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## ***Campus Climate on Hookup Culture Perceptions and Participation***

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### **Abstract**

In recent years there has been an increased curiosity in hookup culture among young adults, especially college students. This research is designed to examine the LaGrange College campus climate on hookup culture. The purpose of this study will be to compare students' perceptions of hookup culture and their participation in it. Scholars agree that there is no one specific definition of what a hookup is, so for this study, hooking up will be described as any intimate or sexual activity with someone that the participant was not in a committed relationship with. To examine this phenomenon, a survey will be given to randomly selected classes at a private, liberal arts college in Georgia. Responses will be examined to compare perceptions to participation in hookup culture. I expect to find that students believe their peers participate frequently in hookup culture. I also expect to find that, while they believe their peers participate frequently in hooking up, they don't participate in hooking up as frequently as believed. If students are participating as much as believed in hooking up, educational resources should be implemented to inform students about sexual health. If less students are participating than are perceived to be, then the social phenomenon of "hookup culture," could be determined to be a more recent stereotype created by society that may need to be addressed

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### **Introduction**

Hookup Culture has been a hot topic in recent years due to its unconventional nature. Hookup Culture put simply, is the thoughts and attitudes that surround a new dating culture in today's society. It is especially thought to be present on college campuses because students are perceived to be not participating in traditional dating practices. It is believed that many college students are having sexual activities with people outside of a committed relationship, going against what their parents and grandparents once believed to be normal dating culture. This research is designed to examine this new phenomenon and determine if hookup culture is prevalent on the LaGrange College campus or if it's a stereotype created by society and placed specifically on young adults.

### **Literature Review**

Hookup culture is a relatively new concept that has come to light in recent years, especially in the media. The emergence of hookup culture stems from the changing mentality around dating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The dating scene has evolved over the years, especially for young adults on college campuses. Instead of being in committed relationships, students are thought to be engaging in sexual activity with no commitment between the individuals participating. There isn't one universal definition of what a hookup is because the activities of hooking up vary depending on people's values and what they believe to be intimate behavior. For example, some may believe kissing someone who is not your significant other is a form of hooking up. There are some predictors of participation in, or not participating in hookup behaviors. Some of the predictors of hooking up include how one defines hooking up, alcohol use, drug use, prior engagement in hookups and social scripts. Predictors of not participating in hookup behaviors can be religiosity and having married parents.

Scholars agree that there is no true definition to what a hookup is. For example, some may describe it as simply kissing and touching while others describe it as strictly anal or vaginal sex. These definitions vary based on each individual's perception of hooking up. Lewis, Atkins, Blayney, Dent, and Kaysen (2013) found that there were three different explanations of a hookup. The first definition consists of any sexual act, from kissing to penetration. The second definition has a social and interpersonal aspect to hooking up, meaning that there is a lack of emotional involvement. The third definition describes hooking up as specific sexual activities. Olmstead, Anders, and Conrad (2017) also found differing meanings of hooking up. They also grouped beliefs into three categories, committers, flexibles, and rec reactioners. Committers believe that sexual activity are activities for people in committed relationships. This was the largest group for

this study, meaning more people believed that sexual activities have deep personal meaning and are reserved for people in committed relationships. They also found that this group consisted of more females than males. The next largest group they found were the flexibles. Flexibles describe sex in a variety of ways. They believe it can have meaning and be with a committed partner or it could just be for fun without commitment involved. The meaning for flexibles depended on the context of the relationship, whether it was with someone just for fun or with someone they are in a relationship with. The smallest of the three groups was the recreationers who also consisted of more men than women. This group believed that there was no meaning behind sex, that it was just an outlet for pleasure. How someone defines hooking up can ultimately influence whether or not they participate in hookup culture. There are also other factors that influence participation in hookup culture, along with how people define hooking up.

