese. At least one GS student seems to have been not asked the question at all, presumably out of respect for his age. Finally, there is the question itself. It's notable that a full 30% of those surveyed either refused to answer or gave resolutely ambiguous answers. It is likely that the question, in contrast with the more serious sounding questions, isn't given much weight. Answering it is a chance to appear clever or glib, without really considering the social effects created by making such a decision.

In summation, one cannot determine the preference for cheese over oral sex at Columbia via this overview of six years of unscientific research. More formalized study

would be needed in order to come to a clear conclusion about the preferences of Columbia's graduating classes.

