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Hooking up in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

This study presents an exploratory analysis of the meaning of "hooking up" based on 1) academic literature, and 2) the perspective of college students from differing backgrounds. The authors investigated definitions of hooking up based on scholarly articles derived from search engine results and then from college students' responses to an open-ended question on an online survey (N=358). Coding was used to identify themes that emerged from the data with the goal of understanding what the phrase means and whether the research is in line with students' perspectives. Additionally, the authors sought to examine whether differences exist based on demographic variables. The findings revealed that the phrase "hooking up" predominantly represents sexual behavior ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse in the research base, but has been more narrowly constructed among college students. Gender differences also emerged, with males being more likely than females to view hooking up as involving sex rather than a broader range of sexual behaviors. A discussion follows and highlights directions for future research.

Keywords: Definitions; Hooking up; Intimate relationships; Sex

Introduction

What is "hooking up"? Does it pertain to sexual intercourse alone or can it involve oral sex, fondling, and/or any acts of affection like kissing? Does it involve any emotional connections? Can it be completely innocent, non-sexual gatherings? Is this phrase universal among young adults or do differences exist based on background variables? Many questions exist on this under-researched topic. We often hear about people hooking up, yet we may not be on the same page when it comes to understanding what it means. While the phrase has been incorporated into research (Table 1) and other writings including family textbooks [1], definitional issues have surfaced given the variations in what constitutes "sexual encounters". This paper will investigate the meaning of "hooking up" from the academic research base and also from responses provided by college students to determine whether mutual agreement exists on its meaning and whether research corresponds to real life. It will also examine whether views are consistent across various groups.

Background

Studying intimate relationships has proven to be complex. Historically, the concept of intimacy has evolved from first time. Shifting from courtship and committed dating relationships resulting in marriage to an array of relations such as open partnerships and those that lack commitment, there has been an undeniable transformation in modern day relationships behaviors. While contemporary cases of romance still exist, there has been an indisputable expansion in the composition of intimacy.

In modern society, we are increasingly hearing about "hooking up" as a staple of American culture. Among young adults, such encounters have been thought to arise from the mixing of young men and women in a culture where individuals marry at a later age, in part due to the expectation of attending college (which comes with the subsequent burden of paying off loans), and possibly due to sexual revolution that comes with independence and even technological advancements. Relationships are more egalitarian today than in the past and sexual scripts have changed. Although double standards of sexuality still exist here in the states, males and females have been participating in what has become known as the "hook up" culture at similar rates [2].

Hook ups are thought to be becoming more prevalent than ever before in American society, but this may be a social artifact due to either increased definitional awareness or increased reporting due to fewer stigmas associated with the behavior in sexually liberated societies. Nevertheless, a review of the literature suggests that these encounters are becoming increasingly normative among adolescents and young adults in North America, representing a marked shift in openness and acceptance of uncommitted sex. Estimates on the percentage of those who have engaged in hooking up have ranged from as low as 40% [3] to 75% [4] to as high as 81% [5].

According to Garcia et al. [6], "Hookups, or uncommitted sexual encounters, are becoming progressively more engrained in popular culture, reflecting both evolved sexual predilections and changing social and sexual scripts". A study by Fielder and Carey [7] revealed that over half of the sample reported hooking up (i.e., oral, vaginal, or anal sex) before college, and nearly two-thirds had done so by the end of their first semester. Other research supports the notion that over half of those who are sexually active have had partners they were not dating [8]. As evidenced in the earlier statistics on range, some research suggests that a smaller portion of young adults have hooked up while some research suggests that the numbers are higher. Other discrepancies have also been found in definitions. While some research notes that hookups are one-time events involving strangers or brief acquaintances [4,9,10] other research suggests it may be ongoing and largely includes friends [7,11]. With the increasing use of socially interactive technology, it is also possible that some of these encounters are being facilitated through text messaging and/or social networking. Yet little is known about whether technology has been used for such purposes; if so, it may imply that friends and acquaintances are not off limits when it comes to hooking up.

