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Associations Between Hookup Culture and Social Group

by

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Abstract

Differences in hookup culture and behavior were examined across different social groups at the University of Richmond. Specifically, I examined the difference between Greek life members, varsity athletes, and the general student population. The sample consisted of 174 students (123 females, 51 males) from the University of Richmond. The sample was 33.3% Greek life, 25.9% varsity athletes, and 40.8% general student population. I distributed a web-based survey for participants to complete in a quiet place of their choosing. Fraternity members, sorority members, and male athletes scored higher than the comparison group on a measure of personal attitudes towards hooking up. Additionally, Greek life members reported a significantly higher number of hookup partners than the comparison group. These findings suggest that Greek life members and male athletes would benefit the most from additional education regarding safe sex practices. Further education could decrease negative emotional reactions after a hookup and reduce instances of sexual assault on campus.

Keywords: hookup culture, hooking up, hookup behavior, social group, athletes, fraternity, sorority, Greek life

Association Between Social Group and Hookup Culture

Hooking up can be defined as acts of physical intimacy (kissing, touching, sex) between two partners who are not currently involved in a serious relationship. Hooking up is a common part of college campus culture (Bogle, 2007). Prevalence rates of hooking up on college campuses vary by study but somewhere between 69-75% of students report having at least one hookup in college (England et al., 2007; Olmstead et al., 2013; Paul et al., 2000). There are significant gender differences regarding hookup culture. Many studies report that men hookup at higher rates than women and also are more likely to have sex during a hookup (Paul et al., 2000; Reiber & Garcia, 2010). Men also report higher comfort levels with all types of sexual activities (Lambert et al., 2003; Reiber & Garcia, 2010). These studies also report that males and females overestimate their male and female peer's comfort with all sexual behaviors. Studies have also reported an over perception bias in males, meaning males are more likely to incorrectly perceive sexual interest from a female (Haselton, 2003).

Multiple studies have looked at hookup culture as a function of distinct groups and have emphasized the importance of peer influence in establishing hookup culture (Holman & Sillars, 2012; Kalish, 2013; Manthos et al., 2014). Studies have found significant differences between Greek life members, athletes, and the general student population regarding attitudes and beliefs about hooking up and typical hookup behaviors . For example, data from the College Social Life Survey indicate that students perceive that members of Greek Life hookup more often than the general student population (Kalish, 2013). It also appears that Greek life events are one of the most common locations for hookups to occur. Authors of another study found that 44% of participants reported having their hookup at a Greek event (Paul et al., 2000), and Greek life affiliation has been positively associated with hookup culture endorsement and participation

(Reling et al., 2018; Sweeney, 2014). Additionally, sorority members are more likely to report alcohol related sexual coercion and physical coercion than the general student population (Kalof, 1993; McMahan, 2010).

In addition, rape myth has been heavily studied in Greek life populations and has been strongly associated with hookup culture endorsement (Reling et al., 2018). Rape myths are prejudicial or false beliefs about sexual assault, rapists, and victims that serve to excuse sexual aggression (Burt, 1980; Hockett et al., 2016). Fraternity members exhibit the highest levels of rape myth acceptance and hookup culture endorsement on college campuses (Foubert & Newberry, 2006; McMahan, 2010; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Interestingly, sororities also report higher levels of rape myth acceptance compared to the general student population (McMahan, 2010). One meta-analysis found fraternity members were more likely to hold rape supportive attitudes (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). This meta-analysis also reported a significant association between fraternity membership and hypermasculinity, which could contribute to hookup culture norms.

Whereas studies on Greek life affiliation and hookup culture have relatively consistent findings, studies regarding varsity athletes and hookup culture have had varying results. Data from the College Social Life Survey indicate that students perceive that athletes hookup more often than the general student population (Kalish, 2013). Similar to fraternity membership, male athletes are more likely to hold rape supportive attitudes and report higher levels of hypermasculinity. A recent study found that although male and female athletes were more likely to hookup, the hookup culture was less male dominated compared to other student populations. Male athletes were more likely to report female initiated hookup situations, indicating potential for a different dynamic for hookup scripts (Allison, 2016). These findings are in contrast to

studies of general student populations that found that males have more hookup initiating actions (1-7) than females (0-2) (Eaton et al., 2016). Other studies have reported that female athletes are less likely to hookup than male athletes and score lower on attitudes towards hooking up measures (Allison & Risman, 2013). This is in contrast to findings regarding perceptions of varsity athletes hookup culture as reported by the general student population (Kalish, 2013). The differences in results regarding varsity athletes and hookup culture could be caused by different cultures at varying schools, different team cultures seen across different sports, or other outside influences. Furthermore, it can be difficult to interpret results about varsity athletes due to self-selection into different sport types (basketball, cross country, baseball) that leads to cultural differences between teams.

