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### The Upside to Hooking Up: College Students' Positive Hookup Experiences

Shannon Snapp<sup>a</sup>, Ehri Ryu<sup>b</sup> & Jade Kerr<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Frances McClelland Institute, Norton School of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA

<sup>b</sup> Department of Psychology, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, USA

<sup>c</sup> Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology, Yeshiva University, New York, New York, USA

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## THE UPSIDE TO HOOKING UP: COLLEGE STUDENTS' POSITIVE HOOKUP EXPERIENCES

Shannon Snapp<sup>1</sup>, Ehri Ryu<sup>2</sup>, Jade Kerr<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Frances McClelland Institute, Norton School of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, USA

<sup>3</sup>Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology, Yeshiva University, New York, New York, USA

**ABSTRACT.** *Objectives:* Popular media and research have predominately focused on the risks of hooking up, which may stigmatize young people. In the current study, we identify factors that facilitate positive hookups. *Methods:* College students ( $N = 250$ ) in the United States reported hookup motives, sexual self-concept, sexual satisfaction, and emotional reactions to a hookup. *Results:* Emotional reactions were more positive than negative. Intimacy and pleasure motives predicted sexual satisfaction; self-affirmation motives predicted positive emotional reactions. Hookups with a previous partner were rated as more satisfying. *Conclusions:* Understanding qualities associated with positive hookups may better equip young adults to make informed decisions about their sexual lives.

**KEYWORDS.** Hooking up, sexual behavior, positive sexuality, sexual motives, college students, sexual self-concept

Hooking up is defined as any sexual encounter from kissing to sex with a stranger, acquaintance (Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000; Stepp, 2007), or friend (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Lewis, Granato, Blayney, Lostutter, & Kilmer, 2012) in which a commitment is not expected (Bogle, 2008; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). Hookups may involve a range of sexual behaviors in a noncommitted relationship, and they may overlap with other sexual relationships, including friends with benefits (Bisson & Levine, 2009) or casual sex (Gentzler & Kerns, 2004). More than a decade of research (2000–2012) has shown that between 70% to 85% of undergraduate students reported hooking up at some point during college (England, Shafer, & Fogarty, 2008; Garcia & Reiber, 2008; Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Paul et al., 2000), and hooking up is believed to be a normative experience for college students (England et al., 2007; Garcia & Reiber, 2008; Garcia,

Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012; Kalish & Kimmel, 2011).

Popular media (Fritas, 2013; Stepp, 2007) has highlighted the costs of hooking up, and the majority of research has utilized a problem-focused perspective aimed at reducing risks and negative consequences (Kalish & Kimmel, 2011; Paul et al., 2000). This perspective, similar to most research on adolescent and young-adult sexuality (Diamond, 2006; Ehrhardt, 1996; Russell, 2005), makes it difficult to assess positive sexual experiences (Impett & Tolman, 2006; Tolman, 2012) that may occur in a hookup context. Stinson (2010) suggests that hooking up is not “indicative of moral decline in our culture, a reflection of our hypersexualized media, and a promotion of sexual irresponsibility” (p. 98), but instead, it is a developmental transition from adolescence into adulthood, when young adults can experiment with sexual intimacy. The predominant

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Address correspondence to Shannon Snapp, Ph.D., Frances McClelland Institute, Norton School of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Arizona, 650 N. Park Avenue, P. O. Box 210078, Tucson, AZ 85721-0078, USA. E-mail: sdsnapp@email.arizona.edu

attention on negative aspects of hooking up, may inadvertently stigmatize young people (particularly women) who choose to hook up (Armstrong, Hamilton, & England, 2010).

The evidence that hookups may be related to negative psychological outcomes (Eshbaugh & Gute, 2008; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Paul et al., 2000) or unwanted sexual intercourse (Flack et al., 2007) or that hookups are considered “bad” (Littleton, Tabernik, Canales, & Backstrom, 2009) because they were related to adverse sequelae or were unsatisfying warrants serious attention and justifies the rationale to understand risk factors and negative outcomes in hooking up. However, such evidence does not negate the possibility that some hookup experiences may be positive.

