



‘Hook – up’ in the sexual culture of Polish and Ukrainian students – a communique of research

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Abstract:

‘Hook -ups’- emotionally uninvolved sexual encounters are becoming more and more rooted in popular culture, reflecting the changing social and sexual attitudes. Hook-up behavior may include a wide range of sexual activities such as kisses, oral sex and penetration. Hook-up raises the anxiety of many researchers due to many negative consequences, such as sexual violence, sexually transmitted diseases, emotional disorders and / or unplanned pregnancy. The aim of the study was to answer the question: how often do Polish and Ukrainian students take sexual relations with strangers?

1. Introduction

‘Hook -ups’- emotionally uninvolved sexual encounters are becoming more and more rooted in popular culture, reflecting the changing social and sexual attitudes. The hook-up culture emerged from the more general social changes that took place in the last century (Stinson, 2010). Hook-up behavior may include a wide range of sexual activities such as kisses, oral sex and penetration (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012). The use of the term ‘hook-up’ to describe the physical relationship between young people has appeared quite recently in the scientific literature. The searches in eight EBSCO scientific databases in the education, psychology, social sciences and sociology sectors regarding titles of articles containing the terms ‘hook-up’ / ‘hookup’, revealed that this term was not used in the 90s. It was used sporadically in 2000-2005 (only 4 articles from peer-reviewed journals described this phenomenon) and has been used extensively since 2006 (84 articles in 2006-2007) (Bogle, 2008). Stinson (2010) described the hook-up as a ‘trend’, Kalish and Kimmel (2011, p. 138) as ‘a new normative sexual experience at American universities’. Researchers link this trend with other social trends, such as a change in sexual relations at universities, a rapidly rising age at first marriage (Regnerus & Uecker, 2011), a tendency to delay economic self-sufficiency (Harden, 2013). The use of the term ‘hook-up culture’ implies not only characteristic behavior patterns, but also values, attitudes, and lifestyle (Skolnick, 2006). Hook-ups are part of a cultural change that has penetrated in the western world the lives of the young generation entering the adulthood (Garcia et al., 2012) and are the result of changes in sexual norms (Monto & Carey, 2014). However, as Ira Reiss claimed in 1960, new sexual morality is mainly the activity of young people in each generation. Young people liberalize moral norms and afterwards, after reaching a certain age limit, they become conservative and accuse the next generation that it exceeds the set ceiling (for Imieliński, 1992, p. 140).

The term ‘hook-up’ is still ambiguous and is used differently by different researchers. ‘Hook-ups’ can be characterized as a form of casual sex outside a formal relationship (dating, marriage, etc.), without a ‘traditional’



reason (such as love, procreation) (Garcia et al., 2012). Paul, McManus and Hayes (2000, p. 79) define hook-ups as 'a sexual encounter, usually lasting only one night, between two people who are strangers to each other or short-term friends. These meetings may or may not include sexual intercourse'. Lewis et al. (2012) applied a more behaviorally specific definition in which such behavior was defined as an event in which at least one physical intimate behavior occurred (kisses, touching, oral sex, vaginal, anal sex) with a stranger or a person not being in relationship, for whom there is no mutual expectation of romantic engagement. Glenn and Marquardt (2001) used an overtly heteronormative definition: the hook-up occurs when a woman and a man have physical contact and do not necessarily expect to continue their relationship.

