

“SEX IS FUN”: A STUDY OF HOOK UP BEHAVIORS AND EXPERIENCES OF POST-COLLEGE AND
MIDDLE-AGED ADULTS

By

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Abstract

This research is a qualitative study of the hook up and casual sex behaviors and experiences of those in full adulthood, focusing on their motivations to hook up and the subsequent outcomes of those casual sex activities. Most of the existing scholarship on hooking up and casual sex primarily investigates the behaviors, attitudes, and experiences of college students within emerging adulthood. Little consideration is made for the ways in which adults negotiate hooking up and casual sex in other stages over the life course and after major life transitions. In this dissertation, I asked three questions: 1) How do adults engage in hooking up and what are their motivations for seeking a hook up? 2) What outcomes do adults experience from hooking up? 3) Do adults experience stigma from engaging in hook-up and casual sex behavior? I answered these questions by conducting lengthy semi-structured interviews with post-college and middle-aged adults who actively hook up and engage in casual sex. My findings indicate some similar hook up motivations and outcomes between what is found in the literature on emerging adults and the adults of my study. The unique differences, however, offer new perspectives and conceptualizations of hooking up and casual sex. I pay specific attention to the interconnectedness of hook up motivations and outcomes and how they are influenced by participants mature stage in the life course.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Why should college students have all the fun? What may be the surprise to many scholars is people engage in “hooking up” and casual sex across the life course. This is a study of the hook up and casual sex behaviors and experiences of adults that are post-college and well into full adulthood, focusing on their motivations to hook up and the subsequent outcomes.

Hooking up can be defined as “sexual behaviors ranging from kissing to intercourse with a partner in which there is no current relationship commitment and no expected future relationship commitment” (Lewis, Atkins, Blayney, Dent, and Kaysen 2013: 1-2). Hooking up and casual sex are frequently used interchangeably in literature. Garcia, Massey and Merriwether (2012) state, “Hookups may be characterized as a form of “casual sex” or “uncommitted sexual encounter” (162). Kalish and Kimmel (2011) offer specific indicators that a particular rendezvous is a hook up in that a hook up is a sexual interaction that occurs outside the context of committed or conventional relationship, without the pretense that the encounter will lead to a relationship, illusory spontaneity, and the lowering inhibition effects of alcohol.

The categories or type of hook up are dependent on the level of acquaintance or friendship between those involved. According to Wentland and Reissing (2014, 2011), the common hook up types, *One-Night Stand*, *Booty Call*, *Fuck Buddy*, and *Friends with Benefits*, correlate respectively to the incremental connection between those involved in a hook up. Arguably, a One-Night Stand (ONS) is the quintessential type of hooking up and what many people imagine when they think about a hook up. Wentland and Reissing (2014) describe the activity as “sex between strangers or people who do not know each other that well..., sexual

activity is not planned ahead of time..., there is no expectations that the two will see each other again (even if they exchange contact information)” (171). ONS is the only type of hook up that occurs between strangers (Wentland and Reissing 2011). Varying slightly, Rodrigue, Blais, Lavoie, Adam, Magontier, and Goyer (2014) showed that an ONS, they refer to as “one-time sexual encounter”, can also occur between acquaintances and friends, not just strangers or less acquainted individuals suggested by Wentland and Reissing (2011).

The Booty Call (BC) entails either party initiating communication, via phone call or text, to invite the other to rendezvous specifically for sexual activity, typically within an immediate time frame and often late in the evening (Jonason, Li, and Richardson 2015; Wentland and Reissing 2014). Unlike the short-term nature of a one-night stand, a BC can be on-going and enables partners to delve into their sexual interests, which results in high rates of kissing and anal sex (Jonason et. al. 2015). Individuals are often under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs when they initiate one-night stands and booty calls (Wentland and Reissing 2014).

A Fuck Buddy (FB) occurs when a connection between two individuals is solely for sexual activity, although distinctly differs from a booty call. The term “buddy” indicates at least a familiar level of friendship between those involved, often as a subsequent manifestation of prolonged sexual encounters. Alcohol and drugs may be absent from the initiation and sexual activity between FB’s. A fuck buddy relationship ends coincidentally when sexual interactions have ceased (Wentland and Reissing 2014, 2011).

Friends with Benefits (FWB) differs from FB, according to Wentland and Reissing (2011), in that FWBs may also start off as friends then develop a sexual relationship and the friendship may continue after the sexual encounters have ended. Sexual activity does not always occur

when FWB meet up or the use of alcohol and drugs. Friends with benefits partners associate with each other publicly and socially. Additionally, they communicate the particularities of the relationship to help maintain boundaries (Wentland and Reissing 2014). Participants of this study primarily reported having one-night stands, fuck buddies, and friends with benefits.

Throughout much of recent Western history, casual sex is stigmatized and viewed as suspect behavior that is marred with negative connotations and associations (Vrangalova 2015; Reay 2014). Hooking up and casual sex are typically framed as a risk-taking sexual behavior within the context of the ill-reputed “hook up culture” and much of the research in psychology, public health, sociology, and gender studies focuses on the negative outcomes, liked those associated with depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and loneliness (Vrangalova and Bukberg 2015; Bersamin, Zamboanga, Schwartz, Donnellan, Hudson, Weisskirch, Kim, Agocha, Whitbourne and Caraway 2014; Vrangalova, Bukberg and Reiger 2014; Owen and Fincham 2011; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley and Fincham 2010; Grello, Welsh, and Harper 2006; Crepaz and Marks 2001; Paul, McMagnus, and Hayes 2000), seen as “high risk” and associated with alcohol and drug use, the spread of sexual transmitted disease, and other psychosocial problems. (Bersamin, Paschall, Saltz, and Zamboanga 2012; King, Nguyen, Kosterman, Bailey, and Hawkins 2012; Eisenberg, Ackard, Resnick, and Neumark-Sztainer 2009; Mercer, Copas, Sonnenberg, Johnson, McManus, Erens, and Cassell 2009) or linked to negative consequences of the gendered sexual double standard (Danube, Vescio, and Davis 2014; Allison and Risman 2013; Armstrong, Hamiton, and England 2010).

The overwhelming majority of studies on hooking up and casual sex sample only from the college age and emerging adulthood population. As a result, these studies tend to center

young, middle to upper class, white, heterosexual, men and women, with little to no attention paid to the hook up behavior and experiences of different races, classes, genders, and sexualities (Allison and Risman 2014). Analysis of these particular demographics is beyond the scope of this project. My research, however, is situated within the ongoing debate regarding the validity and accuracy of generalizations drawn from youth samples to the rest of the adult world (Henry 2008; Sears 1986).

Concerns regarding the use and oversampling of college students, often synonymous with convenience sample, were debated as early as the 50s and 60s (Peterson 2001). Coined “the science of sophomores” by McNemar in the late 1940s (Gordon, Slade, and Schmitt 1986). Sears (1986) argued that as of the 1980s over 80% of the studies published in academic journals on Social Psychology used samples primarily of college students and cautioned against biases that derive from this “narrow data base.” The issues of validity, reliability, and generalizability arise from the use of college students as a primary sampling source (Peterson & Merunka 2014; Henry 2008; James & Sonner 2001). Peterson (2001) found that responses from college student samples were more homogenous than that of the nonstudent responses. According to Henry (2008), limiting study sampling to just college students draws concerns for the external validity of data and theories, in that the perspectives of college students may not accurately represent how those in the “broader world typically think, feel, and behave” (60). Further, in a study on perceptions of commercials and advertising, James and Sonner (2001) found that the views of traditional college students vastly differed from those of working adults. The authors strongly argued against the use of college students in marketing research.

Peterson and Merunka (2014) set out to test the validity and reliability of convenience sampling of college students through a study that examined the perceptions of business ethics and capitalism. They collected convenience samples from nearly 50 business schools across the United States. While the sample demographics were consistent with national collegiate and business school averages, the results of the study demonstrated polarizing inconsistencies among the nearly 50 samples. Peterson and Merunka (2014) urged caution when using convenience samples of college students, particularly when combining the samples, and resist making sweeping generalizing claims about the greater population. Henry (2008) showed that while college students and adult samples shared similar philosophies on equality and racism, the levels of prejudice towards minority groups differed between them. University students were less conservative favoring more egalitarianism and between group-friendliness than the adult population. This was also evident for minority university students compared to the overall adult population. In a review of the same article, Sears (2008) suggests that students might be exposed to more liberal ideas or that they might hide their true feelings to gain social capital. Ultimately, by utilizing only college students in research, new frameworks and theories may be underexplored that shed light and understanding on social phenomena.

The need for new frameworks and theories is evident in the increase of STIs among those over 50. Linked to lack of condom use, this lends support to the reality of hooking up and casual sex among that age group (Lichtenstein 2012; Minichiello, Hawkes, and Pitts 2011). Additionally, with increased popularity of the swinger lifestyle, nonmonogamy relationship structures, and the fact that relationship dissolution rates hover over 50%, it is likely that hooking up and casual sex are a part of dating and recoupling among individuals in their late

20s, 30s, 40s, and up (Berdychevsky and Carr 2020; Kimberly and McGinley 2019; Wade and DeLamater 2002).

As will hopefully now be clear, casual sex did not spring fully-formed, history-less, in the college culture of the postmodern fin de siècle. As our examples of opposite-sex interactions in the 1920s and same-sex encounters in the 1970s have demonstrated, casual sex has a rich and nuanced past. (Reay 2014: 19)

Current sexuality scholarship must begin to differentiate between the hook up culture of college students/emerging adults and hook-up behavior of those well within adulthood. More importantly, isolating research solely to the emerging adult age group limits our understanding of hook up and casual sexual behavior throughout the life course and the potential for more diverse conceptualizations. The purpose of this study is to offer a new perspective and framework for hook-up and casual sex research centered on the supposition that hooking up and casual sex behavior extends beyond emerging adulthood throughout middle age. I use interviews of 32 individuals, situated in full adulthood, who actively engage in hooking up and casual sex to explore the motivations and outcomes they experience, as well as the potential stigmas and the subsequent stigma management mechanisms they employ. Particularly, this dissertation addresses the following research questions:

- **RQS1:** How do adults engage in hooking up and what are their motivations for seeking a hook up?
- **RQS2:** What outcomes do adults experience from hooking up?
- **RQS3:** How do adult experience stigma from hooking up?
 - If so, how do they manage that stigma?
 - For those who actively seek hook-ups, do they adhere to the sexual double standard?

Chapter Outline

Chapter two navigates through the existing literature on hooking up. Through this scholarship, I examine the theoretical conceptualizations of hooking up and hook up culture, the motivations that drive hook up behavior, the outcomes of hooking up, and the impact of stigma on those who do engage in hooking up. Additionally, I explore hooking up at the intersections of race, class, and gender. Lastly, I present alternative theoretical frameworks not commonly associated with hooking up, along with other gaps in the literature.

Chapter three details the methods I utilize to collect data, including the recruitment criteria and demographics of my sample, as well as the interview process. I also provide explanation and justification for the analytical procedures that frame the interpretation of the data.

Over chapters four, five and six, I discuss the data and findings of my research. Chapter four outlines the various hook up types engaged in by participants. I also explore the specific motivations for hooking up described in the interviews, such as pleasure and a desire for a connection. In Chapter 5, I discuss the resulting outcomes of hooking up that participants experience. I demonstrate the link and connectedness between their motivations and outcomes. Chapter 6 is a continuation of the reported outcomes of hooking up, focusing on potential stigma experiences and management.

In the final chapter, I summarize and present the findings of my study. Specifically, I answer my main research questions regarding the hook up motivations, outcomes, and stigma found in the developed themes of my participants experiences. I also address the implications

for future research and conceptualization of hooking up and casual sex. To conclude this chapter, I discuss the limitations of my study and potential directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

There is some debate among scholars about main influence of hooking up and casual sex behavior. Essentially, is hooking up the result of biological drives, psychological predilections, or social influences? In their thorough review, Garcia et. al. (2012) explains how evolution-based scholars (starting with Buss and Schmitt 1993) attempt to align hooking up within mating and reproductive strategies. Specifically, hooking up provides the opportunity for men to increase their reproductive chances with by seeking out new sexual partners. At the same time, women seek out the stability of a relationship for the purposes of reproductions (Garcia et. al. 2012). In another study of two of the authors, Garcia and Reiber (2008) posit that the proliferation of hook up behavior is in part due to the decrease in age of first menstruation and later age of reproduction for women, which creates a greater stretch of time for sexual viability and mate selection.

In both studies, however, the authors suggest that given the popularity of hooking up among both men and women, relying solely on these evolution-bases theories may not explain the entire phenomenon. In particularly, hooking up runs counter to the proposed reproductive strategies of women (Garcia et. al. 2012; Garcia and Reiber 2008). To add to this point, according to Lyons et. al. (2014) twenty-eight percent of men reported hoping for a relationship to form from their most recent hook up, which is incongruent with the ascribed male mating strategy ascribed in evolution-bases mating strategy.

Some research in psychology has examined the link between personality and psychological traits with the propensity to engage in hooking up and casual sex (Jonason,

Hatfield, and Boler 2015; Vrangalova and Bukberg 2015; Olmstead, Pasley, and Fincham 2013; Gute and Eshbaugh 2008; Paul, McManus, and Hayes 2000) In Paul et. al. (2000), hooking up was associated with certain personality and psychological traits. The authors operationalized hooking up as either hooking up with coital intercourse, hooking up without intercourse, and those who had never hooked up. Hooking up with intercourse was significantly associated with various alcohol intoxication symptomatology (behaviors and thoughts while drunk), game-playing love styles, high impulsivity, autonomy, fear of loss of individuality in a relationship, and avoidant attachment style. As the authors mention, however, the study does not demonstrate directionality of the associations, so it is unclear whether the personality and psychological factors draw the individual to hooking up or hooking up reinforces these proclivities within the individual. Additionally, given that at the time of Paul et. al. (2000), most hook up research focused on the behavioral aspect of hooking up (coital vs noncoital), while more recent studies have begun to incorporate nuanced hook up styles. For example, Jonason, Hatfield and Boler (2015) expands on how personality types are associated hooking up by differentiating between one-night stands, booty-calls, and friends-with-benefits. The study found that those who are extroverted and express casual love style, preferring easy, drama-free connections, are more likely to engage in the varied hook up styles. Conversely, those who demonstrate a secure love style are less likely to have booty-calls or friends-with-benefits.

Gute and Eshbaugh (2008) found some evidence that the big five personality traits (*Extraversion, Neuroticism, Openness to Experiences, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness*) play a role in hooking up. In their study, hooking up is operationalized in 3 types: having sex with someone once and only once, having sex with someone you meet less than 24 hours prior, and

having oral sex with someone you met less than 24 hours prior. Although these parameters constitute hooking up in the study, they seemingly denote a one-night stand, rather all hooking up or other hook up styles. Through a single logistic regression, the study shows that each of the big five traits predicts some combination of the 3 types of hooking up, such as *extraversion* is linked to having sex once and only once and having intercourse with someone known for less than 24 hours. Whereas *agreeableness* was only associated with oral sex with someone known for less than 24 hours. None of the traits predicted all 3 hook up types.

In their study on college aged men, Olmstead et. al. (2013) analyzed several psychological and behavioral variables for their influence towards hooking up. The study found that having permissive sexual attitudes (sociosexuality) was significantly linked to greater likelihood of hooking up and found only slightly significant ($p < .10$) link between extroversion and a higher likelihood of hooking up. Interestingly, Vrangalova and Bukberb (2015) show that sexual permissiveness is linked to extroversion and negatively associated with loneliness and social isolation.

While these studies help to expound on the likelihood that specific psychological influences that might drive an individual to engage in hooking up, it is important to note that all personality and psychological traits are found among individuals who engage in hooking up, just not at the level of statistical significance. Additionally, these studies do not consider participants personal motivations for hooking up or other sociocultural factors that may impact hook up and casual sex behavior.

Life course

C. Wright Mills (1959) posits that to comprehend the social world we must consider the biography of individuals and their place in history. From that lens, Life Course Theory (LCT) is a perspective that utilizes an interdisciplinary or “transdisciplinary” framework to understand the factors that shape the lives of individuals by incorporating social and cultural complexities, such as structural and institutions factors, the influences of social change, the age at which an individual experiences historical events, and the impact of transitions on the life trajectories (Elder, Johnson and Crosnoe 2003; Elder 1975).

The three main concepts that are examined through LCT: *trajectories*, *transitions*, and *turning points*. Trajectories are the long-term aspects of one’s life path, such as work/career history and future or health throughout life. Elder states that trajectories are “a pathway defined by the aging process or by movement across the age structure.” (1985:31) The different aspects of trajectories (i.e., career or health) can be examined as “linking states across successive years”. Trajectories are made up of a series of transitions (Elder et. al. 2003).

Transitions, similar to life events, are changes in an individual’s role or state. Transitions are situated within a trajectory, which provides context and meaning (Elder 1985). The dissolution of a relationship during college can have a particular meaning and impact but have a vastly different set of consequences after the birth of a child. Early life transitions can have lasting influences on trajectories by shaping subsequent transitions and events later in life (Elder et. al. 2003). The time between transitions is called *duration* which can have implications and consequences for trajectories, positively and negatively. “The consequences of the duration of any event depend on what people bring to the situation.” (Elder 1985:32) Turning points are

sudden and significant transitions that change the course of trajectories. Turning points can be caused by an outside event or objective change (i.e., major crisis), additionally the result of a fundamental change in perspective or attitude that affects a person's future life course (Elder and Shanahan 2006; Elder et. al. 2003; Elder 1985).

Life Course and Hooking up

The study of sexuality through the lens of the life course allows for the development of comprehensive, interdisciplinary models that support the analysis of sex and sexuality through transitions, life stages, and the influence of life and sociohistorical events and timing on future attitudes and perspectives (DeLamater and Carpenter 2012). Sexual behavior is commonly examined at the different life stages, adolescence, emerging adults, adulthood and midlife, and later life, as well as the effects and durations of the transitions between each stage. As mentioned, hooking up and casual research samples primarily from college students, while prior research through life course theory situates hooking up and casual sex within the emerging adult life stage (DeLamater and Carpenter 2012).

The transition to college and dorm life paired with a new sense of autonomy being free from the surveying eyes of parents requires adjustments to new social dynamics. In the qualitative study by Wade and Heldman (2012), students reported that hook-up culture was deeply embedded into social life on campus and to refrain from hooking up was tantamount to not being social or accessing social environments. Several studies out of Oakland University by Lyons, Manning, Longmore, and Giordano (2015, 2014, 2011) demonstrate the transitions of casual sex attitudes and behaviors within the emerging adult life stage. The rate of casual sex partners increases as young people transition to emerging adult, which they claim peaks at

around age 21 for both men and women (Lyons et. al. 2015). In another study, Lyons et. al. (2014) found that in addition to motivations for hooking up found in previous studies (i.e. pleasure, alcohol, and peer pressure) emerging adults also see hooking up as “transitional” situation between relationship or to help get over a break-up. Further, hooking up and casual sex structures give them the sense of freedom whether they are more investing in education or social activities, desire travel or relocation, or just feel they are “too young to be tied down” (91). Lastly, Lyons et. al. (2011) explores how emerging adult women are impacted by the sexual double standard and the mechanisms utilized to negotiate the resulting stigma of casual sex behavior.

Notably, evidence presented from Lyons and her colleagues (2015, 2014) demonstrate change in casual sex attitudes and behaviors as people begin to transition from emerging adults into adulthood. At 21 years old, the number of casual sex partners peak; that number begins to decrease as individuals get older (Lyons et. al. 2015). Further, the older emerging adult respondents in Lyons et. al. (2014) reported feeling too old for casual sex and hook up behavior. Consequently, Lyons (2015) proposes that based on the normative trajectories of marriage and parenthood, hooking up and casual sex may be an “age-inappropriate” behavior and run counter to the transitional goals of “settling down”. Interestingly, Lyons found that for emerging adults going through life transitions (i.e., career and moving out parents’ home) influence seeing yourself as an adult which in turn prompts a more negative view of casual sex (2015).

Little to no research has examined the hooking up and casual sex behavior of midlife adults. In a large survey study, Carpenter, Nathanson and Kim (2006) found that men had a greater likelihood to engage in casual sex or sex with a close friend or acquaintance. Other

studies offer insights on attitudes about casual sex. In a study sponsored by OurTime.com, an over-50 dating site, found that with age there is a decrease in sexual behavior and openness to hooking up and casual sex, even among those who are single (Gray, Garcia and Gesselman 2019). Similarly, Miller, Garcia, and Gesselman (2021) show that men have a great acceptance of casual sex over the life course compared to women. The same studies argued that midlife-older women were less likely to seek out relationship, choosing the independence that comes from remaining single, whereas men were more likely to remarry (Miller et. al. 2021; Gray et. al. 2019). Additionally, they posit that through women choosing to remain single and the higher morbidity rate of men, midlife and older men had a larger pool of women within their cohort to engage with romantically and sexually (Sassler 2010).

As it is stated that prevailing attitudes towards casual sex reported diminish with age, perhaps the understudied component of transitions and turning points in adulthood, specifically the dissolution of long-term relationships or marriage, impact the sexual attitudes and behavior of adults. Wade and DeLamater (2002) found evidence to suggest that sexual permissiveness increased after relationship dissolutions, specifically after a long-term cohabitation women reported high sexual permissiveness. Further, divorced adults also demonstrate a high rate of sexual permissiveness (Smith 1994 cited in Wade and Delamater 2002.) More compelling, data from National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior, which the sample comprised of nearly 6000 people ages ranging from 19-94 years old, found that a notable minority of respondents stated their most recent sexual encounter was with a “friend”. This point towards notion that casual sex occurs across the life span (Herbenick et. al. 2010).

With the growing popularity of the highly sexual older woman or “cougar” trope in popular media, there is growing interest in the sexual behaviors and health of middle age/midlife women (Alarie 2019). One qualitative study detailing the experiences 20 women (35-65yr old) reentering the dating scene after relationship dissolution showed that safe sex issues were secondary to concerns of maladapted social behavior and violence. Additionally, women stressed over desirability and managing the loss or access to social networks (Lichtenstein 2012). In a similar small qualitative study out of New Zealand found that women in midlife stage were more attentive to their sexual pleasure and that of their partner, than concerns of safe sex practices (Morison and Cook 2015). Both studies suggested the women’s lack of trepidation regarding condom use was a result of pre-HIV/AIDs timing of their sexual development, the belief that sex with men in their cohort who had also been in long term relationship or married were not at risk, and a blatant disregard fueled by romance and a desire for companionship (Morison and Cook 2015; Lichtenstein 2012). These studies also imply sexual behavior of adults after relationship dissolution is primarily the context of re-partnering or romantic relationships, with little focus on hook up and casual sex behavior specifically.

Alternatively, Miller (2021) finds support for the notion that newly single/divorced midlife women experience a newfound sexual wherewithal, aggressiveness, and experimentation that is facilitated by absconding the gendered passivity of heteronormative coupledness. Arguably, the formative sexual developing years of the cohort that is transitioning into and currently within the midlife stage occurred during the growth and popularity of hook up culture of the 1980s and 90s (Bogle 2008). More research needs to be performed to examine

the hooking up and casual sex behavior over the life course, with particular focus on the influence of transitions and turning points in adulthood and midlife.

Social Networks and Hooking up

The pattern of social networks in a person's life grows from childhood through adolescence then begins to consistently and steadily decline into old age. This is often due to a combination of age-related transition, changing life goals, or normative and nonnormative life events, such as entrance into the work force or death of a relative (Wrzus et. al. 2013; Carstensen 1998). One way to maintain or build new social networks throughout the life course is to engage in recreational sports or other leisure activities (Huxhold, Miche, and Schüz 2013). Evidence suggests that maintaining strong social networks helps to reduce health risks, particularly mental and emotional decline. According to Huxhold et. al., middle aged adults engaging in informal social activities with friends or family can increase positive affect (2013). Further, partaking in leisure activities is related to higher self-rated health outcomes (Kim, Schneider, Faß and Lochbaum 2021).

Wade and Delamater (2002) suggest that divorce or ending of a serious relationship are also a "life stage transitions" and that after the dissolution of a relationship individuals will seek to establish new social networks, as well as more likely to seek out new sexual partners. Shepardson et. al (2016). Some college age women report appreciating the friends and social connections formed from hooking up.

Sex as Leisure

Further, a growing theory in Leisure Studies is reframing sex as leisure.

Sex as leisure also plays various beneficial roles throughout the life course by supporting developmental tasks and experimentation, fulfilling the needs for excitement and

sensation seeking, serving adaptive purposes, supporting the evolution of sexual identity, and contributing to health and wellbeing from adolescence to older adulthood. (Berdychevsky and Carr 2020 p260).

Sex as leisure activity can also be used as positive coping mechanism for depression (Berdychevsky, Nimrod, Kleiber, and Gibson2013) and was reportedly used to alleviate the negative impacts of the recent Covid-19 pandemic (Berdychevsky 2022). By framing sex as leisure and recreational activity in the context of social network building, the argument can be made that hooking up and casual sex as a leisure activity has the potential to help adults build social networks after relationship dissolution.