For example, early studies document positive factors associated with hooking up such as positive affect and pleasure (Paul et al., 2000; Rodberg, 1999). In one study, college students described their hookup experiences positively and noted feelings of happiness, excitement, and satisfaction (Paul & Hayes, 2002); and most hookups happen with a friend, which may yield more positive feelings (Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2006). In a study of more than 4,000 undergraduate students, more than 80% of men and women reported “very much” or “somewhat” enjoying sexual activity in hookups (England et al., 2007). Furthermore, young adults who had casual sex were not at greater risk for negative psychological well-being compared with young adults who had sex within a committed relationship (Eisenberg, Ackard, Resnick, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2009). Similarly, both college men and women’s emotional reactions to hooking up were more positive than negative (Kenney, Thadani, Ghaidarov, & LaBrie, 2013; Owen & Fincham, 2011). In a more recent study that focused on women’s hookup experiences, 86% of women said they “somewhat enjoyed” the hookup and 50% said they “very much” enjoyed sexual activity within a hookup (Armstrong, England, & Fogarty, 2012). These findings were echoed in other studies aimed at understanding college women’s hookup experiences (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Kenney et al., 2013). Thus, there is growing

evidence to suggest that hooking up or similar casual sexual encounters may be positive and normative for young women and men.

Feminist researchers who have explored the positive aspects of girls’ sexuality draw upon a developmental perspective that also normalizes sexual exploration during adolescence (Impett & Tolman, 2006; Tolman, 2001). Part of this normalization includes attention to the “missing discourse” about desire and pleasure, particularly in regards to adolescent girls’ sexuality (Fine, 1988). Although growing research has attended to this missing discourse and has begun to highlight the pleasurable aspect of hooking up, less is known about the conditions and factors that facilitate positive hookups.

To capture young adults’ positive sexual experiences, researchers must measure positive sexuality variables (Russell, 2005). In the present study, we assessed variables that are related to positive sexuality, including sexual self-concept and sexual motives (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994; Impett, Peplau, & Gable, 2005; Impett & Tolman, 2006). These constructs are part of “sexual selfhood”—a normative process of sexuality development that acknowledges that young adults are sexual beings who make decisions about their sexual behaviors (Tolman & McClelland, 2011).

### **Sexual Self-Concept**

Sexual self-concept is the understanding a person has about his/her self as a sexual being (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994; Cyranowski & Andersen, 1998; Rostosky, Dekhtyar, Cupp, & Anderman, 2008; Winter, 1988). Researchers have utilized sexual self-concept as one way to understand sexual motives and behaviors. For example, in one study, women who had a variety of sexual experiences and partners also had a more positive sexual self-concept (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994). Similarly, in a sample of adolescent girls, a positive association was found between sexual self-concept and sexual experience, indicating that girls who felt better about their sexual self were also more likely to have experienced a variety of sexual encounters (Impett & Tolman, 2006). Higher sexual

self-concept also predicted sexual self-efficacy or the belief in one's ability to perform sexually (Rostosky et al., 2008). Longitudinal work has confirmed that sexual self-concept was correlated to sexual openness, such that as sexual self-concept becomes more positive, adolescents may be more open to a variety of new sexual experiences. Researchers concluded that with each new satisfying sexual experience, comfort with one's sexual self is likely to increase and sexual anxiety will decrease (Hensel, Fortenberry, O'Sullivan, & Orr, 2011). In sum, sexual self-concept is positively related to a variety of factors from sexual experience to openness and was also positively correlated to sexual satisfaction (Impett & Tolman, 2006). Women (as well as men) may have positive sexual self-concepts and positive sexual experiences. Furthermore, sexual self-concept may also be related to sexual motives. When adolescent girls were motivated to have sex because of physical attraction or feeling "ready" (i.e., approach motives), they had a higher sexual self-concept (Impett & Tolman, 2006). Understanding the role of sexual motives in a hookup experience and how it relates to sexual self-concept may provide further insight into young adults' hookup experiences.

### Sexual Motives

Sexual motives are reasons people engage in sex (Cooper, Shapiro, & Powers, 1998; Impett & Tolman, 2006) and have been widely studied in adolescent, college, and community samples. Cooper and colleagues (1998) found that among college students, men have endorsed *enhancement* (i.e., for pleasure), *coping* (i.e., to reduce negative emotions), *self-affirmation* (i.e., to feel self-confident), and *peer-approval* (i.e., to fit in with peers) motives more so than women. Women more strongly endorsed *intimacy* (i.e., to feel closeness) motives than did men. Similar trends emerged when Cooper et al. assessed a community sample (i.e., participants represented greater diversity in age and ethnicity/race), but *intimacy* motives did not differ by gender. These earlier findings suggest that men and women tend to

endorse different sexual motives, though these endorsements may change based on the diversity of the sample.

