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Hook-Up Culture: Setting a New Research Agenda

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Abstract Summarizing the major findings of literature on hook-up culture, we propose a new research agenda focusing on when and why this sexual subculture emerged. We explore a series of hypotheses to explain this sexual paradigm shift, including college and university policies, the gender distribution of students, changes in the nature of alcohol use, access to and consumption of pornography, the increased sexual content of non-pornographic media, rising self-objectification and narcissism, new marriage norms, and perceptions of sexual risk. We then recommend new directions for research, emphasizing the need to explore structural and psychological as well as cultural factors, the role of discrete events alongside slowly emerging social change, the need for intersectional research and studies of non-college-attending and post-college youth, and the benefits of longitudinal and cross-college designs.

Keywords Hook-up culture · Hooking up · Casual sex and college-aged students · Media · Pornography · Raunch culture · Binge drinking

Introduction

Scholarly research on heterosexual hook-up culture is new, spanning only a decade. Still, the literature has reached a critical mass, and we now have excellent descriptive data. We know what percentage of college students hook up, how frequently they do so, and what sexual activities are included in hook ups. We are learning what students expect when hooking up and how students form relationships within hook-up culture. And, we have a good handle on the social and emotional consequences of hook-up culture, especially for women.

However, despite the critical mass of research on hooking up and the agreement that hook-up culture is somehow "new," we have not addressed its emergence. We know very little about when it arrived and how it got here. Further, we have only begun to theorize the distinction between a sexual culture that includes hooking up and a "hook-up culture." And, relatedly, we have yet to fully parse out the relationship between its emergence and the changes in sexual practices that appear to be more-or-less concomitant with this form of sexual engagement (e.g., the rise in incidence of anal sex and re-ordering of the sexual script to place oral sex "before" intercourse).

Gathering data with which to theorize answers to these questions, we argue, is the next step in understanding both hook-up culture and the larger social patterns that hook-up culture can illuminate, especially how sexual cultures and subcultures change and persist. It will also offer insights into how to shift cultural and institutional environments in ways that empower young people to make more autonomous decisions when negotiating hook-up culture. In the pages that follow, drawing on research in psychology, sociology, education, communications, and medicine, we review the literature on hook-up culture, discuss hypotheses for the causes and timing of its emergence, and recommend new directions for research.

Our approach is informed by radical feminism, focusing on modes of sexuality as both reflections and tools of gender oppression. We follow in the footsteps of 1970s

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pioneers Kate Millet and Marilyn French and more recent scholars, such as Andrea Dworkin and Gail Dines. Radical feminist critiques have mostly been eclipsed in the academy by liberal and post-modern feminist perspectives, but a Renaissance is underway, marked by renewed scholarly emphasis on pornography, women's objectification, and self-objectification (Calogero 2004; Dines 2010; Fredrickson and Roberts 1997; Jensen 2007; Tiggemann and Boundy 2008). Radical feminism is a useful tool for understanding both the emergence of hook-up culture and its implications.

What We Know about Hook-Up Culture

The literature on hooking up, while extensive, primarily examines traditional college students. Most studies focus on gender differences, to the exclusion of other axes of identity, such as race, class, and sexual orientation. Accordingly, our summary of the existing literature applies primarily to 18-22 year old heterosexual college students, undifferentiated by other meaningful and potentially relevant identity categories.

Hooking Up

In the literature, hook-up culture is defined as casual sexual contact between nondating partners without an (expressed or acknowledged) expectation of forming a committed relationship (Armstrong et al. 2009; Bogle 2008; Flack et al. 2006; Garcia and Reiber 2008; Paul et al. 2000; Paul 2006). The typical hook up occurs at a party (Bogle 2007a). The first step involves an exchange of verbal and non-verbal communication signaling mutual attraction. Once the mutuality of this attraction has been established, couples select a semi-private or private location where they engage in sexual contact (e.g., at the party or in a dorm room). After hooking up, participants generally do not stay the night with each other to avoid the "walk of shame"—walking back to one's dorm room in the morning with disheveled party clothes from the previous night (Bogle 2007a).

Depending on methodology (surveys, interviews, and focus groups) and operationalization (of, for example, "friends with benefits"), studies have found that between two thirds (Garcia and Reiber 2008) and three quarters of students (Armstrong et al. 2009; England et al. 2008; Paul et al. 2000) hook up at some point during college. Armstrong et al. (2009) find that, of those who have hooked up at some point, 40% did so three or fewer times, 40% did so between four and nine times, and one in five students have hooked up ten or more times during their college years. England et al. (2008), also, found that a slightly higher number—28%—had ten or more hook ups. In summary, a majority of college students participate in hook-up culture and about a quarter will hook-up ten or more times during college.