The term 'hook-up', according to many authors, focuses on the emotionally uninvolved nature of sexual encounters, instead of focusing on what behaviors are being undertaken and with whom. The ambiguity of this term affects the discrepancy in results (Bisson & Levine, 2009). For example, the online research Garcia et al. (2012) show that 70 per cent of sexually active teenagers reported that in the previous year they had had sex in an uninvolved form. Such behavior was most frequent at parties – 67 per cent, in student resident halls or in brotherhood homes – 57 per cent, in bars and clubs – 10 per cent, in cars – 4 per cent and in any available place – 35 per cent. However, in the Fielder and Carey study (2010b), 98 per cent of respondents reported that they had had a hook-up, but only kisses occurred during the meeting. Other behavior were less frequent. In Reiber and Garcia's research (2010), 58 per cent of respondents had sexual contact above the waist, 53 per cent below, 36 per cent had oral sex, 35 per cent received oral sex, and 34 per cent had penetrative sex. Kalish and Kimmel (2011), stated that among 14,000 students at 19 universities, 58 per cent of respondents admitted to hook-ups in the last year (an average of 7 such contacts). Armstrong et al. (2010), examined over 13,000 heterosexual women: 69 per cent declared hook-ups (3 contacts on average). Bisson and Levine's research (2009) shows that women more often than men take casual sexual encounters with someone they know well, an acquaintance, a close friend or ex-boyfriend but not with a stranger. So conceptualizing hook ups as interactions between strangers or short friends can distort many test results. What's more, this conclusion raises the question whether 'sex with a friend' is a hookup subtype or it is a separate type of relationship.

Regardless of the definition adopted, the results of American research can be interpreted as indicators of culture 'without any obligations'.

2. Causes of hook-up behavior

Human evolutionary behavioral research attempts to explain sexual behavior by understanding our evolutionary history and its impact on behavioral patterns in a given environment. In terms of the theory of sexual strategy, men prefer to have as many partners as possible (even with a view to experiencing one-time contact), which can potentially increase their reproductive performance. Men will try to involve the maximum number of female partners and settle for sex faster than women. In this approach, women are expected to prefer long-term relationships to extract the maximum amount of resources from partners (Buss, 1998). In a cross-cultural study of 16288 people in 52 countries, Schmitt et al. (2003) showed that men declare a greater need for diversity of sexual partners than women, regardless of the status of the relationship or sexual orientation. In North America, relatively more men (65.2 per cent) than women (45.4 per cent) are looking for short-term contacts. However, according to many researchers, the main factor affecting the popularity of hook-up are widely understood media. Contemporary popular culture often encourages sexual behavior, including premarital and casual sex. The themes of books, movie and TV shows as well as the lyrics of many songs demonstrate the liberal sexuality of young people. For example, the first verse of the popular song *Last Friday Night (TGIF)* by the singer and songwriter Katy Perry 'There's a stranger in my bed' emphasizes the consequences of Friday partying, presumably involving casual sex, alcohol and a fragmented memory of the night events (Perry, 2010). The popular US reality show *Jersey Shore*, which began its broadcast in 2009, glorifies hook-ups among strangers, acquaintances, friends and former partners (Garcia et al., 2012). Non-traditional sexual behavior is also promoted by the series '50 Shades of Grey' by E.L. James. According to most theories of media effects, the influence of the media depends largely on the content they present. The amount of sexual content that young people encounter varies depending on the platform. Many studies show that in the US more than 70 per cent of television programs in the so-called prime-time contains some sexual content (about 20 per cent of sexual relations of people who knew each other but were not in a relationship, and another 15 per cent