Hook up Culture

Cultural and social influences have an impactful role in the proliferation of hooking up and casual sex. Within Sociology, many scholars examine hooking up and casual sex on college campuses through the lens of Simon and Gagnon's sexual script theory (Allison and Risman 2014; Garcia et. al. 2012; Bogle 2008). In this context, sexual script theory is used to suggest that people, much like stage actors, learn, negotiate, and produce hook up behavior through the interworking of cultural, interpersonal, and intrapsychic scripts. Cultural scripts are the sexual values and norms learned as members of culture or society. Intrapsychic scripts are the fantasies and sexual plans developed by the individual. Interpersonal scripts are procedural and operational sexual behaviors that people negotiate and act out between the engaged partners. Intrapsychic and interpersonal scripts are heavily influenced by cultural scripts; as well as having an impact on the other script (Simon and Gagnon 1983). Framed within sexual script theory, "hook up culture" is the ever-present, ubiquitous specter that permeates life on college campuses and is reproduced through the media and entertainment (Wade 2017, Allison and

Risman 2014, Bogle 2008). Through the scripts of hook up culture, college students and emerging adults learn, negotiate, and maintain the presumed behavioral scripts of hooking up.

The origins of hooking up and hook up culture are murky. Bogle (2008) couples the ubiquity of hook up culture to proliferation of the collegiate fraternity system and sexual revolution of the 1960s. Others cite the advancement of the automobile in the 1920s as an earlier influence, offering young people expedited privacy to explore sexual urges (Garcia et. al. 2012). Since then, however, the trope of the sex crazed college co-ed and lasciviously out-of-control fraternity party has permeated pop culture and more contemporary social media.

The specific elements of hook up culture are not standardized throughout the literature, but scholars offer various prescriptions for what constitutes hook up culture and its influence. Wade (2017) likens hook up culture to an ever present “fog” that permeates all aspects of college campus life. Lovejoy (2015) suggests that hook up culture is associated with partying consisting of drinking and celebration around school sports and athletics. In her study, students attending universities with strong athletic programs and that are in close proximity to a flourishing bar or club scene reported a higher prevalence of hook up culture than more secluded universities that did not have strong athletic programs. Bogle (2008) suggests hook up culture flourishes on college campus due to students living in close proximity to like individuals, such as class, race, religion. Essentially, being a fellow college student of similar demography creates a sense of familiarity or camaraderie and might facilitate a greater ease of hooking up.

Ultimately, hook up culture can be understood as impacting all aspects of campus social life, such as interactions, clothing choices, party or event attendance, and peer association, predicated on the intense tease of sexual possibility and the ubiquitous pressure, ascribed or

imagined, to be sexual. Even in studies that utilize bio-evolutionary and psychological frameworks, concede that social influences like hook up culture play a significant role in the hook up and casual sex behavior (Gracia and Rieber 2008). Regardless of the foundational or theoretical drives, the majority of scholarship on hooking up efforts to understand the motivations of individuals who engage in the behavior and the subsequent outcomes and effects.

Motivations

Alcohol

Alcohol is a mainstay to life as an emerging/college age adults and a fundamental component to hook up culture on American campuses (Kalish and Kimmel 2011) In the qualitative study by Kalish and Kimmel (2011), some students lamented that hooking up might be optional, but drink and getting drunk was not. When asking college students about past experiences, several studies found that the more alcohol consumed by research subjects, the more likely that not only would hook-ups occur and an increased likelihood of sexual intercourse within those hook ups (Blayney et. al. 2018; Roberson, Olmstead, and Fincham 2015; Bersamin, Paschall, Saltz, and Zamboanga 2012; King, Nguyen, Kosterman, Bailey, and Hawkins 2012). Further, Bersamin et. al. (2012) argued that attending a location or event, such as a fraternity party or off-campus house party increase the likelihood of having sex with a stranger in connection with drinking alcohol. Clearly, there is a strong link between hooking up and alcohol consumption, however whether alcohol is a direct motivator for hooking is less certain.

Interestingly, Anderson and Sorenson (2006), using secondary data analysis, looked into how often respondents (college students) drank alcohol to enable themselves to have sex. Specifically, they found that around 18.5% of males and 12.7% females reported drinking to access to allow themselves to have sex. Those numbers increased and the gap widened when controlled for race, age, and class. Overall, the study showed that males were more likely to drink to have sex than female (Anderson and Sorenson 2006). It is important to note that the data was based on self-reports about excess drinking and not just whether any alcohol was consumed to hook up or have sex. Similarly, Lyons et. al. (2014) found that men and woman charged alcohol as the third likely motivator for hooking up. In their qualitative analysis portion of the study, however, it is unclear whether alcohol was a motivator for hooking up or merely an influence in the decision study respondents' making process. Also, in Bersamin et. al. (2012), it was determined that while alcohol and sex are often correlated, that does not suggest causality or the direct link between alcohol with risky sexual behavior. Risky sexual behavior may be the result of "personality dimensions and behavioral tendencies." (Vélez-Blasini 2008:127) It is difficult to assess whether alcohol and other substances are actual motivators for hooking up and casual sex or a retrospective scapegoat after the fact (Paul 2006).

Peer/Social pressure

A noted motivation for hook up pursuits and behavior mentioned in the literature can be found in peer or social pressures. In some ways, social pressures to hook up are influenced by the hook up culture at the university or college. In the qualitative study by Wade and Heldman (2012), students are required by the university to live in the dorms as freshman and sophomores, which meant "escaping the presence of hook up culture was nearly impossible"

(135). Further, the authors reported that students claimed, “opting out of hook up culture felt, to many, like opting out of socializing entirely” (135). Bogle (2008) shared a similar sentiment from the student in her study. In the “campus sexual arena”, students made assumptions about hook up behaviors of others which often impacted their own behavior. For example, several women respondents reported that they eagerly sought out “losing their virginity”, because they assumed everyone was having sex and being a virgin was embarrassing. Additionally, students engaged in hooking up to “fit in” and be able to discuss their sexual adventures, which was a main topic of conversation (Bogle 2008).

Other social pressure motivators come in the form of accolades from peers and friends. Some women report feeling supported by friends in their hook up behavior (Lyons et. al. 2014). Kimmel (2014) posits that men hook up as way to reinforce their masculinity and achieve social status among friends and other men. Regan and Dreyer (1999) found the same trend their research and argue that casual sex and hook up is considered normal behavior for some friend groups. By engaging in the behavior and sharing tale of their exploits, men might be able to strengthen their position in the group.

Pleasure

Sexual desire and sexual pleasure are key motivations for hooking up. In their qualitative study of 105 psychology undergraduates, Regan and Dreyer (1999) found that the majority of respondents made references to sexual desire, pleasure, and sexual exploration as a reason for hooking up. Sexual desire and pleasure were among the top motivations for men and the third highest motivation for women (Regan and Dreyer 1999). Similarly, to explore the positive aspects of hooking up, Shepard et. al. (2016) found that sexual gratification was the most

common motivation to hook up among first year female undergraduates, however only accounted for by 22.5% of respondents. Blayney et. al. (2018) collected a sample of 396 respondents from a larger university study to examine gender difference in hook up motivations. In their study, men were more likely than women to cite enhancement (sexual pleasure) as a motivation to hook up.

These studies and other qualitative studies (Bogle 2008; Wade 2017) suggest that men are more motivated by desire and pleasure to hook up than women, a number of other studies demonstrate a less gendered perspective. Thorpe and Kuperberg (2021), Olmstead et. al. (2019), Snapp et. al. (2015), and Lyons et. al. (2014) all show that sexual pleasure as a main motivation to hook up for their participants and specifically state there is no difference between men and women. Notably, Garcia and Reiber (2008), who also find no gender difference, report 89% of respondents stated sexual pleasure as a motivation to hook up. While sexual pleasure and desire are significant motivations for hooking up, direct focus on pleasure is often under- or unexplored in research (Berdychevsky and Carr 2020).

Outcomes

Regret

Regret is a potential outcome of hooking up that both men and women experience equally. In their Canadian study, Fisher, Worth, Garcia, and Meredith (2012) found that both men and women expressed some level of regret for previous hook up experiences.

Correspondingly, in the recent study by Reese-Weber, Zimmerman, Cary, and McLeese (2022) found that about half of both men and women reported feelings of regret after their most recent hook up. Conversely, the secondary date analysis by Uecker and Marinez (2017) using the

Online College Social Life Survey (OCSLS) showed that only 15% of women and 12% of men regret their last hook up experience, suggesting that for the most part college students do not regret the majority of hook ups. While there may be inconsistency in the instances of regret between men and women, the reasons for regret paint a different picture, especially between the genders.

In Eshbaugh and Gute (2008), women who engaged in sexual intercourse with someone once and only once and sexual intercourse with someone known for less than 24 hours reported more feelings of regret than women who did not engage in the same behaviors. This was consistent with Uecker and Martinez (2017) who reported that women tend to feel more regret about a hook up than men when the initial hook up involves sexual intercourse. However, women report less regret from hook ups, including those involving sexual intercourse, when the individual hooked up with a partner on multiple occasions (Reese-Weber et al. 2022; Uecker and Martinez 2017).

Uecker and Martinez (2017) also examined other confounding mediators that influenced feelings of regret, particularly for women. Overall, women are more likely to report feelings of regret about a hook up when they are pressured or forced to engage in sexual behavior, when the woman reports less sexual enjoyment, when they have prior conservative views about casual sex, and have feelings of diminished self-respect or respect from a partner.

Commonsensibly, one might argue that if someone has little or no control and is forced or pressured to do something they may not want to do, then they are made to feel bad about themselves for doing it, they are less likely to enjoy it and most likely regret doing it. Further, one can extrapolate that having a pleasurable experience willfully and autonomously engaging in a

behavior that previously brought joy without shame will most likely not result in regret. Interestingly, Uecker, Pearce, and Andercheck (2015) demonstrated that those who are motivated primarily by sexual fun and gratification are less likely to regret their hook up experiences. This was supported in the open-ended responses Fisher et. al. (2012) that showed high quality or “good” sex resulted in positive feelings and negated any negative feelings from hooking up, while “bad” sex was linked to negative emotions and regret. Fisher et. al. also found that men were more likely to report feelings of regret when reported to have less sexual attraction to their partner (2012).

Men often shared similar reasons for feeling regret as women, but those reasons were not always statistically significant. However, in multiple studies, alcohol and being intoxicated were heavily associated with feelings of regret after a hook up for both men and woman (Reese-Weber et. al. 2022; Uecker and Martinez 2017; Fisher et. al. 2012). Regardless of the reasons or factors, regret from hooking up appears to be balanced between men and women, and above evidence suggest it is decreasing overall. Although, other studies show that hooking up is associated with other mental health issues.

Negative Outcomes

Negative hook up outcomes are associated with negative psychological and social factors, such as depressive symptoms, lower self-esteem, and loneliness (Bersamin et. al. 2014; Crepaz and Marks 2001; Grello, Welsh, and Harper 2006; Owen and Fincham 2011; Owen et. al. 2010; Paul, McMagnus, and Hayes 2000). Paul et. al (2000) report that individuals who engage in casual sex have slightly lower self-esteem than respondents that do not. Additionally, they argue that a disposition for casual sex (higher permissiveness) might be based in a risk-taking

personality. Mirroring Paul et. al. (2000), Grello, Welsh, and Harper (2006) demonstrate a relationship between casual sex and depressive symptoms. In their research, they argue that casual sex is rooted in “problematic functioning” which may contribute to the engagement in casual sexual behavior and subsequent depressive feelings. They found that women who report more depressive symptoms and men who report fewer symptoms were more likely to engage in hooking up and casual sex. Additionally, feelings of regret for the hook up were associated with depressive symptoms for both men and women. This would suggest that act of casual sex or hooking up may not be direct causes of depressive symptoms, but rather preexisting symptoms or sociocultural mitigating factors that trigger depressive symptoms (Grello et. al. 2006). Likewise, Paul et. al. (2000) posits that women’s mental health was impacted more by the potential social ramifications, such stigma and getting a bad reputation, than men, which is a result of the sexual double standard.

In a recent study utilizing the Multi-Site University Study of Identity and Culture (MUSIC) survey data examined casual sex behaviors among college students from 30 university and colleges in the United States found a strong negative correlation between engaging in casual sex (per their definition) and psychological distress and diminished well-being equally for men and women. Those who engaged in casual sex reported higher levels of anxiety and depression, and lower levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Bersamin et. al. 2014).

Positive Outcomes

Overall, hooking up and casual sex often elicit positive emotional reactions or affect for college students/emerging adults, although women report slightly less positive reactions than

men (Woerner and Abbey 2016; Snapp et. al. 2015; Lewis, Granato, Blayney, Lostutter, and Kilmer 2012; Owen et. al. 2011). Lewis et. al. (2012) found that approval for sexual behavior, essentially sexual permissiveness and having autonomy in the sexual activities that occur, was positively related to positive affect. Similarly, Snapp et. al. (2015) showed that when motivated by pleasure and self-affirmation, student respondents had positive hook up experience, particularly when goals of the motivations (pleasure and self-affirmation) were achieved.

According to Woerner and Abbey (2016), negative hook up outcomes were related to negative perceptions of others who hook up and lower peer approval, particularly for those who followed more traditional gender norms. Conversely, peer approval was related to higher positive outcomes. This is supported by Vrangalova and Bukberg (2015) who found that those with higher sexual permissiveness reported high levels of victimization and stigma. However, those with high permissiveness and extroversion reported more social connections and were less likely to express feelings of isolation and loneliness.

In another study, Vrangalova (2015) found that hooking up and casual sex were not related lower self-esteem, depression, or anxiety for emerging adults. The study shows evidence to suggest that individuals may seek out hooking up and casual sex to increase sexual satisfaction, which can lead to greater life satisfaction. Further, Vrangalova argues that these issues were possibly present prior to the hook up or reactions to subsequent social outcomes, such as reputation loss and worries over relationship development, and STI's (2015). Grello et. al. (2006) demonstrated that women who reported more depressive symptoms were more likely to engage in casual sex. They predict that lower self-worth and isolation might drive women to seek validation through sex.

In summation, these studies indicate that negative and positive hook up outcomes may be influenced more by prior individual attitudes and values or concerns of judgement from others than the sexual activities inherent in hooking up and casual sex.

Stigma

Stigma is another potential outcome of hooking up and casual sex. Described by Goffman (1963), stigma is a “mark” or attribute that is disgraceful or has the potential to cause disgrace, which can be either visible or concealable, and to the degree of intensity and scale is socioculturally contextual. Since the work of Goffman, the study of stigma and its processes gained significant attention and focus, expanding perspectives on new types of stigmas, concepts, and theories to the many fields of social, natural, and health sciences. Pescosolido and Martin (2015) propose a new framework called the “Stigma Complex” which provides an integrated system for different types of stigmas and theory for a more comprehensive conceptualization. This system enables researchers to clearly define the “basic concepts”, essentially the details and nature of the mark/stigma, dimensions the stigmatization process, and the degree and effect the ascribed labels and stereotypes elicit prejudice and discrimination. The Stigma Complex also helps to differentiate and organize the “characteristics” of stigma, whether the mark be on the physical body, personality characteristic, or a societal role or status. Lastly, researchers employ the Stigma Complex to properly frame the “target variants”. The “variants” of stigma categorize how stigma is recognized and internalized by the stigmatized or those associated with the stigmatized and by whom prejudice and discrimination manifests because of stigma, such as the self or the public at large (Pescosolido and Martin 2015).

Labels and Stereotypes

For this dissertation, the basic stigma frame of hooking up and casual sex constitute is a “discreditable, concealable mark”, but at the intersection of the SDS, this stigma can result in harsh labels and stereotypes when revealed, particularly for women (Pescosolido and Martin 2015; Alison and Risman 2013; Bogle 2008; Goffman 1963). The sexual double standard celebrates the sexual behavior of men, while chastising women for the same behavior (Reiss 1956). Women risk being labeled “slut” and “whore” and stereotyped as being “dirty” or “low class” if it is revealed or divulged that she violated this nebulous sexual norm (Farvid et. al. 2016; Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong and Steeley 2014; Muelenhard 1988). In the tradition SDS, men are referred to as studs and praised for their sexual prowess (Allison and Risman 2013; Bordini and Sperb 2013; Marks and Fraley 2005). However, as it was mentioned above, recent studies show that there is an equalizing of the SDS towards a conservative egalitarian perspective (Cook and Cottrell 2021; Allison and Risman 2013). As a result, there are growing negative stereotypes toward men who engage in hooking up and casual, such as “sexual predators”, “diseased” (Cook and Cottrell 2021; Wade 2017; Marks and Fraley 2005). Prejudice and discrimination, as well as loss of status and opportunities, can come from negative labels and stereotypes (Kettrey 2016; Pescosolido and Martin 2015; Green, Davis, Karshmer, Marsh and Straight 2005; Goffman 1963). While the SDS, labels, and stereotypes associated with hooking up and casual sex seem to be equalizing between women and men, the anticipation of their consequences is still gendered.

Anticipated Stigma/Reputation

The variant Anticipated stigma is the fear of the negative consequences that arise from labels and stereotypes (Pescosolido and Martin 2015). Framed through the SDS, *anticipated stigma* is the same as the fear of getting a bad reputation or judgment from others for your sexual behavior or lack thereof (Armstrong et. al. 2014; Bordini and Sperb 2013; Armstrong et. al. 2012). Conley et. al. (2012) demonstrated that when posed with the opportunity for casual sex, women were more likely to decline than men out of fear of stigma and negative perceptions. Conversely, men were expected to receive praise for accepting the offer. However, men who choose not to engage in hooking up and casual sex risk judgment from peers for their sexual inactivity (Wade 2017; Bordini and Sperb 2013). *Anticipated stigma* can lead to negative health outcomes and distress (Quinn and Chaudior 2009). To manage stigma, whether self-inflicted or from public perception, women hope for and seek out relationship from hooking up (Farvid et. al. 2016; Bogle 2008). Additionally, emerging adult women will “other” or “slut shame” other women who engage in the same behavior to create social distance (Farvid et. al. 2016; Armstrong et. al. 2014).

Functions of Stigma/SDS

As shown above, the sexual double standard is a key element in the stigma associated with hooking up and casual sex behavior, which is also evident in the functions of stigma (Phelan, Link and Dovidio 2008). Phelan et. al. (2008) posits that in linking stigma and prejudice, three functions emerge: “exploitation/domination”, “enforcement of social norms”, and “avoidance of disease” (362). All three functions are manifested in the SDS and the stigma of hooking up and casual sex. Stigma is used for *Exploitation/domination* is based on ideologies

that are ascribed to create power imbalances and inequalities, which is precisely the purpose of the sexual double standard. Stigma is also used to *enforce social norms*, as with the SDS. Men and women adhere to the SDS, even engage mechanisms to prevent violating or perceived violation of social norms, to do so can result in negative consequences (Wade 2017; Montes, Blanco and LaBrie 2017; Armstrong et. al. 2013, Armstrong et. al. 2012).

Exploitation/domination and enforcement of social norms are concomitant within the same ideological frame, as also evident within the SDS (Phelan et. al. 2008). Lastly, stigma of hooking up and casual sex can be used as a strategy to avoid disease. Hooking up and casual sex are often associated with STI's, with disease avoidance stated as a negative perception in target studies of those who engage in the behavior (Cook and Cottrell 2021; Bersamin et. al. 2012; King et. al. 2012; Eisenberg, et. al. 2009; Mercer et. al. 2009).

Intersectionality of Hooking up

Gender

The comparison of gender differences is a notable component of a considerable amount of the scholarship on hooking up and casual sex. Earlier studies, such as Paul et. al. (2000) showed that while men reported more hook ups than women (47.5% men and 33.3% women), there was no gender effect on the likelihood and most predictors of hook up behavior. Consistently, other studies shared similar little to no effect of gender or sex on the effects of hooking up (Lewis et. al. 2012; Owen et. al. 2010). Some qualitative studies delve into the nuanced experiences of men (Epstein et. al. 2009) and women (Hamilton and England 2009) separately, but these studies do not discern the differences between the genders. In the recent study, McKeen, Anderson, and Mitchell (2022), showed that women experience more negative

consequences, but each parameter loaded heavily on the variable “concern about being negatively judged by others”. This suggests the negative hook up outcomes experienced by women were based on fears or worries of social ramifications and stigma, rather issues derived from the sexual encounter. This is in line with Engand et. all. 2007, a mixed methods study that found the main gender differences were housed in the sexual double standard and orgasm gap, which I discuss in more detail below. Further, the Allison and Riseman (2014) suggest the class, race or ethnic differences between women may hold more insight than the differences between the genders.

Class and Hooking up

The examination of class and hooking up among women offers unique insights. While Brimeyer and Smith (2102) did not find a statistically significant effect of social class on the likelihood of engaging in hooking up, other qualitative studies demonstrate how class can impact hooking up. Armstrong et. al. (2014) suggest there is a class privilege in relationship to hooking up. In their qualitative study, class is operationalized at high-status and low status depending on sorority membership and self-reported economic and cultural resources. They found that, despite engaging in more hook ups, high-status women created a discursive system of othering, centered on femininity and economic advantage, to slut-shame low-status women who attempted to navigate those high-status spaces and behaviors. In a similar qualitative study, Allison and Risman (2014) posit that economically disadvantaged students, in this case commuter students that lived still their families, were unable to engage in and negotiate typical college hook up culture scripts as did students that lived on campus.

Race

The intersection of gender and race creates a sensitive complexity to the hooking up and casual sex. Ethnic minority groups and people of color have been historically and consistently underrepresented in hooking up and casual sex research. Some research suggests people of color and ethnic minorities are more likely to adhere to more traditional dating practices over hooking up (Pham 2017; Wade 2017; Hall and Tanner 2016; Kimmel 2014; Bogle 2008). Black, Latina, and Asian women report fewer hook ups than white women, and men of all racial groups (Allison and Risman 2017; Wade 2017; Bogle 2008). One explanation is that, as an interviewee from Bogle 2008 states, "Hooking up is a white thing." Hook up culture is ubiquitous on college campus that are often predominantly white student populated. Black women outnumber black men on typical college campuses, which situates a power imbalance between the two groups (Hall and Tanner 2016). Some women of color also report feeling a diminished level of sexual desirability compared to their white counterparts, which they feel results in a decrease in hook up opportunities (Wade 2017). Black men and women have to negotiate the juxtaposition of hypersexual stereotypes and sexual tokenism within dominant cultures and the sometimes conservative sexual morality ascribed by the Black community and Church (Sheff and Hammers 2014; Hill-Collins 2005). Racial identity and connection to minority communities poses other struggles to people of color who do participate in alternative sexual behaviors, not just risk of stigma and prejudice, fear of losing access to and support from their community (Sheff and Hammers 2014). Lastly, culture plays a role in openness and disclosing of sexual information. The majority of sex and sexuality researchers tend to be white; evidence suggests people of

color can be less trusting with revealing sensitive sexual information to white researchers (Sheff and Hammers 2014, Catania, Gibson, Marin, Coates and Greenblatt 1994).

Orgasm Gap

One way that hooking up and casual sex can be gendered is through the pleasure disparities between men and women, also known as the *orgasm gap*. In overall acts of sex, men report a higher rate of orgasm (approx. 75%) than women (approx. 33%) (Fredrick, John, Garcia and Lloyd 2018). Within hook up or casual sex, the women's orgasm rates reduce to approx. 11-16% (Wade 2017; Armstrong 2012). In many cases, the orgasm gap is a result of male focused or phallocentric activity, in that the main type of sex that occurs is penial-vaginal intercourse (PVI) (Willis, Jozkowski, Lo and Sanders 2018; Armstrong 2012). Routinely, women are less likely to orgasm solely from PVI, whereas men orgasm primarily from PVI (Fredrick et. al. 2018; Herbenick et. al. 2010). Conversely, PVI paired with other sexual activities such oral and digital stimulation, both men and women have an increased rate of orgasm, particularly for women (Fredrick et. al. 2018, Willis et. al. 2018; Armstrong 2012; Herbenick et. al. 2010).

In other studies, women report high rates of orgasm while in a relationship rather than within a hook up or casual sex situation, in part due to psychological comfort and an increased occurrence in non-penetrative sexual activities given that male relationship partners are more invested in their partner's sexual pleasure (England and Ronen 2015; Armstrong 2012; Armstrong 2010). Additionally, women are more likely to orgasm when they take responsibility and focus on their own pleasure within a sexual setting, than when centering on their male partner (Willis et. al. 2018; Kalish and Kimmel 2011). Lastly, the orgasm rates of women are

impacted by the specter of the sexual double standard (Piemonte, Conley, and Gusakova 2019; Armstrong et. al. 2012).

Sexual Double Standard

An important intersection of gender and hooking and casual sex is the sexual double standard. According to Reiss (1956), the initial idea of the "sexual double standard" (SDS) was defined as the idea that men have the freedom to engage in premarital sex, while women are prohibited from doing the same. A man who has had many sexual partners might be called a "stud" or be revered as being "successful" with little to no stigma (Kimmel 2008). Conversely, a woman with comparable experiences may be called a "slut" or "easy" and face more severe social consequences (Barash and Lipton, 2001; Marks and Fraley, 2005). Ultimately, the SDS is an unbalance set of social rules guiding the sexual behavior of men and women. Women experience far more stigma or punishments for engaging the same behavior as men, often manipulating them to seek relationship from hooking up to mitigate the effects of the SDS (Farvid et. al. 2016; Bordini and Sperb 2013; Bogle 2008; Crawford and Popp 2003). Further, casual sex and male driven conquest are vehicles to reaffirm heteronormative masculinity and acceptance from peers (Danube et. al. 2014).