Hook ups include one-time sexual encounters (a "random"); multiple encounters, generally on the weekends, often without any contact during the week (a "regular"); infrequent sexual encounters with an acquaintance or friend late at night, generally after an "unsuccessful" night of hooking up (a "booty call"); and repeat hook ups with a friend that do not involve a dating relationship ("friends with benefits" or "fuck buddies") (Bogle 2008; England et al. 2008; Flack et al. 2006; Paul et al. 2000). When respondents in Armstrong et al.'s (2009) study of 12,925 students were asked about their last hook-up partner, 50% said that this was the first time they had hooked up with this partner, 18% said they had hooked up with this same person once or twice before, one third had hooked up with them at least three times before, and 16% said they had hooked up with the partner ten or more times.

Sexual Content

Hooking up exists within a broader context of shifting heterosexual sex scripts that determine prevailing sexual norms and activities (Gagnon and Simon 1973). Contemporary scripts are characterized by a move away from vaginal intercourse with increases in oral and anal sex and the introduction of a new sexual script that places oral sex "before" intercourse in a hierarchy of intimacy (England et al. 2008; Gindi et al. 2008; Halpern-Felsher et al. 2005). While researchers have been late in detecting these shifts given the difficulties of getting information from minors about their sexual practices (Remez 2000) and researcher biases about what constitutes "sex" (Sanders and Reinisch 1999), surveys now measure a variety of such activities as a matter of course (see the National Survey of Family Growth, 2002, presented in Mosher et al. 2005).

Rates of vaginal intercourse have declined significantly in the last decade (Kaiser Family 2006), while rates of oral and anal sexual activities have risen during this time. Comparison of two national surveys show a stark increase in anal sex among 18- to 24-year-olds from 1992 (16.2% for women and 15.8% for men) to 2002 (26.5% for women and 27.2% for men) (Laumann et al. 1992; Mosher et al. 2005). Similarly, one longitudinal study of a Baltimore sexually transmitted infection (STI) clinic shows that rates of heterosexual anal sex doubled among patients from 1994 to 2004 (Gindi et al. 2008), while a large sample of Seattle residents shows that reported rates of heterosexual anal sex doubled among 18 to 39-year-olds from 1995 (4.3%) to 2004 (8.3%) (Aral et al. 2005).

A similar pattern exists for oral sex. This activity has been steadily rising throughout the second half of the twentieth century (Gagnon and Simon 1987; Laumann et al.

1994), but increased noticeably in the past decade. Fifteen- to 19-year-olds experienced a significant increase from 1995 (49.5%) to 2002 (55.0%) (Gates and Sonenstein 2000; Lindberg Duberstein et al. 2008). "Adolescents [are] more likely to report engagement in oral sex than intercourse [and] report more oral sex partners than intercourse partners" (Prinstein et al. 2003, p. 243). Halpern-Felsher et al. (2005) argues that young people:

> …believe that oral sex is more acceptable than vaginal sex for adolescents their own age in both dating and nondating situations, oral sex is less of a threat to their values and beliefs, and more of their peers will have oral sex than vaginal sex in the near future (p. 845).

In the Baltimore study of STI patients, rates of oral sex among 12- to 25-year-old patients increased dramatically from 1994 to 2004 (from 13% to 40% for females and from 16% to 33% for males) (Gindi et al. 2008); in the Seattle study, rates of oral sex increased significantly from 1995 to 2004 (81.6% to 85.8%) (Aral et al. 2005).

However, while college-aged women are more likely than ever to pleasure their male partners with oral sex, men have become less likely to pleasure their female partners in this way during college. Among college-age respondents, rates of oral sex for women increased significantly from 1992 to 2002 (from 69.1% to 72.4%), while for men, the number significantly decreased (72.4% to 66.3%) (Laumann et al. 1992; Mosher et al. 2005).

When asked about their activities during the most recent hook up, one third of college students reported only kissing and touching without genital contact; an additional 16% and 15% reported also engaging in manual and oral sex, respectively, alongside kissing and making out, but not including intercourse; and 38% reported engaging in penile–vaginal intercourse (possibly also including manual and oral sex) (England et al. 2008). The study of Paul et al. (2000) finds that one third of female and half of male college students engage in intercourse during a hook-up encounter. This, overall, means that students engage in a wider variety of sexual behavior than in previous eras and, even when students do not have intercourse with a casual partner, they often nonetheless engage in oral sex.