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Author	Source	Definition
Fortunato et al. [17]	Journal of Child and Adolescent Substance Abuse, 19 (3), 261-278.	"a single sexual encounter that may or may not include sexual intercourse with someone who is a stranger, brief acquaintance, or friend. The encounter is just a one-time event and may include just kissing or it may include other sexual activity" (p. 268).
Barriger and Velez-Blasini [9]	Journal of Sex Research, 50 (1), 84-94.	"a sexual encounter usually lasting only one night; between two people who are acquaintances, strangers, or brief acquaintances; and involving some physical interaction, which may or may not include sexual intercourse (Paul et al., 2000)" (p. 86).
Aubrey and Smith [18]	Journal of Sex Research, 50 (5), 435-448.	"one kiss or it can involve fondling, oral sex, anal sex, intercourse, or any combination of those things. It can happen only once with a partner, several times during one week, or over many months. Partners may know each other very well, only slightly, or not at all, even after they have hooked up regularly...Feelings are discouraged, and both partners share an understanding that either of them can walk away at any time (Stepp, 2007, p. 24)" (p. 436).
Lewis et al. [19]	Archives of Sexual Behavior, 41 (5), 1219-1229.	"a range of physically intimate behaviors outside of a committed relationship"(p. 1219).
Brimeyer and Smith [20]	Sociological Spectrum, 32 (5), 462-473.	"'kissing, sexual intercourse, or any form of sexual interaction generally seen as falling between those two extremes' (Bogle, 2008, p. 27)" (p. 462).
Kooyman et al. [21]	Adultspan Journal, 10 (1), 4-13.	"casual sex with noncommittal partners" (p. 4).
Reiber and Garcia [22]	Evolutionary Psychology, 8 (3), 390-404.	"a sexual encounter between people who are not dating or in a relationship, and where a more traditional romantic relationship is NOT an explicit condition of the encounter" (p. 393).
Young et al. [23]	American Journal of Health Studies, 25 (3), 156-164.	"one in which the participants are strangers, or brief acquaintances, who participate in sexual activity with little or no expectation of a future relationship, beyond the current encounter" (p. 156).
Burdette and Hill [24]	Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 48 (3), 535-551.	"casual physical encounters" (p. 536); also, "when a girl and a guy get together for a physical encounter and don't necessarily expect anything further" (p. 540).
Owen et al. [25]	Archives of Sexual Behavior, 40 (2), 331-341.	"casual sexual encounters (ranging from kissing to intercourse) between two people with no clear mutual expectation of further interactions or a committed relationship" (p. 331); also, "when two people get together for a physical encounter and don't necessarily expect anything further (e.g., no plan or intention to do it again)" (p. 334).
Epstein et al. [26]	Journal of Sex Research, 46 (5), 414-424.	"two parties are not involved in a committed relationship, that the encounter is short-term and occurs outside of a committed relationship, and that there are a variety of sexual behaviors" (p. 414).
Owen et al. [2]	Archives of Sexual Behavior, 39 (3), 653-663.	"a range of physically intimate behavior (e.g. passionate kissing, oral sex, and intercourse) that occurs outside of a committed relationship" (p. 653); also, ''an event in which two people are physically intimate outside of a committed relationship without the expectation of future encounters" (p.. 656).
Gute and Eshbaugh [27]	Journal of Community Health Nursing, 25 (1), 26-43.	"Paul et al.'s (2000) definition of hooking up—'a sexual encounter, usually lasting only one night, between two people who are strangers or brief acquaintances' (p. 76), with or without sexual intercourse" (p. 31).
Bradshaw et al. [15]	Sex Roles, 62 (9/10), 661-669.	"a sexual encounter, usually only lasting one night, between two people who are strangers or brief acquaintances. Some physical interaction is typical and may or may not includesexual intercourse." (p. 664).
Lambert et al. [5]	Journal of Sex Research, 40 (2), 129-133.	"when two people agree to engage in sexual behavior for which there is no future commitment." (p. 129); also, "a sexual encounter between two people who may or may not know each other well, but who usually are not seriously dating" (p. 131).
Manning et al. [8]	Journal of Adolescent Research, 21 (5), 459-483	"sexual relationships that occur out-side the dating context" (p. 459).
Gute and Eshbaugh [26]	Journal of Social Psychology, 148 (1), 77-89.	"any of the following four actions: (a) engaging in intercourse with someone once and only once, (b) engaging in intercourse with someone known for less than 24 hr, (c) performing oral sex on someone known for less than 24 hr, and (d) receiving oral sex from someone known for less than 24 hr." (p. 80).
Fielder and Carey [27]	Archives of Sexual Behavior, 39 (5) 1105-1119.	"sexual interactions between partners who do not expect a romantic commitment…" (p. 1105); also, "a catch-all term used by adolescents and young adults to describe a sexual interaction between two partners who expect no romantic commitment" (p. 1105); also, "someone whom you were not dating or in a romantic relationship with, and at the time of the sexual interaction, you understood that there was no mutual expectation of a romantic commitment" (p. 1108).
Littleton et al. [28]	Sex Roles, 60 (11/12), 793-804	"generally defined as a spontaneous sexual encounter, with or without sexual intercourse, between two individuals with no prior romantic relationship (Paul and Hayes 2002; Paulet al. 2000)" (p. 793).
Paul et al. [4]	Journal of Sex Research, 37 (1), 76-88.	"a sexual encounter which may or may not include sexual intercourse, usually occurring on only one occasion between two people who are strangers or brief acquaintances" (p. 76); also, "a sexual encounter, usually lasting only one night, between two people who are strangers or brief acquaintances" (p. 76 and 79).