While some studies show that the sexual double standard is very prevalent in the hooking up and casual sex practices of college age adults (Armstrong, et. al. 2010; Danube et. al. 2014), recent studies demonstrate changes in the perceptions of SDS (Allison and Risman 2013; Papp, Hagerman, Gnoleba, Erchull, Liss, Miles-Mclean, Robertson 2015, Kettrey 2016, Farvid, Braun, and Rowney 2016). Allison and Risman (2013) suggest that college students are moving toward an egalitarian perspective of the sexual behavior of men and women. In that, "the

majority of men and women hold both sexes to the same sexual standard when evaluating hooking up” (Allison and Risman 2013:1201). However, that perspective leans more conservative than liberal, meaning co-eds expected each other to have fewer sexual partners overall; a certain Goldilocks zone of sexual experience. They posit that men and women look unfavorably towards any individual who engages in “a lot” of casual sex or hooking up. Further studies claim the presence of a “reverse sexual double standard”, in which highly sexually active men are judged more harshly than women (Kettrey 2016; Papp et. al. 2015; Allison and Risman 2013). In a target study, Cook and Cottrell (2020) demonstrate that both men and women chose to increase social distance from presumed promiscuous men.

Women, within their immediate social circles, feel an increased or complete personal freedom to engaged in hooking up and casual sex, but at the same time feel that they are judged more harshly from the traditional sexual double standard within society (Farvid et. al. 2015; Kettrey 2016). Farvid et. al. (2015) reports that while interviewing women about casual sex, they would often talk openly and proudly about their own experiences and challenge the notions of the traditional sexual double standard. However, at the same time the interviewees condemned other women for engaging in similar behavior. Echoes of the traditional sexual double standard were internalized by these women in their concerns of having a sexual reputation, which was inherently negative. Study participants argued that they did not have a sexual reputation, but that other women who had casual sex were “sluts” (Farvid et. al. 2015). Essentially, men and women personally feel they have an egalitarian view of sexual behavior, but also believe there is a greater societal sexual double standard that echoes the more traditional perspective (Kettrey 2016).

Further, men and women who are more sexual permissive (meaning they are more open to hooking up and casual sex), face more judgment than less or nonpermissive peers. Men and women report be less likely to be close friends with and more distrusting of someone who is more sexual permissive, based on their sexual morality. Additionally, those more permissive individuals reported more victimization and friendship violations, such as “talking behind their back” than less or nonpermissive individuals (Vrangalova and Bukberg 2015; Vrangalova et. a. 2014).

While these discussions of the sexual double standard are centered on college age adults, Bogle (2008) posits that concerns over reputation and the perceptions of others lessens with age. In some of her follow up interviews of post college individuals and alumni, Bogle reports that individuals are more isolated in “the real world” than they were on a college campus and less concerned with their reputations and perceptions of masses. As a result, they are more focused on the perceptions and judgments of potential dates and significant others. Elements of the traditional sexual double standard, as well as an egalitarian perspective are evident in how these older adults view the sexual behavior of those potential relationships (Bogle 2008). Further, in a large two sample study target study, Marks and Fraley (2005) found no significant difference in perceptions and judgments towards men and women with high number of sexual partners. This egalitarian, albeit sexually conservative, perspective of the sexual double standard is seen for women in the fear of a negative sexual reputation and for both men and women in the stigmatization from the outward expression of sexual permissiveness (Farvid et. al. 2015; Vrangalova, Bukberg, and Rieger 2014).

Conclusion

This literature review presents the current trends in hooking up and casual sex research, as well as the gaps in methodology and theory. Additionally, the reviews show the over sampling of college student or emerging adult populations with little to no attention paid to other adult age groups. This dissertation addresses these sampling errors and holes in the literature by examining the hooking up and casual sex practices and consequences of post college age and middle-aged adults using in-depth semi-structured interviews. Further, I propose new theoretical perspectives that on hooking up and casual sex rooted in the motivations and outcomes of this under studied population.

Chapter 3

Methodology

A clear way to understand hooking up and casual sex is to hear the stories of people who do it. In this chapter, I describe the procedures employed to find the 32 individuals who were open enough and willing to share about their hooking up/casual sex experiences, drives, and behaviors. Additionally, I describe the interview process and the justification of its use in examining the particularly personal and sensitive subject of hooking up and casual sex (Shuy 2002). I then present the theoretical/theory-driven thematic analysis approach used to analyze the rich interview data.

Those Who Hook Up

The focus of this study is on the stories of individuals who actively hook up or engage in casual sex. Most hook up research consists of the attitudes and experiences of those situated with hook-up culture and environments, as a result may feel social pressures to engage in hooking up, rather than it being a fully autonomous choice (Bogle 2008). This distinction is important in that the conscious, active decision to engage in hook-up behavior, as in any activity, yields unique perspectives and outcomes that may be missed in only examining those who are entrenched in hook up culture (Vrangalova and Rukberg 2015).

Each participant reported to have hooked up or engaged in casual sex within the 12 months prior to beginning of the study. Many of the respondents reporting having at least one or a combination of friend-with-benefits, an on-going “fuck buddy” or one-night stand. Additionally, there were a small number who enjoyed all hook up types over the previous year.

Through word of mouth and social media, participants passed my contact and study information to others they felt were a good fit. One participant made posts in polyamorous and swinger groups on social media sites to draw potential respondents to the study. I ensured those individuals self-selecting to participate were over the age of 25, straight or mostly hetero-bi, and had hooked up within the last 12 months before agreeing to set up an interview. All recruitment and interviews occurred in Las Vegas, NV.

Utilizing this snowball and convenience sampling, 32 individuals (19 women and 13 men) ranging from 28 to 52 years old agreed to participate in this study. Twenty-six identified as straight, while five (three women and two men) identified as bi or pansexual. However, several of the women who identified as straight reported having same-sex sexual interactions during their hook up/casual sex experiences. Seventeen reported being divorced at least once and fifteen interviewees had never been married. Eight of the thirty-two participants reported being in a committed relationship (i.e., having a girlfriends/boyfriend, polyamorous, or married) in addition to having solo hook up/casual sex partners. When recruiting, I required that individuals in relationships also to have engaged in hooking up with others without their partner. It was important to distinguish between hooking up/casual sexual experiences from those sexual experiences in context of polyamory or swinging. Two of the participants were African American, two were Latino, and the remaining twenty-eight were Caucasian. Participants were mainly middle to upper-middle class and came from a wide range of careers and types of employment, from full-time I.T. to gig work in entertainment and self-employed life coaching to prior military and armed private security. (See Table 1 for demographic information.)

Interview Process

Interviews were scheduled at a time and place of the participant's choosing. While I was often successful at urging for public areas such as restaurants, bars, and coffee shops, a few chose more private locations such as my office on the university campus or the respondents' homes. Upon initially meeting and prior to beginning the face-to-face interview, participants were presented with a hard copy of the informed consent and explained the aspects of the study including a thorough explanation of confidentiality and that subjects could end the interview at any time. Additionally, I explained that each interview is electronically recorded and transcribed into written text. I transcribed some of the interviews and opted for the services of a professional transcription company for the remainder. Individual identifying information was modified or removed from transcripts and aliases provided in lieu of their names. All those interviewed agreed to be contacted for follow-up interviews should new questions or insights arise.

Using Interviews

Qualitative methods allow the researcher to gather more in-depth, detail-rich data about a phenomenon, particularly the unexplored or under-researched (Patton 2002). Most data on hooking up and casual sex behavior is quantitative, survey research which offers a wide breadth of superficial perspectives based on predetermined possible responses (Patton 2002). While other ethnographic approaches, such as participant observations, may be difficult to conduct on hook up behavior, interviews serve as an adequate tool to gain a thorough and descriptive understanding of the shared meanings and motivations of hooking up and casual sex of adults. The in-depth, semi-structured face-to-face interviews offer insights into the

knowledge and experience of the individuals (Shuy 2002). Additionally, beginning with broader qualitative measures such as interviews enables future inquiries to be more specified and nuanced based on the patterns and themes that develop in the data (Patton 2002).

The goal of this dissertation is not only to explore those shared meanings and motivations, but also to examine whether their experiences are similar to those reported by college aged/emerging adults in other research projects. As mentioned previously, very little data on adult hook up and casual sex behavior has been collected. Little is known about how adults view hooking up and casual sex, whether they experience the same emotional and self-esteem issues that emerging adults experience, how they logistically find partners to hook up with or if adults experience hook-up culture. (See Appendix A for the preliminary interview schedule)

Thematic Analysis

In Sociology, many subfields such as Interactionism or Feminist Studies, the researchers often adhere to their respective theories, methodologies, and literature sources (Schwemmer & Wieczorek 2020). The nebulous and interdisciplinary nature of Sexuality Studies enables the researchers to utilize sources, data, methodologies, etc., from a wide breadth of disciplines, such as Psychology, Public Health, Women and Gender Studies, and Anthropology, to formulate projects that are multifaceted and robust scholarship (Wickramasinghe, Naples, Hoogland & Wong 2016). Thematic analysis, specifically theory-driven thematic analysis, provides a rigorous framework to examine qualitative data with a functional level of flexibility, meaning it can be used and adapted to fit the specification of a given research project (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules 2017; Braun and Clark 2006). Thematic analysis is positioned as a method of analysis,

rather than a methodology bound to theoretical and epistemological frameworks (Clark and Braun 2017; Braun and Clark 2006).

After familiarizing myself with the interview transcriptions, using theory driven or theoretical thematic analysis, I took a 3-tiered manual approach to producing the initial codes guided by the life course, social network, and stigma management frameworks and research questions. I identified prevalent patterns that formed from the initial codes. In turn, these patterns became the foundations for the themes and subthemes. As a final stage, the data and miscellaneous codes were reexamined to determine if they fit within the prevailing themes and subthemes. Once that final review and reexamination was completed, each theme was named in relationship to the theoretical framework and research question to which they applied and serve as the main chapters of this dissertation.

Research Questions

- **RQS1:** How do adults engage in hooking up and what are their motivations for seeking a hook up?
- **RQS2:** What outcomes do adults experience from hooking up?
- **RQS3:** How do adult experience stigma from hooking up?
 - If so, how do they manage that stigma?
 - For those who actively seek hook-ups, do they adhere to the sexual double standard?

Table 1. Demographic Information of Interview Participants

Study Name	Age	Gender	Race	Sexuality	Relationship Status
Ashley 38	38	Woman	White	Straight	Single
Barbara 52	52	Woman	White	Straight	Open Marriage
Brandi 33	33	Woman	White	Straight	Did not mention
Carrie 37	37	Woman	White	Bisexual	Open Relationship
Christie 30	30	Woman	White	Straight	Single
Clint 47	47	Man	White	Straight	Open Relationship
Crystal 33	33	Woman	White	Straight	Single
Dario 41	41	Man	Latino/a	Straight	Did not mention
Edward 37	37	Man	Latino/a	Bisexual	Poly Relationship
Jack 34	34	Man	White	Straight	Open Marriage
Jamie 35	35	Woman	White	Straight	Single
Jeremy 37	37	Man	White	Straight	Open Relationship
Karen 30	30	Woman	White	Straight	Single
Kate 40	40	Woman	White	Straight	Open Marriage
Laura 39	29	Woman	White	Bisexual	Poly Relationship
Leo 36	36	Man	White	Straight	Open Marriage
Liam 45	45	Man	White	Straight	Open Relationship
Maggie 37	37	Woman	White	Straight	Monogamous Relationship
Mandy 34	34	Woman	White	Straight	Single
Maria 28	28	Woman	White	Pansexual	Single
Mark 50	50	Man	White	Straight	Open Marriage
Martin 27	27	Man	Black	Straight	Single
Mary 38	38	Woman	White	Straight	Open Relationship
Matt 36	36	Man	White	Bisexual	Single
Melissa 51	51	Woman	White	Straight	Single
Patricia 38	38	Woman	Black	Straight	Single
Rian 40	40	Woman	White	Straight	Single
Sarah 32	32	Woman	White	Straight	Single
Todd 28	28	Man	White	Straight	Single
Tom 30	30	Man	White	Straight	Single
Tracy 41	41	Woman	White	Straight	Single
Tyler 34	34	Man	White	Straight	Single

Chapter 4

Hook Up Types and Motivations

In this chapter, I will address the research questions: How do adults engage in hooking up and what are their motivations for seeking a hook up? Primarily, I explore the various types of hook ups engaged in by participants and report on their experiences. I will also examine how primary motivations, like alcohol, peer pressure, and sexual gratification, drive participants to engage in hooking up.

Hook up Types

During my interviews, I prefaced there were different types of hook ups, such as one-night stands, booty-calls, etc. but allowed the respondents to define and explain their preferential hook up types. The definitions and hook up parameters were consistent with those found in previous studies mentioned above (Wentland and Reissing 2011, 2014). Further, each type of hook up is associated with a unique level of connectedness or acquaintance to the hook up partner (Wentland and Reissing 2014).

One Night Stand

Of the 32 interviewees in my study, 20 reported having at least one one-night stand (ONS) in the last year. According to my subjects, for a successful one-night stand one must be flexible, spontaneous, and have no pretenses of seeing that person ever again. Jamie 35 shares how an ONS might go for her:

I've met people on [dating apps], then there's also strangers in bars. I've met people just organically in a bar and that has turned into sex in the backseat of a car in the parking lot of the bar...We've had sex and then I've never spoken to them ever again.

Jamie 35 may not know her ONS partner very well, but it may result in sex shortly after meeting. The key for her is choosing to communicate with the ONS partner afterward.

Edward 37 adds the component of spontaneity to an ONS, "If right now, I'm sitting here and some girl walks up and starts talking to me, immediately says "Let's go fuck" or something, I'm like, "Okay." He asserts that sometimes that an ONS might present itself and he is happy to oblige the request at any time. Similarly, Barbara 52 found herself in just such a spontaneous situation with someone at a sex club:

I bump right into this person and he was really tall. I looked up and (laughingly) said, "Wow!" He asked, "What's so funny?" I said, "Just something really funny just happened to me." He goes, "You're cute." I said, "So are you. Let's go." We ended up screwing all night, til 4:00 in the morning. It was fun and he ended up being 25. At the end of the night, the place closes and we were walking outside. The sun was starting to come up.

Although Barbara 52 is in a sex club and attuned for a random hooking up, Barbara 52 has the experience of literally running into someone and having a ONS.

While one-night stands often get a bad rap in society, my participants identified some benefits of the activity. Such as, If the people involved have busy lives but still want their sexual needs met, as Dario 41 explains, "There isn't a lot of courting. There's not a lot of going out on dates or movies. It's more just we're busy people in our lives. We're attracted, let's have sex and then move on with our lives." Likewise, a one-night stand can also be a great way to pass the time when traveling out of town. Mark 50 says:

If I'm hooking up, it's because I'm out of town and I'm out just looking for somebody there that's in that town, either another tourist that's not local or just somebody that's local. I'm totally just looking for that evening.

For Mark 50, as Dario 41 suggests, when one has a busy life that consists of traveling, a one-night stand can offer the momentarily situational companionship one might want or need. Both parties enjoy the pursuit of sexual pleasure and then part ways.

On the other hand, Patricia 38 uses one-night stands as useful tool to get through difficult times:

Mostly just one-night stands. I used to use Tinder a lot. My friend said I'm a "hobo-sexual", because for while I had lost my job so like, if you want to get dinner, just have a date with someone. I'm like, "Hey, Let's go out for dinner and whatever." So that happens a lot.

As Patricia 38's primary mode of hooking up, she might use the hook up as means to get more than just sex, such as a dinner or sometimes even a place to crash. However, she still maintains an emotional distance from her ONS partners.

Participants in this study demonstrated that one-night stands entail spontaneity, an opportunity to achieve sexual pleasure, and other benefits without the necessity of familiarity with their hook up partner. Ultimately, as Martin 27 puts it, you need a one-night stand, "because sometimes you just need someone. Like, it works, and it is what it is." However, for the participants who want to get to know or have a connection with their hook up partner, may choose to continue seeing their ONS partner and evolve into a fuck buddies or friends with benefits.

Fuck Buddy

Of those in this study, 14 participants had a fuck buddy in previous 12 months and offer some insights when looking to engage in this type of hook up. Unlike an ONS, a fuck buddy (FB) involves an on-going sexual situation with varying degrees of connectedness. Jack 34 presents how a conversation might go when setting up a FB:

I don't think romance has ever been off the table except with Lindsey. It was definitely off the table with her very early on. She described it because I was new to more casual sexual. It was my first time with anything remotely casual and, well not the first time really, first time major casual kind of thing. And she had to say, "Okay, we're not going to do this fawning over you, asking if you want to go on a date. No, we hang out sometimes, but the primary focus of this relationship is physical.

In this case, it was Jack 34's hook up partner, Lindsey, that set the parameters of being fuck buddies. There was to be no romance or emotional connection and the relationship, for the lack of a better term, was purely sexual. Equally, Mandy 34 also keeps her FB at an emotional and social distance, "I have a friend that, I mean we hooked up a few times, not even once a month. It was really we were friends, not even friends with benefits, and just "Let's have sex, and that's it."" Even though Mandy 34 refers to this person as a "friend", she contends that the connection is also just sexual, and their interactions are limited.

Interestingly, not all participants keep their FB at a distance and acknowledge the friend aspect of "buddy". Carrie 37 shows us that maintaining friendship is a key component and might require a little effort. She says, "I just have one hook up that I see maybe once or twice a year. So that's just kind of like a fuck buddy, but we still communicate a lot and just talk." Conversely, Tracy 41 enjoys keeping her fuck buddy close for convenience:

I have not had a one-night stand in the last twelve months, but I have hooked up with somebody that I do hook up with off and on for the last couple years. And that's just because he lives across the fucking street.

Both Carrie 37 and Tracy 41 report not hooking up with their FB often but have developed a closer connection with them. Carrie 37 is not in close physical proximity to her FB, but enjoys talking to him regularly. Tracy 41's FB lives just across the street, and they are friends, but only hook up on a rare occasion.

The rules of having a FB do not seem to be hard and fast and provide some wiggle room for how they are conducted. Mary 38, in referencing the HBO show *Insecure* tells us how she juggles a few fuck buddies in there “HOE-tation”. “I had about three dudes I was seeing casually. They were not boyfriends at all. That I was kind of rotating though...because I’m not going to form an attachment at way.” She maintains emotional distance from her fuck buddies by having several that she rotates though, rather than giving one primary access.

Todd 30, however, blurs the lines with his fuck buddy by going on what could be considered a date. “I wouldn’t even call it “friends”. It was just benefits. We didn’t hang out with each other as friends. It was really like we would see each other once a week. We’d go get dinner and then just go to her place. It was pretty simple.” While they do go out to dinner, Todd 30’s situation still constitutes a fuck buddy since the purpose of going to dinner is to engage in sexual activity later in the evening. One might speculate that going to dinner is a way to briefly reconnect and fuel up before partaking in physical activity.

For my subjects, fuck buddies were sexual partners that they did not necessarily consider close friends or, in some cases, “friends” at all, but still worked to maintain a distant level of acquaintance that enabled sexual activity without emotional complication. Those participants who desired a greater connection with their hook up partners engaged in friends with benefits.

Friend with Benefits

The most common type of hook up amongst the study participants, with 23 having a friend (or friends) with benefits. For participants, an FWB involves more of a connection than an ONS or FB, even allowing for an emotional bond, and the partners emphasis that the friendship

aspect is an important component. FWBs can evolve from ONS or FBs, where a friendship is developed from hooking up. Ashley 38 says that she finds hook up partners by feeling the energy and vibing off of people. However, the experiences with those random hook up partners can lead to an on-going connection for Ashley 38:

It's got to be more someone that I have a history with, and a relationship with, and trust with...So someone that I would be having sex with repeatedly is someone that there is a lot more depth.

The evolution from ONS or FB to FWB requires more connection for Ashley 38. This would indicate that hooking up and having sex involves less social and emotional investment than making friends.

The friendship component may not always evolve from a hook up or through sex, as

Matt 36 shows, a FWB may start off as regular friends:

But yeah, so most of what I've been going through has been people that I already know that I'm friends with and then just progresses further, but with an understanding that this is not going to go too far.

Matt 36's FWBs were already friends when they began being sexual and maintained their level of friendship as the encounters continued. Similarly, Martin 27's FWBs start off as friends and he emphasizes the importance of maintaining beyond sexual interactions:

I'd say more friends with benefits. Where it's one of those, we're friends. We'll legitimately be friends but then we can also have sex. Having sex doesn't impact our friendship. We're still legitimate friends who like each other's company and we also like each other sexually sometimes. It doesn't change how we see each other.

Here, Martin 27 states that sexual activities should not negatively impact the friendship between him and his partner. The sex between friends does not diminish to lessen the friendship. However, one might interpret Martin 27's statement "It doesn't change how we see

each other.” similarly to Matt 36’s caveat that the friendship should not become something more serious, meaning a committed or conventional relationship.

My participants report how they discuss the particularities of the relationship and maintain boundaries with their friends with benefits. Christie 30 states that her FWB was a means of “not getting into a relationship”, but still enjoying “good sex” and companionship. Through her FWB, she enjoys the benefits of a relationship without the conventional obligation and commitment. Likewise, Crystal 33 explains how she has set up and adapted boundaries with an FWB.

“Well, I had one that I found right after my breakup. I told him very clearly I just want sex and I just want a friend. I'm not ready for no relationship stuff. I'm dealing with my crap and I can't. So if you're down to be my friend who has sex with me then we can totally be friends and have sex. He's like yes. So we had an ongoing relationship for about six, seven months before he was like I love you and I want to be your boyfriend. I was like, “Sorry. We're going have to not do this anymore.””

Like Christie 30, Crystal 33 sought an FWB solely for the sex and companionship with a set boundary that the friendship is not pushed towards a conventional relationship. Although the FWB ended with her partner eventually wanted more of a relationship, Crystal 33 was able to enjoy the arrangement for several months, while working through the difficulties from a previous break-up.

For others, the preference for a FWB structure offers an avenue to build trust. Brandi 33, builds on Ashley 38’s depiction of how a friendship can evolve, and states how building trust within a FWB is important to her and the sex:

I'm not a very trusting person. I'm very cautious and stay on my guard a lot. It's typically with a friend. It's typically with someone I get to know before I let them over my house. It will turn into a friends-with-benefits thing, is what I typically like to do. I'm comfortable with that person. I can trust that person. We can do all kinds of things. I

weed out a lot with just coffee or drinks, because if I can't feel the common ground and that they might actually be a good friend, then I won't hook up.

Brandi 33 struggles with trust issues and focuses primarily on finding a FWB over a conventional relationship. During the process of finding and building a FWB situation, she develops the connection and trust needed to enjoy sexual activity with the individual.

The participants of this study emphasize the importance of “friend” in friends with benefits by showing how a friendship can develop from other hook up types, by maintaining the closeness that existed prior to sexual activity, continue to communicate needs and boundaries, and effort to build trust with their hook up partner. While one-night stands, fuck buddies, and friends with benefits were the three main types of hook ups reported by the study participants, most engage in more than one and sometime all three types of hooking up over the previous year. Further, FWBs are the most common type of hook up, and the most enjoyed, according to participants; in many cases ONS and FB evolving into FWBs and friends of participants developing into FWBs.

Alcohol and Drugs

The adults in this study offer a unique perspective of alcohol and drug use in conjunction with hooking up and casual sex. Most adults in this study report not using alcohol or drugs as a hook up catalyst, and often suggest limited consumption to maintain a sense of control, performance, and awareness. While alcohol is present in hook up scenarios of my participants, as it is amongst college student/emerging adults, the social pressures and influences of hook up culture to drink are absent. The motivations of my participants to drink and use drug while hooking up are influenced by the norms of popular social settings (i.e., bars and parties), they simply enjoy the taste of alcohol, or the enhancing effects of drugs.

Arguably, bars and parties are the predominate social environments for adults, so logically meeting hook ups at bars and parties is a fairly standard practice and drinking is commonplace within those settings. Thus, most adults in this study find themselves drinking when they meet people they intend to hook up with. As Clint 47 articulates, “Usually when I meet somebody, I'm like at a bar and stuff, you know, so there will probably be alcohol involved.” Additionally, as Maria 28 reports the social setting for meeting people can beget drinking, “I do (drink). Not all the time, but especially in a social setting it's kind of like if I'm just at a party or something like that, I'm already drinking to begin with.” For Clint 47 and Maria 28, their social place of choice for finding or meeting a hook up is a bar or party. While drinking is not inevitable, it is a highly typical behavior they engage in while in those environments. Often, the start of a hook up can simply entail grabbing a drink and enjoying some entertainment together, as Maggie 37 states about drinking and hooking up:

Sometimes I drink. Mostly, I mean, if it's a social setting, and I'm a beer drinker anyways. But I don't ever purposefully start doing shots to make sure I'm completely obliterated. That's not the point. Usually it's a matter of, we're meeting up at a bar. I'd sit and have some beers like that. I met one guy at a bar to watch a football game. We had some beers, went back to our place, did our thing and he left.

Meeting at a bar or grabbing a drink are classic ‘get-to-know-ya’ activities for adults. Magge 37, like many adults, enjoys the taste of beer and the social setting of a bar. Importantly, she mentions that getting heavily intoxicated or “obliterated” is not the goal when meeting a hook up, and key aspect participants express when pairing drinking and hooking up.

Not drinking to hook up

While drinking may be prevalent, it is not the center of a hook up experience for adults in this study. Alcohol is not a necessity to enable respondents to hook up, as is with many

emerging adults. As Kate 40 states, "It's not like I have to be drunk to hook up. Although some people do, but I don't." Jamie 35 furthers this notion by adding that she doesn't imbibe for "courage", but drinks, like many adults, because she enjoys the flavor:

I drink because I enjoy the taste of the beverage. Just like I have sex because it feels good. Like I do things because I want to not because I need the courage to do or not do something else. I will have this one beer and pay for it and leave this bar without the desire or need to have another one. I ordered this beer because I like the way this beer tastes. So, I don't need the liquid courage.