refer to people having sex right after getting to know each other) (Greene, Banerjee, Krcmar, Bagdasarov, & Ruginyte, 2011). The variety of erotic content available on the Internet is even more widespread. Moreover, this content can be viewed on computers, MP3 players, and mobile phones. This new portability allows you to use multimedia in a variety of settings and as much as possible throughout the day. Pardun et al. (2005) found that a total of 11 per cent of the media contains erotic content. However, the content is more concentrated in music (40 per cent). The theory of social learning and social cognitive theory prove that exposure to screen media leads to cognitive acquisition of behaviors along with their expected social, emotional and cognitive consequences. The exposure to images suggesting that behavior (sex) will lead to social disapproval or other negative effects (e.g., pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases) may contribute to negative attitudes towards the behaviors described above. In general, young people watching more sexual content in the media were more likely to take risky behavior in one year of follow-up than those who watched less. According to Roberts et al. (2005, p. 12) 'other people's comments may facilitate, inhibit or otherwise direct the understanding and / or acceptance of a message'. With more media portability, we can expect messages promoting sexual risks to have a greater impact on young people (Collins, 2008). Brown and L'Engle (2009) found that people exposed to pornographic materials through various media were more likely to report indifferent sexual attitudes (e.g., acceptance of premarital sex) and took risky behavior. Most of the internet content is generated by users, therefore they can be perceived as more realistic. What's more, you can view them in 'real time' via a webcam and be interactive. Hinduja and Patchin (2008) analyzed the content of social networking sites. 5.4 per cent of respondents posted their photos in a swimsuit or underwear. According to a study by the National Campaign Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008), 20 per cent of teenagers ever sent their naked photos or in negligee; 15 per cent of them sent them to someone they knew only online. The ubiquity of mobile telephony, the ease of communication and the apparent tendency to reveal oneself through relatively impersonal digital media can certainly lead to the spread of the ambiguous sexual communication between (often foreign) sexual partners. Some teenagers report that they are more determined and aggressive in using sexual words and images online than offline (Collins, Martino, & Shaw, 2011). Sending sexual messages may result from perceived peer pressure or other social pressure. A sexually inexperienced teenager can post a sex message so as to look or at least be perceived as mature. When other people's reactions strengthen his/her behavior, the youngster may start to perceive himself / herself as a sexually mature. Ultimately, this can lead to more free or risky action. Subrahmanyam, Smahel and Greenfield (2006) analyzed the content of 20 chat sessions, which is about 600 minutes of talks between 583 people. Nineteen percent of all pseudonyms were sexual. Sexual themes accounted for 5 per cent of all statements, which translated into one sexual commentary per minute of discussion. Popular culture thus provides patterns of sexual behavior for people entering the adulthood.

The media can, however, be a 'healthy sex pedagogue' and a useful tool for interventions aimed at reducing sexual risk among young people. After the episode of the series 'Friends', which included information on the effectiveness of the condom, many teenagers initiated a conversation with a parent or other adults about pregnancy prevention. The so-called 'edu-tainment' has been used to provide information on sexual health also in soap operas (Collins et al., 2011).

3. Hook-up effects

Negative hook-up effects may include emotional spheres, sexual violence, sexually transmitted diseases and/or unplanned pregnancy. Risky sex-related behavior among adolescents in the United States is a serious public health problem. Nearly 800,000 young women have, each year, an unplanned pregnancy, and half of about 19 million new sexually transmitted infections (STI) affect young people (Strasburger, Jordan, & Donnerstein, 2010). Despite many health risks, most students do not use contraceptives. According to Lewis et al. (2012). The test made on a sample of 1468 students proved that only 46.6 per cent of respondents who declared experiencing hook-ups used a condom. The lowest rates of condom use are recorded in the case of oral sex (Nicole Stone, Hatherall, Ingham, & McEachran, 2006). According to Stone and Ingham (2002), a very important indicator of the use of contraception was communication with a partner or lack of it. The key finding of this study is that few respondents feel comfortable in conversations, in particular regarding the use of condoms. The situation is compounded by the reluctance of young men to use them. Evidence suggests that people in short-term relationships or engaging in one-time contact are much less likely to use contraception. Another reason for concern related to emotionally indifferent sex is the high



coexistence of the use of psychoactive substances (Van Gelder, Reefhuis, Herron, Williams, & Roeleveld, 2011). In Fielder and Carey's (2010b) research, 64 percent of surveyed students consumed alcohol before having casual sex (the median was 3 alcoholic beverages). Similarly, another study found that almost 61 percent of students drink alcohol (an average of 3.3 drinks) during accidental sex (Lewis et al., 2012). In contrast, only 10 percent of students admit to drinking alcohol before 'traditional' romantic dates (England, Shafer, & Fogarty, 2007). Alcohol consumption was also associated with the type of sexual behavior. The highest alcohol consumption was conducive to penetration (Owen, Fincham, & Moore, 2011). Alcohol and drugs drastically increase the overall risk associated with sexual activity. Stimulants serve not only as an excuse to establish casual contacts, but also as a strategy justifying their behavior (Fielder & Carey, 2010a; Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Fincham, 2010).