The Present Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if there are social group differences regarding various aspects of hookup culture at the University of Richmond. In particular, I examined whether there would be differences in attitudes towards hooking up, or personal comfort and endorsement of hookup culture. Findings from previous studies indicate that fraternity members, sorority members, and male athletes will score the highest (Allison & Risman, 2013). I expect this finding to be consistent in my sample. I also evaluated whether there were social group differences in hooking up norms, or how participants view hookup culture on campus and in their specific social groups. Based on findings regarding hookup behavior and attitudes towards hooking up (Allison & Risman, 2013; Reling et al., 2018), I hypothesized that fraternity members, sorority members and male athletes would rate the highest perception of hookup culture. Finally, I examined whether there were differences in the number of hook up partners. Previous research has indicated that Greek life members have the highest number of hookup

partners (Reling et al., 2018). I hypothesize that Greek life members will have the highest number of hookup partners in my study as well. Investigating social group differences is important because it has the potential to inform the development of intervention that decrease risky behavior associated with hooking up such as sexual assault.

Methods

Participants

Data from 174 participants were gathered from a small, private University in the Southeastern United States. The sample consisted of 123 females and 51 males. The sample on average was 19.79 years old (age 18-24). The majority of the participants were in their first year (1st year=31.6%, 2nd year=26.4%, 3rd year=16.1%, 4th year=24.7%, 5th year=1.1%). The sample was primarily heterosexual (91.4%), with 2 participants identifying as gay/lesbian (1.1%), 11 participants identifying as bisexual (6.3%), and 2 participants who preferred not to respond (1.1%). The sample was made up of 70.1% white students, 6.3% black students, 4.6% Hispanic students, 10.9% Asian students, and 7.5% entered "other". Regarding social groups, 33.3% were in social Greek life, 25.9% were varsity athletes, and the remainder were part of the general student population.

Any participant that indicated that they had been in a relationship in the last 3 months, or that was under the age of 18 was not eligible for participation in this study. We excluded participants that had been in a relationship in the last 3 months because our measure of Hookup Behavior asked about behavior in the last 3 months. We collected no data on individuals who were in relationships or had recently been in relationships because they would have been participating in a different type of sexual relationship than we are studying. They would either be

participating in a monogamous relationship or would be cheating on their significant other which is a significantly different circumstance than typical hookup culture and behavior.

Procedure

One set of participants was recruited through the introductory psychology class participant pool. These participants received credit for completing the survey. I recruited a second set of participants by distributing an electronic flyer with the survey link. Given the nature of the research question, I oversampled for varsity athletes and members of Greek life. I instructed participants to complete the approximately 15-minute survey independently and in a quiet location. The first page of the survey was the consent form. Participants were informed on the consent form that they are entitled to skip any questions they did not feel comfortable answering and could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants must provide consent before proceeding with the survey. The last page of the survey provided participants with a short description of the purpose of the study and a list of resources available to them in the event that the survey questions caused them discomfort or they more generally had concerns about their well-being. Participants who were not receiving PSYC 100 credit would have the option of entering their email address to receive a \$5 Amazon gift code as compensation for their time.

Measures

Social group information. Participants were asked to respond to the following question: “Which social group do you most strongly identify with?” Participants could choose from ten options: Social Greek Life, Service Fraternity/Group, Professional Fraternity/Group, Varsity Athlete, Club Sports, Club (non-sports), Religious Group, Performing Arts Group, On Campus Employment, and Other. After selecting which group they felt they belonged to, there was a write in box to indicate the name of the group. For example, if they selected Social Greek Life,

they could specify to which group they belonged. After choosing a group we asked “what proportion of your time do you spend with this group relative to other social groups” followed by a sliding bar that went from 0-100. This question can help us analyze the data to determine if the participants spend a significant amount of time with their primary social group.