Motivations

Students express multiple, sometimes conflicting motivations for hooking up. In Garcia and Reiber (2008) study, nine in ten students report physical pleasure as a motivation for hooking up, while 54% reported emotional reasons for the hook up. Several studies have found that the potential to form a relationship is a main motivation for both men and women to hook up, though there is an (often modest) gender difference with women more often hoping for a relationship than men (Armstrong et al. 2009; Bogle 2007a, b, 2008; England et al. 2008; Garcia and Reiber 2008). Garcia and Reiber (2008), however, find that only 6% actually expect to be successful in this endeavor, and England et al. (2008) find that less than half of students (47% of women and 36% of men) express an interest in starting a relationship with their most recent hook-up partner. Still, among the students studied by Garcia and Reiber (2008), only 13% say that "it would be ideal for nothing to happen from the hook up" (p. 199), a statistic that runs counter to the common claim that most hook ups are thought of as "no strings attached" encounters. Instead, hook ups are the new "pathway into relationships" (England et al. 2008, p. 540). While very few hook ups actually lead to a dating relationship (Paul 2006), students do form committed, monogamous relationships (Armstrong et al. 2009), but these relationships tend to evolve out of a string of hook ups (England et al. 2008).

"Bad" Sex

Studies find that much hook-up sex is unpleasurable or coercive (Armstrong et al. 2009; Flack et al. 2007; Paul 2006; Wade and Heldman 2010). First, quantitative studies show that there is a significant orgasm gap between men and women who hook up. Armstrong et al. (2009) find that the first time two partners hook up, women orgasm only 32% as often as men. The ratio improves with repeated hook ups with women experiencing orgasm 49% as often with regular hook-up partners. Men's sexual pleasure, as measured by orgasm, appears to take precedence over women's in hook ups. The deprioritization of women's sexual pleasure is related to the finding that many women consent to sexual encounters and behaviors that they do not desire (Flack et al. 2007; Littleton et al. 2009; Paul 2006). These findings mirror those of researchers examining the sexual lives of adolescents, especially adolescent girls, who feel empowered to say "yes" to sex, but have a difficult time shaping the trajectory of a sexual encounter once it has begun (Holland et al. 1998; Tolman 1994).

Second, hook-up culture facilitates sexual assault (Armstrong and Hamilton 2009; Flack et al. 2007; Littleton et al. 2009; Wade and Heldman 2010), with the consequence that women headed for college have a significantly greater likelihood of being sexually assaulted than their non-college bound peers (Karjane et al. 2002). During college, young women have a 20% to 25% chance of experiencing an attempted or completed sexual assault or rape (AAUW 2009). Using representative student samples from two liberal arts colleges, Flack et al. (2007) find major differences in experiences of sexual assault amongst those who participate in hook-up culture and those who do not.

One fourth of students who report hooking up also report being raped, while none of the 55 students who have never hooked up report rape. Overall, 78% of coerced vaginal, anal, and oral sex occurred while hooking up.

Emotional and Social Outcomes

While some students express unequivocal enjoyment of hook-up culture (Armstrong and Hamilton 2009), a majority report emotional distress to varying degrees. For these students, a (purported) "no strings attached" encounter that is unlikely to lead to emotional connection can leave them feeling lonely and isolated (Paul 2006; Wade and Heldman 2010). The frequent disconnect between what students want and what they get is one reason for hook-up culture's emotional toll (Freitas 2008; Garcia and Reiber 2008; Paul 2006; Paul and Hayes 2002).

While women and men experience similar emotional outcomes with hooking up, gender differences exist in reputational outcomes. Simply put, while men continue to gain social status by sexually "consuming" a large number of women, women who engage in "too much" sexual activity are labeled "sluts" (Armstrong et al. 2009; Bogle 2008). Students in England et al. (2008) focus groups report that:

> …women who hook up with 'too many' people, or have casual sex readily, are called 'sluts' by both men and women. While some men who hook up a lot are called 'man whores,' such men also encounter accolades from other men for 'scoring' more (pp. 538–539).

According to Paul (2006), men use hook ups to establish a socially dominant image and for masculine "bragging rights," while women tend to show regret after hook ups because they have been socialized that having sex outside of a relationship is morally wrong for women. Women's greater interest in relationships and consideration of reputation damage, relative to men, creates an antagonistic dynamic between men and women on campus. The men in Bogle's (2008) study "…spoke about avoiding girls after a hook up, 'not calling girls back,' or 'thinking of good excuses' to get out of spending time with them" (p. 6).

