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Not a One Night Review: How Sexual Hookups Have Changed Over the Past 10 Years: A Review

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Abstract

In 2012, Garcia et al. reviewed the existing hookup literature and concluded that hookups were an ingrained behavior driven by both biological factors as well as ever changing social scripts (Garcia et al 2012). Ten years have passed by and there have been substantial cultural changes, such as shifts in attitudes about sexual orientation to gender roles. This current work is focused on a 10-year follow-up on how hookup research has changed. The term “hooking up” refers to uncommitted sexual encounters, which can include a range of sexual activities such as kissing, oral sex, and penetrative intercourse. The previous review suggested that hookup encounters were increasing among adolescents and young adults in North America, representing a shift in acceptance of uncommitted sex. This review will evaluate the literature across the past 10 years and determine what has changed in hookup culture. This literature will investigate the effects of social media, alcohol/ pregame culture, and dating apps on hookup culture. In addition, broader influences such as COVID-19, the #MeToo movement, and the legalization of gay marriage will also be taken into consideration. The review will also investigate whether sexual minorities have been included in the literature since the last review, as well as whether heteronormative scripts have shifted. We argue that, while things still appear somewhat negative in the hookup literature, positive research on sexual expression and hooking up has begun to appear. There is still a long way to go within the research of sexual hookup culture, but the presence of new, more positive research may be a step in the right direction to a more accepting and sex-positive culture.

Introduction

In 2012, a literature review explored non-committed sexual encounters, otherwise known as hooking up, and its biopsychosocial significance (Garcia et al., 2012). At the time, “hookup culture” was something that had already been mainstream on college campuses, meanwhile dating as a courtship was on the decline (England & Thomas 2007). Some factors that led to this are changes in culture, for example, American college students were getting married eight years later than their parents (Kalish & Kimmel, 2011). These types of cultural changes affect social scripts causing alterations on how people interact with each other. A few societal shifts that may have lead to changes in hookup culture include: the #MeToo movment, the creation of Tinder (2012), the legalization of gay marrage (2015), the rise of social media and Covid (2019). The previous review looked at the different forces that influenced hookup culture at the time (Garcia et al., 2012). Garcia et al. explored evolutionary mechanisms and the influence of popular culture on causal sex. This review continues the work on understanding society’s influence on casual sex by examining the current literature.

Hypotheses

- We hypothesised that after 10 years there will be more positive influences on hookup culture and its representation in the literature would include more sex positive language. Hypotheses include:
 - A shift away from heteronormative scripts.
 - An increased representation of sexual minorites in the literature.
 - The facilitation of hookups by social media resulting in increased clarity in communication
 - A continuing impact of alcohol and pregame culture on hooking-up

Methods

- Major themes were divided among the researchers and peer reviewed academic journals were sourced from PsycINFO and Google Scholar. The following search terms include but not limited to:
 - “heteronormativity”, “sexual scripts”, “hooking up”, “social norms”, “covid and sex”, “lgbtq”, “lesbian”, “gay”, “bisexual”, “transgender”, “sexual minority”, “hookup and social media”, “social media and hookup or hookup or casual sex or hookup culture”
- The first 100 articles from PsycINFO were categorized to create a word cloud.

Results



Figure 1: Rectangular spiral cloud following a logarithmic scale with a minimum size of 10pt and a maximum at 15% created using PowerPoint and categorization data

Discussion

Social Media

- The hypothesis regarding social media and hookup culture was not supported by the literature. Social media allowed people to connect despite physical boundaries (LeFebvre, 2018). However, seeking hookups via social media increased the likelihood of stalking, sexual assault, deceit, and undermined the authenticity of relationships (Wright, 2019; Hobbs, 2017).

Heteronormative scripts

- The results did not support the hypothesis that hookup culture has shifted away from heteronormative scripts. Sexual entertainment media and dating apps were found to enforce traditional, gendered expectations in hooking up (Gamble, 2018). Tinder, specifically, has maintained the expectation for men to initiate conversations and hooking up (Christensen, 2018).