Sexual motives have been linked to sexual satisfaction and frequency of sexual intercourse. Girls who are motivated to have sex because they felt "ready" (66%) or because they were attracted to their partner (81%) also reported having more frequent sex (Impett & Tolman, 2006). Not only does this study reflect sexual agency among girls, but it also suggests that the majority of girls in this sample were motivated to have sex for pleasure or desire. In a sample of 544 undergraduates, both men and women's sexual satisfaction was positively related to motives such as love/commitment, self-esteem, and resources. In addition, sexual motives including expression, pleasure, and experience seeking were also related to sexual satisfaction for women (Stephenson, Ahrold, & Meston, 2011). Similarly, when assessing nine sexual motives, including approach (i.e., to seek pleasurable or positive experiences) and avoidant (i.e., to avoid negative experiences) motives, men and women endorsed all motives equally, except one. Women indicated they were more likely to have sex to express love (Impett et al., 2005). Although this finding may validate past research suggesting women are more motivated by *intimacy* than are men (Cooper et al., 1998), others have found that men too desire intimacy in casual sex (Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, & Ward, 2009). Furthermore, regardless of gender, approach motives were positively correlated with well-being and avoidance motives were negatively correlated with well-being (Impett et al., 2005).

Some research has used checklists and qualitative research to understand various motives for hooking up. For example, 1st-year college women in a qualitative study on hooking up named pleasure, empowerment, and desire for meaningfulness as reasons to engage in a hookup (Wade & Heldman, 2012). Similarly, research on hooking up among women has shown that sexual desire was the most widely endorsed motive for hooking up (by 80% of participants; Fielder & Carey, 2010). In a larger sample of 500 undergraduates, nearly

90% of participants were motivated by physical pleasure, 54% were motivated by emotional gratification, and 51% hooked up to initiate a relationship. Much fewer hooked up due to peer pressure (4%) or because "others are doing it" (8%). There were no gender differences in hookup motives in this sample, and because participants highly endorsed pleasure and intimacy motives, researchers concluded that "ultimately both men and women want intimacy, sex, and love" (Garcia & Reiber, 2008, p. 201). Another recent study did reveal gender differences in hookup motives: Enhancement and peer-pressure motives were higher for men than women, but attachment style also predicted hookup motives, indicating the need to understand more about the relational context of a hookup (Snapp, Lento, Ryu, & Rosen, 2014). One study showed that women's ratings of their peers' hookup motives were related to their own motives. For example, those who were motivated by pleasure were also likely to say their peers were motivated by pleasure. The authors suggest that the ways in which young women view others' motives may serve as a way to normalize their own hookup experience (Kenney et al., 2013). Collectively, this research provides some insight into hookup motives, indicating that almost all young adults are primarily motivated by pleasure and intimacy. While approach motives may indicate a more positive sexual experience (Impett & Tolman, 2006), it is unclear how such motives may predict emotional reactions to a hookup. Further, research has documented that many of these positive hookups may occur with a friend or someone who is more than an acquaintance (Manning et al., 2006; Owen & Fincham, 2011). By assessing the type of hookup partner along with hookup motives and sexual self-concept in predicting sexual satisfaction and emotional reactions to a hookup, we aim to understand factors that may contribute to positive and sexually satisfying hookups.

### Current Study

The purpose of this study is to understand if young adults experience satisfying and positive

hookups, which factors (e.g., motives, sexual self-concept, hookup partner) might predict positive and negative hookup experiences, and whether study variables differ based on gender. For example, do men and women differ on their reports of sexual motives and sexual self-concept? Although we expect most emotional reactions to be positive, it is expected that men will have more positive and less negative reactions to a hookup as compared with women, as documented by recent research on emotional reactions to a hookup (Owen & Fincham, 2011). It is expected that positive emotional reactions (to a hookup) and sexual satisfaction will be predicted by approach motives and a higher sexual self-concept as shown in past research (Impett et al., 2005; Impett & Tolman, 2006). Similarly, negative emotional reactions may be predicted by avoidance motives (Impett & Tolman, 2006). Finally, we expect that there will be an association between hookup partner and outcome variables such that hookups with acquaintances and previous hookup partners (as opposed to strangers) will be associated with positive emotional reactions and greater sexual satisfaction (Owen & Fincham, 2011).

## METHODS

### Participants

Participants were 250 undergraduate students from a midsize university in the Northeastern area of the United States (age range = 19–23 years;  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.65$  years;  $SD = 1.01$ ). Of the 250 participants, 204 participants experienced a hookup and were included in the analysis. Four cases were excluded because of missing data ( $N = 200$ ; 134 women, 66 men). Sixty-nine percent of participants identified as Caucasian, 10% Asian/Pacific Islander, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 7% Black or African American, 4% Multi-racial, and 1% Other. Participants reported their sexual orientation: 95.5% heterosexual, 2% gay/lesbian, 2% bisexual, and 0.5% other.

