College Males’ Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Around Casual Sex and Hook Up Culture

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Introduction

The college environment provides young single adults opportunities for meeting other single adults and to engage in sexual partnering and activities away from parental supervision and constraints (Shukusky & Wade, 2012). The way in which college age students engage in sexual activities varies greatly from engaging in one time hook ups to maintaining a steady monogamous sexual partner (Fielder & Carey, 2010b). Hook up culture refers to an environment where casual sex and “hooking up” is normative in opposition to a sexual culture where relational commitment is necessary (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012; Reiber & Garcia, 2010). Hooking up is described as a common practice in college campuses (Bogle, 2008). It is becoming seen as the dominant sexual script (Bemiston, Hoffman, & Luft 2014). Some researchers found that it is more common than traditional dating and courtship (Garcia & Reiber, 2008; Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012). Researchers’ definition of hook ups vary and can comprise of any sexual act performed between two or more people including manual-genital stimulation and oral-genital stimulation (Olmstead, Billen, Conrad, Pasley & Fincham, 2013 & Hans, Billen & Alakano, 2010). There are, however, different attitudes and opinions about what constitutes sex, hook ups, and sexual relationships among the students (Clark, 1990; Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, & Ward, 2009). Religion (Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992) and peer group ( Forrest, 2010; Gute, Einharda, & Wierama, 2008) have been noted to influence attitudes and practices on casual sex. Other influences such as a student’s GPA or family structure (such as being an older or younger child) has not been addressed. The present study is assessing the knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) of college-age male students on casual sex and hook up culture. In addition, the project tested the following hypotheses:

1. Most students will believe that there is a hook up culture at their university, but that they are not a part of it.
2. Students who have separated parents will report a higher mean number of sexual partners than students with parents who are together.
3. Students who are the youngest sibling in their family will report a higher mean number of hook ups in college than students who are the oldest child or an only child.
4. Students who report a high level of religiosity will report a lower mean number of sexual partners in college than students who report a low level of religiosity.

Methods

A 25 question survey was developed based on the literature. The questionnaire gathered information on age, race/ethnicity, family structure, academic standing, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, birth order, and relationship status. Additionally, the questionnaire asked respondents about what they believe qualifies as sex and what qualifies as casual sex such as penile-vagina intercourse or oral-genital stimulation as well as the number of sexual partners while in college.

The survey was constructed using Qualtrics (a university based software). The study was advertised in the student daily campus on three occasions over the span of two weeks. Those wishing to participate could access anonymously the link to the on-line survey listed in the advertisement. The project received IRB approval (protocol # X15-026).

Sample

A total of 93 college males (between the ages of 18 to 24) participated in the study with 76 completing the entire survey. The sample was 77% White/Caucasian/European American, 10 % Asian/African American, 7% Hispanic/Latino/A, 4% Black/African American, and 2% mixed race. 68% of participants had parents who were married and 31% had parents who were divorced. 42% of participants were the oldest or only sibling, 25% were the middle sibling, and 35% were the youngest sibling. 7% of participants identified as highly religious, 48% identified as minimally to somewhat religious, and 45% identified as not religious at all.

Findings

1) The study did not have sufficient power to prove statistical significance. There did not seem, however, to be major differences in responses based on demographic backgrounds with reference to the majority of students believing that there is a hook up culture at their university, and that they do not believe that they are a part of it. Additionally, the demographical variables did not seem to significantly affect knowledge, attitudes, or practices around casual sex and hook-up culture in a college environment.

2) Participants, as shown in the figures to the left, primarily noted vaginal and oral penetration as “having sex” although there were other practices that were also thought to constitute having sex with manual stimulation and “making out/kissing” seen as less likely to be count as “having sex”.

3) The majority of participants reporting having had sex during their time in college with 47% stating they had 1-3 partners, 12% had 4-6 partners, 3% had 7-9 partners, and 19% had 10 or more partners. 28% of participants had not had a sexual partner in college.

4) 74% of participants reporting having had casual sex although the number of incidents varied from 1 to 100.

Limitations

There are a few significant limitations to this study. This was a non-random survey that elicited volunteers through only one outlet. The survey was only available on-line over the course of two weeks during the mid-term exam period, thus limiting the number of students seeing the ad or able to participate. This may explain the lower number of participation than anticipated. Since the sample was self-selected, participants may have been more comfortable around issues of sexuality and sexual interest. Interestingly, there was variation in demographic backgrounds, including the racial/ethnic backgrounds of the participants. Also, the study was conducted in a large state research university in the Northeast and therefore, may be different than other types of colleges or areas of the country.

References

Calzo, J. P., Smiler, G. A., & Ward, V. (2009). Religion (Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992) and peer group ( Forrest, 2010; Gute, Einharda, & Wierama, 2008) have been noted to influence attitudes and practices on casual sex. Other influences such as a student’s GPA or family structure (such as being an older or younger child) has not been addressed.
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