A number of tests also include feelings and emotions after a hook-up episode. 27.1 per cent of students felt embarrassed, 24.7 per cent reported emotional difficulties, 20.8 per cent experienced loss of respect, and 10 per cent declared conflicts with their regular partner (Lewis et al., 2012). For women, hook-up may involve labeling and spreading negative reputation (Bogle, 2008). Over 70 per cent of Canadian students regret having had the hook-up. Researchers emphasize that women more often regret taking sexual activity with a stranger. Fisher et al. (2012) distinguished two types of regret occurring among the tested students. Remorse because they had had sex with penetration with someone known less than 24 hours and another type of regret, namely that they had experienced sex with penetration with someone ... but only once.

It should also be remembered that often the sexual forms of a mature person's life reflect the *imprinting* of the first erotic experiences. This applies to both the situation and the partner. Situations with the highest sexual satiation are usually associated with fixed images of the first erotic experiences (Kępiński, 2003). The danger of entering into the hook-up relationship lies in the fascination of many people with this form of sex, that is, sex without feelings.

4. Material and method

Pilot studies for an international research project: *Formation of health behaviors and sexual culture of students in the educational space of higher education in Poland and Ukraine* was carried out from January 2017 to February 2018. For the purposes of the research, one adopted a diagnostic procedure based on multilateral exploration of the literature and research in the area. The analyzes carried out constitute an introduction to a more complete study of the issue of sexual culture and health attitudes of students. Due to the limited selection of research samples, they can not be generalized to the entire population of Polish and Ukrainian students. For the purpose of the research, a questionnaire was prepared to study attitudes in the field of pro-health sexual behavior, with particular emphasis on sexual culture of students and selected sociodemographic variables. The questions concerned, among others, the age of sexual initiation, the length of acquaintance before the first sexual intercourse, the use of contraception, the concept of 'sexual culture', and also risky sexual behavior of students. The research was conducted among students living in campuses; in Poland – at the Universities in Warsaw, Poznań, Toruń, Bydgoszcz, and in Ukraine – at the Kiev Universities. Taking into account the topic and nature of research (intimacy, sensitive aspect of research questions), a targeted selection of the sample using the Snowball Sampling Method was chosen. The results of the study were analyzed due to three independent variables: the country of students' origin, gender and marital status. The present study shows partial results of research on only sexual relations with strangers. The aim of the study was to get to know the answers to the following research problems:

- (1) Does a hook-up phenomenon occur in the tested group?
- (2) How do sex and marital status affect the frequency of entering into sexual relations with a stranger?
- (3) What are the feelings accompanying the tested person after the hook-up episode?
- (4) Do the respondents after taking risky sexual behavior perform tests for the presence of sexually transmitted diseases?

In the current study, the definition of Garcia and Reiber (2008) was adopted that 'hook-up' is a sexual encounter between people who are not in a relationship and do not expect to be in it. By 'sexual encounter', researchers understand sexual behavior (vaginal, anal, oral sex, but not kissing). There were no questions regarding the use of stimulants, as the results could not be comparable. In campuses in Ukraine, the provision on alcohol and drugs is rigorously adhered to. A student 'caught' on breaking the rules is thrown out of the Student's House.



5. Participated in the study

In Poland: 111 full-time students (undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students): 50 women and 61 men. The women are in the 18-25 age range: 23 come from cities; 12 are married, 26 in a stable relationship without being married and 12 have a partner but do not live with him. The men are at the age of 18-35 and respectively 10 come from cities, 19 are married, 32 live with a partner but they are not marriage couples, and 10 have a partner but they do not live together.