### Procedure

In the fall of 2009, upon receipt of institutional review board approval, college students

were recruited to participate in a study about “hooking up among college students” via the undergraduate psychology research pool and were given one research credit for their participation. Participants completed the anonymous questionnaire after consent was obtained, and participants were told they could skip any questions or stop at any point in the study and still receive research credit. All paper questionnaires were completed in a quiet room with an undergraduate research assistant; the process took approximately 20 min.

### Materials

#### ***The Hookup Questionnaire (Paul et al., 2000)***

Participants were given a definition of hooking up and were asked whether they had ever hooked up in college. Participants also responded to a checklist of emotional reactions to their typical hookup beginning with the statement, “The next day I felt. . .,” which included four positive emotional reactions (exhilarated, self-confident, attractive, and proud) and four negative emotional reactions (humiliated, lonely, used, and confused). A sum score was created for both positive and negative feelings, ranging from 0 to 4, with a higher total indicating greater positive and negative feelings. To assess participants’ hookup partners, we analyzed two questions from the hookup questionnaire: “We had met before” (assessed whether the hookup partner was an acquaintance), and “We hooked up again on another occasion” (referred to as previous hookup partner; 1 = yes, 0 = no).

#### ***Sexual Self-Concept (Winter, 1988)***

The sexual self-concept questionnaire assessed sexual self-concept—how individuals feel about their sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (e.g., “I consider my sexual feelings pretty typical of people my age,” and “I feel it’s OK for me to have sex”). The scale consisted of 14 positively or negatively worded items that were scored on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly*

*disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Negative items were reverse-coded and a mean score was calculated ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

#### ***Sexual Satisfaction (Impett & Tolman, 2006)***

This measure assessed participants’ overall satisfaction with a typical sexual experience but the term “hooking up” replaced “sexual experience” in the questionnaire as hooking up is not limited to just sex. The four items included: “It was a good experience,” “It made me happy,” “I liked how my body felt,” and “It made me feel closer to the other person.” Participants responded either *yes* (coded as 1) or *no* (coded as 0). These scores were added to form a composite variable ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

#### ***Hookup Motives (Cooper et al., 1998)***

This scale assessed six motives an individual may have for engaging in sexual intercourse. “Hooking up” replaced “sex” in the questionnaire. One motive, *partner approval*, was excluded from this study as this applies to those in long-term relationships and hooking up is usually a short-term relationship or a single occasion. A 25-item measure assessed the five motives (each motive had 5 questions): (a) *intimacy* (e.g., “To what extent do you typically hook up to become more intimate with your partner?”); (b) *enhancement* (e.g., “To what extent do you typically hook up because it feels good?”); (c) *self-affirmation* (e.g., “To what extent do you typically hook up because it makes you feel more self-confident?”); (d) *coping* (e.g., “To what extent do you typically hook up to help you deal with disappointment in your life?”); and (e) *peer pressure* (e.g., “To what extent do you typically hook up just because all of your friends are hooking up?”). Participants rated the items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *not at all* to *a great deal*, and a mean score was calculated for the subscales (intimacy,  $\alpha = .93$ ; enhancement,  $\alpha = .86$ ; self-affirmation,  $\alpha = .89$ ; coping,  $\alpha = .90$ ; peer pressure,  $\alpha = .86$ ).

## RESULTS

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables. Out of the 200 participants included in the analysis, 74% ( $n = 148$ ) indicated that they had met their hookup partner before, and 53% ( $n = 106$ ) of participants said they had hooked up with that partner on another occasion.

We tested gender differences on study variables using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA; Table 2). None of the sexual motives were significantly different between men and women as suggested by some previous research. Men and women similarly endorsed the five hookup motives: intimacy, enhancement, affirmation, coping, and peer pressure. Men had higher ratings of sexual self-concept than women, a finding supported by some previous literature (Rosenthal, Moore, & Flynn, 1991). We expected emotional reactions to be more positive than negative but that men would have higher positive and lower negative emotional reactions to a hookup than would women. This hypothesis was supported: Scores for positive emotional reactions were higher than scores for negative emotional reactions, and men had higher positive and lower negative emotional reactions as compared with women.

