

Understanding the Experiences of Females' who Engage in Hook Up Culture

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Abstract

Hooking up can be defined as the act of kissing, touching, oral sex, or sexual intercourse with little to no expectation of forming an emotional connection or romantic relationship of any kind (Kooyman, Pierce, & Zavadil, 2011). Hook up culture has many positive and negative consequences to female's perception of self. While many studies have clearly outlined the consequences that hook up culture can have on an individual, few studies have explored how female's experiences in hook up culture affect their sense of self. The purpose of this study was to develop a model for understanding the impact of hook up culture on self-identity. Purposive sampling was used to recruit 5 female participants who took part in an open-ended interview. Following the interviews, the data were transcribed and a grounded theory approach was used to develop a model using open, axial and selective coding methods as described by Corbin and Strauss (1998). By constantly comparing codes and categories a model of hook up self-identity was formed. The Hook Up Self Identity Model presents four stages that participants described as being part of their journey to recognizing the effect hook up culture has had on their sense of self: Engagement stage, Assessment of Risks and Benefits stage, Reflection stage and Impact of Reflection stage. Throughout each stage themes emerged that were essential to understanding how hook up culture has affected their sense of self. The Reflection stage is the central category of this model where participants were able to recognize that through a process of self-exploration, hook up culture overall has affected their sense of self in a positive manner.

Keywords: Hook up culture, perception of self

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Understanding the Experiences of Females' Who Engage in Hook Up Culture

The transition from adolescence to adulthood can be a time of exploration for many young adults as they leave home and embark on a journey to higher education, new job opportunities, and self-growth (Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006). Part of self-growth for young adults may include exploring new friendships and intimate relationships with the opposite or same sex (Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015). While the freedom to participate in traditional dating relationships is enticing to some who are exploring their sexual identity, previous research concludes that many young adults are engaging in casual sexual interactions with strangers, acquaintances, or friends more often than formally committing to one partner in an exclusive relationship (Bogle, 2007). "Hook up culture" refers to hooking up as kissing, touching, oral sex, or sexual intercourse with no expectation of forming an emotional connection or commitment of any kind (Kooyman, Pierce, & Zavadil, 2011). This relatively new form of sexual exploration can be exciting for some; but, it can also lead to mixed feelings and confusion about participating in hook up culture. Therefore, it is important to explore the contexts in which hooking up occurs and how it can impact one's sense of self.

Much of the research to date has focused on the contexts and influences associated with hook up culture as well as some benefits and risks with engaging in casual sexual interactions for both males and females (Bradshaw, Kahn, & Saville, 2010; Grello et al., 2006; Kooyman et al., 2011; Paul & Hayes, 2002). While most of the research has included both genders, some studies have discussed the negative consequences associated with hooking up specifically for young females (Armstrong, Hamilton & England, 2010; Kooyman et al., 2011). However, few studies have explored

the overall thoughts and opinions of females who engage in hook up culture and the ways in which it impacts their self-identity. My hope is that by examining the experiences of such women, a better understanding can be obtained about how hook up culture impacts a females' sense of self.

Literature Review

For the purpose of this research study, a definition of hook up culture will be provided as well as some demographics on the individuals that primarily engage in hook up culture. Past research on hook up culture has highlighted the environments, influences and themes that were relevant among casual hook ups including social and peer influences as well as risk taking behaviours that were common for individuals engaging in casual sexual interactions. A discussion of both the positive and negative effects on females' who engage in hook up culture will also be explored throughout the literature review.

Defining Hook Up Culture

Hooking up is used to describe casual sexual interactions. These types of sexual encounters can occur for one night only or continue casually, with no expectation that these sexual interactions will lead to a romantic relationship (Grello et al., 2006). Bogle (2007) suggests that this form of intimate encounter is most popular in college age individuals, generally ages 18 to 25, for whom hooking up is viewed as part of the college experience. She further proposes that it is the college environment and social contexts that students are immersed in that facilitates this form of sexual encounter among young adults. To understand the increasing nature of hook up culture, Grello, Welsh, Harper and Dickson (2003) conducted a study and found that 70% of adolescent's

ages 12 to 21 informed researchers that they had engaged in uncommitted sexual interactions within the past year. It is understood that hook up culture has become a prevailing norm for younger generations but what is not understood is how the experiences of hooking up impacts young adults self-identity.

Social and Peer Influences

There continues to be gendered expectations on what is appropriate sexual behaviour for both males and females. Paul and Hayes (2002) study points out that negative attitudes of females engaging in sexual behaviours is termed the sexual double standard, wherein society reinforces the notion that sexual exploration is encouraged for males but is frowned upon for females. More specifically, males are labelled as studs for having multiple casual sex partners, whereas females are derogatorily labelled as sluts for engaging in identical behaviours (Bogle, 2008; Swauger, Witham, & Shinberg, 2013). In addition, despite hooking up becoming the new sexual norm within contemporary culture, young females may still experience discrimination when engaging in a hook up (Bachtel, 2013) For example, society has become more accepting of both sexes engaging in hook up culture; however, young females are stigmatized for engaging in casual sexual behaviours too often or labelled a prude for refusing to engage in hook up culture altogether (Bachtel, 2013; Harden, 2013). The stigma females receive is a negative reputation for either participating too much or too little in hook up culture. This renders women confused and unsure about their place within hook up culture (Kooyman et al., 2011). Due to the double standards and discriminatory behaviours, many women report more negative experiences when engaging in hook up culture as compared to men, which

will be discussed further in the literature review (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Grello et al., 2006; Kooyman et al., 2011; Paul & Hayes, 2002).

With respect to gender differences, females have been socialized to look for meaningful connections and intimacy with a potential partner in order to feel comfortable engaging in sexual interactions (Kooyman et al., 2011). Bradshaw et al. (2010) found that females tend to associate sex or intimate relations with feelings of love. This can influence the female's expectation that hooking up with a partner is a step towards romantic commitment when that may not be the case. Females also report more sexual satisfaction in committed relationships than in casual sexual interactions (Armstrong et al., 2010). This may be due to having a better emotional connection with one's partner, as well as mutual expectations and respect for one another's sexual pleasure (Armstrong et al., 2010). While hook up culture provides the means to gain sexual satisfaction without forming an emotional connection, it appears that females' prefer sexual interactions where they feel connected and comfortable with their sexual partner.

Although hook up culture is perceived as part of the college experience for young adults, studies report that many females engage in casual sexual encounters because it is believed that their peers are also engaging in these sexual behaviours (Kooyman et al., 2011). Females reported that their engagement in hook ups was led by a desire to fit in with peers even though one may have felt uncomfortable with the sexual behaviours involved in hook up culture (Grello et al., 2006; Kooyman et al., 2011). Grello et al. (2006), reported that the desire to be accepted by peers can lead to feelings of guilt and shame surrounding hooking up behaviours and increases in depressive symptoms, anxiety, and lower levels of self esteem. In contrast to females, males

typically engage in casual sexual interactions to enhance their status among peers and to increase their level of sexual experience (Paul & Hayes, 2002). These behaviours generally impact males positively as they tend to experience pride in themselves, social rewards from their peers and an increase in confidence for initiating intimacy with females (Kuperberg & Padgett, 2015; Paul & Hayes, 2002). It is important to understand the contexts in which hooking up occurs as well as the social and peer influences, so we may understand the emotional impacts on the individual and potentially reduce risk-taking behaviours.

Risk Taking Behaviours

There are many risk taking behaviours associated with hook up culture. During college the ways in which young adults interact and meet others is at various events where drugs and alcohol are consumed, such as house parties or a night socializing at the bar with friends (Bogle, 2008). Bogle (2007) states that alcohol is used as a social lubricant that makes initiating hook ups easier for both genders. Alcohol serves to lower one's inhibitions while at the same time increase feelings of attraction toward the opposite sex, thereby making it more likely that one will engage in casual sexual behaviours (Grello et al., 2006). Bachtel (2013) reiterates these assertions by suggesting that alcohol use and attractiveness are considered two main factors that lead to hooking up. This can be damaging to individuals, as consuming alcohol or drugs also hinders the ability to make good judgements and decisions for oneself. Paul and Hayes (2002) found that partaking in risky behaviours such as consuming alcohol or drugs before engaging in a hook up often leads to unwanted sexual interactions or feelings of regret. Drinking alcohol appears to be a major influence on a young adults decision to engage in casual

sex so it is important to understand how this influence impacts female's who engage in hook up culture and whether or not it contributes to negative feelings such as regret or remorse following a hook up encounter.