Because hook-up scripts are less defined and more varied than dating scripts, the "rules" of hook-up culture are more difficult to decode and navigate than those of dating (Bogle 2008). This learning curve disadvantages first year female college students who tend to "go farther" than they otherwise would in hook ups because they do not know how to say "no" or hope that it will lead to a relationship (Bogle 2008; Wade and Heldman 2010). There is some evidence that sexual patterns shift dramatically starting in students' second year by which time they have learned the rules of the "game" (Bogle 2008; Gilmartin 2006). Still, even as some women figure out that hook-up culture fails to offer them what they want, this realization is not necessarily "accompanied by a stronger sense of sexual agency" (Gilmartin 2006, p. 429). In the meantime, repeated engagement in unwanted sexual acts takes an emotional toll on many participants, both female and male (Freitas 2008).

Considering the various negative emotional consequences for both women and men, Paul (2006) writes:

> It appears that the social [hook up] context is posing a no-win situation for youth—sexual propaganda is rife in media (albeit the sexual double standard for women persists), there is an increasing trend toward later ages for 'coupling,' dating has become passé, and yet youths crave interpersonal belongingness and seem at a loss as to how to achieve it. Yet another layer is youths' ineffective interpersonal negotiation of sexual and social interactions, exacerbated by the persistent social taboo against open and direct communication about sexuality (p. 156).

Feeling badly, students tend to internalize these problems and blame themselves instead of recognizing them as issues inherent in hook-up culture (Freitas 2008; Paul and Hayes 2002). Most students overestimate the frequency with which their peers hook up, how "far" they go in hook ups, and the degree to which their peers enjoy hooking up (Bogle 2008; Freitas 2008; Lambert et al. 2003; Paul 2006). The fact that many students endorse casual sex in principle and believe that others are enjoying hook-up culture contributes to their self blame. If *they* are not enjoying hooking up, there must be something wrong with *them*.

New Patterns of Sexually Transmitted Infection

In addition to potential negative emotional consequences, hook-up culture carries a higher risk of contracting a STI than dating culture because the former entails more sexual activity with "strangers" and sexual contact with more partners. Hook-up culture also involves more unplanned sexual encounters that are less likely to involve STI protection than planned sex (MacDonald and Hynie 2008). The use of condoms use during *intercourse* has increased significantly as a result of sex education programs focusing on the risk of HIV/AIDS (Roberts 2005), but STI transmission has increased in the past decade (Engle 2009), likely due to unprotected oral and anal sex (Leichliter et al. 2007). Chlamydia and syphilis have climbed steadily in the past decade to record levels, and gonorrhea rates have gone up and remained high in recent years (Engle 2009). Herpes simplex virus-1 is rapidly becoming a popular cause of genital herpes due to an increase in rates of (unprotected)

oral sex (Roberts 2005). Increasing rates of oral cancers caused by the human papilloma virus are also theorized to be related to changes in oral sex practices, especially among younger cohorts (Chaturvedi et al. 2008). Little scholarship has delved into the health risks posed by new sexual norms of hook-up culture. Such knowledge is crucial for revising sexual education curricula to address this new sexual paradigm, rife with misinformed perceptions of risk.

In sum, hook-up culture prescribes casual sexual encounters with friends or acquaintances. A majority of students hook up at least once during their college career. Oral sex now precedes intercourse and is defined as not really sex. This development, along with the inclusion of anal sex in the sexual script, has led to an increase, overall, in sexual activity among college students (ironically, it appears, alongside a decrease in the incidence of intercourse). Hook-up culture benefits men more than women in that men are more likely to derive physical pleasure from hook ups and socially benefit from active participation. Women, in addition, are made more vulnerable to sexual assault by men. Accordingly, many students experience negative emotional or social consequences as a result of hooking up. Finally, high rates of unprotected oral sex have contributed to an increase in the transmission of STIs.

Hypotheses for the Causes and Timing of Hook-Up Culture

To hypothesize the causes and timing of the emergence of hook-up culture is to presume that scholars understand the difference between the presence of hooking up on campus and the presence of a hook-up culture. So, though Bogle (2008) argues that "there is evidence that the term 'hooking up'—and presumably the practice—was being used by college students across the country since at least the mid-1980s," this does not necessarily mean that colleges were characterized by a hook-up culture at that time (p. 7).

One possible factor differentiating between the presence of the term, the practice of hooking up, and a hook-up culture may be the existence and acceptance of alternative sexual cultures. Bogle (2008) explains that a "going steady" dating culture permeated college campuses from the 1920s through the 1960s. Today, in contrast, opportunities for hooking up are no longer balanced by a dating culture (Armstrong et al. 2009; England et al. 2008). Casual sex is now hegemonic, and an interest in romance and relationships is seen as undesirable (England et al. 2008). In fact, casual sex appears to have become so normative that, in one study, one third of students report that their first time having intercourse was during a hook up (Garcia and Reiber 2008). So, though casual sex has been a part of college life for decades, a new denigration of, disinterest in, or absence of monogamous, emotionally meaningful relationships may mark the move from subcultural practice to mainstream culture. Answering this question—what differentiates the presence of hooking up from hook-up culture—is the first question we need to answer on the way to understanding its advent.