We conducted a series of regression analyses that examined the association of sexual self-concept, hookup motives, gender, and hookup partner with each of the three outcome variables—sexual satisfaction, positive emotional reactions, and negative emotional reactions. Sexual self-concept and five hookup motives were centered at the means. Gender was coded as 0 = female and 1 = male. Type of hookup partner (acquaintance and previous partner) was coded 0 = no and 1 = yes. We first tested whether there was any interaction effect of each predictor with gender. For all three outcomes, the interaction effect was not significant at  $p < .05$ . The R square increments by including interaction terms were not significant: R square change = .02,  $F(6, 184) = 0.79$ ,  $p = .58$ , for sexual satisfaction; R square change = .02,  $F(6, 184) = 1.05$ ,  $p = .40$ , for positive emotional reactions; and R square change = .03,  $F(6, 184) = 0.86$ ,  $p = .53$ , for negative emotional reactions. Based on this, we modified the model by removing all the interaction terms.

The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 3. Intimacy and enhancement were positively related to sexual satisfaction. There was a marginally significant gender

**TABLE 1.** Means, Standard Deviations (*SD*), and Correlations of Study Variables

	Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	Correlation										
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Sexself	3.21 (0.36)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Intimacy	2.79 (1.08)	.09	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Enhance	3.30 (0.89)	.40*	-.00	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. Affirm	2.24 (1.01)	.02	.02	.51*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5. Coping	1.84 (0.89)	-.05	.02	.40*	.69*	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
6. Peer	1.25 (0.52)	-.05	.02	.17*	.33*	.33*	—	—	—	—	—	—
7. Pos	1.20 (1.25)	.12 <sup>†</sup>	.06	.33*	.34*	.17*	.09	—	—	—	—	—
8. Neg	0.87 (0.90)	-.14 <sup>†</sup>	.02	-.03	.09	.11	.04	-.02	—	—	—	—
9. Satisf	2.81 (1.31)	.05	.23*	.25*	.15*	.14 <sup>†</sup>	.03	.39*	-.19*	—	—	—
10. Gender	0.33 (0.47)	.19*	.04	.05	-.12 <sup>†</sup>	-.10	.12 <sup>†</sup>	.19*	-.14*	.11	—	—
11. Acq	0.74 (0.19)	-.01	.03	.12 <sup>†</sup>	.06	-.02	-.03	.08	.09	-.04	-.09	—
12. Partner	0.53 (0.25)	.05	-.09	.24*	.09	.01	-.12	.22*	.29*	.06	-.09	.31*

Notes. Sexself = sexual self-concept; Intimacy = intimacy; Enhance = enhancement; Affirm = self-affirmation; Coping = coping; Peer = peer pressure; Pos = positive emotional reactions; Neg = negative emotional reactions; Satisf = sexual satisfaction. Gender is coded 0 = female and 1 = male. Acq = We had met before (acquaintance), coded 0 = no and 1 = yes; Partner = We hooked up again on another occasion (previous partner), coded 0 = no and 1 = yes. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ .

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ .

**TABLE 2.** Gender Differences in Sexual Self-Concept, Sexual Motives, Sexual Satisfaction, and Emotional Reactions to a Hookup

	Women	Men	<i>F</i> (1, 198)	$\hat{\omega}^2$
Sexual self-concept	3.15	3.30	7.60**	.03
Intimacy	2.76	2.85	0.29	.00
Enhancement	3.27	3.36	0.51	.00
Affirmation	2.32	2.06	3.12	.01
Coping	1.90	1.71	2.12	.01
Peer pressure	1.21	1.34	2.85	.01
Sexual satisfaction	2.71	3.02	2.37	.01
Positive emotions	1.03	1.53	7.30**	.03
Negative emotions	0.96	0.68	4.14*	.02

\**p* < .05.\*\**p* < .01. $\hat{\omega}^2$  = omega squared as a measure of effect size.

difference with women having lower sexual satisfaction. Self-affirmation was positively related to positive emotional reactions. As found in the ANOVA, women reported significantly lower positive emotional reactions compared with men. No predictor was significantly related to negative emotional reactions.

For type of hookup partner, sexual satisfaction and positive and negative emotional reactions were not significantly different depending on whether or not participants hooked up with an acquaintance. Sexual satisfaction and positive emotional reactions were significantly higher when participants hooked up with a previous hookup partner.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if hookups could be satisfying and positive for young adults, which factors might predict positive hookup experiences, and whether variables may differ by gender. This research adds to a growing body of literature on positive aspects of hooking up.