Why people participate in hookup culture is a main focus in hookup culture research. Researchers want to understand what factors influence one's decision to hookup or not to hookup. This doesn't solely depend on how people define hooking up, though how it's defined plays an important role in that decision-making process. Fielder, Walsh, Carey and Carey (2013) found that there are many predictors of casual sex encounters in college students. They found that women who participated more in alcohol and drug use were more likely to engage in hookups, as well as women who had prior engagement in hookups before college. They found that prior engagement in hookups before college was the most influential predictor of hookups in college. This is similar to Owen, Finchman, and Moore's (2010) findings that concluded that previous hookup experience and alcohol are predictors of hooking up. According to Fielder et al., another predictive factor of engaging in hookups are women who compare themselves to others. Women who compare themselves with others are more likely to engage in hookups because it is seen as a social norm. This is similar to Berntson, Hoffman, and Huff's (2014) research that highlighted social norms and the scripts that students tend to follow. They found that there is a new norm around dating culture and students are now following scripts that have been created around dating culture. They also found three groups of beliefs around hooking up like previous studies have, but they divided them into scripts. Similarly, these scripts consisted of relational, recreational and a combination of both. They found that social norms around hookup culture is also a predictor of hookup behavior. Those who believe it to be normal and expected are more likely to participate in hookups. While there are some predictors of participating in hookups, there are some predictors of not participating in hookups. While Berntson, Hoffman, and Huff (2014) did not find a connection between religion and hooking up. Fielder, Walsh, Carey, and Carey (2013) found that those who reported high levels of religiosity were less likely to engage in hookups, as well as people who have married parents.

While most research focuses on both college men and women, Olmstead, Pasley, and Finchman (2013) focused on men's sexual behavior. They found, like Fielder, Walsh, Carey and Carey, that college men are more likely to participate in hookups if they have previous hookup experience, are under the influence of alcohol, and have extraverted personalities. They found that most college men from their sample had engaged in at least one hookup during the semester. This is similar to other research that suggests that alcohol plays a role in hooking up behavior. Other research suggests that men who have permissive attitudes about sex are more likely to engage in hookup behavior (Danube, Vescio, and Davis 2014). They also found that men who endorse masculinity and men who have sexist attitudes about women's roles are correlated to engaging in hooking up (Danube et al. 2014). Men who supported traditional masculinity reported more hookup partners.

Media influences one's perceptions of society, along with other aspects of life. Monto and Carey (2014) examined if the portrayals of hooking up in the media reflected hookup culture in today's society. They wanted to examine if college students are hooking up as much as the media suggests they do. They found that older and younger people don't actually have many differences in sexual behavior. Younger people didn't report having more sexual partners than older people, but they were more likely to report casual sexual encounters with a friend or casual date. The main point of this research is that there isn't much difference between sexual behavior of younger and older adults. This finding suggests that sexual behavior isn't so much changing as much as perceptions of younger adults' sexual behavior. The perceptions society has towards younger adults' sexual behavior may have a lot to do with how the media portrays young adults, which tends to be in a way that shows young adults as being unable to commit to relationships. There has been a shift in the narrative surrounding dating culture in recent years, which can explain why younger adults report more casual sex than older adults. But still, the difference between the two groups were not major. The way we talk about hookup culture is leading society to adopt new sexual behavior norms.

Reling, Barton, Becker, and Valasik (2018) also examined hookup culture in relation to sexual assault, more specifically, rape myth acceptance. They define rape myth acceptance as the false belief of stereotypical or negative things about a rape victim or perpetrator. For example, a rape myth would be when a male commits rape, he is believed to be a good guy who was overcome by his "biological" sex drive while the female didn't fight back enough or gave the wrong signals. Their research highlighted that hookup culture endorsement is the largest predictor of rape myth acceptance.

Their research shows that people who endorsed hook up culture are more likely to believe rape myths. Not only are people who endorse hookup culture more likely to believe rape myths, those who had higher rates of religiosity were more likely to believe rape myths. People who believe that hooking up is normal, fun, or an elevation of social status are also more likely to accept rape myths while those who believe hooking up to be a form of sexual freedom are not. Women are less likely to accept rape myth acceptance, which is expected knowing that they are less likely to participate in hookup culture.

While other research has focused on what hooking up means, risk factors of hooking up, and how media influences our perception of hookup culture, I want to focus on how prevalent hookup culture is on our college campus. I want to examine the campus' perceptions of how their peers participate in hooking up and compare it to how much they actually participate in hooking up. Previous research suggests that society perceives college campuses as having a lively hookup culture scene. I want to determine if hookup culture is a reality on our college campus. By knowing if hooking up is a common occurrence among students, we can best determine what actions to take regarding hookup culture and how to handle it. If there is a prevalent hookup culture on campus, we should consider offering sexual health education to students, so they may learn how to best protect their sexual health and their well-being. If there is no prevalent hookup culture on campus, we could assume that our campus does not feed into the hookup culture stereotype that has been portrayed in the media and believed by much of society.