The danger of hook up culture is also associated with many health risks, such as contracting a sexually transmitted disease (STD) from a partner with an unknown sexual history (Kooyman et al., 2011). Kooyman et al. (2011) reported that the rates of STDs are constantly rising for females' ages 15 to 24 accounting for the largest amount of reported STDs compared to any other age group in 2008. This can be due to young women's beliefs that peers are also engaging in risk taking sexual behaviours such as unprotected sex (Kooyman et al., 2011). By partaking in risky sexual practices there is also a greater likelihood of unwanted pregnancies (Rhoads, 2012). With adolescents partaking in sexual interactions at earlier ages, it is imperative to educate youth on the potential risks of engaging in hook up culture. It will also be helpful to understand how these risks impact females' self-identity for those who engage in hook up culture.

The Effects on Females Engaging in Hook Up Culture

There are several positive and negative consequences associated with hook up culture. While some females enjoy the physical aspects of a hook up encounter, others find it difficult to feel comfortable sharing themselves intimately without a formal relationship (Rhoads, 2012). This internal conflict can have many consequences on one's mental health. Several studies show that females tend to exhibit more depressive symptoms after a casual sexual interaction with a stranger, acquaintance, or friend than do males (Armstrong et al., 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2011; Grello et al., 2006; Kooyman et al., 2010; Paul & Hayes, 2002). Paul and Hayes (2002) also assert that some females feel

remorse and regret after a casual hook up encounter, which is linked to feelings of low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, Grello and colleagues (2006) speculate that females with depressive symptoms may engage in sexual behaviours to satisfy a desire to be wanted, seeking validation from a sexual partner. When this tactic does not work, patterns of negative self-esteem, and depression continue (Grello et al., 2006). It is apparent that hook up culture has the potential to impact females self-identity in a negative manner therefore, it is important to understand how personal experiences of females who partake in casual sexual interactions impacts their sense of self.

There have also been a few studies that address the positive attitudes of females that engage in hook up culture. For example, females are starting to put education and careers first before building a family (Armstrong et al., 2010). As such, engaging in hook up culture allows females to assert their sexual freedoms because hook up culture can be less time consuming and less emotionally taxing (Armstrong et al., 2010). Additionally, females enjoy being able to make decisions for themselves that do not involve a committed partner's opinion. In a study conducted by Paul and Hayes (2002) it was found that both males and females reported feeling validated by peers for engaging in hook up culture, which lead to positive emotional consequences, such as a boost in self-confidence. Not all females who engage in hook up culture report negative feelings after an encounter which suggests that how hook up culture impacts a females self-identity may be dependent on one's current life situation or overall view toward hook up culture.

In summary, hooking up is the new normal for young adults engaging in sexual exploration (Bogle, 2007). Young females may feel pressured to fit in by peers and therefore may engage in hook up culture regardless of whether or not they feel

comfortable doing so. Consequently, hook up culture increases the likelihood that young women are also engaging in other risk taking behaviours, such as consuming alcohol and drugs or participating in unsafe sexual practices that pose many health risks. Although there are risks to partaking in hook up culture, some females reported having a positive experience engaging in hook up culture as it allowed them to assert their sexual freedoms (Armstrong et al., 2010). After combining all of these factors, women overall report having more negative than positive experiences hooking up which is linked to an increase in depressive and anxiety related symptoms and low levels of self-esteem. Most of the literature on hook up culture is associated with the contexts and environments that facilitate both males and females decisions to engage in hook up culture. What is missing from the literature are the personal experiences of females who engage in casual sexual interactions to better understand the impact these types of encounters can have on females self-identity.

Purpose

Many studies have clearly outlined the positive and negative effects that hook up culture has had on females; but, few studies have focused on the experiences of females and how engaging in hook up culture impacts their sense of self. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of females who have engaged in hook up culture and the ways in which it impacts their self-identity. Once this is understood, the information may be used to inform future research directions in the area and ultimately educate the general public on the impact of hook up culture on females. The information may also be used to adopt different therapeutic approaches for those that may wish to seek help coping with negative consequences associated with hook up culture.

Method

Qualitative Research Approach

A grounded theory methodology was chosen for this project, as it is a proven method of exploring gaps within research. This method was used to help understand participants lived experiences, behaviours, and emotions surrounding hook up culture (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). Corbin and Strauss' (1998, 2015) coding procedures as well as Creswell's (2009) recommendation for conducting research using a grounded theory methodology were used in the analysis of this data. This analysis led to the creation of a visual matrix and a conceptual understanding of the experiences of females engaging in hook up culture (Corbin & Strauss 2015).

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to ensure the data collected contained information specific to the research question proposed. This included finding participants who could purposefully provide information on their experiences engaging in casual sexual encounters (Creswell, 2009). The inclusion criteria for this study consisted of females' ages 18 to 25 years, since research suggests that hooking up is generally more popular at this stage of life (Bogle, 2007). Additionally, the participants had to be willing to discuss their thoughts, opinions, and experiences of their own casual hook up encounters.

Data Collection

Recruitment. Recruitment occurred through online advertisements (Appendix B) on social media (e.g., Facebook) or referrals from other participants after receiving approval from The University of Regina's Research Ethics Board (Appendix A). This recruitment process involved snowball sampling, which is described by Noy (2008) as accessing potential participants through existing participants' social networks. To further

explain, snowball sampling was used as a vehicle to allow participants to provide study information to other potential participants (e.g., members of their social network) who had similar experiences (Noy, 2008). In order to reach saturation, wherein information within the data that is used to create themes and categories no longer produces new variations of themes throughout the data collection process, I aimed to recruit 10 to 12 participants (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Unfortunately, due to the time constraints of this research study I was unable to obtain the desired number of participants and therefore theoretical saturation was not reached.

Participants. Five females between the ages of 18 and 25 years of age participated in the study. The average age of participants was 23 years. All participants confirmed that they had engaged in hook up culture and were willing to discuss their experiences. Once the participants contacted me via email, a time and place was arranged to meet at their convenience.

Interviews. For the purpose of this study, face-to-face interviews were conducted in order to directly observe the non-verbal cues of the participants (Creswell, 2009). The face-to-face interviews included a semi-structured list of open-ended questions that allowed participants to discuss their experiences with as much detail as they wished to share (Creswell, 2009). Prior to each interview, the participants were given an explanation of the purpose of the research study and a definition of hook up culture to minimize the likelihood of obtaining indirect information associated with the research topic. Once this information was understood participants were given a consent form (Appendix C) to read and sign. Participants were then told that they were free to

withdraw from the study and that all of their responses would remain confidential following the interviews.

Next, the interview guide (Appendix D) was reviewed with each participant to ensure that they were aware of the questions to be asked and to ask if there were any questions or concerns moving forward with the interview. All questions within the interview guide were specific to gaining knowledge of the participant's experiences engaging in hook up culture; however, to allow the interview to flow easily, the sequence of questions and wording was adjusted for each interview. The lengths of interviews varied with the shortest interview being 8 minutes and the longest interview being 50 minutes. All interviews were recorded on a password protected Apple iPhone 7 under the participants consent. The recorded interviews were then uploaded to a password-protected computer and were transcribed for further analysis. It is important to note this transcribed data was only accessible to me and one of my supervisors, Mary Hampton.

Data Analysis

Memo-writing. To follow the process of qualitative research, the analyses involved collecting the data by conducting an open-ended interview, memo-writing, transcribing the data and then reviewing the transcribed data for emerging themes and categories. Corbin and Strauss (2015) stressed the importance of writing memos throughout data collection and of the analysis of the transcribed data. Memo-writing was carried out after the collection of data where I was able to write down jot notes from observations I had throughout the interviews, which was later used to remind me of any emerging patterns that may be useful in the analysis stage (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

During the analysis of the transcribed data, I used memo-writing to write down any creative ideas or thoughts I had about the transcribed data (Urquhart, 2013). It was also a useful tool to explore the relationships and interactions that evolved from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For example, following the transcription of interviews, I began to reflect on how the participants' self-view impacted their self-identity. I also questioned how a females' age may impact their engagements in hook up culture and whether or not it would have a negative implication to one's mental health.

Memo #3

March 21, 2018

Participants mentioned that they viewed themselves in a better way after their overall experience engaging in hook up culture. Hook up culture has allowed participants to keep an open mind about engaging in casual sexual interactions in order to explore their identity to understand the potential challenges they may go through while engaging in hook up culture, which appears to help provide a deeper understanding of who they are and how they are growing as an individual. Placed importance on hook up culture being a part of development as you age. Does age impact self-view? Participants suggest to engage in hook up culture at an older age as emotional maturity is more likely at this stage of an individual's life. Would emotions play a role in the decision to engage in this type of culture? Is emotional maturity a contender for having more positive experiences engaging in hook up culture?

Analysis Considerations

Age participants begin to engage in hook up culture

Role of emotional maturity in overall understanding of impact

Within the process of memo-writing I was able to sort, order and re-order developing themes and categories. Memo-writing, in conjunction with coding was a quintessential part of developing a model using a grounded theory approach as it helped to inspire new themes and codes from other existing categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1998).