Overall, women and men reported more positive than negative emotional reactions to a hookup. However, men had more positive and less negative emotional reactions to a hookup than did women. These findings confirm recent research (Owen & Fincham, 2011; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Fincham, 2010) showing that college students experience more positive than negative emotional reactions to a hookup across gender but that women tend to have more negative emotional reactions to hooking up as compared with men. Owen and Fincham (2011) suggested that the overall positive emotional reactions to a hookup may explain why hooking up is an appealing option among college students. Even if hookups are viewed as more positive than negative, women's emotional reactions appeared more negative as compared with men. Others have suggested that women's negative hookup experience may be related to unwanted sexual intercourse within a hookup (Flack et al., 2007), verbal

**TABLE 3.** Predictors of Reaction to Typical Hookup Experience

Predictors	Dependent Variable		
	Sexual Satisfaction	Positive Emotion	Negative Emotion
Sexual self-concept	−0.32 (−.08)	−0.01 (−.00)	−0.26 (−.09)
Intimacy	0.28* (.23)	0.06 (.05)	0.03 (.03)
Enhancement	0.32* (.16)	0.17 (.09)	−0.04 (−.03)
Affirmation	0.01 (−.01)	0.45* (.24)	0.03 (.03)
Coping	0.08 (.04)	−0.15 (−.08)	0.07 (.05)
Peer pressure	−0.07 (.03)	−0.03 (−.01)	0.04 (.02)
Gender	0.37† (.12)	0.63* (.23)	−0.22 (−.11)
Acquaintance	0.00 (.00)	−0.01 (−.00)	−0.15 (.07)
Previous partner	0.47* (.16)	0.62* (.23)	0.16 (.08)
R square	.165	.266	.052

Notes. Gender is coded 0 = female and 1 = male. Acquaintance and previous partner are coded 0 = no and 1 = yes. Sexual self-concept and five hookup motives were centered at the means. Unstandardized estimates are shown. Semipartial correlations are shown in parentheses.

\**p* < .05.†*p* < .10.



coercion (Wade & Heldman, 2012), a physically unsatisfying hookup (Littleton et al., 2009), or women's desire for a commitment to emerge (Owen & Fincham, 2011). It may also be that differences in emotional reactions to a hookup are due to the ways young adults are sexually socialized (Tolman & McClelland, 2011) and the norms that are deemed appropriate for young adults (Bearman, Moody, & Stovel, 2004). For example, the stereotypes that men are "winners" and women are "losers" in a hookup not only perpetuates gender inequalities (Kalish & Kimmel, 2011), traditional gender norms (Epstein et al., 2009), and (hetero) sexual scripts (Allen, 2003), but young adults may internalize these stereotypes and rate their hookup experiences accordingly. Using a normative framework that includes both positive and risky sexual experiences for adolescents (Tolman & McClelland, 2011) may not only equate to a broader understanding of adolescent sexuality, but may also offer young adults the freedom to see their own experiences as more diverse than the stereotypes that are prevalent in their social contexts.

Although we do not know if participants felt coerced into hooking up, we did assess participants' sexual satisfaction, sexual motives, and sexual self-concept. Women and men did not differ in how sexually satisfied they felt after a hookup. Further, in this sample and consistent with some previous research (Garcia & Reiber, 2008), men and women are similarly motivated to engage in a hookup, both for pleasure and closeness. This finding adds to the growing research on the "missing discourse" of pleasure and challenges the stereotypes that men and women are seeking different outcomes when they approach a hookup. Although women are not necessarily hooking up to find a relationship, men are not necessarily hooking up to avoid relationships (Allen, 2003). This counters past research that has shown that women more strongly endorsed intimacy motives as compared with men (Cooper et al., 1998, Impett et al., 2005) and confirmed more recent findings that noted men also desire closeness and intimacy (Epstein et al., 2009). Despite the "no strings attached" attitude often associated with

men, some men felt attachment to their partner after a few instances of sexual intercourse, and others desired emotional closeness before they had sex (Townsend, 1995). Thus, there seems to be a discrepancy between traditional masculine norms and the intimacy men may actually desire (Epstein et al., 2009). Similarly, pleasure as a motivating factor is not unique to just men; women also strongly endorsed this motive, as documented in past research (Fielder & Carey, 2010; Kenney et al., 2013). The mean score for this motive was the highest in comparison to the other four hookup motives, as has been shown in past research, which indicated 90% of college students hooked up for pleasure. Previous research has also revealed that the second most endorsed motive (54%) was "emotional gratification" (Garcia & Reiber, 2008), which is similar to intimacy. Comparable to approach motives, men and women did not differ in their endorsement of avoidance motives. Although mean scores for these motives were low compared with approach motives, it is important to highlight that some men and women may be motivated to hook up based on peer pressure, to feel better about oneself, or to cope with stress, which has been associated with more sexual risk-taking behaviors (Cooper et al., 1998).