The timing and causes of its emergence are a genuine puzzle. These questions have simply been elided in most research on the subject. Several scholars, however, note the influence of the Sexual Revolution of the late 1960s and 1970s, in particular a general increase in sexual permissiveness (Bogle 2008; England et al. 2008; Harding and Jencks 2003) and widespread availability of birth control (Fugere et al. 2008). Others have pointed to the Women's Movement's push for acceptance of casual and non-marital sex for women (Bogle 2008; Fugere et al. 2008).

The second wave Women's Movement and Sexual Revolution may have been necessary but, we argue, were not sufficient causes of hook-up culture. Bogle (2008) put the emergence in the 1980s, decades after these major societal shifts began and, arguably, declined. But, depending on how you answer the question as to what constitutes a "culture" and how you define hooking up (e.g., is the revision of the sexual script a marker of the culture or not?), it is arguable that hook-up culture started in the 1990s. The timing of the decline in intercourse and rise in oral and anal sex is good evidence for this latter view. Further, hook-up culture itself may have changed substantially over time without losing its distinctive characteristics, however we define them.

In the remainder of this paper, with the hopes of stimulating future research, we discuss nine factors that may have contributed to the rise of hook-up culture. Our hypotheses consider college and university policies, the gender distribution of college students, changes in the nature of alcohol use, access to and consumption of pornography, the increased sexual content of non-pornographic media, new self-objectification, rising narcissism levels, new marriage norms, and perceptions of sexual risk. Some of these potential factors have been discussed in previous research, but these discussions have been mostly speculative and have not included an analytic eye toward necessary versus sufficient causes, theoretical consideration of the difference between the presence of hooking up and a hook-up culture, or the acute attention to detail that would allow us to postulate anything other than broad, over-generalized social change.

College and University Policies

Hook-up culture may have been facilitated by policy changes on college campuses. Co-ed dorms, for example, were instituted in the 1960s and 1970s, bringing men and

women into close and constant contact (Bogle 2008). These policies, however, were instituted at least a decade before the emergence of new hook-up sexual scripts. Other institutional factors, such as the role of required on-campus residence and the intensity of supervision, may also play a role.

Examining how institutional factors facilitate or inhibit hook-up culture, or nurture alternative sexual cultures, promises to be a rich direction for research. We still know very little about how hook-up culture varies from campus to campus (e.g., residential versus commuter, large versus small campuses, and liberal arts colleges versus other private and state schools) or whether students with a different relationship to their institution (e.g., living on- versus off-campus and traditional versus non-traditional students) have different experiences with hook-up culture.

The Gender Distribution of College Students

Hook-up culture may also be related to the new gender imbalance on college campuses (Bogle 2008). The Women's Movement opened the doors of higher education for women at the same time that newly dominant modes of masculinity started devaluing education as a feminized pursuit (Epstein et al. 1998). As a result, since the 1970s, female students have increasingly outnumbered male students (Peter and Horn 2005). In 2007, 57% of all undergraduates were women, and the percentage of men on campus has been decreasing steadily throughout the 1980s and 1990s (U.S. Department of Education and Education Statistics 2009). The gender imbalance means that men have become a more "scarce resource" on campus with greater power to determine sexual norms and scripts (Bogle 2007a, b). Whitmire (2008) writes:

> …while women may run the clubs, dominate in classes, and generally define the character of the university, the law of supply and demand rules the social scene. That's why the women are both competitive in seeking men and submissive in lowering their standards (p. A23).

In other words, some individual women may be capitulating to men's preferences for casual sexual encounters because, if they do not, someone else will. Therefore, women's best chances for attaining sexual or emotional intimacy means participating in hook-up culture.