Coding. Corbin and Strauss (1998) stress three major components as essential to coding in qualitative research. The first step in analysing data is to perform open coding. During the process of open coding the transcribed interviews were reviewed line by line

without assumptions so that general themes could emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). To proceed with open coding, I met with my supervisor Mary Hampton after the transcription of interviews was completed and developed 15 open codes (Appendix E). Once the open coding categories were developed the rest of the transcribed interviews were analysed line by line wherein each segment of data was given a code in the left margin of the page. Throughout the analysis of the rest of the transcribed interviews, existing codes and emerging codes would overlap which helped to group together themes that were used in further analysis.

After the completion of open coding, axial coding was the next step to analysing the data. The purpose of axial coding is to physically separate the data under each open code and reassemble the data within individual documents (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). To explain, during this stage of analysis, data (e.g. participant quotes) from each code were separated into individual word documents. From this stage, the data within each code was reviewed further to identify any recurring themes and each code was then compared to other codes to search for important themes presented among other categories.

The last step to coding the data was selective coding. This phase is described by Corbin and Strauss (1998) as refining emerging categories and themes derived from open and axial coding that work to form an overall theory or conceptual understanding of the research findings. During this step of coding some reflection of the analysis process was needed in order to refine emerging themes to develop a central category that would form the basis of a theory. This reflection involved creating multiple diagrams, which allowed me to look abstractly at the analyzed data and lump categories of themes together to discover the central concept of my model, self-exploration. It was during this stage that I

was able to reflect upon the process from start to finish and the Hook Up Self Identity Model (Figure 1) was developed.

Results

The Hook Up Self Identity Model was developed from the participant's experiences of engaging in hook up culture. This model consists of four stages that participants described as part of the influence hook up culture had on their self-identity. The four stages include: The engagement stage, the assessment of risks and benefits stage, the reflection stage and the impact of reflection stage. Within each stage there were factors and themes that participants described as being part of their engagement in hook up culture, drawing attention to the ways in which hook up culture affected their sense of self. Some of these factors and themes include, the type of relationship one has with a hook up partner, concern for their health and safety, and the freedom to experiment with their sexuality.

Whilst discussing with the participants about their experiences engaging in hook up culture, factors that influenced a typical hook up were explored (e.g., alcohol). Next, assessing the risks and benefits of their sexual encounters allowed the participants to bring attention to some of the negative experiences they have endured when hooking up including judgement and a concern for their physical health and safety. Contrary to experiencing some negativity when hooking up, they also mentioned benefits to engaging in hook up culture including, gaining support from peers, and having the freedom to experiment with their sexuality. Throughout the reflection stage, themes emerged within the central concept: self-exploration. These themes were crucial to understanding how hook up culture has affected these females' sense of self. These themes included:

building confidence, self-growth, independence and self-empowerment. The final stage was the impact of reflection, whereby the participants reflected on their experiences overall and how hook up culture led to a positive self-identity.

Engagement Stage

The first stage of the model, the engagement stage, began with participants describing a typical social encounter along with factors that influenced a hook up interaction. These factors included: peers, alcohol and the relationship of the partner they interacted with.

Peers. While describing a typical hook up encounter one participant explained that it is often a night out with friends that helped to facilitate a hook up:

ID2: Oh my god yeah, when I first moved to Regina, oh my gosh, yeah I had a boyfriend when I first moved to Regina so I wasn't in that scene and then when we broke up I was like, "hey okay" so I met up with one of my other girlfriends who was also single and then we were like we know nobody here so we can have so much fun, okay, quote on quote fun.

For another participant, she described a typical scene in which she found herself engaging in behaviours that would eventually lead to a hook up encounter:

ID1: Mostly like... yeah I wouldn't say like probably a lounge scene type of thing where you are just having a couple of drinks with friends is most likely where you'll engage in things like that.

Participant 4 explained that she did not feel pressured from friends to engage in hook up culture but, that she played a role in influencing her friends to partake in casual sexual interactions:

ID4: Because even for example um one of my friends she was like very just like not she had kissed like a couple boys and like um lost her virginity to her like one long term boyfriend and that was it and then we became friends and everything changed um and she's like I blame you but like isn't actually mad about it

Similarly, participant 5 explained that while her hook ups did not facilitate while she was out with her peers, she found that by conversing with her friend she was able to come to terms with her decision to begin engaging in hook up culture after a relationship had ended:

ID5: Um I guess like [laughs] uh when I first was um I guess like broken up with my significant other like you know at the time um I was-- it was like for a lot of reasons like I think it's important to work on myself, be independent um so that was very-- I feel like it was a pretty positive attitude I think to have and I spoke with a friend who I know is-- she engages in hook up culture actually a lot of like kinky stuff and she has stories um and I was talking to her like soon after saying like I had this kind of like friend and we were chatting and he was like, "oh you know if you want to get back out there, give me a call" and I was like talking to my friend and I was like this is so soon right? Like I should have time to like you know like cool off like in between like relationships and she's like, "yeah but that's just kind of like a societal expectation and like you are you, you know like you are running the show now. You're in charge of yourself and I think if you want to then you should just go ahead", and just like talking to her about like my first hook up situation and she's like, "no like you can do what you want to do like it is up to you now you don't have to like, like don't feel like you should wait because like it's a societal expectation or something" and I don't know, she definitely gave me a lot of like I guess like a sense of freedom.

For some participants, a typical night out with friends at the bar or at a pub was most likely where they engaged in hook up culture however, others found that their peers were encouraging them to partake in hook up culture if it was something they wanted to do. Some participants mentioned that simply talking to their peers about engaging in hook up culture encouraged them to feel better about participating in casual sexual interactions. In addition, environments where alcohol would be available for consumption, was another influential factor prominent in hook up encounters described by participants.

Alcohol. Participants mentioned alcohol as a major facilitator in many hook up encounters:

ID2: I think that-- well everyone I've hooked up with is when I'm at a bar or a pub so I think alcohol probably helps everybody a little bit...It's like more courage

cause like if I see someone I think is really good looking and I'm like "oh my god, that guys really good looking I think I need a little drink just to make myself have some courage".

Another participant also mentioned the use of alcohol as an important influence while engaging in hook up culture as it provides a way to gain confidence in approaching an individual to engage in a casual sexual interaction:

ID4: Also alcohol plays a big key in that uh because yeah I just turn into a little bit of a freak I guess um but yeah like cause it's such a shift in like okay like if I'm sober the likelihood of me going to approach some man or just like randomly having casual sex with them is super low right but um if there's like even a bit of alcohol or like to like loosen you up a little bit um I feel like number one that helps the conversation to flow but it also helps to like I don't know give you confidence.

Although alcohol can be used to increase confidence in approaching a partner for a casual hook up, alcohol was also described by a participant as a means to dissociate from the after effects of being sexually assaulted by an acquaintance at a party:

ID3: And then I felt like I had to put-- pretend nothing happened cause I was not-- I was at a party and I had to go back downstairs and see a bunch of people and I had to pretend like it didn't happen and then since I was drinking I just decided to get really drunk and drink a lot more.

Participant 1 was asked how she felt after a hook up ensued in which she found that if alcohol was a factor in facilitating a hook up, feelings of regret were connected to the interaction at first:

ID1: Um okay so it depends so if there was alcohol involved and you wake up the next morning and you hooked up with someone, you likely, well I typically feel regret initially um just like "uhhh I shouldn't have done that" um or yeah mostly just initially but then like as the day wears off or goes on and my hangover goes away then I'm like "ahh whatever its fine".

Not only is alcohol generally used to initiate a hook up; but, it is understood that alcohol consumption can lead to and continue after encounters that participants describe as being unwanted or uncomfortable. Additionally, if alcohol was consumed prior to a hook up

encounter, feelings of regret were mentioned initially, however, it appears that feelings of regret did not persist further.

Relationship to Partner. The relationship between the participant and the hook up partner was an important part to understanding how hook up culture impacts females' sense of self. There were differing views on the types of sexual partners participants preferred wherein participants described two types of relationships of a potential hook up partner. One type of relationship demonstrated a level of anonymity wherein, participants wanted to know little about their partner, and remained without contact after the hook up occurred. Another type of relationship that participants described was having a previously established emotional connection or relationship with their hook up partner. This form of relationship relied on more communication and created confusion about the expectations of a future relationship.