Men and women were similar in their ratings of sexual satisfaction and hookup motives, but they differed on sexual self-concept. Both consistent (Rosenthal et al., 1991) and contrary to past research findings (Rostosky et al., 2008), men had a higher sexual self-concept as compared with women. However, the means for men's and women's sexual self-concept was high (3.30 and 3.15, respectively, on a 4-point scale). Nonetheless, this discrepancy may be due to the way sexual self-concept was measured in this study. Winter's (1988) scale placed heavy emphasis on one's comfort level discussing sex and contraception, which may not have felt as relevant to college students involved in a hookup, as most hookups may not be thoroughly planned or discussed (Bisson & Levine, 2009) and often involve oral sex or touching, in which contraception is less likely to be used. Additional research should explore how sexual

self-concept may vary as a result of context and socialization. As Tolman (2002) noted, the ways in which girls and boys are socialized in regards to sexuality, behaviors, and experiences are drastically different. Contrary to past research (Impett et al., 2005; Impett & Tolman, 2006), sexual self-concept was also not associated with sexual satisfaction or positive emotional reactions to a hookup as predicted. Aforementioned concerns with the measurement tool may explain null findings, or null findings may be due to the high mean scores of sexual self-concept and little variability found within this construct. Null findings do not minimize the importance of sexual self-concept in young adults' hookup experiences, but based on our analyses, other factors such as sexual motives appeared to be more relevant in the determination of sexually satisfying hookups.

Sexual motives were also related to emotional reactions to a hookup and participants' sexual satisfaction in a hookup. The desire for intimacy and pleasure predicted whether college students would rate their hookups as sexually satisfying. This confirms past research by Impett and colleagues (Impett et al., 2005; Impett & Tolman, 2006), which has shown that sexual satisfaction was predicted by approach motives. It also confirms more recent research that has shown that love/commitment motives predicted sexual satisfaction for men and women (Stephenson et al., 2011). In this sample, enhancement (i.e., pleasure) also predicted sexual satisfaction. Stephenson et al. (2011) suggests that those who expect pleasure from sex may be more likely to have their needs met than those who are motivated by other reasons. Contrary to past research (Impett et al., 2005; Stephenson et al., 2011), self-affirmation was positively associated with positive emotional reactions in the present study. Perhaps participants who were motivated by self-affirmation were affirmed in their hookup, which led to a positive emotional reaction.

As for negative emotional reactions, we expected that college students who hooked up due to feeling pressured by their peers or to cope with a problem would report more negative emotional reactions to a hookup. Within

this study, none of the hookup motives predicted negative emotional reactions. This counters previous research by Impett and Tolman (2006) that showed that avoidance motives were associated with diminished well-being. Null findings may be due to the relatively low mean scores for avoidance motives and negative emotional reactions. These findings highlight, for example, that college students in this study were less likely to be motivated by peer pressure, and even if a student was motivated to hook up due to peer pressure, doing so was not associated with negative emotional reactions.

Lastly, partner type was assessed to determine whether hookups with an acquaintance or previous hookup partner may be related to positive hookup experiences. Although hooking up with an acquaintance was not related to the outcomes, hookups with a previous partner appeared to be related to more positive and sexually satisfying hookups. Although it is not clear if previous partners were also friends with benefits, this finding is related to the growing body of research that highlights how young people are likely to feel more comfortable and have pleasurable hookups with those they know better (Manning et al., 2006; Owen & Fincham, 2011) and that most hookups occur with friends (Bisson & Levine, 2009; Fielder & Carey, 2010).

In sum, when young adults are motivated to hook up for intimacy, pleasure, and self-affirmation, they rate their hookups as more enjoyable. Hookups with previous partners are also related to satisfying hookup experiences. However, there are several additional reasons that may motivate sexual behavior (see Stephenson et al., 2011) and influence sexual satisfaction and emotional reactions to a hookup, which could be explored in future work.