Sexual minorities

- The hypothesis is partially supported as the literature has increased the representation, but not substantially. The main finding is that, recent literature is more sex positive, showing benefits of hooking up. Many studies discussed pleasure, connectedness, sexual development, and identity affirmation (Watson et al., 2019). Hooking up between sexual minority women was shown to increase community connectedness and decrease minority stress (Jaffe et al., 2021). Members of the LGBTQ community also seem to stress consent and mutual pleasure, but can still follow heterosexual scripts (Lamont et al., 2018). A new sexual script, performative bisexuality, or the act of straight women lightly hooking up in public male spaces, was identified as a way to experiment and affirm either a “straight” or “gay” identity (Kuperberg & Walker, 2018; Rupp et al., 2014). Men can also experiment through gay specific hookup apps (ex. Grindr) in a more discrete manner (Macapagal et al., 2018). Prior literature focused on male-male sexual interactions in terms of dangers to public health, but more recent literature has shown that men who have sex with men may practice more safe sex than heterosexual pairings (Kuperberg & Allison, 2018; Macapagal et al., 2018).

Alcohol/Pre-game culture

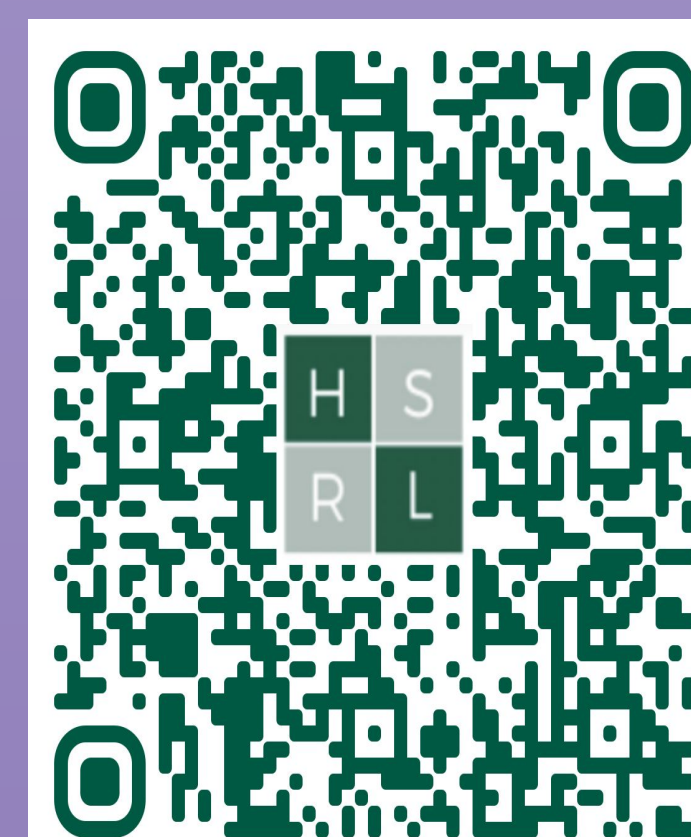
- The literature around alcohol suggests that it continues to hold a central role in hookup culture, and continues the disaster discourse around sex. Most of the data suggests that the involvement of alcohol in a hookup situation can affect hookup partner familiarity (LaBrie et al., 2014), hookup frequency (Thomson Ross et al., 2015) and enjoyment or regret (Reese-Weber et al., 2020). Heavy alcohol use was associated with increased penetrative hookups and increased the likelihood of hooking up with someone they did not know as well. Additionally, most penetrative hookups that occurred with heavy alcohol use were condom protective (Thorpe et al., 2021).

Perception

- College students felt that their social lives were dominated by hookup culture and their peers were hooking up more often than they actually were (Klinger, 2016). Despite negative experiences, people talked about hookup culture in a positive light (Aubrey & Smith, 2013). This distorted perception that casual sex happens very frequently allows hookup culture to thrive.

References

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Figure Citations →



Future Studies

Future research should delve further into hookup culture within sexual minorities, especially with transgender folks who are underrepresented. While the current research is presenting hookup culture in a sex-positive light, there is still an undertone of disaster discourse that future research should work to eliminate. Literary reviews must be continued every few years in order to understand how casual sex changes longitudinally.