Table 1: Definitions of "Hooking Up"*

The increasing documentation of such behavior among college students in the United States enforces the need to study the definition to see if it holds a common meaning. There is ambiguity in the phrase "hooking up" and what it may imply, and we know little about whether young adults' perspectives actually align with the rather limited research base or whether they vary across gender, race, and other demographic groups. The research that has been conducted on this topic has only surfaced over the latter part of the past decade.

Definitions

Research has called attention to the popularity of the phrase "hooking up", which has been thought to be intentionally vague so as to leave room for one's own interpretation. Glenn and Marquardt [3] suggest that it is defined as a "distinctive sex-without-commitment interaction between college women and men" but it can also mean "a couple kissed, or had sex, or had oral sex, but no one will know for sure". Similarly, Kalish and Kimmel [12] note that, "As a verb, 'to hook up' means to engage in any type of sexual activity with someone without a relationship. Hooking up is used to describe casual sexual encounters on a continuum from 'one-and-done' (a hook up that takes place only once with someone who may or may not be a stranger) to 'sex buddies' (acquaintances who meet regularly for sex but rarely if ever associate otherwise), to 'friends with benefits' (friends who do not care to become romantic partners, but may include sex among the activities they enjoy together) (Paul 2006; Paik 2010)". In Western research, "hooking up" often builds on notions of non-relationship intimate behavior. For instance, Lambert et al. [5] conceptualize hooking up as "when two people agree to engage in sexual behavior for which there is no future commitment…" Likewise, Owen et al. [2] suggest that hooking up involves "physically intimate behavior (e.g., passionate kissing, oral sex, and intercourse) that occurs outside of a committed relationship" Garcia et al. [6] impart a similar definition, describing the phenomenon as an "uncommitted sexual encounter" with activities that "may include a wide range of sexual behaviors, such as kissing, oral sex, and penetrative intercourse. However, these encounters often transpire without any promise or desire for more traditional romantic relationship". Paul et al. [4] offer yet another definition: "Hookups are defined as a sexual encounter which may or may not include sexual intercourse, usually occurring on only one occasion between two people who are strangers or brief acquaintances"

While these definitions appear similar on their face in the sense they all imply sexual behavior with a lack of commitment, they may actually differ in several ways. For instance, what constitutes sexual activity is subjective and can be seen as varying from one person's perspective to the next. In some research, sexual activity points to vaginal intercourse but leaves out mutual masturbation, oral sex, and even anal intercourse [13]. In other research, it includes all of these behaviors [2,6]. The definition offered by Lambert et al. [5] simply states "sexual behavior," which can be interpreted differently by many. The second and third definitions by Owen et al. [2] and Garcia et al. [6] offer more specifics parameters and even include kissing. It is understood that non-coital and coital sexual activities are incorporated into their meaning, but whether locking lips signals "sexual behavior" may be debated (for instance, in one study on adolescent relationships [14], classified holding hands and kissing as romantic events, but did not include them in their sexual grouping; sexual events included more physical behaviors involving more private areas such as touching under clothes or without clothes on, touching other's genitals, and having sexual intercourse," among other behaviors). Therefore, there is a continuum of intimate behaviors that can be labeled as sexual.