Much like Maggie 37 describes above, Jamie 35 enjoys drinking for the taste, but does not drink to the point of excess or intoxication and does not need alcohol to lower inhibition in order to hook up with someone. In many cases, the decision to hook up was already made prior to drinking. Tyler 34, when explaining if he uses alcohol to hook up:

If it was something I was going to do, I was going to do it anyway. I don't necessarily need it...it might make me less inhibited in what I'm going to say, but it's not going to necessarily change my behavior so that someone that I would hook up drunk is not someone I would hook up with sober.

This is true for most participants in this study, alcohol may be used to relax or ease social awkwardness, but they express a willingness to hook up just as easily while sober.

Further, some participants may choose to drink to the point, but the willingness or goal of hooking up is established well before becoming inebriated. Sarah 32 reaffirms, intoxication is not a motivating component for hooking up:

Not like, Oh, I'm going to get drunk and hook up with somebody. It's like, Oh, you know, I'm out with this person and I've gotten drunk and it was going to lead to sex anyway so it might as well but it's not a key factor in it. It happens sober too.

As it is clear, the amount of alcohol Sarah 32 consumes is not in relationship to letting herself hooking up, like others she hooks up while sober. However, getting drunk for Sarah 32 may be a way to enhance the experience, a practice that I explore below.

For a few in this study, drug use during a hook is a popular activity, but like alcohol, drugs were not considered a motivator to hook up. Recreational drugs were reportedly used to enhance the sexual experience of a hook up. Laura 29 proclaims, "If I want to fuck somebody, I'll do it sober. I use intoxicants sometimes to make sex more pleasurable. Not because I want to be more comfortable doing it in the first place." Similarly, Jack 34, who enjoys other recreational substances, is not motivated to hook up under their influence, but enjoys the ride if the opportunity presents itself:

I've never used any drug actually to enable myself or allow myself to do something. Now I'm not opposed to doing that. I've absolutely told every partner that I've had that anything I consent to while under the influence of anything, I am game to do. Because I'm the kind of person that I know if I regret it later, I'm not going to regret it a lot. And I'm basically willing to take any risk of having a bad time, because I did something while inebriated that I later in retrospect didn't enjoy.

As with alcohol, Jack 34 and Laura 29 echo the same perspective with other recreational substances, that hooking up and the subsequent activities do not require lowered inhibition from drug use. In fact, they lend to the idea mentioned above, that alcohol and drugs can be used to enhance the sexual experience.

Drugs to enhance

Marijuana was legalized in the state of Nevada in 2017 and in 2019 testing was no longer required for Nevada state employment. Since the legalization, marijuana has become a very popular recreational substance in Las Vegas, with sales hitting \$42 million in just the first year (Hutchinson 2019). At the time of the interview, Jack 34's marijuana consumption had increased to roughly 50% the time he had sex and expands on why:

Largely it's that altered state, it is a more pleasurable experience. I think that's the primary reason, and then I think I happen to be high at the time I engage in sex, because you're high for usually two or three hours if you're inhaling...I've only used it for

enhancing the experience. I've never used it to bring myself to have the experience. But that's largely probably because I don't need to. I'm really easy as you might say. So, it's not something where I have to psych myself up chemically or emotionally.

Smoking marijuana before hooking up provides a more pleasurable experience for Jack 34 that lasts for length of the high. He reaffirms that using the substance is strictly to enhance the experience and not to allow himself to have sex.

Marijuana is not the only drug participants report using to enhance their sexual experience in a hook up. Barbara 52 shares her experience:

If it somebody that I know, that I've been with a few times, and it's something they want to do also. Yeah, I'll get some Molly (MDMA) or weed or whatever. My 25-year-old wanted to do Acid (LSD) together. I said, "That sounds like fun."

She enjoys experimenting with many different substances when she hooks up but contends that she typically does so when she is more familiar with the person. Similarly, Tracy 41 and Carrie 37 recount their experiences with psychedelics in a hook up. Tracy 41 drank mushroom tea (psilocybin) with a hook up, which led to great sex. She claims, "I think because I was on drugs and my mind was open to other things and so it just was a different experience on top of just intercourse and hooking up." Carrie 37, who mainly uses marijuana when have sex, experimented with psychedelics during a hook up. Her experience was positive and pleasurable, but unlike Tracy 41, she didn't have amazing sex. Carrie recounts, "Because usually it's like not penetration it's just mostly having fun and enjoying each other's bodies and things like that, but not actual penetration." As these participants show, the use of psychedelics can greatly enhance the sexual experience in a hook up, but may not result in sexual intercourse.

As with psychedelics, other drugs can also be used to enhance sexual activity, including nonpenetrative sex. Ashley 38 describes how touching nonsexual areas is more enjoyable when she uses MDMA and GHB (“G”) in hook up scenario:

Molly [MDMA] is a really fun one. I haven't used it too many times though, because I already really enjoy touching and sex. Molly makes it actually less sexual for me, sometimes...I guess. I can orgasm just from having someone rub my ribs or something like that. So, sometimes drugs actually make sex less likely to happen. Other than Molly, sometimes “G”. There aren't really drugs where I'm like, “Hey, I wanna fuck and I want to be on a certain drug.

These drugs put Ashley 38 in a height state of arousal where orgasm does not require genital stimulation. Interestingly, Ashley 38 states that she does not seek out a specific combination of a drug and sex, but as other participants mention, enjoys when the situations arise to be sexual while enhanced by the effects of a drug. Further, this data shows that drugs can be used responsibly in a hook up situation and the enhanced pleasure from the substances. Some adults of the study experience greater pleasure during penetrative and nonpenetrative hook ups in tandem with recreation drug use.

Drinking to hook up, but not necessarily to have sex.

Just as most in this study report not needing to drink to allow themselves to hook up, there are a few participants who do seek out the inhibition lowering effects of alcohol. These participants drink to ease social anxiety or reduce the stresses from things like body issues or daily life. Drinking allows them to lowering inhibitions to get out of their own way to enjoy the sex they want to have, not necessarily to enable or give themselves permission to have sex. Rian 40 states that she is an “avid drinker”, but drinks when she hooks up because of “body issues”. Drinking enables her to “feel more comfortable in my own skin.” The act of sex isn't the issue for

Rian 40, but how she feels about the way she looks naked. Tracy 41 shares the same body image concern:

this is the fattest I've ever been in my life. So, I'm a little bit overweight. So, I'm not immediately right away probably going to be comfortable with you with just meeting you sober for a couple of hours in a bar.

Drinking helps Tracy 41 feel less self-conscious about her weight when meeting a hook up.

However, the desire for alcohol is not just to help ease her body issues in a hook up situation, but also to deal with the stressors of being single mother:

It makes me a little more comfortable. A little more out of mom mode. Because my mind is constant everybody eat, is their meals done, lunches for tomorrow, who is picking up who from school, is somebody getting to soccer, somebody has got to go here for [school function]. Oh shit, I have to work seven to three. Okay, the doctor's appointment. So, I'm so constantly in all business all the time for me to just go into a bar and be like, "hey, oh my god." And I'm very black and white on the tour so it's either I'm all business or I'm all not. And to flip that switch takes usually some kind of substance to do that.

For these women, drinking provides an avenue to relax or be less self-conscious. Tracy 41's worries of the days or Rian 40's concerns over body-image can negatively impact desire and responsiveness to sex. As these participants suggested, drinking frees or unburdens their minds (e.g., "getting out of your own way" or "getting out of your head"), which allows them to be present in the hook up and enjoy sex. I discuss further in the next chapter and how it is linked to orgasm.

Drinking alcohol can also help to get over the hump of a breakup when you want to hook up. Mary 38 was struggling after the end of a relationship and felt hooking up with someone else would ease the struggle. She needed help from alcohol to pull the trigger.

JC: Do you ever drink to allow yourself to do things sexually? Like allow you to hook up with somebody?

Mary 38: Yeah, yeah. I've definitely done that.

JC: Recently?

Mary 38: Yeah, I was sort of just trying to move on from somebody, and I liked this person but I didn't really want to--I didn't not want to fuck them, but I kind of also was like, "Eh." But I just really needed to put a person between me and that person. Do you know what I mean? There, I was just, "Alright!"

In this situation, Mary 38 uses alcohol to give a little nudge to her inhibitions and indecisiveness to be sexual, which in turn helps her move past the previous relationship.

For others, seeking out a drink can help with social anxiety, particularly speaking to a potential hook up partner. Jeremy 35 drinks to give himself the confidence in those social situations:

Oh yeah, I mean I am pretty fucking lethal when it comes to be a little sauced. Like my flirting is on point. I mean I wish I could do this while I'm sober because it's pretty damn all right.

He drinks just enough to provide the social lubrication needed to move through the mental blocks that prevent Jeremy 35 from being confident in social interactions and hook ups.

Interestingly, these participants choose to drink alcohol to loosen control caused by the anxieties and stressor, below I explore how other participants choose to limit their alcohol consumption to maintain a sense of control within a hook up situation.

Control

A theme in this study that extends throughout the conversations on alcohol and drug use while hooking up is the need for control; control of yourself and maintaining a of feeling of control within the hook up and situational logistics (i.e., transportation and sexual performance). Although respondents spoke openly about using recreational drugs and alcohol to enhance the sexual experience, it is usually orchestrated with caution and the recognition of

limitations. The sense of control can take many forms. For some, even though drinking may occur, it's important to stay relatively coherent. As Maggie 37 advocates:

I don't go into a hook up with the purpose of being so drunk I don't understand. That's it, too. I want to be in control, because even if you meet somebody, you don't necessarily know anything about them... So, decide whether that risk is going to be worth it. But I think when you add things where you don't understand what's going on, or where someone can easily manipulate you emotionally, physically, however. It's not a good idea.

Maggie 37 urges that one should not get incoherently intoxicated during a hook up, especially when you do not know the person very well. Essentially, she believes keeping your wits about you when drinking is paramount for having a good hook up and keeping you safe, physically and emotionally, while decreasing the likelihood of unwanted outcomes such as regret or violated boundaries. Leo 36 offers a similarly warning:

I try to keep it more honest and uninfluenced by substances because then you start to blur the lines. You can miss things. I find it more respectful of everybody in the party if everybody's on the same page and just enjoying it for what it is rather than doing it out of it being "oh, I was drunk." Learning to regret it later.

According to Leo 36, staying sober or not under the influence of a substance allows for greater wherewithal in a hook up situation and decreased likelihood of crossing boundaries or putting yourself in a situation you may regret later. I will discuss how participants navigate safety in hook up situations a bit later.

Don't Drive Drunk

The desire for control by limiting alcohol consumption during a hook up may also have practical motives. Many of the adults in this study expressed control by being conscientious about their method and availability of transportation. For some, staying sober or relatively

sober creates the opportunity to be more spontaneous when it is time to “go”. As Clint 47 points out:

I've done these stretches of being sober, and I'm like wow I'm actually more, you know, I feel I'm a little more in control, a little more in tune, you know, you can pick up on stuff and, you know, actually one of the greatest things is like you want to go right now, we can go. I can drive right fucking now because I haven't been drinking.

Given that spontaneity is a component of ONS, a type of hook up Clint 47 enjoys, remaining sober provides him the wherewithal and freedom to be able to leave the bar and begin his evening with his hook up partner whenever they are ready. Along the same lines for Karen 30, having a plan for driving or other transportation gives her the opportunity to make an exit if needed or decide to stay and enjoy more beverages:

I'm always very much cautious about driving under the influence. I like having my own car there because if some reason I need to leave the situation. I'll drink if I know the person that I'm hooking up with and they're like a friend of mine then I'm more comfortable with drinking but also if I know that I have transportation to and from.

Aside from not wanting to drive drunk, study participants understand the benefits of having wherewithal and control over the logistics of a hook up situation by staying sober or limiting alcohol consumption. Rather than drinking to excess, they were able to be self-reliant for transportation without consequences, while being less stressed during a hook up.

Performance Issues

According to some men in the study, maintaining control by limiting drinking is associated with concerns over sexual performance. Alcohol is commonly known to impact erectile function for men, which an erection is often a cornerstone of their sexual prowess. As Martin 27 explains:

I also know sometimes I might slow down my drinking. I'm talking to someone, where we might be going to hook up just cause you want to be functional when you're hooking

with someone new. You also want to make sure you give them a good performance. If you get too drunk which I've been there. It's not fun for anyone if you're a drunk slobbering mess. So, generally I will say, once I realize hooking up is going to be a thing that night, I try to at least make sure that I'm at a tolerable pace or I'm not drinking excessively.

Sexual performance is important for Martin 27 when hooking up and recognizes excessive drinking as counter to that goal. Likewise, Jack 34 actively avoids drinking completely to avoid erection issues, if he thinks sex will occur in a hook up. As Jack 34 clearly states:

I don't drink because just drinking kills my physiological ability to maintain an erection. So if I do I might have a drink or two in me, but it's not enough to affect my judgement for sure. But I generally prefer not to drink if I expect to be having sex because it does inhibit my sexual performance.

Although Jack 34 reports putting the desire of sexual gratification over the want or need for a drink, as mentioned above, he enjoys the effects of marijuana when having sex. In his interview, Martin 27 also mentions enjoying the effects of marijuana and other drugs while having sex and hooking up. While not the point of this research, this lends to the argument that the effects of alcohol differ from the effects of other altering substances on sexual performance. Nonetheless, it is curious that a sense of control for men's sexual performance is centered more around alcohol than other substances.

Safety

Excessive alcohol does not only impact men. As some women in this study explain drunk sex is "bad sex" and the sense of control is associated to bodily safety. Jamie 35 states that "sloppy sex isn't fun. So, if I know that's where my night is ending, I try to cut it off...because I don't need to have drunk sex." Like the men above, if a hook up opportunity arises, Jamie 35 will reduce or stop drink to have a sense of control in the sexual situation.

Drunk sex during a hook up can also be potentially harmful to women. The potential harm can come in the form of crossing boundaries and bodily violation, which Laura 29 warns against:

I absolutely will not tolerate, "Hey, by the way, we hooked up when you were puking in the other room." That doesn't sound healthy or intelligent or in any way shape or form a good situation, but I'm okay with the idea of having a bit of liquor in my system, as long as I'm still aware of my facilities.

Here, Laura 29 describes the hypothetical, yet real, dialogue that can occur when consent is violated while someone is excessively intoxicated. She acknowledges that having some alcohol is acceptable, but still wants to maintain a sense of control. In the same way, Ashley 38 tries to limit her alcohol. "I really don't drink that much and I don't enjoy being drunk. Drunk sex is confusing, and you can get hurt, physically hurt with it. So, I try not to." Ashley 38 adds the risk of risk is bodily harm to the potentially negative effects of excessive alcohol consumption during sex.

The notion of control for safety for the women in this study is mostly around alcohol. Ashley 38, and several others, enjoy partaking in other substances during a hook up and sex. This suggests that being drunk, for either hook up partner, has greater inherent risks of harm and potential dangers than being under the influence of other drugs.

Don't have sex with drunk people

Just as women in the study voice safety concerns when being intoxicated during sex or a hooking up, men in the study prefer to actively avoid situations where their hook up partner is too intoxicated. In this case, male participants exercise the sense of control by abstaining from sexual interactions with partners they feel have over imbibed, which prevents unwanted consequences, from awkward moments to violations of consent.

Firstly, male participants report a drunk hook partner can be off-putting. As Liam 45 states, “I kind of do tend to avoid people if they're drunk just because it's not an attractive thing for me.” He goes on to explain that their unpredictable behavior makes Liam 45 uncomfortable. Further, mistakenly hooking up with someone that is intoxicated can result in very uncomfortable situations. Dario 41 regales the time he learned this valuable lesson:

I have a ground rule for myself. Never sleep with a woman who's drunk, period. I had an experience when I was younger. A woman fell asleep on me during sex, you know. It was weird. It was the weirdest thing that ever happened to me. She was drunk. It was Daytona, spring break. I was kind of drunk on the hunt. She said I had beautiful lips, and we went back to her hotel room. That's how easy it was. Should have known anything that easy you should never do. She got on top of me. She got her orgasm on. She had a few of them, and I was still working trying to get mine. She leaned forward and started kissing me on my neck and like yeah, this is great... [Snoring noise] It was just weird. Just a weird moment in general for a first time. I got used. That was cruel, just weird. I put her down. Literally put her clothes all back on, put the blanket back on, tucked her in, put water next to her, rolled her over and left the room and walked back to my hotel room just stunned. Never again will I ever sleep with a woman who's drunk period ever. Fuck that.

While one might chalk up this awkward interaction to youth and being equally intoxicated, Dario 41's somewhat comical anecdote could have resulted in a serious consent violation.

Aside from it being an unattractive state and creating awkward situations, being intoxicated becomes an issue of consent and legality. As with men like Edward 37 and Mark 50, consent is not something to be dismissed or taken lightly. Edward 37, “No, I wouldn't do it if you're a stranger. Literally, legally if somebody's drunk, they can't consent. So legally you shouldn't do it.” Equally, Mark 50 insists on consent:

I've been with people where they have to have a lot of alcohol. The problem with that is not true consent. Is the person really of sound mind to be able to say yes or no; whether they're so fucked up that they don't know what's going on with their body. I don't want to be in that scenario either. I've been with a couple before where I could just feel that the woman was not into it and the guy was kind of coercing her. I'm like no, this is not

happening. I'm not ok with that. I want everybody to be not just onboard, but excited about it. That's very, very important. Absolute consent is extremely important.

Mark 50 explains that consent must be given coherently by all those participating in the hook up, not muddled by alcohol or coerced by a partner. By positioning the importance of consent over sex with an intoxicated partner, Edward 37 and Mark 50 exercise the forementioned sense of control over the potential negative consequences. Edward 37 illustrates the legal argument that an intoxicated person cannot offer clear consent. However, this issue becomes somewhat convoluted when you take into account cases like Sarah 32, who stated above that she sometimes gets drunk during hook up but establishes the intent for sex prior to drinking. A clear answer is beyond the scope of this research, but perhaps erring on the side of caution like men in this study is the pragmatic course of action.

Pressure to Hook up

Another motivation discussed previously in the literature is how, as a part of hook up culture, individuals feel social pressure to hook up or that they should be hooking up. This pressure can seemly come from the environment, especially those on college campuses, media, or from peers (England and Ronen 2015; Wade and Heldman 2012). The participants of this study report a unique relationship with social pressure and hooking up. More specifically, most participants claim to feel little to no societal pressure to hook up. As Todd 30 eloquently describes his position on societal pressure, "I've never really had an issue with societal pressure. Society can go fuck itself if I'm not doing what it thinks I should be doing. I prefer to do what I want to do." Many other participants, like Todd 30, either ignore the societal messages to hook up or do not recognize them as being influential.

One avenue some participants report experiencing pressure to hook up comes from their immediate friend groups. Many participants express being sex-positive and surround themselves with like-minded people, such as those in the polyamorous and swinger communities. The feelings of pressure were not necessarily out of an appeal to conform, but rather an internalized sense of obligation to participate. Laura 29 and Christie 30 have similar experiences and feeling like they should be participating with their group of friends in sexual activities:

Laura 29: I've definitely sat in the non-sexual half of an orgy before and been like, "I feel kind of weird for not doing any of these with anybody, but I'm really not interested in these people." It felt like I was failing to adapt mentally to the situation.

Christie 30: I don't know how to explain it. All of my friends are very touchy-feely and sensual. Some of the time, I feel like I'm pressured into joining cuddle puddles and joining the threesomes and the hookup parties. It's not something I'm fully comfortable with.

Both women experience a sort of cognitive dissonance by bemoaning the social pressures and, at the same time, self-imposed guilt, for not engaging in the activities with their friends. Laura 29 goes on to admit, "And I realized that a lot of that is entirely internal. Most of the pressure that I've experienced, it was something I probably put on myself." Christie 30 posits that she does want to engage in the activities and feels FOMO (fear of missing out) when she does not participate. It is interesting that both women have such comparable experiences and reactions.

On the other hand, several respondents urge that they get societal pressure to do the opposite of hooking up, that they feel pressure to settle down. Being in the military, Leo 36 often associates with individuals who lean more politically and morally conservative. When they find out about his hook up behavior, they are not always open and accepting. Leo 36 says, "Occasionally it will come up in conversation, they are like, "That's just not right." I'm like, "Okay,

it's not right for you." They're like, "Don't you think you need Jesus?" I had Jesus. Me and Jesus didn't work out. He goes on to say that because of his views on hooking up and casual sex, he does not always feel like he fits in at work and with the culture of the military. Oddly, Liam 45, who is in the progressive and sex-positive polyamorous and swinger communities, feels similar pressure from those social circles when he is open about his hook up behavior. He reports that, "Even a lot of people in the poly and swinger community still obviously get married and have children, so I tend to be kind of an outcast in those ways." Even within these seemingly polar opposite communities, these participants find mirroring pressures to settle down.

Congruently, some women in the study feel social pressure to settle down. When asked about feeling pressure to hook up, Karen 30 says:

I would say that's it's the other way around. From society in general there's pressure for me not to. There's pressure for me to lock it down. To just be like all right I've found Prince Charming and now my vagina is closed.

Karen 30 feels that societal pressure is to seek out a husband and a monogamous marriage, not to hook up and have casual sex. Jamie 35 experiences similar pressure for those in her environment:

No, I feel social pressure that I should settle down...I'm not afraid to talk with my girlfriends about these things. And I have single friends and I have married friends and I have like friends that are in committed relationships and whatever. And not all of them but a vast majority of them think that I'm crazy the way that I live my life.

Like Leo 36 and Liam 45, the social pressure Jamie 35 feels to settle down resembles an appeal to conformity from those in her social circles who adhere to conventional or traditional relationships and moral structures, such as monogamy and marriage. By hooking up and succumbing to social pressures, participants can be open to shame and stigma, which I will examine later.

Sexual Pleasure and Gratification

"Sex is fun":

Barbara 52: Because it's fun to have sex.

Leo 36: It's fun and exciting.

Christie 30: Because I like to have sex. Because it's fun.

Tyler 34: Sex is fun.

Laura 29: Sex is fun.

Rian 40: It's fun.

Mandy 34: Because sex is fun.

Matt 36: I wouldn't put a reason on it, but it's fun.

Melissa 51: ...sex is fun.

Overwhelmingly, the pursuit of sex is the main motivator to hook up for the participants in this study. The primary drive is sexual pleasure and gratification, but participants also express a sense of empowerment and the desire for a variety of partners when they seek out sex. Study participants did not feel the need to justify the pursuit of pleasure or conceal their motives behind peer pressure or alcohol, but rather embraced their desire and the reality of hook up as the catalyst. Brandi 33 articulates many of these points:

Because I have a hunger for sex. Because I need it. Masturbating is only so much. I like the human companionship. I like being with somebody. I think it's fun. It's something enjoyable. Some people go skiing, I like having sex. It released endorphins. It makes me relaxed. I get all of the things like a normal drug gets out of it. I get human contact. I get to leave. It's not 24/7. I'm not with that person constantly. I still go to work and do all these other things. It's this really nice pocket of time. I enjoy sex.

Brandi 33 demonstrates a certain leisure aspect of hooking up, in that for her sex is it is like any other share physical activity. She is direct in pursuing sex for pleasure and that hooking up provides that opportunity. Similarly, below many others share the drive for pleasure through hooking up.

It feels good

Although the primary motivation for hooking up is sexual pleasure, nearly half of participants (14 out of 32) state that sexual intercourse is not necessarily the goal of a hook up. This suggests pleasure is achieved by participants through various sexual activities in a hook up, beyond sexual intercourse. For Jamie 35, pleasure, in many forms, is the main motivation for her to hook up:

Getting off feels good. And it doesn't always need to have to end with sex. Like we can have like a heavy make out session and get to third base like we're in high school all over again. But if I get off, then I'm good with that...But getting off feels good, that is why I hook up.

For Jamie 35, making out (kissing and heavy petting) is a sufficient alternative to sexual intercourse if she enjoys it and achieves orgasm. Whether through intercourse or other sexual activities, pleasure is her main reason for hooking up.

As sex feels good, some participants use hooking up to serve as a means of cathartic release, whether that be for pent up energy or the need for stress release. Maggie 37 seeks out hook ups because they allow her to let off some steam:

It's a great stress-relief, honestly. It's a nice little bump to your day. And at the time, I was playing roller derby and I was working out, so I had a lot of energy and things that I wanted to expend. So, it was just another form of physical therapy.

Sex through hooking up is the avenue in which Maggie 37 can expend her excess energy and relax at the end of the day.

As Brandi 33 mentioned above, pleasure can be achieved through solo activities (i.e., masturbation), but some find an increased thrill in finding a hook up partner. Christie 30 echoes this sentiment:

“Because I like to have sex. Because it’s fun. It’s enjoyable. It makes you feel alive. Being with someone else is different than what you can give yourself. Yeah, I can masturbate and give myself an orgasm, but it’s not the same as being with someone.”

Although sexual pleasure can be fulfilled through various means of activities and yield positive results, these participants express a desire for a partner in that pursuit of pleasure. Hooking up is the means by which participants acquire these partners for the sole purpose of sexual pleasure.

Variety

The desire for a variety of partners or “partner novelty” is an understudied phenomenon among humans, even less so as a motivation for hooking up. Contrary to the prevailing *Coolidge Effect*, which suggests men are more likely to seek out novelty and women to seek out familiarity (Rosa et al. 2019), individuals in this study who actively seek hook ups enjoy the “spice of life,” regardless of their sex. According to Edward 37, variety, in people and activities, is a motivation for hooking up:

[High] variety. I said earlier, I don’t date one person that’s everything to you. They can’t cover everything you’re into. Where’s that one partner? I [won’t mention] that to her. But it’s like, I like anal, and she literally had a partner who penetrated her once without asking and ripped the hole apart and she had to have surgery, so she doesn’t do anal? I’m like, cool, you don’t do anal, well I have a [certain] partner who does do that. Everybody for different things. Or I [invite] the other girl. I just like to fuck guys, so I’m going to go fuck a guy. I’ve always been open. Some variety more than anything.