### **Limitations, Future Directions, and Implications**

This study adds to the limited research on hooking up from a positive perspective, offers additional evidence of the missing discourse of pleasure within a hookup, and highlights some

possible angles for future research. In the assessment of college students' hookup experiences, we provided the definition given by Paul and colleagues (2000), which stated that a hookup is usually with a "stranger or brief acquaintance" (p. 79). As noted by a recent review, operational definitions of hookups have varied during the past decade, and the essence of a hookup is less about behavior and more about the "uncommitted nature of a sexual encounter" (Garcia et al., 2012, p. 162). Thus, in providing Paul et al.'s definition, we may have missed some of the nuances of hooking up that are now more commonly understood as central to hookup experiences (e.g., lack of commitment). Additionally, we asked participants about their "typical" hookup experience. This may have posed an issue for participants who had a variety of hookup experiences (Garcia et al., 2012), and thus, future research should attempt to delineate which hookup (e.g., most recent, favorite, worst) participants will draw upon to assess their experience. It is possible that participants may report on more satisfying hookups, which may be linked to also reporting approach motives. Additionally, to assess emotional reaction, we created a measure based on emotional reactions listed on Paul et al.'s questionnaire. In doing so, we were unable to determine how strongly participants agreed with the emotional responses they checked. The use of Likert scales (as documented in recent research, e.g., Lewis et al., 2012) to assess varying degrees of emotional reactions may be a useful next step.

Similar to other research in this field, we utilized a college sample, but as previous studies have indicated, utilizing community-based samples instead of college samples may lead to different findings (e.g., Cooper et al., 1998). As suggested by Owen and colleagues (2010), assessing college samples limits the opportunity to generalize findings to young people who are not in college. Further, this research was conducted approximately 4 years ago, and attitudes about hooking up may have changed as attention to the topic has increased. However, some recent popular media suggests the problem-focused perspective likely remains the dominant discourse on

this topic (e.g., Fritas, 2013). Future research should also encourage participation from sexual-minority populations, as most studies (including this one) consisted of mainly heterosexual participants. For example, what constitutes a positive or negative hookup experience for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer young adults? Thus, research on hooking up should extend beyond Western, White, heterosexual, college populations to understand the diverse range of hookup experiences encountered by adolescents and young adults. Finally, although this study did not address the theoretical underpinnings of hooking up, the authors acknowledge the need for clear theoretical frameworks in which to understand the *why* and *how* of hookups (see Garcia et al., 2012, for a review of theoretical frameworks and their limitations).

Limitations considered, this research has several implications for discourse and campus practices. For discourse, this study offers a critique of the prevailing view that considers hookups to be problematic for most young adults, which inadvertently may problematize the individuals who hook up. Attention toward hookup motives and other positive sexuality variables presented in this study may also expand the framework of "risky sex" on college campuses and within health/wellness and educational programs. For example, such programming may help young adults think more broadly about their motives and expectations within a hookup (Owens et al., 2010), without the assumption that if a young person decides to hookup that he or she is engaging in a "risky" behavior. However, alcohol use is common in hookups (England et al., 2007; Fielder & Carey, 2010), and use of alcohol in a hookup increases the likelihood that sexual assault may occur (Flack et al., 2007). Thus, educational efforts from health and wellness centers on campus may focus on helping students understand both the potential negative and positive experiences of hooking up (for discussion on equitable curricula, see Cameron-Lewis & Allen, 2013).

Because we did not do a longitudinal study, thereby limiting our understanding of causality, future research should also explore

the long-term outcomes (both positive and negative) for those who choose to hook up and the way in which these outcomes may be related to hookup motives. Even though those who were motivated by pleasure, for example, reported greater sexual satisfaction and positive emotional reactions, we did not explicitly ask whether participants' hookup motives were actually fulfilled within their hookup experience. Similarly, campus health officials may be able to help students identify their hookup motives and ways in which to cope with an unsatisfying hookup while simultaneously helping those who have had positive hookups to continue to enjoy hookups in a way that is safe and healthy for them.

Additionally, highlighting the gender similarities between men and women allows us to bring men into the discussion of hooking up as opposed to simply targeting women with advice and suggestions on how to "play it safe" in a hookup (Kalish & Kimmel, 2011). A change in the discourse about hooking up may be expanded to the practices within campus health and psychological services offered to students as well as the way in which educators discuss hookups in relevant courses. Finally, researchers and campus educators should be careful not to solely endorse the problem-focused perspective to understand hooking up. Although the intention to prevent sexually transmitted infections and sexual assault is important to promote the safety, health, and well-being of young adults, it is also important to discuss how hookups may serve as developmentally appropriate ways for young adults to experience sexual pleasure and exhibit sexual agency. Thus, to promote sexual health and well-being of college students who choose to hook up, information about positive and negative hookup experiences should be shared and discussed.

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