No Strings Attached. Some participants described having interactions with no strings attached to their sexual partner. For example, participant 2 explained that she prefers having casual sexual interactions with strangers to avoid forming an emotional connection:

ID2: For a long time in my phone I had Matt #1 and Matt #2. I did not know who they were. I do not want to know your last name, I don't wanna know nothing about you, I don't ever want to see you again sometimes and I am very vocal, I'm like "this was nice, but goodbye". But I find that then I don't get attached (I: Okay) I don't want to say I don't get attached, it's just better. I don't want to get attached and then if I know a little bit more about you, I tend to see them as a person

Participant 4 expressed that having the freedom to hook up with a partner you may not know becomes more acceptable in hook up culture as you age:

ID4: ... when you're younger and you're not as much engaging in hook up culture you don't have that experience and I feel like a lot of the time everything is so like

tense and rigid and it's like um like when you're growing up you only like kiss a boy who is your boyfriend who you've been dating for this long or whatever and then like when you kind of get out of that and you start engaging more in hook up culture it's more like if you feel it's right, if you want to sleep with some guy and like never talk to him again or like literally not know his name, it's fine (I: Yeah) Right? As long as you feel okay about that, which I think is really cool.

Participant 5 discussed that having one-night stands allowed her to feel less guilty if she no longer wanted to communicate or see the individual after a hook up ensued:

ID5: Um I mean like if we had you know like a one night hook up kind of thing and I didn't like them I pretty much just write them off cause I'll think why again? I don't need to put up with someone that I don't like. There's not really a future in it so I don't need to be nice to them. I don't um you know I don't want them in my life so I just won't.

It appeared that having a level of anonymity to the hook up allowed participants to feel as though they were not emotionally attached to the individual they were engaging with maintaining a level of independence and autonomy in their decision-making.

Previous Established Relationship. One participant described her reasons for avoiding causal sexual interactions with friends. In the past, engaging sexually with her friends caused negative feelings to arise for both hook up partners due to expectations of a future relationship:

ID4: And I kind of always just avoided it and like, haha friends, we're just friends and that's all there is and whatever um and then like I got super drunk and we were like kind of talking and I basically was like we're doing this and then the next morning I woke up and was like oh I probably shouldn't have done that and it's not even as if I had regrets like for my actions, it's more like I felt bad because I like know that he had maybe higher expectations.

Participant 2 also avoids hooking up with friends because she did not want to have to hurt anyone's feelings if she did not want to pursue a relationship:

ID2: I have a friend and he has told me numerous times he's like, "why don't we ever just hook up?" and I'm like, "you're my friend". He's like "so you hooked up with, I saw you with that guy at the bar" and I'm like "I didn't know him, did you know him?", he's like "well no" and I'm like, "like that's, he's not my friend, I

have no emotional attachment to him, I don't have to hurt his feelings if I don't want anything to do with him" and if it does continue on, then it continues on, but I'm not hurting his feelings because he's not my friend and I'm not upsetting anybody, especially in our friend circle because it's so small I don't want to hurt my friend's feelings. If I'm not like emotionally attached to somebody then I don't want them to think that oh she's hooking up with me, we're going to start something, so generally if I'm hooking up with somebody I don't want to start something with them.

Participant 1 described feeling emotionally distressed while hooking up with a partner that she was forming an emotional connection to as the expectations differed between partners:

ID1: Um I guess the only time that I would say its caused distress is when you start to build a relationship with that person and it goes from being something that's casual to do you want anything more and they're still at the part where it's just casual for them. So then you obviously want something more, and they don't want more and that would be the only kind of distress.

Others described having to reject a friend who wanted a casual hook up to turn into something more:

ID3: Um yeah, definitely, he definitely was a little bit bummed out and a little bit more awkward I guess now, that's the only downfall like when you mess around with friends it can ruin things

Participant 5 expressed that if a hook up partner expresses that they would like to pursue a relationship, she puts an end to their sexual interactions to avoid leading them on:

ID5: I had one where um he started wanting something more eventually but, cause that one I guess I've known him a lot longer I guess and eventually he just came to me and was just like, "I don't want it to be like an emotionless hook up anymore like if we want to keep doing this I want this to be something more". It's an intimate thing so you know I could certainly understand where it's coming from. Um even if like we did have that conversation like this is casual for both of us, um eventually he did change his mind that he wanted it to be something more.

I: Did that affect your relationship with him at all afterwards?

ID5: Afterwards, yeah I called it off cause I didn't want that and like I didn't want like I don't even want to use somebody you know? Like string them along. Like if

both parties are okay with it I think it's fine but I don't want to take advantage of someone.

It is clear that having a previous established relationship or building an emotional connection with a hook up partner results in feelings of confusion over the expectation of forming a relationship with that person. Due to the nature of hook up culture, communication about the expectations of a relationship are generally not spoken about beforehand. Moreover, if feelings arise in a hook up dynamic, it can be hard to approach a sexual partner to speak about how the dynamic may or may not carry on.

Communication. Dependent on the type of relationship with the hook up partner, some participants noted that varying levels of communication were required. For example, participant 4 stated that the expectation of communication between hook up partners is associated with your previous relationship to that partner:

ID4: I think the expectation mainly comes from like if you've had like kind of a relationship before, even like a friendship (I: Okay) Um and like same like goes for me like if I'm like friends with the person and we hook up like I'm probably more likely to be like, hey like what's coming of this right? Cause otherwise it's awkward right like you don't want to just like I don't know, I feel like there needs to be a discussion regardless when there's a friendship involved.

Participant 5 agrees that if there is a previous established relationship between partners, a conversation is likely needed, whereas, if the casual sexual interaction is with a partner they do not know there is less pressure to communicate about where casually hooking up may lead:

ID5: I would say if I had a relationship previously like we were friends or something, that was more important and we would like bring it up and say like what this is going to be but if I'm just doing like a Tinder hook up or something we kind of don't really talk about it

When asked if there were any expectations of forming a relationship after a hook up participant 2 explained that it was casual for both parties and minimal communication was preferred:

ID2: Oh 100% casual, nothing was happening like if he were really drunk he would call me and I was like "yeah that's cool" other than that we did not talk during the day like we had no communication, I only saw him every once in a while when we hooked up and when I was asked to play on their team for ball and like I was okay with that and so was he. I think we both agreed that this wasn't a relationship thing.

Hook up culture can also be difficult to understand as these types of behaviours lack a clear definition which can make an individual feel confused about where they stand with their hook up partner. For example, one participant mentioned confusion about the lack of communication between peers on what constitutes hook up culture:

ID4: And so I think it's hard because hook up culture is all about the grey area and there's no like defined like right you could be like oh I'm hooking up with this guy but like everyone's like you're dating? And you're like no, no, no. They are like oh so you're like friends? You're like yeah like with benefits but like really that's pretty much it like we're banging right? And then everyone's confused and then somebody starts to develop feelings and then it's awkward because or maybe both of them do but then you're still in that grey area (I: Mhm) When it starts in that um so I think that's hard because I like when things are well defined and like that's something that hook up culture is not.

Due to the increase of young adults engaging in hook up culture, it appears there is a lack of common language to be used while engaging in casual sexual interactions. This prevailing culture is the new normal for younger cohorts. There is still much to be learned, however, about how hook up culture is defined among peers.

Assessing the Risks and Benefits Stage

The second stage in the Hook Up Self Identity Model involved assessing the risks and benefits associated with hook up culture as part of the participants experiences engaging in casual sexual interactions with a stranger, acquaintance, or friend. The

majority of participants reported that the risks of engaging in hook up culture were associated with feelings of judgement from peers and concern for their physical health and safety. On the contrary, the benefits to engaging in hook up culture were feeling support from close friends, and having the freedom to experiment with their sexuality.

Judgement. Engaging in hook up culture can have negative consequences on an individual's sense of self. Most of the participants described feelings of judgement for their participation in hook up culture from peers or society as a whole. For example, participant 2 explained that growing up in a rural town, she faced more judgement from her peers for her engagement in hook up culture:

ID2: Yes, yes. I think urban area you have people who are less judgemental because all of your friend-- I don't want to say all your friends but multiple friends could be doing this and it's not a problem right? (I: Mhm) Whereas, in a small town, you have maybe one or two people doing it and it isn't-- you get a stig-- there's a girl who has a boyfriend now and she still has a stigma and she's been with this guy for like four years now and in high school she slept with a lot of people and by a lot of people I mean like five or six.

Another participant mentioned feeling as though a sexual double standard is still very much prevalent in today's society:

ID5: I still definitely think there's a double standard for men and women (I: Okay) Like regardless of how far we've come. Like if a guy sleeps with a lot of girls he's a player and if a girl does it she's a slut, I still think that's-- I mean like you'll find you know individual opinions differ a little bit but I still think that it's kind of like the overarching idea. Um I don't think that it's right for sure I don't um I still agree that it's still very much a mindset of a lot of people.