Edward 37 explains how having only one partner can fall short of meeting all of one’s sexual needs, especially when there is a misalignment of sexual activities that are enjoyed. Seeking a variety of people and hook up types provides the opportunity for unique experiences and engagement in different sexual acts while being respectful of the boundaries and limitations of other partners.

For other participants, hooking up offers the chance for a person in a relationship to explore sexual opportunities that their partner may not be able to provide. Kate 40, who is married, explains her approach to finding hook up partners:

For me, my husband is much more the submissive type guy. So sometimes I want someone who's very dominant. My husband is also very subby but not kinky. So sometimes I'll look for a very kinky subby boy. What I like, what I don't like. So sometimes I'll go specifically looking for those things versus just a general fuck.

She describes the men she hooks up with as "all very different from each other, and what we do are very different from each other. It's not like I go and I do the same thing with each of these."

Kate 40 enjoys a range of sexual activities, including some BDSM play. She seeks out a variety of hook ups to fulfill different types of sexual desires and pleasures, outside the context of her marriage. Similarly for Mark 50, who is also married:

I don't know. [laughs] Opportunity and I'm horny. It's an opportunity to explore and have fun with someone that's other than who I've been with. Just different experiences, and that's either by myself or with my wife. Either or. It doesn't matter cause the same person in bed all the time is the same person in bed all the time. Even though you may try to mix things up a little bit at home, it's still not the same as meeting a totally different person who has totally different desires and when I do things, you're like, "Holy shit. I never thought about that" and then you can bring that back into your home relationship and improve even more on that.

Hooking up with a variety of people gets him out of the rut of repetitive sex with a relationship partner and exposes him to experiences and activities he can then bring back to enhance the sexual encounters with his wife.

Hooking up and seeking variety, for some participants, is a way to get the most out of life. According to Patricia 38, "I do like variety. I want to live as much life as I can, and I know that it's just nice being with different people." Karen 30 shares Patricia 38's perspective, "I hook up because at this point in my life I feel I have a lot of experiences to be had. And I feel like

everybody is a different experience and it's a lot of fun to figure out what people are like." Karen 30 further proposes that hooking up with a variety of people is a means of self-discovery and improvement, "You figure out more about yourself too because you find different things that you like and different things that you don't like so you're able to more accurately figure out what you're about." Patricia 38 and Karen 30 see great value in the ways a variety of hook up partners affords personal growth opportunities through interpersonal and sexual experiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I address the research questions: How do adults engage in hooking up and what are their motivations for seeking a hook up? The data shows that participants in this study engage in different types of hook up styles that vary in ways based on their individual sexual interests and pursuits. Participants enjoyed one-night stands (ONS), fuck buddies (FB), with friends-with-benefits (FWB) being the more popular type of hook up.

I also explored the specific motivations participants claimed for hooking up and their responses to the motivations that are commonly associated with hooking up. Overwhelmingly, the pursuit of sexual pleasure and gratification was the primary motivation to hook up for every adult in this study. Alcohol and social pressure are mainstays of hook up culture for college students (Wade and Heldman 2012; Kalish and Kimmel 2011; Anderson and Sorenson 2006). Adults in this study also reported using alcohol and drugs, but as I demonstrated they served different functions as opposed to college age adults. Although participants may drink to relax, smooth social awkwardness, or enjoy the taste of alcohol, they report not needing to consume alcohol to enable them to hook up. Alcohol consumption was regulated by participants to maintain a sense of control in the hook up situation. Men limited drinking to ensure sexual

function, while women watching their consumption for safety and travel logistics. At the same time, both men and women participants reported using the enhancing effects of alcohol and/or drugs to achieve different sexual pleasures.

In addition, participants claim to feel more societal pressure to settle down than they do to hook up. Lastly, participants sought hooking up to experience sex with a variety of partners which offered new experiences and sexual situations that allow adults to learn about others and themselves. In the next two chapters, I will explore the outcomes participants experience as a result of hooking up.

Chapter 5

Outcomes

In this chapter, I examine the research question: What outcomes do adults experience from hooking up? I walk through the various hook up outcomes reported by study participants. Firstly, I look at how participants describe what constitutes positive and negative hook ups. From there, I investigate the outcome of developing a connection between hook up partners and subsequent influences of that connection. Lastly, I present participants' orgasm rates from a hook up and demonstrate how age and maturity play a significant gendered role in ease and control of orgasm compared to when they were younger.

Positive Hook ups

Unanimously, hooking up is a positive experience for the participants of this study:

Jack 34 "Oh universally positive in my experience. I don't think I've ever had a bad sexual experience with casual sex."

Maggie 37 "Definitely more positive for me"

Mary 38 "Yeah. Even when the sex wasn't good, at least it was a funny story."

Patricia 38 "It's typically positive. I've had--trying to think of how many I've had--I've only had one that ended up negative."

Maria 28 "It's a very positive thing for me."

While hooking up is typically a positive experience for participants, what manifests a positive hook up is based on if the needs or goals of the individual, within a given context, are achieved. As Christie 30 reiterates, "Everybody has that need and everybody has that want. Hooking up doesn't make me feel negative at all because it's a natural thing." Here, she confirms the notion that seeking out a hook up to get a need met is normal behavior and not to be viewed negatively. Below, other participants present various contexts that denote a positive

hook up experience, such as a new sexual experience, enjoyment of new partner, no commitment, and simple sexual pleasure.

Maggie 37 describes what a positive hook up experience entails:

I learned a lot, I had a really good time when it happened, I have a really good time when it happens. I tried things I wouldn't normally try, because you're a little bit freer from thinking what that person's going to think of me. Are they still going to like me if I'm into this kind of thing? You don't have to worry about that because if they don't like it, you're never going to see them again. Who cares?

She reports that a positive experience involves trying new sexual activities. However, it is also contingent on the delimited nature of a hook up, where Maggie 37 feels free from the burden of maintaining a good impression on her partner. In other words, a positive hook up consists of sexual exploration free from judgment.

For Kate 40, a positive hook up experience means she gets to enjoy the company of someone new, even when those partners are repeat, yet infrequent, hook ups:

It's fun to be with somebody new. That's the problem. When you first start, you're thinking am I just addicted to being with new people? That was a concern for me. I don't want to like someone new every two weeks. Then that's a thing too, when you have people who are regulars but you only see them once a month. That's why it's still new. In a way, it kind of stays new. It is fun to hook up with someone new. I like it.

As mentioned earlier, the desire for variety is a motivation for hooking up for many participants. Similarly, Kate 40 shows that the excitement of a new hook up partner can also be a rewarding positive experience. By the same token, Maggie 37 and Kate 40 share the idea of newness as a component of a positive hook up experience.

A positive hook up experience is also free from the commitment of a conventional relationship. Todd 28 presents his example of a positive hook up:

I wasn't looking for anything serious. So just that momentary connection and maybe one or two more times and staying the night with someone was great. But, beyond that

I wasn't looking for anything serious; so, then it was great.

Below, I show how the desire for connection is a significant outcome for participants in this study. For Todd 28, a positive hook up experience involves making a connection, but one that is mutually understood to be limited in expectations and obligations between hook up partners.

Lastly, a hook up may be deemed a positive experience with the achievement of sexual pleasure. Sarah 32 states that, "If I'm hooking up with somebody it's because I want to get laid and then I've achieved my goal. Then I'm like, sweet." Further, Carrie 37 urges that a positive experience includes a successful orgasm. As she says, "ends on a good note, which is like a good goodbye." Brandi 33 echoes these views by sharing, "I feel relieved, because I like to get off. I feel satiated depending on if it was a good experience or not." Sexual pleasure was positioned as a main motivation for participants seeking a hook up, so the successful fruition of that pursuit as a factor for positive hook up experience is a plausible and logical corollary. While these are only a few aspects of what makes a positive hook up experience, they help to organize the various other outcomes participants encounter from hooking up.

Negative Hook ups

As hook ups are positive experiences for the majority of the study participants, the interviewees posit that bad sex or a bad partner are the primary factors for a negative hook up experience. Just as a successful orgasm is key to a positive hook up, Mandy 34 argues that a lack of orgasm constitutes a bad hook up, "I would say if I don't get off, that would be negative. I like to take time; I like to enjoy it. So if that doesn't happen, that would be negative." If pleasure is the goal of a hook up and the goal is not achieved, one might liken the disappointment to a negative experience.

According to Jack 34, being uncomfortable or bad timing may contribute to bad sex:

A more close partner of mine and I have just had a bad time for other reasons. Like they were in physical discomfort, and it was one of those, "Should we keep going? Should we not keep going?" Those are the only times I've not enjoyed having sex or regretted having sex was when it just turned out to be it was a bad time to have sex and usually those are aborted, but it's usually okay to cancel this sex. It's not going well.

While still respectful to his hook up partner, Jack 34 finds having to bail out of sex to be a cause for a negative hook up experience. This may echo what Mandy 34 elicits as a negative component: disappointment or let down for not getting sexual pleasure. Interestingly, as this is an example of bad sex for Jack 34, the attention paid to his partner and willingness to stop and assess the sexual situation in light of his partner's discomfort is a noteworthy departure from the insular perspective and behavior of men reported in the literature.

A negative hook up experience may also consist of a bad partner or a misalignment of sexual goals. Arguably, a bad hook up partner is one that does not respect your boundaries and is overly aggressive. Jamie 35 shares her description of a pushy partner:

If somebody tried to cross one of those lines and I said no, and they kept going. If somebody tried to force themselves on me that but it gets to a certain kind of way that it's not a hook up, you know what I mean? But that is what would make it not positive.

For Jamie 35, a negative sexual experience with pushy or aggressive partner who ignores boundaries is not a hook up, but rather sexual assault. Even though this is a hypothetical scenario to describe a bad partner, the negative experience of such a situation has a far-reaching impact. While overly aggressive and pushing boundaries are descriptions often reserved for men, sometimes women can be aggressive and threatening as Edward 37 recalls:

I mean, one negative I can think about right now, the girl's on top of me and we were talking about--I don't remember what the context was--but something that she said but I said something back to her and she looks at me and goes, "Sleep with one eye open mother fucker." I'm like, "Oh, I'm not sleeping. You're out. Get the fuck out right now.

Edward 37 felt his hook up partner crossed a line with her threat, ending the sex immediately and demanding that she leave. Regardless of gender, threatening harm connotes a bad partner and definitely grounds for negative experience.

On the other hand, mismatching sexual energy or intentions can elicit negative feelings about a hook up. Tom 30 posits that:

Let's say I hook up with a really attractive looking girl. And she just like lays there like a dead fish and just takes it and then it's just like the most boring sex ever. I'd consider that a negative sexual experience.

This negative experience for Tom 30 is not necessarily that the sex is bad, but his inactive partner, although a consenting participant, is not matching his effort and energy in the activity. This is not to shame the partner for how they might enjoy sex, but perhaps the negative aspect for Tom 30 derives from the misalignment of sexual compartments.

For Christie 30, the change in demeanor and intention of a partner post-coitus elicits a negative response:

I don't like guys trying to play games like it's just annoying. So, even like hanging out, getting a hotel, having sex, and then [the guy says] "oh well it's the middle of the night but I should probably get to work. I'll go drop you off at home now." Even though we got a room for the night. That was a negative experience for me.

The switch in her partner's intentions results in a misalignment of expectation for Christie 30. She views this shift as the partner being manipulative or "playing game", which leads to a negative hook up experience.

Curiously, the factors that produce a negative hook up experience seemingly run counter to the main motivations and outcomes expressed by participants, namely the motivation for sexual pleasure and the desired outcome of a connection. For participants, bad sex is the

antithesis of sexual pleasure. Failing to meet that need or goal would make for a negative condition. Further, the elements of a bad partner, such as violating boundaries, threats of violence, and misaligned sexual goals, could be remedied, or outright avoided, when a deeper connection is made. In that, I explore participants desire for a connection with their hook up partner in the next section.

A Connection

A small few of the participants of this study hope their hook up progresses into a relationship. As Todd 32 proclaims, “Certainly, yes, to move into a relationship. Having been married, I know how great that is. So, I’m definitely looking for that again.” He desires for a conventional monogamous relationship to “come home and talk to an actual significant other about your day.” While Todd 32 is the only individual seeking monogamy, remaining relationship seekers hoped for non-monogamous arrangement. Liam 45 would ultimately like to have a polyamorous relationship with multiple women. For Karen 30, if the sex is really good, she would “really want it to turn into a relationship”, but not a closed (monogamous) relationship.

The remaining majority of participants of this study report they are not seeking any relationship out of a hook up. However, the same majority report that a main desired outcome is for some form of “connection”. Mandy 34 says, “Yes, I would like to develop connection with people, but I have zero desire to move in with somebody.” She elaborates by stating:

I’m not looking for a hugely deeply romantic relationship. I’m not looking at that now. A hook up is great and it’s wonderful and we can be friends and can do all the fun things together, but I don’t ever expect to call you my boyfriend.

The point here is that many participants draw a line at conventional relationships, while still enjoying the benefits of companionship. This further illustrates the popularity of the *Friends with Benefits* hook up type among respondents.

To advance this idea, Crystal 33 conveys that her ideal situation is “something more regular and something that is a friendship and being able to communicate and spend time together outside the bedroom...” As Crystal 33 continues:

JC: So you’re single and you’re hooking up because you’re bored. Why not do something else? Why hook up?

Crystal 33: I do lots of things. That’s the thing. I’m not bored because I don’t have anything to do. I’m a college student. I work in behavioral health. I have a ton of really amazing friends. I have my couples. I travel a lot. I have a lot of things to do so I’m not bored in that way. I’m bored in the way that I don’t have the kind of energy exchange that I want.

JC: How do you mean?

Crystal 33: How do I explain it? Let’s see. So maybe bored is not necessarily...

JC: How does hooking up help with this thing?

Crystal 33: Okay so you know when you’re in a relationship, you have the messaging that goes on between you and your partner, the phone calls, whatever you guys do, right? I’m bored without that cause I’m used to having some sort of...

JC: Communication.

Crystal 33: Yeah, communication.

JC: Some sort of connection.

Crystal 33: Yeah. So that part I’m bored because I don’t have that. So using the apps and using the dating stuff, it kind of fills up a little bit of that time that I wouldn’t normally be talking to anybody cause I can find people to talk to and kind of entertain me that way.

This connection being described is not necessarily a bridge into a relationship, but simply to enhance the experience. Crystal 33 explains that such a connection provides an avenue for communication that she feels is otherwise absent from a hook up.

Jeremy 37 doesn’t shy away from an intimate connection with a hook up:

Jeremy 37: I think human connection is fantastic, and I think...

JC: What’s fantastic?

Jeremy 37: Human connection, like there’s just nothing else like it. To be able to meet someone, talk with them, enjoy their company, get to know them, like be with them

intimately, explore them, see how they are, it's a very intimate thing. And I think humans, I imagine that we evolve this way. I think we evolved, like tribes that had a lot of open sexual stuff. We probably did a lot of community child-raising. I think we probably ended up doing that a lot, and I think it's because it's what we need as humans to feel good.

JC: And hooking up does that for you?

Jeremy 37: Yeah, it does. It just makes me, well also like I missed out on a lot of that too growing up. So it's exciting, it's fun to fuck around and see these things and do the things.

He argues that, even when sex is more open and freer, an emotional connection is at the heart of being human. He looks forward to seeing how those emotional connections made through hooking up will develop.

Leo 36, when asked about the link between connection and hooking up, claims that having an emotional tie to the person, even a small connection, makes the hook up more fun and more worthwhile:

JC: So you look for stuff beyond a superficial, physical—

Leo 36: Yeah, I like a little bit of—at least a base of emotional connection. So there's fun, there's that quirkiness.

JC: Does that connection drive your desire to hook up?

Leo 36: Yes.

JC: In a way?

Leo 36: Generally.

JC: Not—as an overall desire to hook up with people.

Leo 36: That, I think to me is a bigger factor than the physical attraction itself. If you're [connected]—it's fun. The back and forth. The teasing, the behavior, just the banter itself can be more fun than the physical attraction.

JC: While you have—you mentioned why you hook up is it's fun; you like to have this variety. Is that connection part of that drive to hook up?

Leo 36: Yes.

As Leo 36 describes, there are benefits to having a connection with a hook up partner beyond physical or sexual activity. The connection could be framed as a form of situational intimacy, not as a means to justify the hook up, but to augment the fun and pleasure. Moreover, Dario 41

believes connecting on an emotional level should be the goal of a hook up. According to him, an intimate connection allows for a better sexual experience:

Dario 41: I think when I go out with some of the girls that I meet, my intention's not to just have sex with them. I think mostly it's just to build a relationship or be a friend or whatever.

JC: To connect.

Dario 41: To connect and have fun. Here's the thing. Sex is so much better when the intimacy [transcends] superficial bullshit.

Dario 41 and the other participants above introduce the notion that a connection to your hook up partner makes the experience and sex better or more pleasurable. In the next section, I explore exactly how sex is better for study participants when they make that connection.

Connecting for Better Sex

While a main motivation for hooking up is that "sex is fun," many in this study claim that finding a connection enabled them to build a sense of trust and engage in activities that enhanced their hook up experience. For Laura 29, having a connection with one's hook up is a way to explore and learn about oneself and others, socially and sexually:

I used to be more comfortable sleeping with strangers, but frankly it's a little more "meh" to me now. I like learning about people. I think it makes a much better experience overall. As far as I'm concerned, meeting a person and getting to know them as a human is a lot more fun. Because if you can pick up on small details about a person, you can incorporate that into your sexual experience and make it more enjoyable.

Laura 29 posits that learning more about the person is part of the enjoyment and the details they provide can offer insights to enhancing the sexual experience with that individual.

When asked about how she felt about condoms, Sarah 32 suggests that establishing a connection with a partner helps her to feel more at ease when choosing whether to use protection:

Obviously unprotected sex is great too, but that is almost to me more of an emotional thing than a physical pleasure type thing. So, if I have that connection to somebody, then I'll do that with them but on an average basis, not going to happen.

Ultimately, trust is built, however expedited, when a connection is made. That trust may create a sense of security or familiarity. In Sarah's case, having an emotional connection lead to her feeling more comfortable in her decision to forgo barriered sex.

For others, trust or security through connection also creates opportunities for greater pleasure. Ashley 38 says, "I like to have more of an emotional connection there. I definitely like to hang out and chat afterwards or before. I like to cuddle. I like to have sleepovers. I like to go to lunch with those type of people. So, it's more of a real relationship." She finds pleasure in what a connection can provide outside of sex, which look more like intimate or relationship-ty activities.

Tyler 34 and Tracy 41 suggest having a trusting connection freed them to explore more adventurous sexual activities. Tyler 34 recounts a scenario that illustrates why having a connection in specific types of hookups is important for sexual activity:

In some cases, there's not a lot of negotiating that goes on. Like the one-night stand with the wedding, there was no negotiation. It was like we both had a couple of drinks, we're both worked up, we did some oral and we had sex. But in cases where it was a multiple night, a multiple time thing, that's when you kind of talk about things like what are you into or is there anything you want to do. I wouldn't really get into any alternative like any BDSM anything like that. Personally, I feel like it requires a better connection with somebody. There's got to be more trust involved, more development and knowledge of how the other person reacts or is okay with things. If it's like a hook up or a casual thing, it would pretty much just be sex in various forms and activity without branching into any lifestyle stuff.

Tyler 34 explains that having a connection to your hook up partner allows for greater negotiation of potential sexual activities and recognizing boundaries. He shows how the one-night stand had little connection and negotiation, which resulted in limited sexual activity. On-

going hook ups over time create space for conversations about sexual likes and dislikes. Tyler 34 also suggests that hook ups involving BDSM play require even more of connection to increase the level of trust and familiarity to engage in those activities. Likewise, Tracy 41 describes how having a trusting connection enables her to feel comfortable and relaxed so she can partake in different activities, as well as helping her achieve orgasm much easier:

To me maybe just getting good solid penetration and having a good time and laughing with somebody. I enjoy giving oral sex. So, maybe sometimes it's good just to have a cock in my mouth and get good penetration is satisfying for me. I don't necessarily have to cum every time I have sex. Now, if I'm really into you and we've vibing and it's there, there's a connection and I'm ready to kind of open up to you. Then you might be able to give me an orgasm. And I can have three. I can have an anal orgasm. I can have a clitoral orgasm. And I can have a G-spot orgasm. So, if I'm really comfortable with you, you can hit all those and that's usually when you have those times that it was off the charts.

Like Tracy 41, for other women in the study finding a connection with a hook up can increase pleasure and rate of orgasm. This connection can create a sense of comfort that enables a woman to achieve greater pleasure; as Ashley 38 affirms:

My orgasms are not vaginally based. Last week, I had an orgasm that had nothing to do with my genitals. I was just really vibing off these people. It was just an amazing pleasure moment. My brain was in the right spot and I just randomly had this huge orgasm. So, if you're comfortable and feeling sexy, I think as a woman you can have that.

In this context, Ashley 38 attended a "cuddle puddle" with both men and women, although it was not specifically sexual, she was able to achieve orgasm through non-genital touching and caressing from having initially built a connection with the participants. Similarly, Maria 28 finds that her likelihood of orgasm with men increases when she has made some sort of connection beyond just conversation:

I'm more dominant and I'm more about pleasing somebody versus them to me. Then it depends on what kind of connection we have as well. I don't need to be emotionally involved with them or be in love with them, but the more attracted I am to you for whatever that is—whether it's sexually, whether it's physically, whatever that entails—

then the more likely I am to orgasm with you, versus just like we'll have a short conversation, I might be feeling a little bit, then we go hook up, then it's just kind of like my "turn-on meter" is just at ten percent instead of fifty percent or eighty percent, kind of thing.

As the above evidence suggests, developing some form of a connection with a hook up partner results in a better sexual experience for the participants of this study. The better sexual experience can come from knowing more about the desires and proclivities of a potential partner or developing an increased sense of trust and provides more comfort to engage in more pleasurable sexual activities. Additionally, as with women participants, the connection with a hook up partner has a noticeable impact arousal and the likelihood of orgasm. I will go into greater detail regarding the orgasm rates and outcomes of participants below.

Hooking up to Make Friends

The main drive for almost all participants of this study when seeking out a connection, through hooking up, is simply to make friends. According to participants, hooking up is a great way to make friends. It is a social activity with a mutual goal in mind: pleasure. According to Melissa 51, "My ideal situation is a connection that has a lot of sex involved. A lot. Where also there is [compersion] and not jealousy. Because I'm very anti-judgmental." Compersion is the opposite of jealousy, where one gains pleasure or joy from knowing that one's partner is getting pleasure from someone else. In other words, it occurs when one partner is happy that the other partner had a good time with someone else. A hook up for Melissa 51 creates that connection and pleasure.

This is echoed by Jack 34 when he describes the evolution of his hookup as "a casual hookup that became a friend." For Jeremy 37, when seeking a hook up, intercourse may not necessarily be the goal, but he enjoys building a friendship:

I don't think it's a goal, I mean it's really nice, but if it doesn't happen it's still a nice night. It's still a good evening with a friend...I feel like when I go do these hook ups, I want to get to know them, I want to go out on a date and spend time with them and understand them and then have hot sex with them.

Just as previously mentioned that others enjoy the connection with their hook up partner, Jeremy 37 likes to view this connection as friendship, and not just a means of greater pleasure.

Similarly, when asked if she thinks about her hook ups afterward, Brandi 33 says she is not looking for a relationship but hopes a friendship develops:

Sometimes, which goes back to the idea that they are friends. I think that I hope they had a good day in class or hope they did this...If when we're hanging out and they talk about something coming up and hope that goes well. I check in and still talk to them. For me it's usually not the hit-it-and-quit-it rando.

Brandi 33's ideal friendship with a hook up consists of open communication about daily life, even when she is not in their presence.

For Mandy 34, her career and aspirations take up a significant amount of her time and energy, and she felt that a committed relationship would get in the way of her aspirations.

Ultimately, hooking up was a way of getting her needs met and making new friends. According to Mandy 34:

This year has kind of been breaking that for me and recognizing that relationships can be different. So at the beginning of the year, I was still, even though I wasn't looking for another husband, at the same time I had this traditional relationship pattern in my brain. And again, I was taking it slow, but it's like, okay, we're hooking up. Maybe we'll start seeing each other for things other than sex, and then maybe we'll hang out and maybe I'll spend the night at your place, and you can spend the night at my place, and eventually down the road or whatever I'll actually call you my boyfriend. [laughs] But now, no, because it's not what I want. Yes, I would like to develop a connection with people, but I have zero desire to move in with somebody. I don't know where I'm going to be living six months from now. Five years from now, I don't know. My career has always been super important to me and that takes precedence over any relationship I've been in and will continue to. And acknowledging that and recognizing it and recognizing that not everybody wants a wife, not every relationship has to lead that way. You can still be deep, and there can still be connection without that traditional kind of shell I guess or expectation that things will go somewhere. I am, what I want now is just to have really

good friends that I enjoy hanging out [with], that I can go on adventures with and we have sex sometimes, or maybe lots of times. I don't know, whatever. But life is better when you share it with people, and too, because part of what I want to do is explore [laughs] threesomes, and more people.