Additionally, another arguably more important difference that arises in the definitions can be seen with the last definition offered by Paul et al. [4], which place restrictions on the number of encounters and the relationship status. They suggest that "hooking up" is often a non-repetitive event and not among long-term friends or former intimates. Therefore, the previous classifications of "sex buddies" or "friends with benefits" would be seen as rather distinct categories from "hooking up". However, research has noted that hookups were most common among friends, followed by acquaintances, then strangers [7]. Other research has also supported this, stating that only about 15% of hookups involve strangers [11]. Part of this may be due to the increasing use of socially interactive media (e.g. text messaging and social networking), but this yet to develop in the research base. Nevertheless, it can be inferred upon that the vast majority of researchers have found relative uniformity in describing "hooking up" as a sexual encounter between consenting parties for which there is no promise of future commitment. Yet we still see some variation in other definitional aspects.

Interestingly, hook ups may not be completely free from emotions. One study on hooking up found that one-quarter (27%) of women said they were interested in a romantic relationship after the event occurred compared to one-fifth (20%) of men [6]. Therefore, it is possible that hookups have become a norm and, while no promise of commitment is made, they still may involve feelings and potentially to lead to committed relationships, contrary to the notion that there are "no strings attached". This may be a part of negotiating sexual expression, but definitions should consider this. Further, while similar benefits and risks have been perceived by college students, women have also expressed more interest in dating while men have preferred hooking up [15], and they participate in such behavior at slightly lower (albeit similar) rates than men [5]. Other research has suggested that females viewed hooking up less positively [4] and were less comfortable with the experiences then men [5]. They were also more likely than males to express discontent with their hook up experience [16], albeit this was attributed to the role of alcohol in the decision making process. This may be indicative of gender differences in hooking up.

Part of the reason women may have ambivalence about hooking up due to institutional contradictions. "As women, they feel pressure to participate in traditional, committed romantic relationships. Yet the shrinking double standard and the social-class expectations of upper-middle-class women combine to encourage them to enjoy sex by way of hook ups that don't threaten to entangle them in romantic relationships (which require a great deal of time and emotion and might pose a threat to their anticipated career paths)"[6]. According to this presumption, it would be logical to study college students or those wishing to advance in their professional development since hooking up would be expected in these populations. Accordingly, this study will use college students, which is in line with much of the existing research.

Methodology

As a first part of this study, we sought to delve into a typical search that might be undertaken by someone interested in learning about "hooking up" from an academic standpoint. We conducted a search with one of the most popular academic search engines in the social sciences. The terms entered included (a) hooking up, or (b) hook up, and (c) definition, or (d) defined. The search engine was asked to search for scholarly journal articles only. All terms were entered into the search engine and we examined the hits retrieved. In total, there were 306 articles retrieved from 1975 to 2013.

We decided to sample the first 20 articles from the results that involved research conducted in the United States. Given that they are ranked in order of relevance, this method was used instead of a random selection (a quick examination of the latter hits reveals articles outside of this area, predominantly focused on unrelated research in the natural sciences). Only research articles relevant to relationships and those that had clear conceptualizations of "hooking up", whether the definitions were innovative or based on existing research, were included in the sample. If we landed on a hit that was not relevant to our focus or with

multiple, mixed, or unclear definitions, we defaulted to the next result. Here is what we found.

We nearly exhausted all the search engine hits relevant to our topic.

Of course, this list may vary if "casual sex" was entered into the equation, but such terms were not used since the focus of this study was to understand what "hooking up" implies (i.e., whether or not it includes activities other than sex).