Attitudes Towards Hooking Up. We used a 5-item measure taken to assess attitudes towards hooking up (Owen et al., 2010). These items reflect various attitudes about different hookup behaviors and tendencies. The items were: “I would have sex with someone I have no plans to ever talk to again,” “I think its ok to have ‘friends with benefits’,” “I feel more comfortable hooking up with someone than talking about my feelings with them,” “I feel that ‘friends with benefits’ is a natural step towards developing a committed relationship,” and “I feel that hooking up is a normal activity for college students.” These questions were answered on a 7-point Likert Scale, where 1 stood for “strongly disagree” and 7 stood for “strongly agree” (Owen et al., 2010). Higher scores indicate more favorable attitudes about hooking up. Reliability was strong for this measure with a Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$.

Hookup Behavior. We looked at hookup behavior using an adapted measure from Napper et al. (2016) that only used their first two questions. The first two questions were “How many different hookup partners have you been with in the last 3 months?” and “How many times have you hooked up with someone in the last 3 months at UR?” For the first question, participants chose a number between 0 and 14, or chose “15+”. For the second question, participants had six options: 0 times, 1 time, 2-4 times, 5-10 times, 11-20 times, and 21 or more times. We added three more questions to further assess our participant’s hookup experience. Participants were asked if they wished that the above numbers were “less, the same, or more.” We then stated “Some people who have hookups feel pleased with their experiences. Some

people who have hookups feel regretful about their experiences and wish they hadn't happened. When I think about my hookup experiences at UR, I feel..." Participants then chose whether they felt either pleased, regretful or neutral. Finally, we stated "Some people who have hookups feel like those activities are completely voluntary. Some people who have hookups feel like those activities are pressured. My hookup experiences at UR would best be described as..." Participants then chose whether they felt the hookups were "pressured" or "voluntary."

Hooking Up Social Norms. We adapted a social norms measure specifically geared towards hooking up previously used by Fielder and Carey (2010). We modified the questions slightly to assess the culture specifically at our University and at other colleges as well. We used these six questions in the measure: "Hooking up is a part of the college experience at (name of school)," "Hooking up is part of the college experience at all colleges," "College students are expected to hookup," "Hooking up is important to my social life," and "Hooking up is normal among my group of friends." Participants responded on a 7-point Likert Scale where 1 stood for "strongly disagree" and 7 stood for "strongly agree." Higher scores indicate that an individual sees their surrounding peers and general campus culture as being comfortable with hooking up. Reliability was strong for this measure with a Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$.

Results

Descriptive Statistics. I conducted preliminary analyses to obtain means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations for all study variables. On Attitudes Towards Hooking Up, the mean score for the sample was 4.32 and the standard deviation was 1.31, which suggests that overall the sample felt their personal beliefs towards hooking up were neutral or somewhat in favor. For the Hookup Social Norms measure, the mean for the sample was 4.60 and the standard deviation was 1.25, which suggests that participants felt that the general campus culture and their

peer group feel neutrally or slightly agree that hooking up is normal in college. For the Hookup Behavior measure, we looked at items individually. Overall, the sample reported having 2.82 hookup partners over the previous 3 months. I also conducted bivariate correlations between Attitudes Towards Hooking Up, Hookup Social Norms, and Hookup Behavior. The three measures had moderate to strong positive correlations. The correlations between Attitudes Towards Hooking Up and Hookup Social Norms and Attitudes Towards Hooking Up and Number of Hookup Partners were moderate to strong ($r=0.56, p=.000$ and $r=0.44, p=.000$, respectively). Hookup Social Norms was moderately correlated with Number of Hookup Partners ($r=0.40, p=.000$). In other words, higher scores on one of these measures was correlated to higher scores on the other two.