Changes in the Nature of Alcohol Use

Studies show that 44% of college students now binge drink (defined as four drinks for women and five drinks for men every 2 h) on a regular basis (Seaman 2005), up significantly from previous decades (Mitka 2009; Seaman 2005; Wechsler et al. 2000), and that rates of alcohol and drug use before last sexual encounter rose 18% from 1991 to 2001 (Brener et al. 2002). Alcohol use, if not drunkenness, is a central part of hook-up culture (Flack et al. 2007). Women report consuming a median of four drinks prior to hooking up, while men report a median of six drinks (England et al. 2008), and alcohol use is a primary predictor of engaging in intercourse during a hook-up (Paul 2006). Additional research comparing the emergence of hook-up culture and the shifts in rates of alcohol consumption on college campuses may find that accelerated alcohol use facilitates hook-up culture. Qualitative research asking what the new binge drinking culture on campus means and how exactly it is related to hooking up may also prove interesting. An examination of the relationship between drinking, hooking up, and high rates of sexual assault/rape on college campuses is also in order.

Access to and Consumption of Pornography

Some scholars have suggested that access to pornography via the Internet spurred hook-up culture (Fugere et al. 2008; Garcia and Reiber 2008). Internet access accelerated starting in the mid-1990s as personal computer ownership became more affordable. Today, over 90% of teens have access to Internet pornography (Schmitt and Wadsworth 2002), and it has emerged as a primary influence on young people's, especially men's, attitudes towards sex and their own sexuality (e.g., Wade et al. 2005). Pornography both challenges the idea that "good sex" involves monogamous relationships and, in the last 10 years, has rewritten the sexual script to include fellatio, cunnilingus (to a lesser extent), and anal sex (Jensen 2007; Paasonen et al. 2007).

The rising rates of anal and oral sex, with fellatio more common than cunnilingus and cunnilingus rates declining, suggest that pornography is influencing sexual scripts (Armstrong et al. 2009; Dines 2010; Gindi et al. 2008), but we have limited information about how pornography use is related to sexual attitudes and behavior. One study found that adolescent girls and boys with access to Internet pornography have been found to engage in sexual intercourse at a younger age than those who do not (Kraus and Russell 2008). However, we know less about how widespread pornography use, not to mention its shifting content, changes cultural mores on a wider scale.

The "Pornification" of Mass Media

In addition to increased access to and use of pornography, today's college students have grown up in a mass-mediated world with an increasingly thin line between pornography and mainstream media (Paasonen et al. 2007). This new

"raunch culture" (Levy 2005) celebrates sexually explicit images and themes and encourages young women to participate in their own sexual objectification. In a recent content analysis of primetime television programming featuring 12 to 22-year-olds and broadcast between 8 p.m. and 11 p.m., Aubrey (2004) found that 90.5% of episodes contained some sexual reference with an average of 7.9 sexual references per hour of programming. With regard to effects of this viewing, Brown et al. (2006) tracked over 1,000 adolescents to assess the influence of their exposure to sexual content in television, magazines, movies, and music. White participants who consumed the most sexual content were more than twice as likely to have sexual intercourse by age 14 than white participants whose "sexual media diet" was low (the gap was not significant for Black teens). The pornification of mass media may correlate with participation in and endorsement of hook-up culture, just as media violence is positively correlated with aggression (Bushman and Anderson 2001).

Self-objectification

Rising rates of self-objectification is also possibly entwined with hook-up culture. Self-objectification, "a key process whereby girls [and women] learn to think of and treat their bodies as objects of others' desires" (Zubriggen et al. 2007, p. 2), increased significantly in the past three decades (Tiggemann 2004), but most noticeably in the 1990s (Levin and Kilbourne 2008). Self-objectification results from several factors, including the normalization of women's objectification in US culture (Noll and Fredrickson 1998), widespread sexualization of girls in US media (Levin and Kilbourne 2008; Zubriggen et al. 2007), and the pornification of mainstream media that conveys objectifying norms (Heldman 2008; Levy 2005; Levin and Kilbourne 2008). Self-objectification has been linked to earlier sexual experiences (Martino et al. 2006), less sexual agency for young women, and diminished communication with sexual partners (Hirschman et al. 2006). It has also been linked to dampened sexual pleasure, lower rates of arousability (Sanchez and Kiefer 2007), and other forms of sexual dysfunction (Fredrickson et al. 2008). Self-objectification, then, might be explanatory factors for both participation in hook-up culture and the reports of unpleasurable and unpleasant sex. Further exploration is needed to explicate the nature and direction of the relationship between these two trends.

The New Narcissism

Another possible cause of hook-up culture is a steep increase in narcissism amongst the generation that came of age in the 1990s (Twenge 2007). The percentage of students who scored above the mean Narcissism Personality Inventory (NPI) increased 30% between 1979 and 2006, leading Generation Y—roughly those born after 1978—to be labeled "Generation Me" (Twenge et al. 2008). Narcissists are more likely than others to experience fleeting romantic relationships that lack intimacy (Twenge 2007), and young people who view romantic relationships as "conquest" or "game-playing"—narcissistic aspects—are more likely than other students to engage in hook ups (Paul et al. 2000). While cause and effect is not entirely clear here, the likely relationship between hook-up culture and the new narcissism, as well as other psychological traits of today's cohort of college students, requires further exploration.

