

College: Casual Sex or Old School Dating

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Qualitative Methods of Research

### Abstract

The purpose of this project is to explore current attitudes about hook up culture and traditional dating relationships. Hooking up participants within the ages of 18-24 are increasing every year. The methods used within this project compiled interview data from several different college aged students including students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The preliminary results of this project will help determine student's perceptions and definitions on hooking up as well as whether some college aged students believe if traditional dating is dead. This information is useful in helping students make decisions on dating relationships.

*Keywords:* Hooking up, college, dating, traditional dating, student perceptions

### College: Casual Sex or Old School Dating

The word “hooking up” is known around the world. Many have different beliefs and attitudes around the actions of hooking up. This term is a slang word that derived from words and actions such as one night stands, casual sex, random make outs, and anything sexually related. Many definitions have surfaced the past 30 years when people try to explain the act of hooking up. Many believe that “hookups have replaced casual sex and even dating on many college campuses over the years, but as is so often the case when sex is discussed, it’s not altogether clear what everybody is talking when they say hookup” (Dye 2011). A very broad definition of hooking up is described as a sexual encounter, which may be vaginal, anal, or oral, between two people who are not dating or in a serious relationship. These two people do not expect for their hook up to go any further than simply the sexual act. Researchers have spent years trying to decipher the attitudes and perceptions that college aged students have about hooking up, dating, and casual sex.

The purpose of this study is to research and explore the current and past attitudes that young men and women have on dating and hooking up within the college setting. Through this research, participants from Concord University were asked to define their specific definition for the slang term hooking up. Many responses were given; furthermore, all but two participants within the study gave very similar definitions stating that hooking up is considered to be a sexual act that includes penetration. Most participants also stated that, although, this act contained sexual penetration, the two participants that were engaging also had no intentions of dating or hanging out after. Two participants stated that hooking up generally means randomly

making out or heavy touching. The responses given all share a great similarity to the views that other students and researchers across America have on the attitudes surrounding hooking up.

### **Research Question**

In today's college culture, "hooking up" seems to be the norm. What do young people define hooking up as? What are the specific attitudes college students have surrounding relationships? What are student's attitudes on traditional dating? How does traditional dating differ from today's style of dating?

### **Definition of Terms**

1.) *Hooking-up*-- certain sexual acts between two people who are not dating or in a serious relationship and do not expect anything further.

2.) *Traditional Dating*-- best defined in contrast to modern forms of dating such as online dating and speed dating. The first meetings of traditional dating are face to face; only two people meet and the time frame is longer than in, for instance, speed dating. Traditional dating has clearly defined rules. For example, girls don't call boys, and the guy always pays. As time progresses, the rules of traditional dating are less clearly defined.

### **Literature Review**

Many definitions surround the word hooking up. According to Katherine Bogle, hooking up is described by her college participants anywhere from "friends with benefits" to "booty call" (2008). According to a study by ABC news with researchers Amanda Holman and Alan Sillars, the results they came up with from interviews by 274 college students stated that "hooking up

is used to describe a sexual encounter (vaginal, anal, or oral sex) between two people who are not in a dating or serious relationship and do not expect anything further” (2011). Holman and Sillars described hook ups as “spontaneous sexual encounters fueled by alcohol that usually unfold without communication about sexual health and consent or protection against STD’s” (Dye 2011). Unlike the descriptive terms and definitions given by Kathleen Bogle, Amanda Holman, and Alan Sillars on hooking up being more of an actual sexual encounter, Tom Wolfe, author of *Hooking Up* shows through his book that hooking up was “always a sexual experience but the nature and extent of what they did could vary widely” (2000). Wolfe’s description shows that hooking up could vary from making out to actual intercourse. Like Wolfe, Jessica Siebenbruner, Associate Professor of Psychology at Winona State University agrees stating that in her research, a hook up is defined as a “sexual encounter which may or may not include sexual intercourse” (2013). Along with Wolfe and Siebenbruner, in *Sexual Hookup Culture: A Review* by Justin Garcia, Chris Reiber, Sean Massey, and Ann Merriweather, they all agree that through their research findings, a definition provided is that hook up “activities may include a wide range of sexual behaviors, such as kissing, oral sex, and penetrative intercourse” (2012). Although not all scholars and authors agree with the same slang definition for this slang word, generally folks believe that whatever intimate activity two people participate in, it’s defined as hooking up when there’s no intent on a further relationship.