In Ukraine: 115 people – 51 women and 64 men. The women are in the age range of 21-36. 43 come from cities, 6 from villages, 2 did not indicate the place of birth. 8 are married, 10 in a stable relationship without being married, 31 are single but having a partner, 2 did not answer. The men are in the range of 21-39 years. 53 are city dwellers, 8 are married, 8 are in a stable relationship but not married, 46 are unmarried, but have partners, 2 did not give an answer.

6. Research conclusions

- (1) All human reactions, feelings and behavior are the resultant of interaction between biological and physiological factors as well as socio-cultural ones. All this also applies to the sphere of sexual human life. Intelligence and emotional brakes have been shaped in the process of upbringing since an early age. If they are well developed, then in the period of puberty, the increasing sexual needs will be easier to subordinate to them, which facilitates the preservation of harmonious and dynamic development of the emotional and sexual sphere within the development of personality. Human being's sexual sphere is not just a manifestation of the drive, but it is a phenomenon that has a human dimension. It is a special form of communication and interpersonal relationship. The moral evaluation of sexual contacts should be based on whether they are responsible or not and whether they serve to build relationships or destroy them. The social transformations occurring in many countries are manifested first of all by the loosening of traditional norms regulating sexual intercourse: an increase in sexual freedom, the depersonalization of the partner, and the new embodiment of Don Juan's pattern. Instrumental treatment of sex removes love from interpersonal relations, replacing interpersonal relations with the ones having material character (Imieliński, 1992). The example of the objectification of the partner is a hook-up, propagated as a form of social entertainment. In the studied group of students, the hook-up phenomenon is not as popular as in American campuses. A total of 52 respondents admitted to this type of behavior – 23 per cent of the total: 9 Polish women, 9 Ukrainian females, 20 Poles and 14 Ukrainian boys. In Poland, definitely more often sexual contact with a stranger was declared by an unmarried person, but living with a partner (7 women and 17 men). Besides, two unmarried women living alone as well as three married men avowed that they had taken part in the hook-up. In Ukraine, however, it concerned people who had a partner but did not live with him /her (7 women and 12 men). Other people declaring this type of behavior are cohabitants (1 woman and 1 man) and married (also 1 person in each category). The research also shows that the next indicators of entering the hook-up relationship were the age of sexual initiation as well as having multiple partners. Over 40 per cent of the respondents – a total of 38 people (24 in Poland and 14 in Ukraine) who started sexual life at the age of less than 16 declared participation in the hook-up (in comparison with eight people initiating sexual life at the age of over 18, which is 8.6 per cent). All persons, irrespective of the country and gender, who declared having more than 5 sexual partners and three-fourth possessing from 2-4 partners had sexual contact with a stranger in the previous year.
- (2) In the majority, the respondents declared that they had had hook-up behavior only once – a total of 35 people (7 Polish women, 14 Poles, 6 Ukrainian females and 7 Ukrainian men). From 2 to 5 times such contact concerned 2 Polish girls, 5 Poles, 3 Ukrainian women and 5 Ukrainians. One Pole and two Ukrainians had such a contact over 10 times. A multiple of hook-up contacts was declared in Poland by people living with a partner (quotations: 'such sex adds spiciness to the relationship', 'it is exciting when you know your partner is about to come back'). In Ukraine students having hook-up episodes with a partner outside campus said that 'sex with strangers is not a betrayal' (quotation). In Ukraine, such contacts were held in student houses, in Poland – in rooms, bathrooms, during Friday parties, often in a car. The sex in the car was declared by 7 women who, in this way, wanted to imitate the heroine of the novel E.L. James '50 Shades



of Grey'. Regardless of the country and gender, about 60 per cent of the hook-up behavior was initiated during campus events while the others made it by ... Facebook.