Perception of Risk

The generation of students preceding this one grew up during the early fear-filled years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Brandt 1987; D'Emilio and Friedman 1988). People who came of age in the 1980s did so with an acute understanding that sexual choices were life and death ones. Since then, successful safer sex campaigns have normalized condom use for intercourse (Brandt 1987; Roberts 2005), rates of HIV transmission have dropped in the USA (CDC 2008a), and advances in treatments for HIV make it less of an acute threat than it was in the 1980s (CDC 2008b).

There is some evidence that today's college students, having lived most of their young adult lives in the late-AIDS era (if you will), are less sensitive to the potential risks of sexual activity, generally speaking, than those who grew up during the 1980s and early 1990s (Bruce and Walker 2001). They may also believe that that risk is easily managed. If they had comprehensive sex education, it likely focused on the importance of using condoms during penile–vaginal intercourse, but neglected to talk about oral sex at all. Accordingly, many adolescents also do not believe oral sex carries (significant) risk of infection, which may contribute to their increasing willingness to engage in unprotected oral sex with multiple partners (Halpern-Felsher et al. 2005).

In sum, it is possible that hook-up culture would have emerged earlier in the wake of the Women's Movement and the sexual revolution, but that the HIV/AIDS epidemic had a dampening effect. Intensified and shaped by the need to decrease transmission of HIV/AIDS, safer sex education efforts in the 1980s and 1990s focused on condom use during penile–vaginal and penile–anal intercourse. This led to both an over-confidence in student's ability to control the risk involved with sexual activity and an under-emphasis on oral sex that allowed this form of sexual contact to seem innocuous. Accordingly, decrease in the perception of risk and a growing confidence in the ability to limit risk may have paved the way for hook-up culture.

Marriage Norms

The median age for first marriage is the highest it has been since the US Census began collecting data (26 for women and 28 for men in 2009) (U.S. Census n.d.b). Coupled with an earlier age of menarche, this has produced an "unprecedented window of time of sexual maturity but pre-reproductive time" (Garcia and Reiber 2008, p. 203). There is some evidence that this may have contributed to the emergence of hook-up culture. Students may be putting off establishing monogamous relationships until they are ready to begin searching for a marriage partner. Armstrong and Hamilton (2009) also found that many students believed that relationships interfered with their career goals and, accordingly, substituted hook ups for more time- and emotion-intensive relationships. They quote a young woman explaining: "When it comes to a serious relationship, it's a lot for me to give into that" (n.p.). When the interviewer asked: "What do you feel like you are giving up?" She responded: "Like my everything.…There's just a lot involved in it." Another insisted:

> I know this sounds really pathetic and you probably think I am lying, but there are so many other things going on right now that it's really not something high up on my list.…I know that's such a lame ass excuse, but it's true (n.p.)

The same scholars (Armstrong and Hamilton 2009) have also found that students who envisioned postponing marriage and family in favor of a career were more likely to engage in hooking up than students from working class backgrounds who may not envision the same degree of occupational success for themselves. These students more often opted out of hooking up in favor of boyfriends and marriage.

In sum, young people, especially those who see a professional career in their future, may no longer hold expectations of marriage and children at a young age and, as a result, may eschew serious relationships entirely until they feel ready to settle down.

New Directions for Research

These nine factors are certainly not an exhaustive list of all of the possible factors that led to the emergence of hook-up culture. Still, considering them together leads to some more general observations that will be useful in guiding this research project.

First, most speculation about the cause of hook-up culture posits cultural changes (for example, norms for alcohol consumption, attitudes towards sexuality, and access to and consumption of pornography). However, we need also to look at social structural and psychological factors. Changing psychologies of generational cohorts may also play a substantial role in shifting sexual norms; the policies of institutions of higher education may facilitate or inhibit the development of a hook-up culture; and class-privileged students may be responding to shifts in economic opportunity by deprioritizing relationship building during their college years.

Second, unpredictable and unintended but consequential events (such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic and, perhaps also, the Monica Lewinsky scandal) also require theorization. The emergence of hook-up culture was likely contingent on both slowly emerging social change and discrete events. Like the life events that shape personal histories, acute events can shape the collective in surprising, sudden, and non-linear ways.