Today, hooking up within the college scene seems to be a common norm among young people aged 18-24. In contrast, the late 1990s saw that this trend became even more widely known to “almost every American child over the age of 9” (Wolfe 2000). Tom Wolf states that active

hooking up typically ends around the post-college age of 26 (2000). The typical age that falls within this area of culture do tend to be students in college or a university.

Changes in traditional dating styles began to shift in the early 60s with the emergence of socialization on college campuses becoming more apparent. College students began socializing in groups, rather than pair dating, and partying with larger numbers of friends and classmates says Bogle (2008). The parties began to represent mixed genders instead of the normal separation of the sexes which sparked the potential for more sexual encounters. Through research by Katherine Bogle and Beth Bailey, they seemed to see a possibility that the 1960s marked the end of formal dating and the emergence of hooking up on college campuses. The 60's marked an era of wide change for college aged youth; as a result, forms of birth control pills were first introduced paired with a "liberalization of attitudes toward sexuality led to changes in what was socially acceptable to do sexually" (Bogle 2008). As a result of these changes, intercourse was now seen as more of a sign of intimacy and physical pleasure rather than just a means of reproduction for married couples. With these changes came changes in sexual behavior. Students saw that sex outside of marriage wasn't just taboo anymore but was normal and very pleasurable. Specifically, oral sex became an increasingly common act within the sexual script especially with well educated, heterosexual, white people.

Traditional dating has declined drastically since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The idea of focusing on oneself sparked inside the lives of many. Specifically, women are becoming more involved with their jobs, taking care of themselves, and living their own self-paced life. As a result of these dating attitudes, "the median age at first marriage has been climbing for

decades: It now stands at 28 for men and 26 for women, meaning that half are younger and half are older when they wed” (Cohn 2009). Aside from the rising marriage ages, Americans are also getting divorced quicker and more often. Cohn states that “the median duration of the married life in 2009 was 18 years” (2009). People aren’t just marrying and getting divorced once or twice but “one-in-twenty Americans who ever have been married said they had been remarried three or more times” (Cohn 2009). There are various downfalls to transitioning from traditional dating to the current trends of dating. With traditional dating, sexual interaction occurs after two people have gone on multiple dates; with hooking up, though, sex comes before the dating. Because the general guidelines for hooking up is that the two parties have little or no interaction after their initial one night stand, there are “those who never make it to the point of going out or at least hanging out” (Bogle 2008). Students and young adults, alike, aren’t participating in traditional dating like previously in the past. “The problem with dating and relationships today”, Bogle states, “all revolve around the issue that there are no clear cut rules” (2008). College women find it very difficult to know when a college man consider themselves in a relationship because “dating has multiple meanings for college students today, ranging from being in an exclusive relationship to a casual, sexual friendship” (Glenn 2001). The emotional aspect that women have toward dating and hooking up vary from the attitudes that men have. Glenn’s research configures that “marriage is a major life goal for the majority of today’s college women (83%), and 63% said they would like to meet their spouse while at college” (2001). His research states, though, “that women are interested in hooking up to avoid getting into more serious relationships” (2001). In difference to Glenn’s research, it could be

suggested that women hookup over serious relationships in order to “play the field” before finding someone they are interested in.