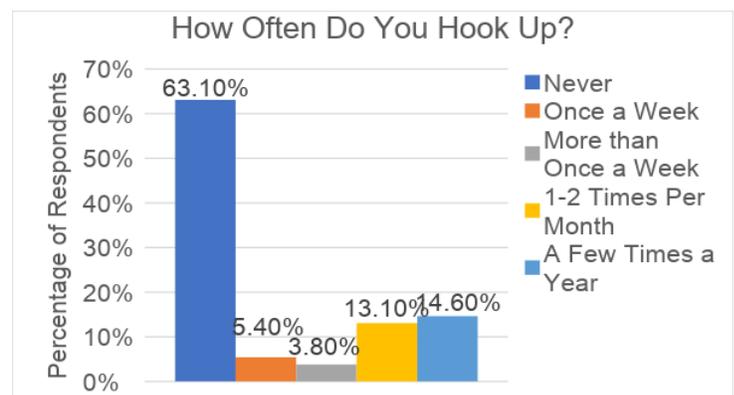
## Methods

To conduct this research, I distributed surveys to college students at a private, liberal arts college in Georgia. This survey asked questions about hookup culture, participation, and perceptions of hookup culture on campus. To do this research I used a convenient sample of students on campus who agree to take the survey. The survey was anonymous to reduce the chance of students not giving truthful and reliable answers. Additionally, a cover letter was provided along with the survey to explain the purpose and details of participating in this research. The cover letter also contained my contact information, along with my advisor's, so they may contact us with any questions or concerns about the survey or research topic.

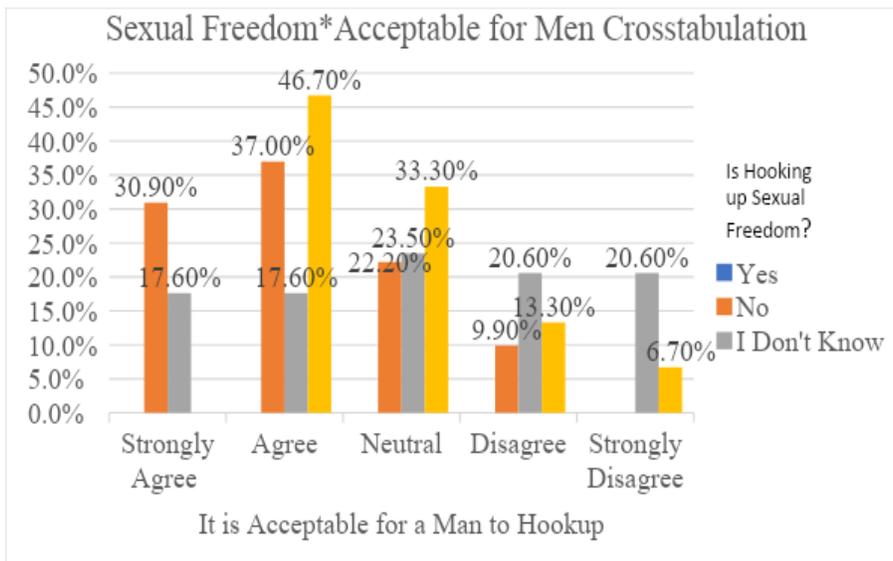
The survey consisted of closed-ended questions about perceptions of hookup culture on campus and students' participation in sexual activities outside of a committed relationship. I sat outside on the plaza on campus and recruit students to take my survey. I distributed surveys for one week, during contact hour on Tuesdays and Thursdays and from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Monday and Wednesday. The goal of this research was to collect 200 completed surveys. The results of the surveys were analyzed to determine if there is a difference between how students perceive hookup culture and their participation in it. To analyze the results, I inputted the data into the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) and ran different descriptive and inferential statistical tests. I also looked at differences between genders and if that influences beliefs of hookup culture. Based on the results of this study, I am able to make suggestions about what resources should be available to students about their sexual health or whether any educational tools or resources should be implemented.