Social Group Differences on Attitudes Towards Hooking Up Scale. To assess differences in attitudes towards hooking up, we ran a one-way ANOVA with Social Group (Greek males, Greek females, Male athletes, Female athletes, Comparison males, Comparison females) as the independent variable (IV) and Attitude Towards Hooking Up scores as the dependent variable (DV). I hypothesized that male athletes, fraternity members, and sorority members would score significantly higher than female athletes and the comparison groups. The ANOVA was statistically significant and my hypothesis was supported, $F(5, 1)= 6.46, p=0.00$. We used Tukey Post Hoc comparisons to further assess the social group differences in scores. Fraternity members ($M=5.20, SD=1.08$) scored significantly higher than female athletes ($M=4.08, SD=1.07$), comparison males ($M=4.03, SD=1.32$) and comparison females ($M=3.75, SD=1.41$). Male athletes ($M=5.20, SD=0.89$) scored significantly higher compared to female athletes and both comparison groups. Sorority members ($M=4.63, SD=1.16$) scored significantly higher than the comparison females (but not comparison males).

Social Group Differences on Hookup Social Norms Scale. To assess differences in Hookup Social Norms (HUSN) we ran a one-way ANOVA with social group as the IV and HUSN scores as the DV. I hypothesized that male athletes, fraternity members, and sorority members would score higher than female athletes and the comparison group. The ANOVA was statistically significant and the hypothesis was partially supported, $F(5, 171)=6.62, p=0.00$. Sorority members ($M=5.20, SD=1.06$) scored significantly higher than Comparison females ($M=3.88, SD=1.50$), and Male athletes ($M=5.19, SD=0.81$) scored significantly higher than Comparison females. We expected to see a significant difference between fraternity members ($M=4.80, SD=0.95$) and the comparison group, but there was only a marginally significant difference ($p=.06$). None of the groups were significantly different from female athletes ($M=4.60, SD=.91$).

To explore this unexpected finding I ran two, one-way ANOVA that split the HUSN scale into two subscales. I created one subscale that consisted of four items that asked about general campus hookup culture. Results from a one way ANOVA with social group as the IV and this subscale as the DV, $F(5, 171)= 3.13, p=.01$, revealed only one significant difference: Sorority members ($M=5.39, SD=1.15$) outscored Comparison females ($M=4.39, SD=1.58$).

The second subscale included two items that asked about hookup culture within the participants' social group. Results from a one-way ANOVA with social group as the IV and this two-item subscale as the DV, $F(5, 171)= 12.17, p=.000$ revealed several significant differences between groups. Fraternity members ($M=4.75, SD=1.09$) and sorority members ($M=4.83, SD=1.29$) outscored Comparison males ($M=3.62, SD=1.43$) and Comparison females ($M=2.87, SD=1.72$). In addition, Male athletes ($M=4.90, SD=.87$) scored marginally higher than Comparison males ($M=3.62, SD=1.43, p=.06$) and significantly higher than Comparison females

($M=2.87$, $SD=1.72$). Finally, female athletes ($M=3.97$, $SD=1.08$) scored significantly higher than Comparison females. Although these findings are more in line with my hypothesis, it is worth noting that female athletes still did not score significantly differently from fraternity members, sorority members or male athletes. This may be because fraternity members view general campus hookup cultures differently than their own social groups (i.e., they do not believe that their hookup social norms apply to all social groups.)

Social Group Differences for Number of Hookup Partners. To assess differences in the number of hookup partners, we ran a one-way ANOVA with social group collapsed across gender as the IV and number of hookup partners as the DV. This ANOVA was statistically significant, $F(2, 172)= 5.14$, $p<.01$. We ran a Tukey's Post Hoc comparison test to further assess the social group differences. Members of Greek Life ($M=3.45$, $SD= 2.50$) scored significantly higher than the comparison group ($M= 2.25$, $SD= 2.00$).

Summary of findings. I found that male athletes, fraternity members, and sorority members indicated the highest personal endorsement of hookup culture. When it comes to participants' views of general campus hookup culture, male athletes and sorority members report an increased perception of hookup culture in their social groups and in the overall campus culture. This reflects feelings about their own peer groups and their view of other social groups on campus. Members of social Greek life seem to hookup at higher rates than other social groups, reporting the most hookup partners over the past three months.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine what social group differences existed regarding hookup culture at the University of Richmond. A hookup was defined as an act of physical intimacy (kissing, touching, sex) between two partners who are not currently involved

in a serious relationship. The social groups of particular interest were Greek life members and varsity athletes in comparison to the general student population. Similar to previous studies, I found that fraternity members, sorority members, and male athletes scored highest on a measure for personal attitudes towards hooking up (Allison, 2016). My finding that Greek life members had more hookup partners was also consistent with previous research (Reling et al., 2018; Sweeney, 2014). Surprisingly, I did not find that fraternity members scored significantly differently than any group on a measure of perceptions of hookup culture in the general campus culture. This was surprising based on previous literature, however, after creating a subscale that only included participants' views of their own social group's hookup norms, fraternity members scored significantly higher than the comparison group. This could indicate that while fraternity members view themselves as active in hookup culture, they do not view other social groups similarly.