Examining and using terminology that young adults can relate to is important because these young adults can hold their own, varying views on what behaviors constitutes particular terms/phrases [30]. Familiarity in language may make respondents comfortable participating in the study. Yet many studies have created and put forth their own conceptualizations and operationalizations of the phrase without asking what these young adults' perceive or they do not examine whether differences exist across groups. In the next stage of this study, we performed a content analysis of what "hooking up" means from the perspective of college students. The sample used in this study was derived from a subset of existing data that was collected from college students attending two Southeastern colleges via an online questionnaire. IRB approval was received for the study. In order to reach subjects, an email was sent by way of a list serve, thereby representing a convenience sample. The email informed students that their participation was voluntary and that all responses would be anonymous.

Participants included graduate and undergraduate college students from a range of disciplines. In total, 458 students participated, but due to mostly incomplete/missing data, 54 (11.8%) surveys were discarded, resulting in a sample size of 404 (88.2% of the original sample). For purposes of this study, age was also restricted to those 18-30 years of age, resulting in the final sample size of 358. The majority of student respondents in the study were undergraduates (80.0%, n=323) who were female (75.2%, n=304), predominantly White (61.6%, n=249) and non-Hispanic (90.8%, n=367). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 30 years of age with a mean of 22.2 years (SD=3.0 years). These characteristics were reflective of the populations used.

Participants were asked basic demographic information first and were asked about "hooking up" following this. In particular, the students were asked the following open-ended question: What is "hooking up?" Since the question was open-ended, respondents were asked to provide a definition for this measure. Then, the researchers sought to closely examine the textual matter and subsequently classify the material based in common themes.

The authors looked through each of the written responses in their entirety to determine which classification best fit (1=Sex only, whether vaginal, oral, and/or anal; 2=any intimate behavior ranging from kissing to sex; 3=any intimate behavior excluding sex, or 4=other, such as meeting up, hanging out, dating, but no mention of intimate/sexual behavior). The researchers coded separately first, then resolved the few minor discrepancies together. Through this method, we were able to determine whether common views are held regarding the meaning of "hooking up".

Results

An examination of the definitions found in the academic literature reveals commonalities previously noted. 1) some type of physically intimate behavior, and 2) a lack of serious commitment between the parties involved. There is also consent by all parties involved. Nevertheless, while a definition may be agreed upon in the United States, we do not know if it is universally acknowledged or accepted.

Additionally, examining the definitions found among college students revealed that the vast majority of respondents (94.2%) considered "sexual behavior", whether sex alone, any behavior ranging from kissing to sex, or any intimate behavior not including sex (Table 2).

Results indicate that over two-thirds of the sample (68.7%) felt hooking up implies sex only, whether vaginal, oral, and/or anal. This was followed by respondents who felt it ranged in behavior from kissing to sex (23.5%). To a lesser extent, some respondents classified hooking up as non-sexual behavior (5.0%), then intimate behavior up to but not including sex (2.0%), followed by unsure (.8%).

The data revealed that, in line with the literature, which has suggested that hooking up can refer to sex alone or any behaviors ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse, respondents predominantly viewed "hooking up" as some type of sexual behavior. Out of the 358 respondents, the majority (92.2%) described it as either involving sex, whether vaginal, anal, and/or oral, or behaviors ranging from kissing through sex. The most common answer was one where the respondents bluntly stated that hook ups were purely sexual. For example, respondents said:

"Sex"

"It means having sex".

"It means sexual intercourse".

"Just sex and nothing more"

"To me, hooking up is having sex with someone you are not in a relationship with"

"Hooking up is a simple sexual encounter with no implied or expected commitment".

"Having sex, whether intercourse or oral".

"Having sex with someone you are not dating".

"Having sex with someone without commitment".

"Having sex casually with a person with no strings, or really emotions attached. I look at hooking up just like a "booty call".

"For me, it's mean sexual contacts with men, without any closer relationships. Only sex with no obligations, free love".

"To me "hooking up" means just having fun. Not having any real commitment involved. This could involve sex and nothing else. One-night stands and 'friends with benefits' fall under this title.

"F*cking".

Some respondents encompassed a broader meaning: "It ranges from kissing to sex"

"Anything physical: kissing, sex, oral sex".

Variable	%
Sex, whether vaginal, oral, and/or anal	68.7% (n=246)
Any intimate behavior ranging from kissing to sex	23.5% (n=84)
Any intimate behavior excluding sex	2.0% (n=7)
Other (e.g. meeting up, hanging out, dating, etc.)	5.0% (n=18)
Not sure	.8% (n=3)

Table 2: Behaviors constituting "hooking up" (N=358).