## Results

The majority of students in the sample (74%) believe that their peers engage in hooking up. While most of the respondents believe that their peers hook up, 58% believe that their peers hookup more than they have sex with a committed partner. Out of the sample of 131 students, only 24.4% say that they have more hookups than sex with a committed partner and 61.3% reported that they never hookup (See graph 1). There is a significant relationship concerning those who believed their peers engage in hooking up and whether the respondent engaged in more hookups than sex with a committed partner. Respondents believe their peers engage in

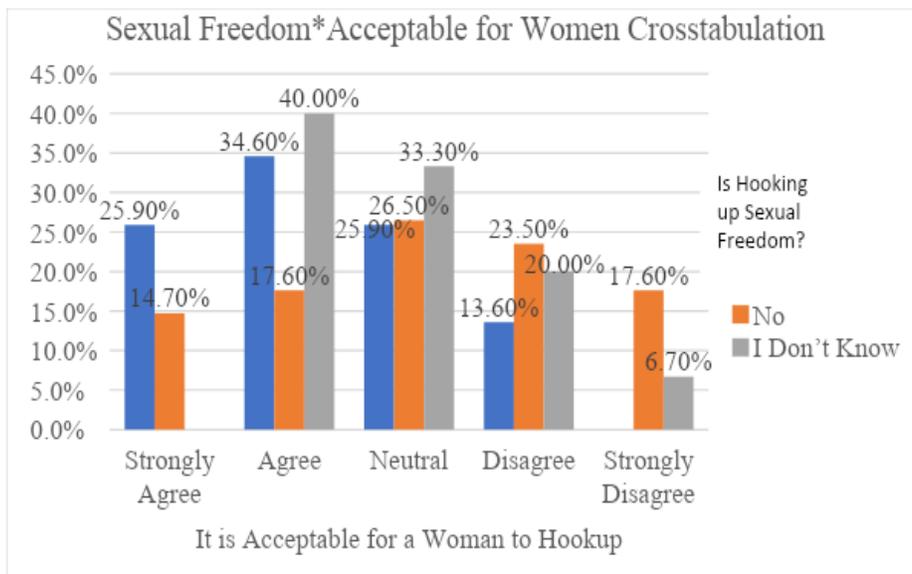


Graph 1. How often do you hook up responses.



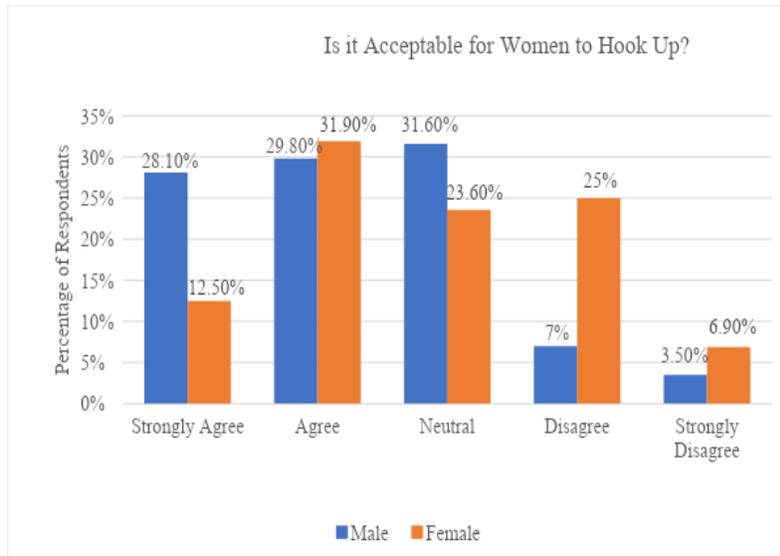
Graph 2. A crosstabulation on beliefs about hooking up being a form of sexual freedom and hooking up being acceptable for men.

hookups but, they themselves do not have more hookups than sex with a committed partner, suggesting that their perceptions of hookup culture on campus do not reflect their own participation in hooking up ( $X^2 = .025$ ). Roughly 60% of respondents describe hooking up as sexual freedom. Sexual freedom is significant in relation to whether hooking up is acceptable for men and if it is acceptable for women. Those who believe it is a form of sexual freedom were more likely to believe that it is acceptable for both men and women ( $X^2 = .000$ ,  $X^2 = .003$ ) (See graphs 2 and 3).