### **Methodology**

The participants for this research were various students of different age, sex, and racial backgrounds from Concord University. Voluntary interviews were selected based on the three factors listed above; moreover, students were able to opt out at any time. The data collection procedures used within this project compiled interview data from several different college aged students. By choosing to do interviews, the researcher was able to gain a more understanding on the views given by participants. Facial expressions and movement of the body during an interview can show signs of happiness/sadness, comfort/discomfort, and/or satisfaction/regret. These signs can help the interviewer have a better understanding of how their participants feel for each question asked. Participants were allowed and encouraged to keep complete discretion and privacy since the topics on sex, dating, and relationships can often be sensitive. Interviewer and participants used a private conference room and a human observant laboratory where general questions about hooking up, traditional dating, and various other questions surrounding these topics were asked. Because these questions are sensitive, the researcher faced various challenges specifically when asking the questions. In order to keep ethics morally sound, the researcher had to word the questions in a way that students were allowed to give their perceptions and opinions on the concepts regarding hooking up, dating, and relationships. Other challenges the researcher faced were the numerous definitions participants gave on the act of hooking up. The researcher had to analyze each definition to

find specific similarities within each given definition that generalized the act of hooking up to be any form of sexual conduct where the two individuals participating didn't have any further relations after the encounter.

### **Analysis**

Through this research, several findings were found on dating and hooking up. The research suggests that students have various perceptions and opinions on what constitutes the act of hooking up. Of the eleven participants that were interviewed, only five were kept for the purpose of having a variety of students with different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Of the five participants, three stated that hooking up is specified as an actual act of sex that includes vaginal, anal, and/or oral sex. Two of the participants indicated hooking up to be "a random make out with a person and then not talking with them again" (Participant 2 and 4).

Participants two and four have extremely similar views when asked how they define hooking up. In the interview with participant four, he stated that his views on hooking up, pre-marital sex, and his overall moral standing were very conservative Christian; furthermore, participant two's demographics state that she is from an area very close to radically religious Middle Eastern countries. According to the Pew Research Institute, over 94% of Middle Eastern individuals believe pre-marital sex is morally wrong (Global Views on Morality 2013). A similarity could be connected between the conservative Christian to the Middle Eastern individual based on their views on sexual activities, dating and relationships because of their religious backgrounds and the culture from where they originated.

Another finding in this research suggests the supposed societal attitudes and perceptions of traditional dating given by participants could be reflective of their own personal attitudes and perceptions they have on traditional dating. Of all five participants, they all propose that traditional dating is dead in some form. Some participants, though, believe that it isn't quite dead yet, but that traditional dating doesn't happen as often as it has in the past. An anonymous survey given to 150 students at Concord University on the hook up culture shows ample evidence to the suggestive research. In the survey, students were asked how often during a semester do other students at their college participate in a more traditional style date. 20.7% stated that often (2 or 3 times monthly) students participate in this type of dating. Next, students were asked how often their friends participated in this type of dating. 25.2% stated that often their friends participate in this type of dating. Lastly, students were asked how often a semester they, personally, participate in this type of dating. 10.8% stated that often they participate in this type of dating (Luff 2015). The statistics provided show that students especially believe their friends and other students at their college often go on dates 2 or 3 times a month; yet, the statistics show a substantially lower amount of the actual student taking the survey who personally participate in that type of dating as often. 4.5% of these same students also stated that students at their college never go on these type of dates. 9.9% correspondingly stated that their friends never go on these types of dates; furthermore, 26.1% of students who were taking the survey stated they never go on these types of dates during a semester (Luff 2015). By looking at the statistics, there is a significantly large statistical gap between students in general, close friends, and the actual student participating in the survey on whether they engage in these types of dates or not. The statistics from this survey, correlating

with the interview statements by participants, provide sufficient support that student's believe traditional dating is dead actually based on how often they date.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to see how different college students defined the slang word hooking up and to gain an understanding on traditional dating. Through these definitions the researcher was able to find the specific attitudes and perceptions on hooking up, dating, and relationships. Furthermore, the main importance of this research is that students who participated in this were not only engaged in a topic that is often sensitive but were also able to be exposed to questions that made them think about their attitudes based on these subtopics surrounding hooking up. Because this is a societal trend in American colleges, engaging students so they can have a better understanding of the hookup culture will better their knowledge and allow for discussion of likewise sensitive topics further in their careers as students and professionals. Further study for this research will include gathering and analyzing quantitative data from a larger number of students on campus in order to receive even more accurate statistics for how many students participate in dating, hooking up and other related terms. For current or future researchers that want a challenging project, where the societal values and norms change variously throughout time, then the study of college students and the way they perceive hooking up, dating, and relationships should be a good field of interest.

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