On the contrary, one participant expressed that she felt some judgement from peers when she was not participating in hook up culture:

ID3: Yeah, I think so, I think I got the idea if you weren't participating or doing enough or often or at all then you were judged or people would look at you differently

It is no surprise that participants felt a level of judgement from peers on their engagement in hook up culture as the double sexual standard is still relevant within our current society. It is interesting to note that differences in opinion on hook up culture can vary in urban and rural communities as one participant mentioned feelings of negative judgement in the small town she grew up in, yet, felt more support from peers in an urban setting on her experiences engaging in hook up culture.

Concern for Health and Safety. Almost all of the participants stated that one of the worst parts of engaging in hook up culture was their concern for their physical health and safety. This included fears of contracting an STD, unplanned pregnancies, and physical or sexual assault. For example, one participant expresses that her biggest worries while participating in hook up culture were surrounding her health:

ID2: Surprisingly, no because every person I've slept with has never had, my biggest worry sometimes is I'll like oh my gosh like contract something, that's my biggest fear in life (I: Okay, okay) I've never had that worry, like I've kind of had the scare and then I'm like, "no I'm okay".

Another felt that if she were to become pregnant while participating in hook up culture, she would have to cope with the circumstances alone:

ID5: Um I've just always just had this fear that I'm going to get knocked up. I don't know I think women just have-- like if you're not ready which I'm not, um but I think it's a different-- something I've like thought about you know in dating and hook up culture because when you're in a relationship and like something like that happens you have a support system, like I am-- if something happens to me while I'm in hook up culture like I have made it clear that I don't want anyone else involved so that would be on my mind a little. But I think I'd probably--like it would be very much up to me to deal with that kind of thing.

For one participant, she felt as though using dating apps such as Tinder, where meeting an individual you do not know can come with a risk for physical or sexual assault:

ID4: And you're putting yourself out there one hundred percent and like for example, I have a friend and like recently she moved to a new city and she's on

Tinder and she's like a big fan of Tinder and dates and all that stuff and she invited a guy back to her house and he ended up getting like quite scary physical and like that turned into a bad situation and so they like the cops ended up having to come and all this other stuff and she had never met this man before right?

Similarly, one participant expressed that she was involved in a sexual interaction where her consent was not given. This experience caused her emotional distress and negative feelings toward herself:

ID3: Um yes, for sure emotional distress. I felt um betrayed I guess, used, very used and then it makes you feel like you did something wrong even if you are the victim of something, it makes you feel like its your fault, like you didn't try hard enough to stop it or you didn't do something else enough so then you start blaming yourself and you have more feelings of guilt and hatred for yourself.

As described by participants hook up culture can lead to putting oneself at risk for health related concerns and even endangering oneself in situations that can result in physical or sexual assault; however, participants also noted a number of benefits to engaging in hook up culture as well.

Supportive Culture. Although there is a sense of judgement associated with engaging in hook up culture, many of the participants also noted feeling encouraged by friends to make decisions for one's self:

ID4: Yeah like I told my roommates like if I come home and hear you having sex like I'll be like woohoo outside the doorway because like that's just who I am and I feel like sexuality is so important. Um so yeah I'm not sure, there probably is still very much a double standard like I-- like even in my guy friend group, all they do is like brag about their number and like...Right? Like how many girls they've slept with and like oh this person has the most and blah blah blah and like I think that it's less of a conversation within um like my girlfriend group, um because they don't think it matters...I think we're just like celebrating, like if you choose to have one partner your entire life and that's what makes you happy and like you feel fulfilled... awesome.

Having a support system was mentioned as being a particularly important aspect of hook up culture. Encouragement from friends increased participant's confidence to engage in

hook up culture overall. It was apparent that regardless of whether or not an individual chooses to participate in casual sexual interactions, they accept that individuals can make decisions about their own body and what sexual behaviours they feel comfortable engaging in. Another participant mentioned that opinions on hook up culture differ among peers however; engaging in casual sexual interactions is a prevailing culture for the young adults of this generation and is becoming more accepted:

ID5: You know like I have a lot of friends and things like that and I will talk about it and I've had people say like you know what like I don't want to do it, but you can make your own decisions and I think people do place more value on that now and people are more open minded like even if it's not like the norm maybe like people have accepted that and especially people that are already like you know close to you or are like friends with you or something.

It was apparent that having the ability to make your own decisions regarding participation or lack thereof in hook up culture has become more accepted by close friends.

Furthermore, having a support system while engaging in hook up culture results in a better sense of self overall.

Freedom to Experiment. For many, hook up culture was described as having the opportunity to experiment with their sexuality:

ID5: Actually hooked up with some women too um and I think that kind of gives you like the freedom to you know to try it kind of thing (I: Yeah, for sure!) I think it was also kind of like a cultural thing, it's more accepted now

And for others experimenting with hook up culture has allowed the participants to view themselves in a more positive light:

ID2: Yeah like I don't, I guess just like experimenting has made me feel better about myself (I: Mhm) I feel like, I don't want to say like it made me feel prettier but sometimes when someone desires you, you're just like this feels really good I feel great, someone thinks I am attractive and I'm good enough to sleep with

ID3: Um in a sense that I used to be very self conscious, I mean I still am, but I used to be a lot more self conscious about just little things and I realized that those

little things, nobody else actually notices like nobody else actually really cares... It's just you that pick apart things (I: Okay) Yeah like people see you as a whole, whereas you look at yourself as like little bits, like you know are my arms too big, my stomach? People see you as a whole person

I: Right okay that's very interesting. So you feel as though um participating in this type of culture has allowed you to kind of view yourself in a different way?

ID3: Right, in a better way

While assessing both the risks and benefits of hook up culture, participants noted that they had a general concern for their physical health and safety. The benefits, however, appeared to have exceeded the risks. It was not until the reflection stage, that participants began to understand the impact that hook up culture had on their sense of self.

Reflection Stage

It was during the reflection stage that participants described the process of, self-exploration, which was the central concept that led them to progress onto the last stage. Throughout the interviews, participants were able to explore their self-identity while reflecting on past experiences engaging in hook up culture. This process allowed participants to understand what they had learned about themselves while engaging in casual sexual interactions. Within this stage, participants revealed that their experiences engaging within hook up culture had led to an increase in confidence, self-growth, independence and self-empowerment. It is throughout this stage that participants began to understand the impact hook up culture had on their self-identity.

Confidence. Many of the participants felt as though their experiences in hook up culture allowed them to build confidence in themselves:

ID4: Um I don't know I think like the more that I engage in it like honestly the more confidence I get cause I haven't had a really like horrifying experience right? (I: Right, yup) And it's just kind of like wow self high-five you're killing it out there right? (I: Yeah) And like you can do this and not feel guilty or like

shameful and like no one's making me feel shameful or like trying to even right? And I think that's really cool about like today's day like it's almost like a bit more encouraged

Another participant added that with her experiences participating in hook up culture her confidence grew because she felt desired:

ID1: Mmm, okay so it does make me feel um I don't want to say positive but it gives you like confidence when these guys like they don't really know you but clearly they want to sleep with you obviously cause they think you are attractive

Self-Growth. Other participants mentioned feeling as though participating in hook up culture provided an opportunity to learn more about oneself:

ID5: Definitely in some cases I think I learned a lot about myself like I should really stand up for myself and be like more um I guess like a little more like firm in my own beliefs... And like um I don't know if it's just me or I'm like a people pleaser type person, I think in relationships you're going to be more willing to like um I guess agree with the other person or something because it's the relationship you're saving, it's not just something casual, whereas if I'm with someone I don't emotionally care about, I don't have a problem with like asserting myself and being like no I don't want to do this (I: Yeah) Because I don't care basically, right? (I: Right, yeah) But I think that has like carried over like just to how I like carry myself as a person

One participant found that her experiences in hook up culture helped her to understand the role she played as a partner in past committed relationships:

ID4: Um right, I think honestly like the more I engaged in hook up culture, the more I see myself like grow as an individual. Um just because I feel like you learn a lot about yourself from casually hooking up with somebody right? (I: Yup) And like for example, I learned that I am a bit more cold maybe in relationships. Um so like for example, in hook ups I said like I'm more likely the person who like isn't invested and so like I think that really transfers over to like relationships I've had where like the other person is really giving it their all and I just like don't reciprocate as much

It appears as though engaging in hook up culture allowed participants to better understand their functional role in committed relationships but also to learn more about what they may be looking for in a potential future partner. This type of self-growth

fuelled participants to become more assertive in what they want in life while also maintaining their independence.