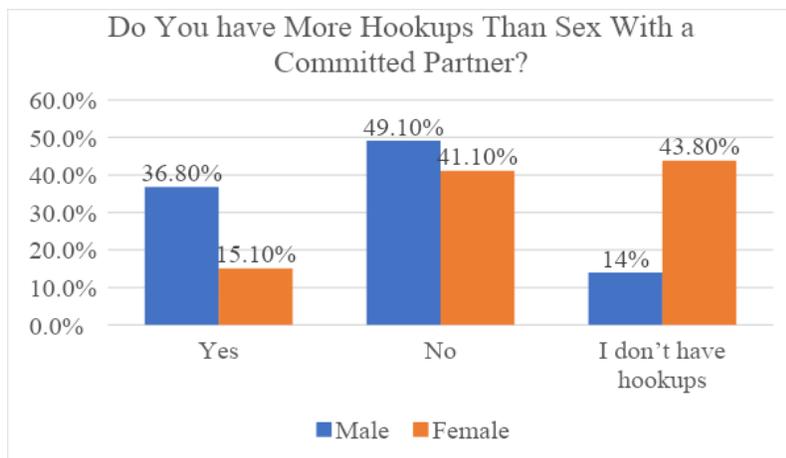


Graph 3. A crosstabulation on beliefs about hooking up being a form of sexual freedom and hooking up being acceptable for women.

There was also a significant relationship between gender and if it is acceptable for women to participate in hooking up. Women were less likely to believe that it's acceptable for women to hookup while men were more likely to believe that it is acceptable for women to hookup, as depicted in Graph 4 ( $X^2 = .022$ ). Men are also more likely to hook up and hookup more frequently than women (See graph 5) Women hookup far less than men, with 76.4% of women respondents answering that they never hookup compared to 47.4% of men ( $X^2 = .002$ ). About 20% of men said that they would rather hookup than have sex with a committed partner compared to 6.8% of women respondents ( $X^2 = .035$ ). Religious affiliation was only significant in the amount of times someone hooked up. Roughly 63% of respondents who identified with Christianity reported that they never hookup compared to 80% of respondents who identified as "other," and none who identified as atheist ( $X^2 = .006$ ).



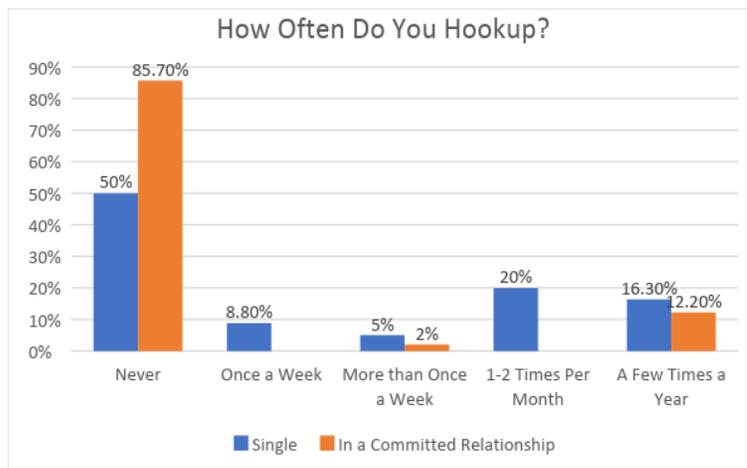
Graph 4. Responses to “Is it acceptable for women to hook up?”



Graph 5. Responses to “Do you have more hookups than sex with a committed partner?”

Most of the respondents (72%) reported that they would rather have sex with a committed partner than hook up. There was also a significant relationship between relationship status and how often respondents hookup and if they have more hookups than sex with a committed partner. Those who reported being in a committed relationship reported never hooking up more than any other frequency of hooking up and also reported that they do not have more hookups than sex with a committed partner ( $X^2=.001$ ,  $X^2=.025$ ). There was not much difference among those who reported being single, with nearly 60% of single respondents reporting they do not have more hookups or do not hookup at all and 50% reporting they never hookup (See graph 6).

Over 90% of respondents believe that penetration and oral sex define a hookup compared to only about 50% who defined hooking up to include making out and fondling. Additionally, 33% of respondents reported that they are more likely to hookup while being intoxicated while 45% report that they would hookup without being intoxicated and 30% said there was no difference in the likelihood that they would hookup while being intoxicated. The respondents who said they are more likely to hookup while intoxicated also reported that they would hookup without being intoxicated as well. So, while they are more likely to do it while intoxicated, they would do it regardless.



Graph 6. Responses to “How often do you hookup?”

## Discussion

My results suggest that hookup culture is not as prevalent among students on our campus, though many scholars believe that hookup culture is taking over the traditional dating scene. Less than half of my sample reported that they would rather hookup compared to having sex with a committed partner. Most of the respondents reported that they never hookup, challenging the common belief that college students’ dating culture is changing. Only about 24% of respondents reported that they have more hookups than sex with a committed partner. So, even though students think their peers are hooking up, most students reported that they do not hookup and those who do only make up a small percentage of the students surveyed. The next highest reported frequency is 14% who say they hookup a few times a year.