Third, most studies of hook-up culture remain resolutely non-intersectional, leading to a flattened understanding of the factors that influence the entrenchment of hook-up culture. We know very little about how sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, class, religious affiliation, disability, and other variables influence, and interact to influence, (attitudes towards) hooking up among individuals and the shape of sexual cultures at institutions. There is some evidence, for example, that lower income students, students of color, religious (particularly Evangelical) students, and gays and lesbians are less likely to hook up than their counterparts (Bogle 2008; Freitas 2008; Owen et al. 2010). If the paper of Armstrong et al. (2009) on the intersection of gender and class (discussed above) is any indication, this will offer insight into the uneven adoption of hook-up culture at the level of the individual. Tying demographic differences in rates of participation to the cultural, institutional, and structural contexts that shape their lives may lead to insight into the emergence of hook-up culture.

Fourth, and relatedly, investigations into hook-up culture at institutions of higher education should be compared to the sexual cultures of age-concordant people who do not go to college. Because college students are so easily accessible to scholars, most research on the sexual lives of college-age people involves people in college, as opposed to the 59% of 18- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in college or vocational school (U.S. Census n.d.a). Comparing the sexual lives of college-enrolled and non-college-enrolled young adults will tell us whether hook-up culture is limited to college and college-like settings. Our understanding of hook-up culture will also be improved with an extensive examination of what happens after college. Bogle is the first to examine the hook-up generation post-college, and her early research suggests a return to dating culture (2008). Situating hook-up culture within the larger interplay of sexual cultures in the USA (and elsewhere) will allow us to put both hook-up culture and cultural change in perspective.

Finally, a research agenda examining the emergence of hook-up culture will be necessarily multi-methodological with cross-disciplinary collaboration. One ongoing quantitative data collection effort, chaperoned by Paula England, currently includes over 13,000 respondents at 17 universities (e.g., Armstrong and Hamilton 2009; Armstrong et al. 2009; England et al. 2008). This project will no doubt continue to offer excellent survey data that lays the groundwork for qualitative investigations into the logic and practice of hooking up. Research on hooking up will also benefit from better communication across the various disciplines that investigate the subject, especially the "natural" and "social" science fields involved.

In addition to survey methods and the focus groups, interviews, and ethnographies that provide qualitative data across many disciplines, both longitudinal and cross-college comparisons are called for. Longitudinal studies will shed light on the long-term effects of participation in hook-up culture, as well as enable the taking of a life course perspective (Rossi 1994) that examines how college students do or do not change over the course of their 4 years in college, after college, and well into adulthood.

Cross-college comparisons will allow us to determine whether hook-up culture is a feature of every institution of higher education and when it became so. Pinning down exactly when hook-up culture arose is contingent on figuring out where it started and how it spread. It is unlikely that college and university sexual cultures all shifted in identical ways at exactly the same time. It is also probable that some institutions of higher education today are still not characterized by a hook-up culture (even though we may find hooking up). If we find that the hegemony of hook-up culture is a variable, cross-college comparisons will allow us to tease out institutional effects by isolating features of institutions that facilitate or inhibit hook-up culture or the co-existence of multiple sexual subcultures. Combining an investigation of institutional features with demographics related to rates of hooking up may further allow us to refine our theories about why hook-up culture becomes hegemonic at some institutions and not others.

Conclusion

The existing literature on hooking up has done a laudable job describing the landscape of this new sexual culture, but we still do not know when, where, or how it emerged. The answers to these questions depend on better theorization of the difference between the presence of hooking up and a hook-up "culture" and differentiating between necessary and sufficient causes. They also require more rigorous attention to the complex cultural changes that have occurred not simply during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, but in the 20 years since. We have offered hypotheses and outlined a research agenda that will help us begin to address hook-up culture's emergence.

This research is important for our understanding of hook-up culture, but it also has broader theoretical promise. The emergence of this culture is an opportunity for scholars to further develop theories for explaining how sexual cultures shift and change. New research on this trend—building on historical work by D'Emilio and Friedman (1988), Brandt (1987), and Foucault and Hurley (Translator) (1978), as well as new research on sex and globalization (Altman 2001)—will no doubt extend and complexify our understanding of the relationship between sexuality and institutional, economic, and ideological change. Examining hook-up culture also promises to help us understand how sexual *sub*cultures, specifically, emerge, are adopted, thrive, and evolve.

This research agenda has practical implications as well. Parents, law makers, high school and college officials, sex educators, and, most importantly, young people who are immersed in hook-up culture can all benefit from a better understanding of its origins. We cannot respond to this paradigm shift in a thoughtful, objective way until we understand its causes as well as its consequences. The questions of when, why, and where hook-up culture emerged are exceptionally important for creating strategies with which to empower young people to negotiate their own sexualities.

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