Mandy 34 describes the evolution of other her perspectives on relationships. Within a year, her goals of finding a traditional/conventional relationship have shifted in the wake of being hyper focused on her career and unclear where that will lead. Mandy 34 sees that deep connection is possible through a hook up and without the constraints of a traditional relationship structure.

Leo 36 furthers this notion that not only can hooking up be a way to form connections, but also that shared hook up experience is a way to make actual friends:

Friends with benefits where not only is it a sexually beneficial relationship, but we're also supportive as friends, like, "Hey, if you've got something going on in your life that I can help you with, let me help you. I'm actually your friend. Not just your fuck buddy." ... I had a lot of issues when I was younger. Too many things going on. I wasn't in an emotionally strong place as I am now. I have a better support system than I did. Now, people support the choices that I make. Actually, some of those are hook ups that ended up being—that turned into hooking up less and more friendship. They're friends and they're part of my support system. They support my decisions like, "Hey, this is not wrong. You're a good person and you're ethical about the things you're doing. You're okay. You don't need to. You're honest with the people you're engaging with. You're doing right by the people you're doing these things with so you're fine. You don't need to worry about it.

Leo 36 offers an interesting component to connection and friendship, when he seeks out someone to hook up with, he hopes to add the person to his social support network and have a connection that is mutually beneficial and supportive. Leo 36 claims that many of his hook ups have evolved into these types of friendships, even when the sexual connection no longer exists.

Orgasm

As presented previously, research indicates that there is a suggested orgasm gap between men and women when hooking up and having casual sex. Women report notably lower rates of orgasm compared to men during these encounters (Wade 2017, Armstrong et. al.

2012). The data of this study suggest the adults' orgasm rates within hooking up is slightly more complex. In that, both men and women reported high and low rates of orgasm during a hook up and casual sex. For example, Jamie 35, Leo 36, and Mandy 34 declares that their orgasm rate is 100%, where Karen 30, Jeremy 37, and Carrie 37 claim their rate is approximately 20-25% or less.

Study participants offer explanations and clarifications for their low orgasm rates. Carrie 37 links her low orgasm rate to a mainstay of a hook up: alcohol. "I think it's because some of the hook ups involve alcohol and even though I'm not drunk, alcohol still play a role in me not getting an orgasm because I just can't get there." Just as the male participants describe performance issues with alcohol consumption, Carrie 37 shares that alcohol often prevents her from reaching orgasm.

Other participants choose to purposefully limit their orgasms during a hook up. Mary 38 doesn't have issue achieving orgasm on her own, but she is less likely during hook:

So for me to do that [orgasm] with somebody, there's just got to be a comfort level there that maybe isn't. Honestly, hook ups for me are more about--pardon me, this is vulgar, but--I just want to get fucked. I just want to get fucked real hard and have my hair pulled. That's more what I'm out for. But it creates a bit of emotional distance just like, "You didn't give me anything." It's like, "No, I got from you. You didn't get from me." I know that is weird, but it keeps the distance for me.

To orgasm, Mary 38 needs a closer connection, but rather chooses to engage in more aggressive sexual activities during a hook up to maintain an emotional distance from her partner. Jeremy 37, on the other hand, actively chooses not to orgasm to prolong the pleasure of sex and the hook up:

I've got to the point where I can kind of sustain and go as long as I really want without cumming. But once I do cum, it's kind of like a downer, it tapers off...I like to wake up and have morning sex and we go brush out teeth and have some coffee and I'm going to

pound you on the couch. And then I'm like we're going to go watch a movie or watch a movie on the couch and I'm going to start feeling you up and have sex again. So, if I came during the first of that, like it wouldn't be as hard, it wouldn't be as good the next time, and the time after, and the time after. So, I've got to the point where I don't orgasm generally and with that it allows me to go extended amounts of time.

Jeremy 37's low rate of orgasm is not indicative of a low sex rate, but rather the opposite. By controlling his orgasm from one session to the next, he is able to extend sexual activities and thus the length of the hook up. Seemingly, this runs counter to the abundant reports of male-pleasure centered hook up expressed in the literature.

Interestingly, the high rates of orgasm for women and low rates for men are better understood in relationship to the change in ease of orgasm from when respondents were emerging adults to their age at time of the study. In the next section, I investigate how orgasm rates are gendered, in that women interviewees report an increased ease of orgasm with age and men claim a longer process for achieving orgasm with age.

Women

Getting out of your head

A major factor that women in this study attribute to the increased ease of orgasm, as they age, is learning to prevent or ignore obtrusive thoughts that distract them during sex or "Getting out of your own head". Brandi 33 describes what "being in your head" was like for her when she was younger, "Over evaluating what's going on as it's happening, rather than doing a replay later. It lessened my enjoyment. I was overanalyzing the whole time. I'm I doing this right? What's their opinion of what going on right now?" These obtrusive thoughts seemingly made Brandi 33 overly critical of her performance or focus on what her partner might be thinking, rather than how she was feeling and engaging with what was transpiring sexually.

Sarah 32 expands on this notion of “being in your head”/obtrusive thoughts by incorporating body image concerns:

When you’re young, you can be afraid to be even naked in front of somebody like, “Oh God, I look funny, or my boobs are sitting a weird way,” As an adult it's like, “I don't give a fuck.” You can focus more. I had a really hard time being in the moment and focusing on what's happening. That was my main problem. So, I've definitely gotten better at that as an adult. Versus when I was younger, I definitely would be even more in my head, and self-conscious, and concerned with, “Do I look good? “Do I sound good?” “Am I doing things right?” Versus now, it's just, “Are they doing things right?”

Sarah 32 explains when she was younger, she would fret over the way her body looked during sex, but as she got older those concerns dwindle and she is able to focus on the pleasure of the encounter. Ashley 38 shares the exact same sentiment:

I think I really cared more, when I was young, about how my body looked during sex. I don't care at all now. If someone is fucking me, I don't worry about how my body looks. They're in for it and I'm not going to try to lay a certain way or think “Oh, there's that fat roll there”. I just don't think about it anymore. As opposed to when I was younger, I was a lot more vain about it.

Both Sarah 32 and Ashley 38 do not directly allude to what enabled the transition away from self-critical, obtrusive thoughts, but their explanations strongly ascribe aging and maturity play a significant role in the process. I contend the link between age and “Getting out of your head”, also influences participants’ sex-positivity and overwhelmingly positive hook up experiences, particularly for the women of this study.

Knowing your body

Following in line with preventing or controlling obtrusive thoughts about their body, women participants associate the ease of orgasm with learning to connect with their bodies and understanding how to bring it pleasure. Tracy 41 says “You just learn how your body is and what works better. And you try things that don't work and then you try this, and it does work. And it's

just being comfortable with who you are and yourself.” For Tracy 41, orgasm is easier now than when she was younger, because she largely gained more experience and sexual awareness through exploring her body. This bodily exploration also brought on a greater sense of acceptance of her body and self.

Rian 40 shares a comparable perspective, “In my twenties and when I was married and trying to discover my sexuality, it was much more difficult, and I didn't feel the comfort or ease with my body that I do now. Now I feel almost a little bit too easy to please.” Like Tracy 41, through getting more comfortable with her body as she got older, Rian 40's difficulty to orgasm decreased almost entirely. To the point now, she claims that orgasm comes “too easy”.

Lastly, Maria 28 explains how getting to know your body through exploration helps to increase the pleasure you can achieve with a partner. A skill she speculates that needed to be developed when she was younger:

I can orgasm by myself. I don't need somebody else. So that alone is exploring my own body so that way if I know my own body myself, then I know how to direct somebody else. Then of course the more people that I sleep with, then the more I know how to navigate that. So, it's definitely a lot easier now than before, because before you might not know what you were doing. Kind of like stumbled along.

Body awareness, particularly sexual, is a pivotal component to increasing orgasm for the women of this study. Much like any tool, the more one uses it the more mastery one has over it. These participants demonstrate that with age and maturity, they gained more control and mastery over their bodies that enables a greater ease of orgasm. Additionally, with this mastery over their body, they are able to share this knowledge with a partner to help guide them towards even greater sexual pleasure.

Responsible for own orgasm

A concept that men are often taught early in their life, a number of women participants state as they got older, they learned to take responsibility for their own orgasm. Laura 29, while not long ago she was an emerging adult, she recognizes her own responsibility in achieving orgasms:

I think I might be slightly better now as a slightly older adult, just because you learn how to become more responsible for your own orgasm and where to find it yourself as opposed to hoping that your partner will do it.

Rather than relying presumptuously on the sexual prowess of a partner, Laura 29 posits that her ability to orgasm increased with the realization that she is the one responsible for her own pleasure. Seemingly, the final ingredient of taking responsibility for one's own orgasm, along with preventing obtrusive thoughts and bodily sexual awareness, is the introspective recipe for increase ease of orgasm was women age.

Empowerment

In line with an increase in orgasm, hooking up for women participants can be a source of empowerment by decamping from ascribed societal and gender norms. For them, empowerment arises from finding body autonomy and pleasure, reclaiming the self after the dissolution of a relationship, and breaking from daily routines. Firstly, Ashley 38 shares how she feels when she hooks up:

Empowered. Excited. I feel incredibly sexually empowered. It's really fun for me to know that that's something I can do...You know, I'm really well-liked and it just makes me feel more able to interact with people on a real level. Whether we're cuddling or fucking, I get to go out and have really super, super authentic experiences with whoever I'm interacting with. And so, it's neat...it's neat knowing that I can engage my world on an...appropriate level. Whether the appropriate level is friendship or fucking or just touching, I get to meet people where the energy is appropriate.

Empowerment, for Ashley 38, comes in the form of sexual freedom though seeking pleasure and having control in how she connects with others. She is able to dictate what is an

“appropriate level” connection for each person she meets, rather than being held to conventional standards of relationship formation and commitment. Similarly, after the dissolutions of a couple of marriages, Mary 38 finds hooking up empowering because she no longer must play the role of wife and endure the obligations that are carried within it:

Mary 38: Well, I’ve been divorced twice, and just—I’ve had a lot of fucking drama. A lot of it. My first husband was abusive. My second one had a drinking problem. I just realized that I was putting—I spent so much of my twenties putting shit on hold for the man in my life. So much time wasted doing that. And I loved [it]. Whatever. Like, I understand it, but at the same time I was like, “Okay. I need my life to be about me. My life cannot be defined around who I love. I don’t want a boyfriend. I want sex.” I want to feel wanted. I want all of that. But I don’t want someone. There were certain things about being a wife that I didn’t like. And I don’t know if it was their expectations or stuff that I had absorbed throughout my life. Probably a combination of both.

JC: Like a weird sense of obligation?

Mary 38: Of what I’m supposed to be. And of making myself smaller to fit their life and to be what they want. And I didn’t want that. I wanted to be big. I wanted to take up space. I wanted to do whatever the fuck I wanted to do, and I didn’t want anyone telling me what to do. I wanted to go out as late as I wanted. I wanted to not tell anyone where I was. I wanted to go take a weekend trip and not tell anybody I was doing it. I didn’t want to be accountable to anybody. I really just wanted to lean full into being as selfish as possible. To really find out what I want and don’t want and like and don’t like. Because I didn’t feel like a fully finished person.

JC: So how does hooking up enable you to do that?

Mary 38: I have all the fun, and there’s always something new, and I don’t get totally attached. If we don’t date, we don’t break up. It doesn’t have to get ugly. There doesn’t have to be any fighting. I’ve had more fighting than I ever needed or wanted. I don’t like it. I don’t want it. If we’re just cool, then it’s no big deal. No big deal. We never date, we don’t break up. There’s nothing to fight about. We’re not together. If I just casually ghost, no biggie. Nobody gets hurt. Nobody gets—nobody’s trying to rein me in or limit me. And it was very important to me to explore my own independence.

Mary 38 shows how the detached aspect of hooking up enables her to focus on herself and empowers her to seek out fulfillment that makes her feel more of a complete person. Through a hook up structure, Mary 38 can remain independent and free from the stress of a relationship, such as fighting and break ups.

Other participants find empowerment by having the opportunity to shake up the status quo or the mundane routines of adult life, even if it is temporary. Tracy 41 finds empowerment through one-night stands and her occasional fuck buddy, which provide a much-needed break from the stresses of being a single mother:

You get so stuck in having to constantly [be a mom]. The phone is always going and there's always somebody. And you always are needed for something, which is fine, that's how it should be. But when you're constantly going, "Nothing is mine." My phone is not mine; my tampons aren't mine...When there is one adult and three children, you really kind of lose your identity a little bit in being a fucking normal feminine woman who deserves to go out and fucking meet people and have happy hour on Fridays. You forget that. So, sometimes it's nice to go out so that when I go out that's kind of what I'm looking for. So, somebody can make me feel and appreciate that, that's usually when a conversation will start.

Being a mother of 3, Tracy 41 shares how many aspects of her life and identity are occupied by children. Like Mary 38, Tracy 41 feels a conventional relationship can add another person via for her attention and energy. Hooking up gives Tracy 41 the opportunity to feel like a woman and connection with other adults away from the pressures of children and a would-be relationship.

Men got better at sex

A common saying within the field of sexuality is that "Good lovers are made, not born." Just as portion of the women in this study indicate being more comfortable and familiar with their body as they age, this evidence submits that men also gain experience and learn to be more comfortable and familiar with women's bodies as they get older. As Christie 30 states, "The men I hook up with now have a lot more experience than when I was younger, so they know what they're doing." The sexual experience and knowledge gained by men enables them to be better sexual partners. Kate 40 also equates her ease of orgasm to having sex with more experienced men:

I think boys have gotten smarter, too. I think the internet helps. I do. I don't think people [initially] have the framework of how each other's bodies work. I think men are a little smarter in how to get a girl off now. Most guys, I don't have to say you're not doing it right. Most guys seem to get it right.

Kate 40 claims that the men she hooks up with have more knowledge about giving pleasure than men did when she was younger. She credits some of this knowledge to the internet, but this does not take away from her praise of men's increased prowess.

To further illustrate this point, Leo 36 conveys how his sexual habits have changed:

I definitely have more--definitely have better sex now than I did than when I was younger. I was going in for one thing. Get in and get out. And now it's more of an event. It's more about making the whole thing fun rather than just getting to an orgasm. It's having fun in between.

This change in Leo 36's sexual script illustrates the points made by Christie 30 and Rian 40.

When he was younger, his focus was singularly his own pleasure. However, as an older man, Leo 36 reports more and better sex by centering "fun", assumedly for all those evolved, rather than his selfish drive to orgasm. Whether it be through experience or study, it is time or age that helps the increased sexual prowess of men, which translates to ease and increase in orgasm for women. In the next section, I examine what men in the study express as other effects of age on orgasm.

Men

Many of the men in the study report a decrease in the ease of orgasm compared to when they were younger, specifically that it just takes more time. Mark 50 enjoys being able to sustain sexual activity longer than when he was younger:

I would say it takes longer now, but it's just as easy. I enjoy the fact that during normal, average get together, typical vaginal sex with the other woman, I have a pretty decent staying power now than compared to what I had when I was a kid.

The protracted window of time of initial arousal to orgasm manifests in a variety of ways. As described previously, Jeremy 37 actively chooses to refrain from orgasm to prolong his sexual encounters. Although a result of this conditioning, he does find achieving orgasm to be “harder and harder” over time. Along the same rationale, some men participants report the elongated time frame is due to an increase in stamina and bodily awareness. Tyler 34 states, “I wouldn't necessarily say it was more difficult. I have more experience and can go longer because I know what my body's doing than anything else.” Like women participants ease of orgasm through knowing their body, Tyler 34 describes an increase ability at controlling his orgasm as a result of the same bodily awareness.

The increase in stamina and time to orgasm is reportedly a product of desensitization through numerable sexual experiences. Dario 41 shows that orgasm can sometimes be difficult, requires that you “put in more work when you're in the later stage of life.” He goes on to suggest:

You just can't say, “Hey it's a vagina.” You've seen enough by the time you're this age. If you haven't...there are guys out there that probably don't have as much sex as other people. But I would like to think by the time you're in the later state of your life, it's a lot harder.

Here, he is suggesting that someone who has had a lot of sexual experiences may no longer be as easily aroused from simply seeing genitalia or breasts. Presumably, this is not to say that Dario 41 does not experience the same level of arousal as when he was younger, but that when one is older, arousal is a little more complex. Building on this idea, Jack 34 elucidates further on getting older exposes one to more stimuli which may result in a longer time to orgasm:

I think it's a physiological thing over time. It just takes more stimulation over time. There's probably desensitization. Over time, you have more and more sex and masturbate to varied kind of porn. So, it's probably pretty likely that it's not just a

physical desensitization over time. I wonder if it's almost like someone with a drug addiction, where once you're had this you need a harder hit, but not necessarily because your body's less receptive of that harder hit, but just for that experience to stand out and you need a harder hit. It's boring and hum drum without that harder hit of sex. I think that's what leads a lot of people to things like BDSM and hook up culture in the first place probably. It's probably a thrill for a lot of people.

Jack 34 likens the decrease of orgasm to being desensitized to conventional sexual stimuli, whether through experience or pornography. According to him, arousal requires more robust sexual stimuli over time. Jack 34 posits that perhaps this pursuit of new stimuli is what lead people to various kinks and alternative sexual proclivities, like BDSM and hooking up. Whatever the reason, be it choosing to prolong pleasure, increased bodily awareness, or desensitization, these are all factors that decrease the ease of orgasm as men age.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented outcomes of engaging in hooking up and casual sex reported by participants. Hooking up for these adults was purportedly an overall positive experience, particularly when the goal of sexual pleasure is achieved. Conversely, bad sex was the main catalyst for a negative hook up experience. Hooking up is also an avenue to making new connections. These connections enable individuals to form emotional attachments without the stresses of commitment. Having a connection with a hook up partner was also linked to better sex and enhanced pleasure. Further, for some the connection with a hook up or casual sex partner was seen as a friendship and means of expanding one's social and support networks. Lastly, I show how outcomes are gendered by exploring the orgasm rates of participants and the influence associated with the increase or decrease ease of orgasm, as well as a sense of empowerment experience from hooking up.

Chapter 6

Stigma and the Sexual Double Standard

This chapter examines the following research questions: 1) How do adult experience stigma from hooking up? 2) If so, how do they manage that stigma? 3) For those who actively seek hook-ups, do they adhere to the sexual double standard? Stigma or the fear of being stigmatized is a strong socializing force, particularly when it comes to sexual behavior. The different variants described by Pescosolido and Martin (2015) allow researchers to narrow the focus to a more precise context. Specifically, this study focused on how participants feel about *Perceived and Anticipated Stigma* (e.g., reputation concerns) and the strategies they employ (e.g., rejecting self-stigma, control of personal information, surrounding themselves with like-minded people) to negotiate the stigma of hooking up and casual sex.

Stigma Concerns

The sex-positive and sexually open adults who participated in this study are not ignorant of the negative consequences of stigma within the public sphere. As I will demonstrate later, although they may resist self-stigma and reputations ascribed by the people in their immediate environment, a number of interviewees voiced concerns about how their behavior might impact opportunities, such as employment, and others fretted over the potential impact of inaccurate information or disinformation regarding their behavior.

Loss of Opportunity

It is no secret that the risk of and concern about losing a job or career is a ubiquitous concern for many people in gender- and sexuality-based communities (i.e., LGBTQ, Poly, BDSM). For some employers, it seems the assumed “misalignment” of an employee’s sexual morality

carries more weight than job performance. This, in turn, forces employees to mask the potentially offending sides of their lives or personalities. Jack 34 worries about how his casual sex proclivities may impact opportunities later in life:

I'm worried of just being judged, being in a situation where I have some avenue closed off to me socially or careerwise. Not as much careerwise right now, I work in a union position where I could tell my boss about my sexual exploits all day long and it's not going to affect my career. But who knows, [in] five years I might be applying for work where that's not the case.

Mark 50 relates more immediate concerns about the potential loss of opportunities, "In my business world, I get nervous that people that I do business with might find out because that'll definitely impact my ability to score contracts and continue working." Liam 45, having reenlisted in the military, expresses the importance of discretion:

The people that I would be worried about are typically people that I don't allow any access to that part of my life too, like coworkers, other people in the military, because I did get out of military back in 2006. I was active duty for four years and then I was in the guard for six years. And I just recently, a few months ago, got back into the guard, so I'm officially back in the military now. So...

Conversely, Matt 36 is hesitant about the hassle of workplace gossip but is not overly alarmed by the potential consequences, "I don't necessarily want that professionally known, my professional career. I don't necessarily want everybody to know my private business, but I'm also not going to be broke up about it if they do. So no." Although the adults of this study are comfortable and accepting of their hook-up and casual sex behavior, they may feel hesitant to be cavalier about sharing this information with employers or coworkers out of concern for a loss of opportunities. Their sexual behavior may be easier to conceal than a sexuality that is a component of identity (i.e. LGBTQ), but may be no less stigmatized. In fact, those deemed promiscuous, regardless of sexual identity, often experience greater stigma than those with

identity-based sexualities (Bellis, Hughes, & Aston 2004)

Rumors

Rumors spread mis- or disinformation that can result in emotional and reputation damage. A portion of the adults in this study find rumors about their hook up and casual sex behavior to be vexing and work to address the issue head-on, rather than letting rumors spread unchecked. Edward 37 is no stranger to rumors and how to handle them:

The only time I would have cared what somebody thinks of me about what I do, is if it's something negative or misunderstood. Now I care. "Come here. What do you think I did or something?" I'm like, ah, let me explain or talk to that person cause I don't want that around ... I don't like somebody talking shit like they're in control or whatever. Okay, one example. I was out with one of the girls hooking up and then this dude puts stuff [on social media] like, "Oh, this fucking player's out with my ex" or something like that. [So, I go straight to him] and I go, "What do you mean player? I knew her way before you motherfucker, what's the issue?" (mocking the guy's reply) "Well, you know, this and that." I go, "Yeah, (re-reading his message) I know you're talking about me cause she told me." Then he's like, "She said you were this dirty motherfucker." And I go, "What does that mean, dirty motherfucker? Cause I fucked all your friends? Like, [dude] I know I don't have any diseases, but I know you have herpes. So, what the fuck is your deal cause she told me." Things like that. Stuff like that, I'll call it out. But it's not even a narrative or nothing, I just don't like anyone thinking they're getting one over on me or running their fucking mouth. Or like thinking anything bad ... I'm not going to have that shit go around. If you want to get broken, I'll fucking call anybody out on that.

This rumor was based on assumptions made about Edwards 37's hook up and casual sex activities. Edward 37 felt the need to confront a jealous individual attempting to spread rumors about his STI status. Although Tom 30 is honest and forthright about his casual nature with new partners, he actively must correct rumors and misinformation that often stem from stigma and prejudice:

Some girls that I know are like, "You're a dog, you shouldn't do that" because I hooked up with a few of their friends, they're like, "Why would you do that to Katie" or something like that. I'm like, "Look, I even told her exactly what the deal was. She thought she could be the one that could change me. She was wrong, and that was her

fault. I told her exactly what I was about, and she didn't believe me and now that she saw that I'm the asshole."

In this instance, a previous hook up partner and her friends were unhappy with the way Tom 30 comports himself, although he reports being upfront and honest about intentions and behavior. Edward 37 and Tom 30 circumvent stigma with their approaches to dealing with rumors, either by confronting the accuser face to face or being upfront and transparent as possible. Although I can only speculate about the motivations of the rumor instigators, it is clear by these examples that they were attempting to shame or elicit self-shame in the participants for their hook up behavior.

Resistance to Shame and Stigma

The adults interviewed in this study are extremely sex positive and show a notable amount of resilience to *Perceived* and *Anticipated Stigma* from others. They are unabashed and accepting of their hook up and casual sex behavior and the same behavior in others, which translates into a resistance to self-stigma or -shaming. As clearly described by Liam 45, "I don't feel negative in any way. I mean I've always been a pretty sex-positive person, and I don't have a lot of the guilt that a lot of people in our society have when it comes to casual sex or sex in general." Similarly, Sarah 28 reaffirms her comfort in hooking up,

"I feel fine. Because I already made that decision to go forward, so I mean people make mistakes all the time. I've never actually walked away from somebody where I cried myself to sleep or was like, "I never should've hooked up with them" or anything along those lines."

Sarah 28, like many participants of this study, has a sense of accountability as a component of her sex-positivity, which translates into ownership of her behavior and the outcomes. As I explain below, participants also demonstrate resistance to shame and self-stigma with feelings

of empowerment through acceptance of their hook up proclivities and by suggesting that one's age might play a role in self-perception and shame.

Empowerment

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, many adults in this study find their hook up and casual sex behavior to be empowering. This sense of empowerment is also a form of resistance to self-stigma and -shaming, particularly for the women in this study. Melissa 51 does not hide from potential negative labels, "I am that person, and this is the way I feel about it. You can't be slut-shamed if you're not ashamed of being a slut, and I'm not." Rian 40 expresses how she actively works through feelings of shame:

I have to consciously talk myself out of shaming. I have to have conversations with myself where I say, "This is okay, you're not bad, this isn't gross. You're not desperate or pathetic. You're growing. You're expanding and opening yourself to things that are fun and new and make you feel alive." I have to actively talk myself out of shaming myself or trying to make sex into something it isn't, like a relationship or something.

Rian 40 recognizes the perceived stigma surrounding hook up behavior, she engages in rational, positive self-talk to prevent the anticipated stigma and falling into a shame spiral regarding her hook up behavior. In doing so, she has done the work to empower herself against shame and stigma. On the other hand, Melissa 51 seems almost immune to shame by not seeing anything wrong with hooking up.