Greater comfort with hookup culture and behavior in males can be partially explained by peer pressure. Males often indicated that positive reinforcement from their peers influenced their decisions in hookup partners. Males consider their peers approval even in their absence, indicating that peer approval has a significant effect on hookup behavior (Kalish, 2013). Among the males in this study, fraternity members and male athletes stood out in regard to their hookup attitudes. This could be explained by research that indicates fraternity membership and athletic participation has been associated with higher levels of hypermasculinity, which could contribute to their opinions towards hookup culture (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). In both of these groups, there are hierarchies based on age. The older members of the group have a significant influence on the attitudes and behaviors of the younger members. As a result, new members conform and follow the existing social norms that were created before their arrival. Furthermore, male

participation in Greek life and varsity sports can lead to adherence to gendered scripts and hookup culture expectations (Allison, 2016; Reling et al., 2018).

The peer group is not just important for males, but is significant in the development of hookup attitudes and behaviors in all genders and groups (Holman & Sillars, 2012; Kalish, 2013). One study found that within peer groups with strong peer relationships, frequent communication about hooking was related to increased hookup behavior and more favorable attitudes towards hooking up (Holman & Sillars, 2012). Since Greek life membership and varsity sports teams typically lead to close peer relations, this could be part of the underlying mechanism that leads to hookup attitudes and behaviors in these social groups. Greek life members and male athletes likely talk more often and more positively about hooking up than other social groups do, leading to greater comfort and increased participation in hookup culture.

This leaves the question as to why there is a difference between male and female athletes' personal attitudes towards hooking up, but no difference by gender in the other social groups. Research indicates that hookup dynamics among athletes could differ from other populations. Male athletes report more female initiated hookups than other social groups (Allison, 2016). In addition, female participation in sports may result in female athletes developing different definitions of femininity such as greater assertiveness and less passivity which could influence how they navigate their sexual relationships (Allison, 2016). Another difference with varsity athletes is that there is less opportunity for cross gender interaction compared to Greek members and the general student population. Varsity athletics takes a significant amount of time due to practice, travel, and competition. During this time, most teams only interact with their same gendered teammates. As a result, male athlete attitudes have less of an effect on female athlete attitudes and vice versa. In contrast, fraternity and sorority members have many more

opportunities to interact with each other and influence each other's opinions. This could further explain why there is a difference between male and female athletes but not other social groups.

Limitations. One limitation of this study is that I was unable to measure alcohol use which is a strong predictor of hookup participation. This would have been a useful moderator for analyzing hookup behavior. Another limitation is the male sample size for each social group. Each was slightly below twenty, which was acceptable, but a larger male sample would have increased the reliability of the findings. Additionally, not all varsity sports teams or Greek organizations are represented in my sample, and some are only minimally represented.

Future Directions. One future direction is to study Varsity athletic teams to search for differences in hookup culture across sport type. Various sports are made up of demographically distinct groups (ex: tennis compared to basketball) and may come from different cultural backgrounds. It is unknown whether team hookup culture differs by sport, however, varsity athletes are referred to as one group. It is important to confirm that varsity athletes can be referred to as one group in future studies. Future studies should also examine how risk for sexual assault and attitudes towards rape differ by social group. These studies should also focus on factors that protect against sexual assault (ex: verbal communication), and not just risk factors for sexual assault. This research could improve the quality of interventions. Studies regarding hookup culture should be used to develop effective, targeted interventions to increase the sexual safety and well-being of college students.

Conclusion. My study replicates other studies that have found that Greek life members and male athletes report greater comfort and participation in hookup culture. It also further indicates the hookup culture differences seen in female athletes. These results indicate that fraternity members, sorority members and male athletes would benefit from additional education

regarding sexual communication and safe sex practices. Education for these groups could benefit other social groups on campus and lead to fewer negative emotional reactions after a hookup and reduce instances of sexual assault on campus.

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