"Having oral, vaginal or anal sex with someone I am not in a committed relationship with".

"Hooking up goes along the lines of making out, heaving touching and actually having sex".

"Any type of physical intimacy: kissing, groping, oral, vaginal intercourse, etc".

"Hooking up means that two people come together to either kiss/make out/have sex without any emotional commitment. It is usually a onetime thing but may occur more than once. Hooking up implies that it is casual and it does not occur within a relationship".

"There are physical/sexual behaviors between couples, anything from ""fooling Around"" to having sex with the mutual understanding that there is not a commitment to one another and there may not be communication with each other after hooking up. It can be a single incident or happen on multiple occasions, but they are not committed to one another".

Differences in whether respondents thought it was a one-time event or something that happened on several occasions were evidenced. "It refers to a one night stand".

"Hooking up" means having sex with that other person it often refers to a one time occurrence".

"A one-time or recurring sexual encounter, with the sole purpose of some type of sexual interaction, usually with no commitment to the person or emotional involvement"

"Casually having sex, in between being single and in a relationship could sometimes mean being in an open relationship".

"Hooking up is having casual sex with someone you may or may not know very well. It may be a long term or a short term fling".

"Having sex or someone that you are involved with beyond the platonic stage".

"Friends with benefits. Not in a committed relationship but having sex".

"Sexual Relationship within a friendship; not officially committed but practically together".

"Having friends that you can be "involved" with, without having deal with all of the stress of being in a relationship".

"Getting together, occasionally a precursor to dating. Its physical activities with someone who you aren't with officially yet".

It appears that some respondents considered hooking up as a single, isolated event whereas others thought it may or can involve sex on multiple occasions within friendships and possible even lead to a committed dating relationship. One study has called attention to the possibility of hook ups leading to committed relationships. They reported that although it is rare, "A few males and females defined a good hookup as something that develops into a friendship or even just a social connection in which you can comfortably acknowledge each other when you see each other again" [31].

Another interesting aspect that emerged was that some respondents called attention to shift in the terminology. For instance, one respondent stated:

"When I was in high school, "hooking up" usually mean making out, now it means sex".

Other respondents mimicked this thought:

"When I was in high school, it meant making out, and now in college I take it as sex".

"I usually use it to mean things besides sex, like making out, although I know most people use it to mean sex. It's usually something casual that won't lead to anything serious". Additionally, one respondent said it used to refer to meeting up with someone, but now it means something else. Still, there was a smaller percentage that viewed hooking up as innocent, non-sexual behavior: "talking to see where the relationship could go".

"Going on a date or just getting with friends to do something fun…"

"2 people interested in having a relationship together start to talk, get to know each other, and may begin to date".

A smaller percentage of the sample was not sure how to define it.

In order to determine whether the respondents' characteristics influence their responses, we conducted bivariate analyses on basic demographics. Specifically, cross-tabulation analyses were conducted to determine whether perceptions of hooking up differed on the basis of several variables: age, gender, race, ethnicity, and student status. Results revealed that gender was the only statistically significant variable related to perceptions of hooking up ($x2=9.71$, $df=4$, $p<.05$). Males were more likely to view hooking up as sex, whether vaginal, oral and/or anal (78.0%) compared to females (66.1%) (Table 3). Age, race, ethnicity, and student status were not statistically significant.

Discussion

Our research reveals that the phrase "hooking up" is generally seen as a sexually intimate encounter, but there is some uncertainty in the preciseness of behaviors offered by the phrase. The findings here imply that the research base constitutes a broad range of sexual behavior and a lack of commitment to each other in its definition of hooking up, yet most college students view it as "sex" without commitment, giving it a more specific meaning. Other respondents held non-sexual views of the phrase, but were much lesser in count. A few respondents stated that hook ups did not involve sexual interaction. Rather, some students defined hooking up in a broad sense: beginning a relationship, going on dates, or simply spending time with friends. Nevertheless, a substantial portion of the sample reporting hooking up to include any intimate behavior ranging from kissing to sex. Most students also agreed that no emotion or commitment was involved in "hook-ups", although some responses reflected the possibility of it being a stage by which two partners can develop the relationship into something more.