According to Jamie 35, empowerment comes from accepting who you are and pursuing what makes you happy:

In the most recent series of hook-ups that I've had, like after I got ghosted in July, so talking about every hook-up I've had since mid-July. This weekend I feel like Stella getting her groove back. Because I struggled so long and so hard to try to be someone that I wasn't just put myself in a box where monogamy was going to be the rule, or I needed to be in a relationship. I'm not that person. I don't think I'm ever going to be that person and I'm now finally accepting that I'm not that person. So, I have this sense of

empowerment every time I come home from a hook-up or kick someone out of my house. Because this is who I am.

Jamie 35 finds hooking up and casual sex aligns more with her self-perception than attempting to live within the hegemonic guidelines of a conventional monogamous lifestyle. She is empowered by exercising hook up behavior and, in a sense, resisting normative relationship structures. Similarly for Mary 38, finding empowerment through hooking up and casual sex was a way to work through the trauma and feelings of shame from a sexual assault,

Mary 38: No, but very specifically because—so my first year here, over winter break I went on a second date with a guy, and I got raped on that date. So, sex for me going forward after that was largely a process of sort of reclaiming my own space and my own body and my own choices, so it's largely been a very good thing for me. That's a big part of it, not being any shame to it or guilt to it. No, I'm...what's the word I want?

JC: Empowering?

Mary 38: Yeah! Because I'm going, "Okay. This is a thing I want, and this is a thing I'm going to do." And the further I go in that direction, the further I leave that event in the past. And the more it doesn't define what's ahead of me.

For these women, hooking up has become a way to find themselves or heal from past relationships. Their empowerment comes from self-acceptance through subverting social norms and expectations, while also being proactive in their own sexual gratification.

I'm getting too old for this \$%^&.

Many adults in this study report feeling less concerned with the opinions of others regarding their sexual behavior, especially as they grow older. Perhaps to some degree, caring less about how others see you and your sexual behavior is a mark of maturity or financial security. In the face of self-stigma and -shaming, adults participating in this study felt they were "too old" to have such concerns. Ashley 38 poignantly articulates this idea:

I think the older you get, the less shits you give. And I don't care what people think about me. I don't care what gossip is. Sometimes people try to come to me with gossip

or impressions and I just stop them and just let them know I just don't care. No, I'm 38 and the amount that it matters to me, how I fit into social norms, is pretty much zero.

For Ashley 38, age comes with a resistance to gossip and the concerns of others regarding how well she conforms to social norms. Karen 30 is no longer bothered by the opinions of other as she was at younger age, "No. I spent too much of my life worried about what people thought, so I used to be concerned about it, and I'm just very open with it now." Likewise, Patricia 38 explains how age and like-minded friends help one to understand the futility in worrying about reputation or stigma:

As I got older, I just don't care as much. I had a group of friends that were just freer people, and I was just like, "You know, none of this matters." [Laughing] None of it really matters, like who cares what other people think about what you do behind closed doors or even what you want to do in front of open doors. Who cares? So that kind of opened my eyes to a different mindset, and I realized that it was okay.

Age appears to play an important role in the impact of stigma, specifically how the opinions of others have a decreased impact on self-perception. Age also seems to influence greater sex-positivity and empowerment through self-acceptance of sexual behavior, particularly for women.

Sex Positivity through Transitions

For some participants, sex positivity and self-stigma resistance develop through transition and turning points in their adult lives. Sarah 32 recounts how she had to let go of the stigma she experienced from having a reputation as a young adult:

Probably more so back then. Especially coming out of the trauma of high school and being labeled the town whore and this and that before I was even experiencing any sort of sexual activity whatsoever. So, I feel like definitely that stigma carried over into my early twenties. I guess there were times when I did feel guilt a little bit about the sex I was having and the way I was living. Whereas now, I'm totally comfortable with myself.

For Sarah 32, getting older and transitioning into a different stage of adulthood is linked to being more sex positive and accepting of her sexual behavior. She no longer feels the shame and stigma associated with having a reputation in her youth.

Matt 36 shares how his perspective changed after growing up in a religious home and church community, which led to getting married young, and the difficulties with sex and confidence he experienced after the subsequent divorce:

So when I was younger, like I said, there was a lot of shame involved. And that kind of started going away after I got divorced. I started, because I was trying to convince myself that sex isn't bad, sex isn't bad. But I was also kind of like a, for a while I was a nice guy in the bedroom if that makes sense. And I mean nice guy, the term "douchebag," but try to be nice. I focus all my attention on her and nothing on me. I felt like I was doing a good thing, but she felt like she was not satisfying me because I was trying to focus on satisfying her all the time, which is not a good thing I've learned over time. But recently it's become like I'm much more confident in myself now than I was back then. I don't have any regrets or anything when I do that, because I definitely try not to, but I don't have sex that I don't think is okay. Like I'm not going out to have sex with somebody who's not okay with it. So it's completely mutual.

As Matt 36 describes that although he was married, he continued to harbor a sex-negative perspective due to his religious upbringing. It seemed there was a sexual disconnect between Matt 36 and his wife, which led to marital dissatisfaction. After his divorce, Matt 36 gained a greater sense of control and wherewithal in the sex he was having, which led to greater sexual confidence.

Maggie 37 describes her transition from high school to college and ends with how she now feels about the opinions of others. The transition from an individual's parents' home to college can bring new and exciting experiences but is also a time of great uncertainty:

So as a teenager, even going through college, probably up until I was like thirty, a lot of who I was and the value I gave myself as a person were based on if I had a boyfriend. Especially in high school. Did I have a boyfriend, well, was I pretty enough then to have a boyfriend? Was I not fun enough, was I not smart enough to have a boyfriend, was that

it? And then that evolved obviously, you learn a little bit more. Your eyes get opened up a little bit more. Coming from farm country California, and then into Las Vegas. That was my transition. So, I went to a community college in California. We had a football team, that was about it. I was in FFA. We have dairies, and that's not to say things didn't happen. Obviously, they did, kids will find a way. But the transition then from college to UNLV and I went into the Greek culture, and so part of it was I didn't know anybody, and I wanted to have kind of a fast resource for meeting people. And I came to UNLV when I was twenty-one, so I didn't really start drinking until I was twenty-one, so then again I have like five years to make up for. Well then, a lot of your confidence comes from alcohol. Not necessarily from yourself. So then you still doubt yourself. Maybe he thinks my friend is prettier. Or maybe he would rather be with my friend. And now it's just a matter of either you want me or you don't. Because frankly either I want you or I don't. That goes both ways. And if you don't, it doesn't really matter. A, someone else does; B, your opinion doesn't matter in the long run. Your opinion doesn't change anything about who I am. Whether you're here or not. So being able to kind of let go of that.

These stories demonstrate how participants' self-perceptions change over the years and lend evidence to, not only how age impacts stigma, but also how transitions over the life course shape how individuals see and accept their developing sexual behavior and morality.

Stigma Management

In addition to resisting self-stigma, many study participants reported other strategies employed to reduce or avoid stigma from hooking up and casual sex. As mentioned previously, those who actively hook up are not immune to or delusional about the existence and consequences of public stigma around hooking up and casual sex; this is made clear by the concerns of loss of opportunity and of damaging rumors. However, some choose to simply ignore the stigma or even find empowerment in the face of it. Others utilize mechanisms and strategies to prevent or circumvent the potential friction that can surface from the misunderstanding or misalignment of sexual openness.

Control of Information

The issue is not that of managing tension generated during social contacts, but rather that of managing information about his failing. To display or not to display; to tell or not

to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where. (Goffman 1963 p42)

As with those who reported being concerned about the loss of opportunity and of rumors, there is significant attention paid by participants in this study to discretion and control of personal and sexual information. While he is not ashamed of his behavior, Tyler 34 is cautious about sharing information or being overt regarding his sexual activities with his group of close friends to avoid making them uncomfortable:

Yeah. We don't really talk about any type of non-game related stuff generally. That's kind of the thing that binds us as friends is [DnD] every week and [WarHammer] or whatever. But I want to say it almost makes them uncomfortable. I don't want to say uncomfortable, but there was a point in time where one of my exes...she was really into service and wanted to serve my friends snacks and drinks and stuff, but also mess with me by wearing skimpy outfits while she's doing it. I think that made them a little uncomfortable. Just really hot so I don't know if the whole situation made them...it's hard to tell. I think it's cause some of my friends are definitely less sexually active than I have been. So maybe they're not used to coping with those feelings of whatever.

Tyler 34 demonstrates that controlling information about one's sexual behavior among specific people is a strategy used to save face and prevent the unnecessary burden of others having to deal with or process one's behavior, particularly when previous interactions with those individuals would suggest one is likely to encounter difficulty. Sometimes, ignorance is bliss.

Kate 40 suggests that it is best that some people not know to avoid the hassle:

I don't feel like I have to justify what I'm doing, so that's fine. But you do think of certain people where you think they would look down upon it, so in a way you would rather they just not know. Like my brother; he would not be able to wrap his mind around this. So it's just easier for him not to know. Even people at my kids' school, I can think of some of the teachers. Because my son has a super nice kindergarten teacher. Where my older one that I still like, she's super sweet, but she's super Mormon. I think, Oh, if she knew I was doing this, she'd be despondent. But I like her a lot. So I feel for her it's just not good.

Kate 40 actively chooses not to be open about her hook up behavior to spare the feelings of people close to her, while also preventing those individuals having a negative perception of her. To reiterate, participants' decisions to control information are not made out of shame about their hook up and casual sex behavior, but as mechanisms of avoidance and prevention. Brandi 33 reaffirms this point by stating, "I typically don't share my business and I don't really care about what other people think of me anyway. I do what I do because I enjoy it." It is possible that study participants have an advantage, compared to college student/emerging adults, in controlling information about their hook up behavior by being in less proximity to peers, which results in having little to no surveillance of their daily activities.

"I get by with a little help from my friends."

Study participants also discuss surrounding themselves with like-minded people as a mechanism for mitigating stigma. When asked if they would be friends with someone who hooked up or had casual sex, every respondent enthusiastically said, "Yes," and the vast majority followed up to say that they are, in fact, friends with other individuals that engage in hooking up. Participants demonstrate how surrounding oneself with like-minded or supportive people can provide a buffer between public stigma and the individual. Laura 29 describes how her friends view her behavior, "Encouraging. Very encouraging. Most of my friends are like, 'That sounds awesome. Did you try this?' That's my friend circle." Similarly, Ashley 38 also finds encouragement from her friends, as well as support:

I kind of look for ways to bring it up if I get the sense that someone else is sexual. I like having those conversations with people. So, I have some friends that are also sexual, and we get together and swap experiences. Some are girls. Some are guys. It's fun. A few days ago, I was sitting in the back of a car with four other women, and we just spent hours and hours comparing all of our sexual experiences and conceptions ... it was really

fun. I feel when we talk about it with each other we empower each other more to normalize it and make it okay. I definitely don't hide it, at all.

By having friends with which she can openly discuss hooking up and other sexual topics, Ashley 38 is able to normalize the behavior and decrease the stigma around it.

Leo 36 shares that when he was younger, he worried about how people close to him would view his hook up behavior. However, now that he is older, Leo 36 performs a sort of assessment to determine their utility and importance in his life and whether they will be people he can rely on:

I realized—again—it's that the people who are in my corner who continue to be in my corner. The other ones, what are you in my life? Where are you going to be? What kind of power am I going to allow you to have over me? Think about it. What impact do you have in my life? What does that mean to me? And you just kind of compartmentalize. See where the base of that lies. And most of my base lies in a good support system.

Leo 36 chooses individuals who he can add to his support system and most of those people share his open perspective on sex and hooking up. Likewise, Mark 50 finds support from like-minded individuals who share the same interests. Mark 50 is married, but also in the swinger lifestyle, like many of his friends, "Probably half of my friends are either in the Lifestyle or know. They're supportive, but they're not judgmental. They don't say, 'What the hell are you doing?' 'It's stupid.' 'Stop doing that.' I don't really hear that from any of my friends."

Conversely, for Maria 28, friends and others around her do not have to share the same sexual interests, as long as they are supportive:

They don't have to be into the lifestyle that I am. They don't have to be into anything, but if they are judgmental and they don't like it in that type of way, then I don't want any association with you. You don't have to hook up with [women]; you don't have to be in the kink community; you don't have to be open to open relationships; you don't have to do any of that. That's not fair for me to judge unto you just like you to judge unto me. But if you do that then, I'm not a part of it.

Maria 28, along with the other participants, shows how surrounding oneself with like-minded people can offset the impact of stigma. Like-minded individuals do not have to engage in similar behaviors, but as long as they maintain a nonjudgmental attitude the connection can feel encouraging and supportive.

Sexual Double Standard

Egalitarian Hooking Up

Given that most of the participants in this study surround themselves with like-minded people, including friends that engage in the same hook up behavior, they also demonstrate a low adherence or no adherence to the sexual double standard. Many participants share staunch egalitarian perspectives. However, as with anticipated stigma, the participants of this study are not oblivious to the sexual double standard, as Melissa 51 explains:

I think women are so ashamed and like my friend who hasn't had sex in three years because she doesn't feel like she can. A lot of women feel like "if I like sex that means I'm a slut or a whore or whatever." Whatever stupid shitty word that you want to place on people, so yeah, I think there's such a double standard and it's sad.

A majority of the participants in this study believe that both men and women should be able to hook up, equally and without judgment. For example, Martin 27 says, "I'm completely fine with it. It's the same opinion I have with men. Do it because that's what you want to do. That's what makes you happy." Similarly, for Brandi 33, sex is a need to be fulfilled for everyone:

For me it doesn't matter, gender. You're a person who wants to have sex. You're gonna go look for it. It's what you do. You're hungry, you're gonna go find some food. You have sexual need, you're gonna go find it and you're gonna satisfy it.

Martin 27 and Brandi 33 suggest that both men and women are free to be proactive in their pursuit of sexual pleasure and hooking up. Further, sex is a basic need and if it makes one happy

to seek it thought hooking up, then it should not be an issue. Tyler 34 also does not judge men and women, but urges people to be safe:

JC: What's your opinion of women who actively seek out hooking up?

Tyler: More power to them. I've probably said it a million times, but I'm not here to judge anybody. There's no slut shaming. Dude, get your rocks off. If it makes you happy, go for it. Clarify. If it makes you happy and doesn't hurt anyone else, go for it. That's my philosophy for basically everything. If it's not impacting anyone else's safety or if I'm not making [someone] else uncomfortable directly, have fun.

JC: What about men who actively seek out hooking up?

Tyler: Same. It's a judgement-free zone. Do what you want to do, as long as you're not cheating on somebody or having risky behaviors, I guess. Go for it.

Tyler 34 presents a similar positive view as Martin 27 and Brandi 33, that men and women should be free to hook up without being slut-shamed or judged. He adds the pragmatic caveat of not hurting anyone and being as safe as possible in the process. Here, meaning not hurting anyone emotionally by cheating or violating a boundary and as assessing "risk" to STI's or pregnancy.

Overall, participants of this study show no adherence to the sexual double standard, finding no moral incongruency on hooking up for men and women. This perspective runs counter to the hegemonic sexual double standard in society, which consists of an imbalance of sexual freedom and autonomy that advantages men and stigmatized women. Participants position the pursuit of pleasure and happiness in the forefront for each individual equally and argue that everyone should be free from judgment.

Enthusiastic Support of Women

Concomitant with no adherences to the sexual double standard, both men and women participants shared overwhelming support and encouragement for women who hook up. Some participants view this as normal behavior. Dario 41 says, "I think a woman that's going out to

find a companion for sex is perfectly natural and healthy.” Others believe women who seek hook ups should be celebrated, such as Rian 40, “I think, ‘Get yours, sister,’ and I’m proud for people who outwardly just say what they want.” Ashley 38 agrees, “I think they’re rad. I love it. I know so many women this age who just have totally owned that they want to live their own life. They get to have these amazing physical experiences.” According to participants, both men and women, hooking up is a healthy and positive behavior for women.

Interestingly, as with Dario 41 above, some of the most supportive voices came from men. Jack 50 finds women who hook up to be empowered and sexy:

I think of them as empowered, I think of them as in control of themselves. They know what they want and they know what they’re after. I have a lot of respect for somebody who, because I know the societal stigma against women being willing to hook up, I think it takes a huge amount of balls to be. In fact I find that very attractive, when there is a woman who’s very much into...You know, it’s almost like a sexual aggression thing, which is a thing that I find very, very alluring.

Jack 50 acknowledges the stigma associated with women being sexually proactive and hooking up. He contends that women who do so display power and control, which he finds empowering and attractive. Liam 45 is equally supportive of women hooking up and has never understood why men adhere to the sexual double standard, especially when their goals are to have sex with women. He proclaims:

I’ve always tried to get across to women that they should be able to act the same way that men do and not feel guilty or ashamed about it. I mean, that’s a lot of what you see is so many men that want to give women a hard time for the same things they want to do. It’s self-defeating.

Here, Liam 45 seemingly offers advice to both women and men, by encouraging women who want to hook up and arguing that men should also support women’s sexual autonomy,

especially if the men also enjoy hooking up. If men want to hook up with women, but then stigmatize and shame them for wanting to engage in and enjoy activity, it doesn't make sense and men are only hurting your chances of hooking up.

It is clear that study participants go above just not adhering to the sexual double standard by being high supportive of women who seek out hook ups. Participants seem to understand the hypocrisy of the SDS in relationship to the sexual endeavors of men. However, beyond vested interest of male participants in the sexual openness of women, most participants maintain that women hooking up is normal, healthy, and empowering.

Men: Don't be a predator

The sexual double standard doesn't typically apply to men, a fact that clearly affects the attitudes of the interviewees. However, men are not given carte blanche in their hook up behavior. According to a fair number of interviewees, actively seeking hookups is fine, as long one is not a "predator" about it. Ashley 38 indicates that predators use alcohol or drugs to get women to hook up with them:

So, the thing about that is avoiding the predatory vibe. I definitely know guys who are out seeking hookups. They go to a bar. They're trying to get women drunk so they can hook up with them. That really pisses me off, because if you have to get someone drunk to lower their defenses to fuck them, you'd come off as a predator to me. As long as the person hooking up isn't trying to alter the other person's ability to make a good choice in that moment, I don't have an issue with it. I have big issues with guys pushing drinks on girls because they want to hook up with them.

Clint 47 also dislikes predatory men, but he differentiates between men who are bluntly straightforward and men who just give off a difficult-to-explain predatory aura. Enter the "fuckboy":

I don't like predators. There are some guys that I see as predators. There's one guy I saw that I thought was a predator, but then I got to know him and he's not, but he's just very

prolific and, you know, he's very frank like me. But there's another guy, I usually see him when there's a girl that's new in town, or something like that. He kind of zooms in. I have kind of a distaste for him, and I'm like, "I don't fucking trust that guy," you know, there's a vibe. And I talked to this other guy, and he's like, "Oh, no he's a predator." He said, "I knew him before all of this stuff, and yeah, I've seen him do that kind of stuff." It's not like a dangerous illegal kind of thing, but he knows what hell he's doing...like a fuckboy.

For Mary 38, a predator is someone that uses emotional manipulation tactics to hook up and tries to gaslight the hook up partner about the manipulated nature of the relationship:

I mean, I think I have no problem with a man who just wants to hook up so long as he's not a complete douchebag about it. So long as he isn't leading anybody on. So long as there's no, "Ooh, let me start doing girlfriend things with you. Oh, you're not my girlfriend. How dare you." You started—what? Why am I the crazy one? So long as everybody's honest and mature about shit, I don't think there's a problem. So long as people are nice and respectful.

As participants show no adherence to the SDS and an increased support for women who engage in hooking up, it appears they hold men who hook up to a higher standard of etiquette and transparency with their hook up intentions. Participants believe men should be free to seek out hook ups without judgment, just as they do women. However, they posit that predatory behavior should not be tolerated, such as using drugs or alcohol to purposefully lower the inhibitions, operating under false pretenses, or emotionally manipulating a potential hook up partner. Although with a little introspection and wherewithal these behaviors can be avoided, Clint 47 suggests, there is an ill-favored vibe or uneasy feeling that people get when they are around a person they deem as a predator who is typically marred with distrust and apprehension.

Conclusion

According to this study, adults who actively engage in hooking up and casual sex experience and negotiate stigma uniquely. Their sex-positive perspective and mature age

contribute to an active resistance to self-stigma and shame. I recognized a few mitigating strategies that these adults incorporate to prevent and circumvent stigma: controlling information about their hook up behavior and surrounding themselves with like-minded, supportive people. These stigma-management strategies are used to assuage concerns over the potential loss of opportunities, harmful disinformation, and rumors about their hooking up and casual sex behavior. Additionally, I showed how the adults in this study do not adhere to the sexual double standard and, conversely, are encouraging to women who actively seek out hookups.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This dissertation is an exploratory look into the hooking up and casual sex behaviors, attitudes, and experiences of adults. As most of the existing scholarship on hooking up and casual sex concentrates on emerging adults/college students (18–24 year olds), the attention of this study is given to the hooking up and casual sexual behaviors of adults once they graduate college or transition out of emerging adulthood. Focusing primarily on the college students/emerging adult, chidingly called “the science of sophomores”, the scholarship on hooking up and casual sex is limited in scope and depth with incomplete conceptualization and theorization of this behavior (Peterson & Merunka 2014; Henry 2008; Gordon et. al. 1986). To investigate this gap in the literature, I conducted a series of interviews with adults, ranging from 27 to 52 years old, who proactively engaged in hooking up and casual sex. These semi-structured interviews focused on the types of hooking up and the motivations of the participants to hook up, the subsequent outcomes that arise from hooking up, and how shame and stigma are experienced and negotiated as a result of their hooking up and casual sex experiences. Based on these interviews, I found evidence to suggest post-college/middle aged adults have a unique hooking up and casual sex experience, particularly when compared to the experiences of college age/emerging adults detailed through the literature, which I will go into great detail discuss below.

Findings

Chapter 4 is guided by addressing the research questions: What types of hook ups do they engage in? What are the motivations adults have for hooking up? The participants of this

study defined hooking up broadly in line with emerging adults and the hook-up styles found in Wentland and Reissing (2011, 2014). While all types of hooking up were engaged in, one-night stands, fuck buddies, and friends with benefits, the majority of study participants appeared to lean towards a friends-with-benefits (FWB) structure. As Martin 27 stated, "I'd say more friends with benefits. Where it's one of those, we're friends. We'll legitimately be friends but then we can also have sex. Having sex doesn't impact our friendship." In many cases, FWBs were developed from previous ONS or FB, as well as participants hooking up with established friends.

Participants show a clear preference for sexual pleasure as the primary motivation for hooking up. Unanimously, when asked why they hook up, participants astoundingly replied, "Sex is fun." Sexual pleasure was achieved through various sexual activities, such as kissing, heavy petting, and sexual intercourse. While sexual pleasure is possible through solo activities, the type of sexual pleasure that drives participants to hook up is that which is achieved with another person. Interestingly, the theme of sexual pleasure was an underlying component for other motivations, as well as most outcomes discussed below.

While Interviewees reported meeting hook ups at parties and bars, they were not explicitly motivated by location or by alcohol and drugs to engage in hook up or casual sex behavior. Importantly, participants claimed they did not require alcohol or drugs to lower hook up or sexual inhibitions. This runs counter to the dominate theme in the literature that reports college students experience high levels of social and peer pressure to drink (Kalish and Kimmel 2011, Bogle 2008) and subsequently associate hook up behavior with the consumption of alcohol (Wade 2017; Lyons et. al. 2014; Anderson and Sorenson 2006) My respondents reported different pressures and uses of alcohol. In fact, the decision whether or not to consume alcohol

or use drugs was often predicated on maximizing sexual pleasure in a hook up. Participants reported some drinking for social lubrication or overcoming some anxieties, but limited alcohol consumption to maintain a sense of control to feel comfortable in the hook up situation or to ensure their body functioned properly in a sexual scenario. Additionally, drugs were sometimes used with trusted partners to enhance the sexual experience.

Participants reported little to no social pressure to hook up, but fair amount of pressure to settle down and commit to a conventional relationship. The little pressure felt to hook up came as a sense of obligation to conform to sex-positive friend groups and communities to which they associated, namely in the pursuit of sexual pleasure. These findings, to a certain extent, are at odds with the literature, in that Wade and Heldman (2012) reported that student respondents felt obligated to engage in hook up culture or feared being left out of social groups. Similar to Bogle (2008), however, both our findings suggest respondents sometimes engage in hooking up to “fit in” with friends. In line with those sex-positive groups, many participants reported the desire for a variety of sexual partners as a motivation to hook up. A pursuit of a variety of partners offered participants an avenue to meet different sexual needs, explore sexual desire and self-improvement, breaking out of sexual ruts and routines.

The focus of Chapter 5 was discussing the outcomes participants experienced from hooking up. Indications of the underlying theme of sexual pleasure continued to permeate throughout the various outcomes. The factors that constituted a positive or negative outcome were impacted by the presence or absence of sexual pleasure, respectfully. A positive hook up experience was one that met the needs or achieved goals of the hook up partners. Essentially, the motivation or intention to hook up often influenced the outcome. For most participants, the

main motivation was sexual pleasure; thus, as long as sexual pleasure was achieved, the hook up was a positive experience. Conversely, the factors that shaped negative hook up experiences were those that failed to elicit sexual pleasure. Participants described how bad sex or a bad sexual partner were main elements of a negative hook up experience. The absence of orgasm or sexual pleasure was the definitive aspect of bad sex while a bad sexual partner was one whose sexual intentions or respect for boundaries misaligned with the participant. Additionally, a bad sexual partner was one with which participants were unable to form a connection.