This suggests that sexual behavior isn’t changing so much on our campus, but our attitudes surrounding the matter are. Most of respondents believed that hooking up is an act of sexual freedom, another suggestion that our attitudes and beliefs are shifting around the conversation of hookup culture. Those who believe that hooking up is a form of sexual freedom also reported that it is acceptable for both men and women to hookup. This aligns with Monto and Cary’s (2014) research that found that college students’ sexual behavior has not changed much compared to older generations. They found that younger adults talk about sex differently than older adults and their attitudes around hooking up are different. So, while younger adults report more casual sex than older generations, there is not a significant difference between the two groups according to Monto and Carey. Society is changing the way we talk about casual sex. My results indicate that those who believe hooking up is an act of sexual freedom believe that it is acceptable for men and women to hookup, but most of my sample reported that they don’t hookup. This also suggests that our attitudes surrounding casual sex, or hookup culture, are changing but sexual behavior isn’t.

Most of the sample reported that they believe it is okay for men and women to hookup. There were, however, gender differences in the makeup of the responses. Most men believed that it was acceptable for women to hookup while more women, compared to men, believed that it was not acceptable for women to hookup. Based on these results, women seem to be more critical of what sexual behavior is acceptable for women. Men either think it is acceptable or show no strong feelings on whether or not hooking up is acceptable for women. While most women believe it is acceptable, more women than men do not think it is acceptable. This may be due to women being afraid to be “slut-shamed,” meaning they are afraid that they will be called names and harassed if they are perceived to be promiscuous which is how the media projects college students to be. Men are also more likely to hookup and report hooking up more than women. This may be because of masculinity which is explored in Danube, Vescio, and Davis’ (2014) research. Men are expected to be masculine which can mean a variety of things, but one specific “masculine” characteristic is that men have sex with multiple women to assert their masculine characteristic of dominance, especially to other men. Men see heterosexual activity as a validation of their “manliness.” This could explain why more men report hooking up than women. It validates their sense of masculinity while women are degraded if they do the same because it isn’t feminine.

Consistent with existing literature, I found that there is no consensus on what a hookup is. Most respondents believe it is strictly just penetration while some believe it is penetration and oral sex. Only half of respondents believe that making out and touching or fondling is a form of hooking up. Also, the literature suggests that consuming alcohol is predictor of hooking up but, I found that students who hookup report that they would do so without being under the

influence of alcohol. This may also be due to changing attitudes around hooking up. Students believe that they have the freedom to do what they want to with their bodies. Hooking up is not something students do just because they are making poor decisions while intoxicated. My findings suggest that students don't think alcohol consumption alters the likelihood that they would hookup, meaning they would hookup regardless if they are intoxicated or sober, directly contradicting the existing literature that finds that alcohol is a predictor of hooking up.

Results from this study suggest that on the LaGrange College campus there are inconsistencies between students who think their peers hookup and how often students report hooking up. While the majority believed their peers hookup, most reported that they never hookup. This finding suggests that there may not be a need for sexual education on hooking up for this campus. Previous research found that those who believe hooking up is a form of sexual freedom are not likely to accept rape myths. Since most of the sample believe that hooking up is sexual freedom, students may be less likely to believe rape myths (Reling, Barton, Becker, and Valasik 2017). We could assume that the sexual assault and sexual health programs on this campus are successful and additional programs are not needed. We could also assume, based on these findings, that hookup culture is a stereotype that has been placed upon young college adults and needs to be addressed. We need to start talking about the way college students are represented in the media and make our own definitions of what a college student or young adult is.

### Limitations

There are a few limitations to my study, though I found similar trends in the existing literature on the topic. First, my sample was not random and was small, with only 131 respondents. These findings can't necessarily be generalized to the college campus. Additionally, I analyzed chi squares of crosstabs which is usually done with a random sample. Third, my sample consisted of mostly white, Christian respondents, resulting in a lack of diversity. There were some inconsistencies in how respondents answered questions, complicating how I analyzed the responses. Lastly, due to the taboo nature of this subject, respondents may not have given truthful and accurate answers to survey questions. Though there are some limitations, many of my results are similar to existing research on this subject. The major takeaway from this research is that sexual behavior may not be changing, just our attitudes about it. We may also conclude that hookup culture is a stereotype that has been placed upon college students in recent years.

Appendix materials available upon request.

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