Independence. Independence was found to be a positive aspect in participant's decisions to engage in hook up culture. Feeling in control was mentioned as a benefit to engaging in these types of hook up encounters as it allowed them to maintain independence in their decisions:

ID3: It makes me feel I don't know, kind of in control like (I: Okay) Like I can kind of call the shots if I want

Another participant expressed that maintaining her independence was one of the most appealing aspects of engaging in hook up culture:

ID5: Something that I-- the reason that I kinda started out um I guess when engaging was like I wanted to keep my independence. Um and so I don't know, participating in hook up culture it let's you like let's you like feel confident, and let's you like feel in control of your own life um I just feel like I'm not dependent on anyone and like you still get to get laid [laughs] But um you know you don't have to like make I guess sacrifices for another person so I generally a selfish way of thinking but at this point in my life that's just kind of like where I'm at

Empowerment. Feeling empowered in hook up culture for some participants was mentioned as a positive aspect in their experiences engaging in hook up culture:

ID5: Um sometimes I do feel like empowered in the sense that like oh you know I'm like this sexual creature this has been a good time, not really making a lot of rules for myself or anything like that I just sort of like went for it. Um at this point like where I'm at now, I still-- I have definitely gained things from this kind of partaking in hook up culture I don't know, makes me feel a tiny bit powerful just kind of like um to be able to like I don't know engage in that kind of stuff

One participant expressed that she believes hooking up at a younger age can be detrimental to a young person's development, but she does agree that hook up culture has allowed herself and many others to feel a sense of empowerment:

ID3: I think just because you still have so much innocence and you don't need to ruin that yet because the world will corrupt your innocence pretty quickly and you

have a lot of years left afterwards (I: Mhm) Um but I do think that some people find it empowering, like I didn't start hook up culture until later on definitely but I definitely feel more empowered in it

Self-empowerment was mentioned as a strong influence to participant's realization of the impact hook up culture had on their self-identity. It appears that participants enjoyed that hook up culture allowed them to take control of their own life without the influence of others and found that they felt empowered by making their own decisions.

Self-exploration. The central concept for the Hook Up Self Identity Model was self-exploration. Throughout the interviews, participants mentioned that engaging in hook up culture encouraged them to explore themselves by hooking up with a variety of individuals; doing so, they reported they found out what they liked and disliked in a sexual partner. It was during the reflection stage that participants began to realize how hook up culture had impacted their self-identity. For example, participant 5 explained how she felt about her experiences engaging in hook up culture altogether:

ID5: Um overall yeah I think it's good. I've um you know explored a lot about myself um you know yeah again you know I haven't had to let go of my independence and I've felt free to like try new things. Um I just think I know more about myself now as a young adult like how am I going to stick up for myself, how much I should um like you know set my own rules and things and I just think I wouldn't have done that if I was like you know like seventeen or eighteen

Participant 2 found that she felt good about herself after exploring different ways of connecting with others throughout hook up culture. She also found that through self-exploration within her experiences in hook up culture, she was able to understand herself as a sexual partner to her current boyfriend:

ID2: Um I think so. There's sometimes you find that I think the reason why I did it is cause you just like to explore more with just different relationships and like the different ways people do things I know my own body too and I think that's what, I don't want to say exploring myself is like being able to know myself a little bit better to know what I like and what makes me feel good

Many participants realized that by exploring their identity through hooking up, they were able to learn more about their wants and needs, build up confidence to interact with the opposite sex, keep their independence and feel empowered in the decisions they made for their bodies. Reflecting on their journey of self-exploration within hook up culture ultimately led to the final stage of the Hook Up Self Identity Model, which is the impact of reflection stage.

Impact of Reflection Stage

The final stage of the model is the impact of reflection stage where individuals reported their feelings toward their experiences hooking up. It was through self-exploration that participants expressed feeling confident, independent and empowered which led to a positive sense of self. Some participants mentioned their opinions and thoughts on their engagements in hook up culture so far:

ID3: Overall opinion I think it helps women become more in touch with themselves in a way I guess or like empowered, in tune, you have more self-respect in a way some people don't I guess maybe whereas what I have experienced, I definitely feel more self-respect in a way that like people do want to be around you and you know what, you feel beautiful sometimes too like you know?

When asked if participants were satisfied with their experiences engaging in hook up culture they expressed that it had been a positive experience overall. For example, participant 1, 4 and 5 expressed what they took away from engaging in hook up culture:

ID1: I think so. I think it's an important part of life to find out what you like about people and like casual, meeting people casually has like helped me understand what I want in a person now whereas, like I don't think if were to have engaged in those situations before then I probably wouldn't know what to look for now

ID4: Um, yes from what I have experienced. Um I think it's tough because if you're not willing to go to bars or go to I don't know even like parties and like meet new people the likelihood of you engaging in hook up culture is pretty small

but that being said overall, I think that engaging in hook up culture has made me feel good about myself and has allowed me to make decisions for my own body which is cool. I don't feel guilty or shameful for participating, just like if I want to continue hooking up it is my choice and that's a very powerful feeling. Like I said before I don't allow myself to have regrets so I don't regret participating in hook up culture at all.

ID5: Yeah so I think-- I don't know it just gives you a different perspective of um people and like yourself. And I think for me like I don't know I also like oh okay it's actually like more difficult than I thought to actually find someone I actually want to date as opposed to someone that you just want to hook up with and I don't know I think I've like raised the bar now in life for myself for like the next person that I'm going to have a relationship with (I: Mhm) Which maybe I'll be waiting a while I don't know but that's fine. I think it's better to have--yeah raise the bar (I: Yeah) Yup, yeah but then I wonder if I hadn't you know engaged in this kind of thing I don't know if I would have come to that conclusion so if nothing else that's good

Regardless of whether or not participants felt as if they had both positive and negative experiences hooking up, they came to the conclusion that they were pleased with their engagements in hook up culture as a whole. Additionally, participants expressed that had they not engaged in hook up culture they would not have had the opportunity to learn more about themselves and what they are looking for in a future partner.

Discussion

The data that participants provided formed the Hook Up Self Identity Model, which presents four stages participants described as being crucial to understanding how hook up culture impacted their sense of self. This model is a representation of the thoughts, opinions and experiences of females' engaging in hook up culture which led to the recognition that hook up culture impacted their self-identity in a positive manner.

A small portion of research on hook up culture has focused on the benefits of engaging in hook up culture for females (Armstrong et al., 2010; Paul & Hayes, 2002).

One study found that out of 311 college students, 57% of the female's reported that their

most recent engagement in hook up culture was enjoyable (Garcia & Reiber, 2008). The results of this study contribute to this research by suggesting that hook up culture has an overall positive impact on female's self-identity. For example, multiple participants expressed that their engagements in hook up culture promoted self-growth and boosted their self-confidence (Paul & Hayes, 2002). Additionally, participants found that having the freedom to assert their sexuality allowed them to maintain independence in decision-making without having to communicate with a committed partner (Armstrong et al., 2010). Paul and Hayes (2002) study found that while 17% of participants experienced remorse and regret after their hook up interactions, 65% expressed an overall satisfaction with their hook up encounters. What was missing from this research was an analysis of the personal experiences of females' who engage in hook up culture.

The Hook Up Self Identity Model is an attempt to understand these personal experiences. It summarizes how participants understood to what degree hook up culture had impacted their self-identity. The model led them through a process of engagement, where participants described factors that influenced their causal sexual interactions (e.g., peers, alcohol). Peers were mentioned as a factor in influencing one's decision to engage in hook up culture. Views differed on the role that peers played in influencing their decision to hook up. Two participants mentioned that conversing with friends and peers about their decision to engage in hook up culture allowed them to feel the freedom to participate if they chose to. Others mentioned that their casual sexual interactions occurred on a night out at a pub or bar when they were in the presence of their peers and friends. The latter influence was most likely where alcohol would be available for

consumption and was also used as a factor that influences participants to engage in hook up culture.

There was a consensus among most of the participants that alcohol was a factor that influenced their casual sexual interactions as it was used to promote courage and confidence in approaching a hook up. While alcohol was used to facilitate a hook up there was not always positive consequences associated with alcohol consumption. For example, one participant mentioned feelings of regret after a hook up when alcohol was consumed prior to the sexual interaction. The participant associated feelings of regret with the sexual partner she chose to hook up with as she mentioned that had she not been drinking prior to the engagement a hook up would not have happened. It appears that alcohol plays a role in loosening an individual's inhibitions, which can influence whether or not an individual will engage in a casual hook up. Another participant mentioned that alcohol was used as a way to dissociate from a sexual assault that occurred at a house party. It is understood that alcohol is a common factor used in hook up culture however, it is unknown whether it is associated with more positive than negative consequences while engaging in hook up culture.

Another factor that influenced a participants' decision to hook up was the relationship they had to their sexual partner. This factor was important for participants to understand how hook up culture impacted their self-identity. There was no consensus on the type of partner participants preferred however, there was an understanding on the level of communication required dependent on the type of relationship the participant had with their casual sexual partner. Two types of relationships with a potential casual sexual partner were mentioned. For participants who preferred a no strings attached relationship

to their sexual partner, communication was rarely required. In fact, participants mentioned that knowing as little as possible about their sexual partner was a benefit to engaging in hook up culture as they did not have to worry about their partner's feelings as the interaction was purely for a physical purpose.