Interestingly, the analyses presented here shed light on gender differences in perception of hooking up. Males were more likely than females to view hooking up solely as sex, whether vaginal, oral, and/

Variable	Male (n=82)	Female (n =274)
Sex, whether vaginal, oral, and/or anal	78.0% (n=64)	66.1% (n=181)
Any intimate behavior ranging from kissing to sex	13.4% (n=11)	26.6% (n=73)
Any intimate behavior excluding sex	0.0% (n=0)	2.6% (n=7)
Other (e.g. meeting up, hanging out, dating, etc.)	7.3% (n=6)	4.0% (n=11)
Not sure	1.2% (n=1)	0.7% (n=2)

Table 3: Cross-tabulations of gender and "hooking up" definitions (N=358).

or anal whereas females were more likely to view it in a wider sense, although they still predominantly viewed it as sex. Gender was the only statistically significant factor in varying conceptualizations; age, race, ethnicity, and student status did not matter. This is a curious finding because behavior such is kissing as seen to be more sentimental than pure sex, and this can possible explain why women are more likely than men to feel dismay post hook up [4,16,32].

The findings of this study suggested that both male and female college students were most likely to describe hooking up as sex rather than sexual behaviors ranging from kissing to sex. If research considers hooking up to comprise behaviors such as kissing, it would be expected that we would find estimates of hooking up to be substantially higher than if it only included sex. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the way the variable is conceptualized and operationalized. In addition, research that asks students if they have ever hooked up without offering definitions to respondents should consider the interpretation of their findings. It is possible that the respondents may be counting sex only rather than any sexual behavior when reporting rates of hooking up, which can result in different implications.

As with all other research, this one is not immune from its limitations and we would like to highlight some of these. For one, we understand that the results from the search engine could have been different if we used another outlet. Therefore, we are unlikely to have uncovered everything and anything related to defining "hooking up". Second, our sample was based on a convenience sample of college students at two colleges in the Southeast. It is possible that using another sampling method as well as using students from another geographical location may give way to different results. Additionally, it would have been more beneficial to have students expand on their definitions, and future qualitative research may wish to do so, especially to learn about how these types of encounters come about.

In short, the diverse definitions of a hook up may reflect the diversity of dating behaviors in the United States. It may also reflect differences in socialization whereby females are taught to be more sexually conservative than their male counterparts, and males are taught to be more aggressive in sexual conquests. Differing definitions make it difficult to accurately assess the number of students who have hooked up, but the ideals of the hook up culture can continue to be studied. Future research should consider whether to define hooking up purely as sex (i.e., vaginal, anal, and/or oral), as most of our respondents have, or encompass behaviors on a continuum ranging from kissing to sex. At the very least, it should specify what they mean when referring to it; some research has done this whereas others have not.

Research should also examine the degree to which hookups result in subsequent committed dating relationships (or investigate how many committed relationships started with hooking up). It is possible that hooking up may be a "stepping stone" or precursor to later intimate relationships. Even though many have suggested that it is an event that occurs once or twice, it may be an event that also leads to a serious relationship, as indicated by some of the responses.

Finally, as sexual scripts change, the use of technology in those scripts will also be increasingly important to study. Research has suggested that the use of technology has and will continue to change the way people interact with one another [33]. Given the technological world we live in, text messaging and social networks may be partly responsible for facilitating hook up encounters. The ability to communicate in time and space can ease the way by which these events occur, but limited attention has been directed at the role of socially interactive technology in hooking up. As previously noted, research has found that hookups were more likely to involve friends or acquaintances rather than strangers [7], yet many academic definitions of hooking up suggests that they involve strangers or brief acquaintances and the responses from college students yielded mixed results. Due to the rapid use of and reliance on technology, it may also be possible that college students are now meeting and hook up with friends at higher rates than acquaintances and even strangers. Thus, future research should examine whether technology has facilitated intimate encounters and with whom. Additionally, further research could be done on whether or not technology or in-person facilitations of hook ups are more common given the digital age we live in. Therefore, it is believed that the role of socially interactive technology warrants attention in studying contemporary hook up encounters.

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