Forming a connection with a hook up partner was a main outcome identified by participants and another key theme that underlies many other outcomes, as well as being linked to sexual pleasure. To reiterate, this connection was not in the pursuit of a conventional relationship, but a means to foster a link between the hook up partners. According to participants, a connection, however expedited or amatory, was a catalyst for achieving and enhancing sexual pleasure and to make friends. Through a connection, participants were able learn more about their partner and themselves, build trust with a partner, and felt freer to express and explore sexual desires, which all led to greater sexual pleasure, even an increased likelihood of orgasm for some. Additionally, participants identified these connections as a way to build friendships and social networks. A connection from a hook up that grows into a friendship aligns with participants key interest in engaging in a friends-with-benefits type of hook ups. A friendship built from a hook up might also be founded on shared principles of sex-positivity and sexual pleasure, which can contribute to creating a positive hook up experience.

Lastly, I discussed the orgasm rates reported by participants from hook up. Some participants stated having low orgasm rates, however in many cases this was due to choices

being made in the hook up. Alcohol was a factor for one participant and other participants actively resisted orgasm, either by engaging in sexual activity that did not elicit an orgasm or by learning to resist or prolong the orgasmic response. Overall, rates of orgasm in a hook up were impacted by gender and, another key theme that developed through the analysis, age or getting older. Women participants indicated higher rates and ease of orgasm in a hook up due to their older age. When comparing their rate and ease of orgasm to when they were younger, many women reported feeling less “in their head” during sex, which enabled them to focus on the pleasure in the moment. Women participants felt a greater sense of bodily autonomy and ownership over their pleasure. They expressed feeling less concerned on how their body looked during sex, less worry about the feeling or judgment from their partner, more attuned to their body, and overall empowered by being proactive in seek the sex and pleasure they want. Additionally, women of the study claim that as they got older, men got better at sex and being attentive to their sexual needs and pleasure. On that note, men participants claim a decrease in the ease of orgasm as they get older. This does not necessarily indicate a difficulty with orgasm, but rather an increase in control over their orgasmic response and an element of desensitization to arousal stimuli. Basically, for men participants, it takes a little more to get them going and they are able to last longer, which may be a contributing factor to their increase in sexual prowess as suggested by women participants.

Chapter 6 is a continuation on the outcomes of hooking up, concentrating on the research question: How do adults experience stigma from hooking up? I also looked at how stigma from hooking up is managed and whether adults who actively hook up adhere to the sexual double standard. Participants main stigma concerns associated with hooking up and

casual sex were loss of opportunities and rumors that propagate inaccuracies or disinformation. Interestingly, men participants voiced greater importance of these potential consequences, specifically in connection to their career and finding future hook up partners, respectfully. Some men were concerned with the negative perceptions of employers and coworkers about their sexual behavior and that those negative perceptions might lead to loss of career opportunities. Others worried that the spread of fallacious rumors and disinformation would impact their reputation or likelihood of finding hook ups in the future. For the most part, participants of this study did not seem overly concerned with the potential consequences of the stigma (either self-imposed or perceived and anticipated) of hooking up, instead offered insights on how they resist or manage stigma and shame.

The underlying themes that are integrated throughout the motivations and outcomes of hooking up also play a role in participants resistance to self-shame and stigma and their management of stigma. With sexual pleasure at the forefront of what drives participants to hook up, their concurrent sex positive inclinations situate hooking up as a positive activity, rather than a shameful or regretful act. Further, many participants report feeling empowered by embracing their hook up behavior and acceptance of their non-normative sexual proclivities. As Melissa 51 argues, “You can’t be slut-shamed, if you’re not ashamed of being a slut.” By prioritizing sexual pleasure, participants do not feel shame for their sexual and hook up behavior and gain a sense of empowerment in that self-acceptance, which seems to provide a level of insulation from stigma and its effects.

Participants indicated that the key underlying theme of age/getting older provided a place of resistance to stigma. Some suggest aging has accompanied a growing level of

indifference to the opinions of others regarding their sexual behavior. Other participants, both men and women recount becoming more sex positive and self-accepting of their sexual behavior is a result of a life transition. Some transitions are specific, like breaking away from their religious upbringing or dissolution of a major relationship, while others emphasize the progression of self-acceptance and sex positivity as one moves through the various age categories (i.e., late adolescence to emerging adulthood to adulthood) over the life course. This data demonstrates the influence age and life course on the malleability of personal perspectives (self-stigma) and social pressures (anticipated stigma).

Participants employ strategies to manage and reduce the potential negative effects of stigma. With their main concerns of loss of opportunity and rumors, some participants moderate with whom they share information about their hook up behavior. This control of information is not based on shame of their hook up behavior, but to prevent possible difficult or uncomfortable situations in one's career or personal life. In a way, participants' hook up behavior is like an activity or hobby that they know not everyone enjoys or understands, so they may only share information with those who also engage in or support the activity. In the same way, participants surround themselves with those like-minded people as another stigma management strategy. In doing so, they can be open about their behavior to others and in their environment. In fact, many participants report that most of their friends engage in hooking up and casual sex. When meeting new people, they assess the level of trust that can extend to the individual based on whether their sexual perspectives and proclivities align. Additionally, men and women of this study sought to surround themselves with like-minded people further

articulates the key underlying theme and desired outcome of forming a connection with a hook up partner.

Lastly, to round out the examination of sexual and hook up stigma, participants addressed their understanding and attitudes towards the sexual double standard (SDS). This is the idea that men are allotted more social freedom to be sexual with many partners, while women are chastised for the same behavior. In line with their sex positive perspectives on hooking up, participants demonstrated very low or no adherence to the SDS by expressing egalitarian support for men and women regarding their hooking up and casual sex behavior. In fact, both men and women participants reported tremendous support for women who actively engaged in hooking up, to the point of denouncing those who oppose the behavior, especially hypocritical men who hook up, but shame women for doing the same. What's more, participants asserted that men be held to a high standard of sexual decorum. Specifically, men who were seen as "predators" or exposing "predatory behavior" towards women were not to be tolerated.

Scholarly contributions

My main scholarly contribution is demonstrating how the hook up motivations and outcomes of adults, which center on sexual pleasure, connection, and aging, depart from the conventional hook up culture or high-risk sexual behavior frameworks associated with emerging adults and college students. Although my initial findings on the types of hook ups participants engaged in correspond with those presented in Wentland and Reissing (2011, 2014), the findings on the motivations and outcomes experienced by the adult of this study differ widely from that found in the preceding scholarship.

Firstly, the findings are at odds with the conventional hook up culture model that is often used to frame the experiences of college students and emerging adults. According to the hook up culture model, individuals are influenced, even pressured, to hook up by the party culture or atmosphere that is ubiquitous on university campuses or a part of college life, which includes going bars, heavy drinking, sports culture, and Greek Life (Wade 2017; Alison and Riseman 2014; Bogle 2008). Bogle (2008) adds that hook up culture is perpetuated through an illusory sense of familiarity built from being in close proximity to individuals of a similar demography. My findings show that the typical parameters of hook up culture do not influence the hook up behavior of the participants of this study. As older and post college adults, participants do not live on a college campus or engage in university life, so the party atmosphere and locational component of hook up culture is not applicable. However, my sample was collected from adults living in the Las Vegas metropolitan area, which has a commonly known reputation for being a party city. Although not directly referenced by my respondents, this may be an underlying factor in their hook up behavior and a possible future avenue to explore the casual sex and hook up scripts associated with vacation locations. Conversely, my sample consisted of residents of Las Vegas, who may be desensitized to the allure of the party scene of Sin City. Further, alcohol consumption is a prevalent component in hook up culture and main motivator for hook up among emerging adults (Kalish and Kimmel 2011; Paul 2006). For many emerging adult hook ups, alcohol is present 65-80% of the time (Garcia et. al. 2012). According to Fielder and Carey (2010), emerging adults may use alcohol to lower inhibitions permitting themselves to hook up or retroactively attribute drinking to their hook up behavior. My findings suggest that alcohol plays a different role in the hook up behavior for the adults in this study compared to emerging

adults. My findings show that participants do not require alcohol in their decision to hook up and some actively limit alcohol consumption to maintain a sense of control and safety in a hook up situation and ensure sexual function and performance.

My findings on sexual pleasure as the primary motivation to hook up for participants are consistent with previous research (Thorpe and Kuperberg 2021; Wade 2017; Lovejoy 2015; Lyons et. al. 2014; Garcie and Reiber 2008). Interestingly, as the authors of Lyons et. al. (2014) posit, “theoretical treatments that concentrate on the problematic nature of casual sex do not adequately reflect that sex is often a pleasurable activity” (88). Much of the corresponding literature that reports sexual pleasure as a main motivator often glosses over that aspect to problematize hooking up and casual sex, typically in relationship to imbalances between genders (Lovejoy 2015; Allison and Risman 2013; Armstrong et. al. 2010; Bogle 2008) or risk-taking behaviors such as heavy alcohol consumption (Wade 2017; Bersamin et. al. 2012; Kalish and Kimmel 2011). For example, in the chapter entitled “How sex became fun” in *American Hookup*, Wade (2017) initially describes how many respondents in another study and in her report wanting to have “fun” as a motivator for hooking up. Rather than framing “fun” as sexual pleasure as it is clearly implied, Wade uses the opportunity to situate “fun” as exercising freedom. The author then rebukes the idea of sexual freedom through hooking up, particularly for women, with a lengthy exposé on traditional gender norms and the sexual double standard. Contrastingly, I position sexual pleasure in the forefront of my analysis to show how this key underlying theme is pivotally integrated throughout the outcomes and other themes, equally for both men and women.

Participants sometimes consume alcohol and drugs to enhance the sexual experience, which might expand on Lewis et. al. (2012) which finds that alcohol is linked to greater positive affect related to a recent hook up. The authors postulate that positive affect is elicited by the effects of alcohol. My data offers a confounding variable by suggesting that perhaps the positive aspect hooking up is created by sexual pleasure that may be achieved or increased as a result of alcohol consumption.

Overall, my participants report positive outcomes to hooking up, which is in line with likelihood of positive outcomes and reactions found in the literature. Through various parameters in prior research, it is reported that both men and women overall have positive outcomes from hooking up, but women tend to report slightly less positive reactions to hooking up than men (Woerner and Abbey 2016; Snapp et. al. 2015; Lewis, et. al. 2012; Owen et. al. 2011). In that, the findings show how a positive or negative outcome of a hook up experience for participants is predicated on goal achievement, primarily the achievement of sexual pleasure; and a connection, which I will discuss more below. These findings are supported by Snapp et. al. (2015) who showed that positive outcomes can be seen when students, motivated by pleasure and self-affirmation, are successful when the goals of those motivations are achieved through a hook up.

Conversely, negative outcomes are linked to failure to achieve the goals established by hook up motivations. The main two negative outcomes for my participants were bad sex and/or a bad partner. Although these two are strongly intertwined, bad sex is basically linked the failure to achieve sexual pleasure and a bad partner is the failure to make a good connection in the hook up. Arguably, the negative hook up outcomes in the literature are also a result of failure of

motivational goal achievement. According to Uecker and Martinez (2017), negative hook up outcomes such as regret and negative affect/well-being, were often a result from coercion, prior disapproving views towards hooking up, and relationship goal misalignment, particularly for women. Vrangalova (2015) suggested that negative reactions and outcomes to hooking up are based on prior feelings about hooking up or worries over the social ramifications of others finding out about the individual's behavior. Further, one might assume, given prior disapproval towards hooking up, lack of desire to hook up, and concerns about if the hook up will develop into a relationship correspond with different motivations that might lead someone away from hooking up. Thus, the goal associated with the motivation to avoid hooking up was unsuccessful.

I make another contribution by demonstrating how a desire for a connection and aging are pivotal throughout the various outcomes and intertwined with sexual pleasure. Unlike emerging adults' hope for a relationship (Uecker and Martinez 2017; Lyons et. al. 2014; Bogle 2008), the connection desired by study participants is some variation of friendship. I show how a connection made to a hook up partner and getting older is associated with greater pleasure and likelihood of orgasm for women. I illustrate how connections are a means of building social networks, particularly as participants age and after a life transition. Simply put, this contribution is that as they age, post college and middle-aged adults may seek out hook ups in order to make friends. These findings are broadly in line with the research in Wrzus et. al (2013), which shows how personal social networks diminish after emerging adulthood, particularly after typical life path events. Moreover, hooking up and sexual pleasure as the catalyst for a connection is supported by Huxhold, Miche, and Schüz (2013) that suggests social networks can be built from

engaging in leisure activities. Further, Berdychevsky and Carr (2020) argue that sex can be framed as a leisure activity.

Gender Comparisons

With the main focus of my study being the unique examination of hook up behaviors and experiences of post-college and middle-aged adults and the majority of scholarship centering namely on college-age and emerging adults, the comparison of my findings to the literature demonstrates the influence of age and life course on motivations and outcomes. However, much of the literature attempts to identify differences between men and women in hook up behaviors and experiences. As I have shown, the major themes of pleasure, seeking a connection, and age were consistent for both men and women, which is consistent with previous research that found little to no effects of gender in their analysis (Lewis et. al. 2012; Owen et. al. 2010; Paul et. al. 2000). Although gender is not the direct purpose or analysis of this project, my findings did present some interesting comparisons.

While both men and women reported limited alcohol consumption as a means of maintaining a sense of control, key gendered differences are found in their appeal to safety. Some women participants expressed concerns about the potential bodily harms of “sloppy drunk sex” and lamented that drunk sex was often bad sex. For men, the concerns of alcohol consumption and safety were about preventing consent and boundary violations of intoxicated female partners. This is counter to the dominant narrative of the literature where alcohol consumption is a key component to hooking up, in which college students drink to excess (Blayney et. al. 2018; Wade 2017; Roberson et. al. 2015; Bersamin, et. al. 2012; King et. al. 2012; Kalish and Kimmel 2011). My finding suggests that, with age, both men and women become

more conscientious about the potential dangers of alcohol, particularly in combination with sex. In addition to age, the sex-positive nature of my respondents implies that as one gets more familiar with sex, there is less reliance on the disinhibiting effects of alcohol. This warrants further examination into intersection of age, sexual permissiveness, and alcohol.

Another notable gender difference that arises from my data is orgasm. Contrasting with the literature that argues a vast orgasm gap that benefits men in hook ups (Fredrick et.al. 2018; Armstrong 2012), women and men participants of this study report both high and low rates of orgasm. While there were some women participants who did report lower rates of orgasm, the key in these findings is that overall women reported greater or increased ease of orgasm than when they were in emerging adulthood. Whereas for men, there is a greater emphasis on controlling or prolonging orgasm.

For women of this study, orgasm is a vital indicator of a positive hook up experience, which in some cases is predicated on developing a connection with their hook up partner. In some ways the link, described by women participants of this study, between forming a connection to a hook up partner and increase orgasm supports the claims made by England and Ronen (2015) and Armstrong (2012; 2010) that women experience great rates of orgasm in a relationship. The connection formed with a hook up partner offers the same reassurance and comfort for women and increase non-penetrative focus on her pleasure.

The main ways orgasm increased for my women respondents is by letting go of anxieties and “getting out their own heads”, taking responsibility for their own orgasm, and getting to know their own bodies. This is consistent with Willis et. al. (2018) which indicated that women’s orgasm rates increased when women centered their own pleasure rather than succumbing to

the singular focus of their male partner's pleasure. Additionally, Vrangalova (2015) showed that sexual assertiveness was linked to greater sexual pleasure and positive hook up outcomes.

While some women participants report using alcohol to ease the social anxieties or bodily insecurities, overwhelmingly most women participants link the ease of these issues to age and maturity. In fact, age is an influential component to the ease of the forementioned issues for women regarding orgasm.

Conversely, while some men participants of the study reported high rates of orgasm, many express that they willful avoid or prolong orgasm to extend the sexual engagement. Essentially these participants focused on drawing out the sexual pleasure for both participants. At the same time, many women participants also reported that their higher orgasm rates were a result of increased sexual prowess of men, gained from experience and age. One explanation for this decentering of male pleasure and focus on the pleasure of women in hook ups can be attributed to participants' lack of adherence or complete rejection of the sexual double standard. As I demonstrated above, both women and men of this study share highly egalitarian, sex-positive attitudes, to the point to promoting and celebrating the sexual agency of women. Woman participants are less concerned about the potential judgment from their partners and social ramification from others. Men participants do not shame women for seeking out pleasure in a similar fashion as themselves and actively avoid engaging in public slut-shaming. By holding more egalitarian perspectives on the sexual agency of women and men, maximizing pleasure is centered for all hook up participants.

Implication of research

With the three key underlying themes in the data, sexual pleasure, connection, and aging, my research offers the initial stages of a new model for hook up behavior. This model rests upon theoretical components from social network theory, life course theory, and leisure studies. Hooking up and casual sex behavior has had very little exploration within these scholarly avenues, which may offer new insights to help broaden our understanding of this phenomenon. Additionally, this study clearly demonstrates that age and life course reduce the influence of conventional gender norms and sexual double standard, which hold significant implications for other sex and sexuality related areas of study.

Limitations and Reflexivity

The findings of this study are limited to the experiences and attitudes of the participants and not generalizable to any greater populations. With my sample predominantly white, straight and bisexual, middle class individuals, favoring women respondents, it is limited by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and class. The sample also consisted of sex-positive identified individuals, which may skew findings in the direction of normalizing hooking up and casual sex. Given the lack of hook up research on the sample age demographic, the exploratory and inductive nature of this study may be limited epistemologically. As the sole investigator, all data collection, data analysis, and interpretation are limited to my knowledge and skill.

Sexuality research is awash with suspicion and concern and must be performed with particular sensitivity. There is always debate whether the gender of the researcher will impact the data collected, particularly if the participant is of the opposite sex. To alleviate that issue I demonstrated that the purpose of this project is to present the stories and perceptions of the

interviewees, not to speak for them. At all points in this project, I was aware of my position as a large, masculine, cis-gender man and as a researcher. Particularly, in that while interviewing both men and women for this project, I understood that my size, gender, and status could impact the answers and responses I collected. It was important that I be reflexive regarding my interactions with participants and interpretations of their responses. Having conducted prior sex research and many years of experience within the field of sex education, I was able to maintain and project a non-judgmental attitude, as well as develop a professional and welcoming rapport when discussing sexual topics. I found that the word-of-mouth aspect of the sampling procedure established a level of confidence and security between participants and myself, particularly for the interviewees who were women. Essentially, I was given the validating “stamp of approval” from people they knew and trusted. Additionally, prior to the start of the interview, I made a point to mention that this project was from a sex positive perspective and that I identify as a non-monogamous person who also engages in hooking up/causal sex behavior. The word-of-mouth approach and personal self-disclosure seemed to put participants at ease and open an opportunity for them to share more sensitive and salacious personal information free from fear of judgment or ridicule.

Future of Hook up Research

Based on this study, there are several avenues I recommend for the future of hook up and casual sex research. Specifically, the dearth of data and scholarship on adult and middle-aged adult hook up behavior should be a rectifying focus. This clear absence shines a light on just how limited our understanding is of this behavior, especially when scholarship on emerging adults is the standard for social sentiment and policy. Moreover, future studies should examine

hook up behavior at the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality in relationship to post college and middle adulthood. My findings show the complexity of hooking up and casual which advocates for the need of wider theoretical framework, incorporating concepts from leisure studies, social network theory, and life course theory. Future scholarship on hooking up should adopt an unbiased or even sex-positive approach that does not initially problematize hooking up and casual sex. Additionally, further scholarship is needed to address the importance of sexual pleasure and gratification as a primary motivation for hooking up.

Appendix A

Preliminary Interview Schedule

- **What's your story?**
 - Where are you from?
 - How was your upbringing?
 - Can you tell me about your family?
 - Did your parents have conversations about sex with you?
 - What were your earliest sexual experiences?
 - How old were you?
 - Can you recall what activities you did?
 - What was your most memorable sexual experience?
 - What made it so memorable?
- **Hook up experiences (most recent and ongoing).**
 - How did you meet?
 - How often do you meet people like that?
 - What other ways have you met people to hook up with?
 - How does the hook up get set up?
 - Is there a plan? Who typically does the planning?
 - What sexual activities do you engage in?
 - Is the goal intercourse?
 - Are there any activities you don't do in a hook up? Why?
 - Did you drink or use any drugs during your most recent hook up?

- Do you typically partake in substances while hooking up?
 - Why? Or why not?
 - Did you use protection during your hook up?
 - Do you use other types of protection or contraception?
 - How often do you use protection?
 - Does your use change depending on your partner or frequency?
 - How do you feel about safe sex, in general?
 - What's your opinion on condoms?
- **Feelings about hooking up.**
 - How do you feel about yourself after hooking up?
 - Is hooking up typically a positive or negative experience?
 - Can you tell me about that?
 - How did you feel after your most recent hook up?
 - After you part ways from your hook up partner, what kind of thoughts do you have?
 - Do you think about the other person after a hook up?
 - Do you ever hope the hook up will evolve into something more?
 - Where would you like it to go?
 - Why do you hook up?
 - What type of hook ups do you engage in?
 - Do you ever feel pressure to hook up?
 - Societal or pressure from friends?

- **What is it like hooking up as a middle aged adult in today's society?**
 - Is it easier or more difficult? In what ways?
 - Do you worry what other people think about you hooking up?
 - Do your friends know you seek out hook ups?
 - What do they think about it?
 - Do you think middle-aged adult men and women seek out hooking up in equal frequency?
 - What's your opinion on (opposite sex as participant) who actively seek out hooking up?
 - (Same sex)
 - Would you be friends with someone who you knew hooked up a lot?
 - Would you hook up with someone you knew hooked up a lot?
 - Is there a "too much" when it comes to hooking up?
 - What does that look like to you?
 - Do you feel post-college/middle-aged adult men and women still play the "cat and mouse game/chased and chaser" in regard to sex and hooking up?
 - Tell me about your pleasure and sexual activity you have in a hook up?
 - How vocal are you about asking for what you want?
 - Do you orgasm during hook ups?
 - Is it easier or harder for you, compared to when you were younger?

- Do your partners orgasm during your hook ups?
 - For men: If you orgasm first, do you help your partner achieve orgasm after you?
- **Wrap up and closing**
 - Do you have any new thoughts or comments on any of the questions I asked?
 - Is there anything about your hooking up experience you wish I had asked?
 - Anything about hooking up, in general, you wished I had asked?
 - May I contact for a follow-up interview if new questions come up?
 - Is there anyone you know that you think would a good participant for this study?

Thank you for talking with me today and participating in this study.

Additional question:

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EDUCATION

Table with 3 columns: Year, Degree, and Chair/Institution. Rows include 2024 Ph.D. Sociology, University of Nevada Las Vegas; 2012 M.A. Sociology, University of Louisville; 2007 B.A. Psychology and Human Sexuality, Indiana University, Bloomington.

RESEACH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Table with 2 columns: Research Interests and Teaching Interests. Research interests include Political Sociology, Social Control and Regulation of sexual behavior, Mixed Methodologies. Teaching interests include Statistics and Thematic Analysis, Sexuality and Gender Studies, Introduction to Sociology.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

University of Nevada Las Vegas
Dissertation Research Project July 2018 – 2024
SEX IS FUN: A Study of Hook up Behaviors and Experiences of Post-College and Middle-Aged Adults
Committee Chair: Barb Brents, Phd

University of Louisville
Masters Thesis Research Project October 2011 – April 2012
Quantifying Promiscuity: Assessing Individual Attitudes on Sexual Behavior
Thesis advisor: Dr. Patricia Gagné

The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction, Indiana University
Senior Thesis Research Project August 2006 – April 2007
Men and Women’s Attitudes toward a Potential Partner’s Sexual History
Thesis advisor: Dr. Erick Janssen

Project: Mood, Sexual Arousal and Sexual Risk-Taking
Principle Researcher: Dr. Erick Janssen
Research Assistant May 2005 – May 2006

Project: Gender Differences in the Effects of Sexual Arousal on Attention and Perception
Principle Researcher: Dr. Erick Janssen
Research Assistant March 2005 – May 2005

SERVICE AND AFFILIATIONS

Indiana House of Representative Intern - Democratic Caucus	2015
Society for the Scientific Study of Sex (SSSS) Student Ambassador	2013-2014, 2011-2012
C. Wright Mills Sociology Club – UNLV Member	2013-2014 Founding
Sociology Graduate Student Association – University of Louisville	2010-2012

AWARDS AND HONORS

2021	Public Sociology Award. UNLV Department of Sociology
2011 of Sex	Outstanding Student Ambassador Award Society for the Scientific Study (SSSS) Annual Meeting 2011
2010 Annual double Partner's	Jules Delambre Student Paper contest – 1st Place Undergraduate Paper Meeting of Anthropologist and Sociologist of Kentucky, "The Sexual Standard Revisited: Men and Women's Attitudes toward a Potential Previous Sexual History"
2007 Indiana	Most Outstanding Senior Project Award Individualized Major Program, University. "The Sexual Double Standard Revisited: Men and Women's Attitudes toward a Potential Partner's Previous Sexual History."

POP SOCIOLOGY PUBLICATIONS

KNPR	April 2021	Guest Commentator
<i>Does A New Sex Revolution Beckon As The Pandemic Wanes?</i>		
<i>Sex Nerd Podcast</i>	2019-2021	Cohost
<i>Baking Naked</i> Patreon.com	Feb -Aug 2018	Cohost, Producer: 1 season, 12 episodes
<i>Daily Kos</i>	October 17, 2016	"Just Say "No" to a 3rd Party President...For Now"