On the contrary, some participants noted that engaging in hook up culture with a partner they had a previous established relationship with (i.e., friends, past romantic relationships) was preferred for comfort reasons, but that these hook ups required more communication. It appears that hooking up with a friend or a past romantic partner did trigger negative emotions as there was often confusion about the expectations of a future relationship after a hook up ensued. If an emotional connection was apparent for one sexual partner and not the other, participants mentioned ceasing the casual sexual interactions to avoid further confusion about the current relationship between sexual partners. This could be seen as a potential risk for young adults engaging in hook up culture.

Next, participants assessed the risks and benefits of engaging in hook up culture. As all of the participants in this study have explained, there were some risks to engaging in hook up culture. For instance, judgement from peers was mentioned as a potential risk to engaging in hook up culture. This finding is supported by Paul and Hayes' (2002) study that suggests the double sexual standard is very much relevant in today's society wherein, females are stigmatized for having multiple casual sex partners and males are praised for the same behaviours. Within the current study, one participant mentioned how the double sexual standard for females is still relevant throughout this generation however, individual opinions differ and it is becoming more acceptable for females' to

engage in casual sexual interactions. Another participant mentioned feeling negative judgement from her friends within the rural town she grew up in, but felt less judgement from friends in her current urban environment. She attributed less judgement from her urban peers as being part of the normalcy of hook up culture for young adults in city settings. Even though judgement was mentioned as a potential risk to engaging in hook up culture, participants felt that it did not deter their decision to continue casually hooking up.

Participants also expressed a concern for their physical health and safety. For example, one participant opened up about an experience she had that led to sexual assault. It was difficult to imagine how the assault may have impacted her self-view but, the participant was told that she did not need to disclose any information she was uncomfortable with, however, she was willing to discuss her experiences and still expressed that she does not regret her experiences in hook up culture and that she was satisfied with her experiences overall. Other participants mentioned that there is a potential for unplanned pregnancies and a risk of contracting an STD. Although hook up culture presents a concern for sexual assault and other health related issues it appears that the benefits exceeded the risks in the grand scheme of understanding the impact hook up culture had on their self-identity.

Benefits included feeling support from friends and the freedom in hook up culture to experiment sexually. Due to the increase of hook up culture for young adults ages 18 to 25 (Bogle, 2007) participants felt that they received more positivity from their friends in their personal decision to engage in hook up culture. One participant mentioned that hook up culture allowed her and her friends to celebrate and embrace their sexuality by

supporting one another's decision to experience casual sexual interactions. It was also mentioned by some participants that hook up culture gave them the freedom to experiment. While one participant expressed that hook up culture allowed her to experiment hooking up with the same sex, another used hook up culture as a means to experiment with different sexual partners. Being able to experiment sexually gave participants insight on what they may be looking for in a potential romantic partner. This led to the reflection stage of the model, which was crucial for participants to recognize the impact hook up culture had on their self-identity.

This stage is where the participants began to understand the impact hook up culture had on their self-identity. It is unlikely that if participants had not reflected on their experiences engaging in hook up culture overall that they would have gauged the precise impact it had on their sense of self. Self-exploration was the central concept, which helped to form a conceptual understanding on how hook up culture impacted females' self-identity. Participants found that through a process of self-exploration, several factors led to a positive self-identity (e.g., self-growth, confidence). It appears that hook up culture allows young adults to connect with new people, experiment with different partners sexually while also maintaining control of one's life. Participants felt that their experiences in hook up culture was used as a means to explore their self-identity altogether.

The reflection stage was also where participants decided whether or not hook up culture was worth the risk of a negative impact on self-identity after identifying the benefits and risks of hooking up. This affirms the importance of exploring one's self in the reflection stage. Regardless of any negative societal opinions about hook up culture,

participants noted that growing as an individual, maintaining independence, building confidence, and feeling empowered contributed to the positive impact it had on their self-identity. Therefore, time spent in the reflection stage was important in determining whether or not the participant felt their sense of self was impacted by their experiences in hook up culture.

The final stage is the impact of reflection. Within this stage, participants reflected on their experiences engaging in hook up culture as a whole and understood the impact on their self-identity. Participants were asked if they were satisfied with their overall experiences engaging in hook up culture and proposed that hook up culture was important for their personal development. Their experiences with casual sexual interactions helped participants learn more about themselves and what they are looking for in a future relationship. Additionally, hook up culture improved their self-view by building confidence to interact with the opposite sex and led them to feel empowered by controlling the decisions they made while hooking up. This stage led participants to perceive hook up culture as being a positive impact on their self-identity overall.

Engaging in hook up culture may not yield the same positive affect as the participants found throughout this particular research study so it is important for young adults to take a step back to decide whether or not hook up culture would permit a positive or negative impact on one's self-identity before engaging in casual sexual interactions. Young adults must gauge the risks that are associated with hook up culture before proceeding with casual sexual interactions as it may not be a positive experience for all individuals. Finally, it is important for young adults to have a supportive network of people to help navigate through hook up culture as there is still much research needed

on this topic to better understand the implications that hook up culture can have on young adults self-identity.

Implications

This study aimed to fill the gaps within current research findings and contributed to the growing body of literature on hook up culture. Although studies have documented the influences, environments and potential positive or negative consequences that hook up culture has had for young adults, few studies have focused on the personal experiences of females' who have engaged in hook up culture. The Hook Up Self Identity Model was created to form a conceptual understanding of how the personal experiences of female's engaging in hook up culture impacted their self-identity. Moreover, this research could be expanded to understand how the influences, environments and common themes presented throughout the literature interact with the personal experiences to grasp the precise impact it had on female's self-identity.

Limitations

Due to the nature of the research topic there are some limitations to consider. The Hook Up Self Identity Model attempts to explain how the experiences of females' who engage in hook up culture impacted their self-identity. Although this model discusses the journey that participants described as part of understanding how hook up culture impacted their self-identity it is likely not generalizable to a larger population. Due to the limited number of participants it is possible that the model does not reflect accurately toward the current culture. Therefore, the understanding of this model should be taken with discretion.

First, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) suggest recruitment of 10 to 12 participants to ensure theoretical saturation has been reached. However, due to the time restraints of the research study, I was only able to recruit, interview, transcribe and analyse the data of 5 participants. During the analysis stage, constant comparisons were made to ensure that all gaps within the data collection were filled however; because theoretical saturation was not met it is unlikely that all gaps that emerged were filled (Birks and Mills, 2015). Second, my inexperience conducting qualitative research may have limited my ability to adequately interview participants in the beginning stages of conducting research. For example, the first interview conducted only lasted for 8 minutes, which hindered the amount of useable data I obtained. Lastly, with a focus on personal experiences engaging in hook up culture, the themes, factors and environments presented as part of understanding how participants experiences engaging in hook up culture impacted their self-identity may not be generalizable to all person's engaging in hook up culture. Furthermore, there is a possibility that the volunteers for this research study may have been more open to discussing their experiences engaging in hook up culture because they have mainly had positive experiences. This could have altered the results to only focus on the positive aspects of hook up culture.

Future Directions

Future research could examine the experiences of males' who engage in hook up culture to better understand how casual sexual interactions impact their self-identity. By gaining a better understanding of the experiences of males, we may be able to perceive any similarities or differences that may be apparent between the two sexes which can provide a better understanding on the impact of hook up culture on young adults self-

identity overall. It may also be useful to recruit a larger sample size and employ quantitative survey's to supplement the qualitative research to see if other contexts (i.e., age, attitudes, ethnicities, geographical location) would have a profound impact on the decision to engage in hook up culture. This could enhance our understanding of the demographics of young adults who choose to participate in hook up culture, but also to provide more knowledge on how those demographics may impact young adults self-identity altogether. Furthermore, more research should be conducted on hook up culture within the LGBTQ community to understand how hook up culture impacts self-identity for young adults across varying sexual orientations.

There is a possibility that throughout the process of reflection females' could end up with a negative self-identity. Future research should critically analyse factors that could lead to negative self-identity (i.e., a pre-existing mental health conditions, unsupportive peers, sexual assault or other health related concerns) to understand the negative implications casually hooking up can have on females' self-identity. Finally, future studies could be done on providing therapy to young adults engaging or not engaging in hook up culture who may seek help to cope with their experiences hooking up. In understanding the factors that could lead to a negative self-identity after casually hooking up, research on appropriate therapies to provide the best possible services could be an asset for young adults engaging hook up culture.