- (3) Everyone creates an individual hierarchy of sexual needs. The diversity of people in this respect is very large: some of them are dominated by the need for pleasure, to fulfil themselves (level I), the others search for confirmation of their own attractiveness (level II), finally the others else look for love, partnership and warm family life (level III) (Lew-Starowicz, 2004). All the surveyed women, through participation in the hook-up, wanted to satisfy the need to feel their own attractiveness and understanding (citations: 'it is painful when the guy you live with treats you not like a woman, mistress or even mother but a cook and a cleaner'). Most of them after the hook-up felt disappointed and deceived because they did not receive what they had expected, which would be confirmation that they were attractive and desirable (frankly speaking, none of the partners offered another meeting). The female respondents are also concerned about their reputation. Women who, despite disappointments, still had sex with a stranger, are looking for ways to satisfy their erotic fantasies ('I do not know why but I can tell 'my stranger' all my erotic desires, but I would feel embarrassed to tell them to my husband'). On the other hand, all men were satisfied ('quickly, without sulks, without unnecessary conversations and above all, without obligation'-quotation).
- (4) One of the elements of sexual culture is taking care of your health and your partner's health. Each risky contact involves the probability of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (and consequently, the partner as well). In Poland, only 2 women and 8 men (34.48 per cent in total) participating in the hook-up have done the tests for HIV and other diseases; it should be added that 5 men only decided to take tests after taking part in group sex. In Ukraine, 5 women and 8 men (56.52 per cent) performed the tests.

7. Discussion

According to Bauman (2003), all of our traditional ties are loosening up. Even those, allegedly established and lasting, such as family, religious ties, marriage, and maybe even love are not as reliable or as desirable as they used to be. We live in fluid time and demand that sex, and perhaps love, would succumb to us like everything else. We are consumers and we demand our rights: love and sex must give us what we would expect from other purchases: newness, diversity, transparency and speed. This is because the modern civilization puts mobility at the forefront. Whoever puts the question 'do you love me?' is *passé* and loses his/her valuable time. Increasingly, our relationships are composed of fragile bonds. Every day it is more and more difficult to create a reality composed of lasting relationships. In today's world, people make contacts, not relationships (Bauman, 2003). It is very difficult for contemporaries to discover that there are things – the most fundamental ones – like family, love and sex that do not follow economic rules. The example coming from research indicates that the relationships that the respondents establish are often devoid of meaning and above all, commitment. The question is, why students enter into such ephemeral, unemotional sexual contacts. Is it always the result of light-heartedness, curiosity, fashion, and pressure? Is it rather the result of other factors including, inter alia, unmet in the childhood needs for love, warmth and belongingness? According to Jaczewski (2014), the child is to be surrounded by warmth in the family. He must be aware that he is loved and that this love is shown to him. In relation to older children, it is also important to talk, but not only about the progress in learning, but also about the problems of sexuality, experiences, feelings and emotions. Unfortunately. There are still too many people suffering from loneliness. The results of the presented research may not awaken social anxiety. 23 per cent of adults had sex with a stranger; after all, it is less than one-fourth. However, the results of our research do not reflect the whole of the phenomenon, they do not comprehensively cover its causes and effects. We do not know how many respondents concealed the fact of participating in such behavior. It should also be remembered, citing the results of American research, that much risky sexual behavior taken by young people (even those studying at prestigious universities) often occurs under social pressure. So maybe this is a problem that is worth bending over. We, adults, have tools in hand so as to raise young people's awareness for an increasingly socially accepted sex without feelings, namely upbringing and further education. However, in order to be able to get results, we have to start using them in childhood. When bringing up children, we must provide them with self-esteem, the value of their body, self-awareness and the ability to make lasting relationships. Perhaps some risky sexual behavior could be avoided if there were reliable sex education classes in both countries and if the youth talked about sex with their parents and teachers and they would learn how



to be assertive. It is necessary to be able to say NO in a situation that you do not accept, but assertiveness must be learned from an early age! It is to be hoped that the need for action in this area will be noticed not only by theoreticians but also by practitioners and decision makers.

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