Conclusion

Previous studies have documented the factors, environments and attitudes involved for young adults who engage in hook up culture, but do not explain the personal experiences of females' who engage in hook up culture and how it impacts their self-

identity. The current study was an attempt to fill these gaps by documenting the stages a young adult goes through on their journey to understanding the impact that hook up culture has had on their self-identity. Within each stage of the model, factors and themes emerged for participants while reflecting on their experiences engaging in casual sexual interactions. Participants acknowledged the risks and benefits of engaging in hook up culture and expressed that the benefits exceeded the risks. The final stage of the model, the impact of reflection stage, highlights how participants came to recognize the impact that hook up culture had on their self-identity. Conclusively, this study provides a model, which presents a conceptual understanding of the stages that young adults may go through to recognize how hook up culture impacted their self-identity.

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Appendix A



*Research Ethics Board
Certificate of Approval*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Madison Heintz

DEPARTMENT
Psychology

REB#
2018-001

TITLE: Understanding the Experiences of Women who Engage in Hook Up Culture

APPROVED ON:
January 22, 2018

RENEWAL DATE:
January 22, 2019

APPROVAL OF:

Application for Behavioural Research Ethics Review, Recruitment Poster, Consent Form and Interview Guide, and List of Mental Health Services.

Full Board Meeting

Delegated Review

The University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <http://www.uregina.ca/research/for-faculty-staff/ethics-compliance/human/forms1/ethics-forms.html>.

Raven Sinclair, BA, CISW, BSW, MSW, PhD
REB Chair

Please send all correspondence to:

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Regina, SK S4S 0A2
Telephone: (306) 585-4775 Fax: (306) 585-4893
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Appendix B

**Department of Psychology
University of Regina****PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN HOOK UP
CULTURE**

We are looking for female volunteers to participate in a study on the experiences of those who have engaged in hook up culture. This study requires the participation of females ages 18-25 who are willing to be open about their experiences engaging in hook up culture to better understand how hook up culture affects female's sense of self.

As a volunteer for this study you will be asked to partake in an open-ended interview about your experiences engaging in hook up culture. The interview will require approximately 60 minutes of your time. All interviews will be conducted in private and will remain confidential.

For more information about this research study or to inquire more about how you can volunteer, please contact:

Madison Heintz
(principal researcher)
Department of Psychology
at:
Email: heintz2m@uregina.ca
Or my Advisor, Dr. Mary Hampton
At:
306-585-4826

**This study has been approved by the University of Regina Research
Ethics Board (REB) Committee.**

**Telephone: 306-585-4986
Email: research.ethics@uregina.ca**

Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

Title: Understanding the Experiences of Women who Engage in Hook Up Culture.

Researcher: Madison Heintz, Undergraduate Student, University of Regina, Regina, Saskatchewan, heintz2m@uregina.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Mary Hampton, Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Regina. Phone: 306-585-4826. Email: mary.hampton@uregina.ca

Introduction: This research study is an examination of the experience of engaging in hook up culture. Some studies have concluded that the engagement of hook up culture for females can lead to many negative consequences. Yet, few studies have explored the influences and contexts to how hook up culture impacts female's sense of self.

Procedure: This study is asking you to participate in an open-ended interview that will be 1 hour or less in duration. The interview is based on an array of specific questions asking you to describe your experience engaging in hook up culture. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for further review. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have in regards to the procedure of this study, or of your role as a participant. Please take the time to read the consent form carefully.

Risks and Benefits: There are no known risks associated with your involvement in this project. The cost of participating in this project is the amount of time required to complete the interview. This project will contribute to the growing body of knowledge about how the influences and contexts surrounding how hook up culture affect female's sense of self. If you feel any emotional discomfort throughout the interview or feel as though you cannot continue, please do not hesitate to let me know. If negative feelings arise, the interview will be stopped immediately and I will refer you to Dr. Mary Hampton, a registered clinical psychologist for support. Phone: 306-585-4826.

Research Personnel: This research study is being conducted by Madison Heintz (Undergraduate), and Dr. Mary Hampton (Professor) at the University of Regina as part of an Undergraduate Honour's thesis in Psychology. If you have any questions or concerns about your involvement with this study please feel free to contact the researcher(s) at heintz2m@uregina.ca or mary.hampton@uregina.ca

Confidentiality: Any information from this study involving your participation will remain confidential by the researcher(s). The recorded audio files and transcribed records will only be available to the researchers for the purpose of this study. The data will be stored in a secure place and will be destroyed after five years. Any self-identifying information will be disguised for all presentation and publication purposes of the analysis

of the data. All communication between the researcher(s) and the participants by email will be kept confidential, and will be deleted upon completion of the study.

Voluntary Participation: For the purposes of this study, your participation is completely voluntary. You can choose to withdraw from the study or decline to consent without any negative consequences. You are able to withdraw your data from this study until March 9, 2018. This withdrawal date has been chosen, as your data will not be identifiable in order to protect the privacy of participants after the data has been collected, transcribed and coded. Whether or not you choose to participate will have no effect on how you will be treated. You also have the right to answer only the questions you feel comfortable answering. A copy of counselling services and support will be provided for you in the event that you may need to access them for emotional discomfort.

Follow Up: If you wish to obtain a transcript of your interview or a printed or emailed copy of the final Honours thesis, please indicate below or contact me, the researcher at heintz2m@uregina.ca

Ethics Approval: This research study was granted approval by the Regina Ethics Board at the University of Regina. If you have any questions or concerns about your role as a research participant or of the research study in general please contact the Chair of the Regina Ethics Board at 306-585-4775.

Consent Statement:

Having read all of the above sections, I agree to participate in this research study as a volunteer. I have gone over the steps involved for the study with the researcher and understand the overall goals of the research. I realize that I am free to withdraw from the current study until March 9, 2018. I understand that although this study has the potential to be presented or published, my identity will remain confidential. Lastly, I acknowledge that I have received a copy of the consent form for my own records.

(Signature of participant)

(Researcher: Madison Heintz)

(date)

Would you like a copy of the transcript of your interview? Yes No

Would you like a printed or emailed version of the final Honours thesis upon completion?

Yes No - If yes, would you prefer it, printed _____ or, emailed _____

Lastly, I have received a copy of the consent form, please initial: Yes _____ No _____

Appendix D

Interview Guide:

(Explain the procedure of the interview process with participant, including the consent form. Review the interview guide with the participant; provide the definition of hook up culture used for the purpose of this study)

Date:

Place of Interview:

Interviewee:

Ethnicity:

Age:

Definition of Hook Up Culture as per this Research Study:

“Hooking up” is used to describe casual sexual interactions. As cited in Kooyman et al. (2011), many authors refer to hooking up as kissing, touching, oral sex, or sexual intercourse with no expectation of forming an emotional connection or commitment of any kind. These types of sexual encounters can occur for one night only, or continue casually, again, with no expectation that these sexual interactions will lead to a romantic relationship (Grello et al., 2006).

Purpose: I am interested in exploring the experiences of females who engage in hook up culture in order to better understand how the contexts and influences surrounding hook up culture and how it affects female’s sense of self

Interview Questions:

- 1) What factors, if any, have influenced your decision to engage in casual sexual interactions with a stranger, acquaintance or a friend?
- 2) Generally, how do you feel about the situation after the hook up occurs?
- 3) Has your engagement in hook up culture caused you any emotional distress? If so, can you provide any examples of how your experiences made you feel?
- 4) What has been the best part about your experiences engaging in hook up culture?
- 5) What has been the worst part about your experiences engaging in hook up culture?

- 6) Are you satisfied with your involvement in hook up culture?
- 7) If you could change anything about your experiences engaging in hook up culture would you? If so, what would they be and why?
- 8) In your opinion, how does hook up culture affect how you view yourself?
- 9) Is there anything I have not asked you that you feel relevant to the research topic that you would like to bring up?

Non-verbal cues (if any):

Appendix E

Open Coding Categories

Alc – Alcohol – anything related to the consumption of alcohol

Cas – Casual Interactions – anything related to describing a hook up interaction

Feel – Feelings – both negative and positive feelings about experiences hooking up

Select – Selection process for partner – any factors related to selecting a sexual partner

Rel – Relationship – any mention of peer or romantic relationships/emotion connection

Tech – Technology – any mention of using technology/apps to facilitate a hook up

Satis – Satisfied – any mention of being satisfied with hook up culture

Peer – Peers – any mention of influence of or communication with peers/peer support

Judg – Judgement – any mention of expressing or feeling judgement

R – Risk – any mention of risks/consequences associated with hooking up

No – No strings attached – mention of a no strings attached relationship/anonymity

Com – Communication – mention of communication with sexual partner/peers

S – Self – any mention of growth in self, independence, self-awareness

New – New experience – mention of meeting new people/experiment, keep an open mind

V – View – any thoughts about view of self after engaging in hook up culture

Figure 1. The Hook Up Self Identity Model

