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**YOUNG WOMEN GOING ALL THE WAY:
WHAT PREDICTS HOOK UPS AND CASUAL SEX IN COLLEGE?**

A senior thesis submitted to the
Department of Psychology
of the
University of Mary Washington

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Departmental Honors

Lauren P. Hartwell

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Lauren P. Hartwell entitled: "Young Women Going All the Way: What Predicts Hook Ups and Casual Sex in College?" has been approved by her committee as satisfactory completion of an honors thesis as partial fulfillment for the degree of Bachelor of Science.



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Young Women Going All the Way:
What Predicts Hook Ups and Casual Sex in College?

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Abstract

Research shows that traditional dating in college has been replaced with a “hook up” culture, defined by casual sexual relations. This change has been attributed to the growing permissiveness of young people’s sexual attitudes. However, the most drastic increase in uncommitted sexual activity has been observed among young women. The current research investigated how enjoying sexualization and participating in self-sexualizing behaviors may influence young women’s casual sex and hooking up behaviors. Participants completed an anonymous online survey that included the Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale, the Sexualizing Behaviors Scale, and measures of sexual assertiveness and sexual esteem. Using these variables, we were able to predict young women’s number of casual sex and hook up partners, as well as their willingness to have intercourse during a hook up. This suggests that factors specific to women (i.e., sexualization and sexual objectification) may be contributing to the observed increase in their casual sexual activity.

Young Women Going All the Way:

What Predicts Hook Ups and Casual Sex in College?

In July 2001, the Independent Women's Forum released the results of an 18 month, nationwide study of over 1,000 college women titled *Hooking Up, Hanging Out, and Hoping for Mr. Right* (Kennedy, 2002). The study, which focused on the attitudes and behaviors of today's college women regarding sexuality and dating, is often considered the first documentation of a widespread social trend on college campuses known as "hooking up." The results of the study suggested that hooking up, defined as casual sexual relations with no expectation of commitment, had replaced dating in college (Bogle, 2008). A firestorm of media reports ensued, which often portrayed an extreme version of hooking up, creating the impression that hook ups necessarily involved sexual intercourse or some other form of "risky" sex (Bogle, 2008).

In reality, hooking up is a deliberately vague term that can refer to a wide variety of activities, ranging from non-coital sex (i.e., hand-genital and oral-genital stimulation) to low-risk sexual behaviors such as kissing or fondling (Bogle, 2008; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Weaver & Herold, 2000). Although it is generally true that hook ups *do* occur without the expectation of developing a relationship (Bradshaw, Kahn, & Saville, 2010; Fielder & Carey, 2010; Paul & Hayes, 2002), it is important to make a distinction between hooking up and engaging in casual sexual intercourse. In a casual sex encounter, sexual intercourse is the necessary and defining element (Paul & Hayes, 2002). Hook ups are also sexual in nature, but they may or may not involve sexual intercourse (Paul & Hayes, 2002).

Both hook ups and casual sex encounters often involve two people who are brief acquaintances or strangers (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Fielder & Carey, 2010; Paul & Hayes, 2002), although some women may chose to hook up with individuals they know well (e.g., a friend or

ex-boyfriend; Fielder & Carey, 2010). These sexual encounters most often last only one night (defined as a “one-night-stand” if coitus occurs), but the same two people can also hook up on multiple occasions (Paul & Hayes, 2002). The defining element that keeps such encounters “casual” is the lack of anticipation for a future, committed relationship (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Research shows that the majority of college students are indeed hooking up, with approximately 78% of female and 84% of male college students indicating they have hooked up (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). Other research has indicated that hooking up on college campuses can involve 53% to 76% of the student population (Stinson, 2010). Casual sex has also become increasingly popular on college campuses, with 70% of college students engaging in sexual intercourse with partners with whom they are *not* romantically involved (Stinson, 2010).

Furthermore, young people’s sexual attitudes and behaviors are considerably more permissive than they were 20 to 30 years ago (Walsh, 1991; Wells & Twenge, 2005). The number of young people who are sexually active has, in fact, increased over time for both men and women, but the most drastic increase has been observed among young women (Wells & Twenge, 2005). In the current research, we investigated some issues specific to women that may help further explain this increase in sexual activity among college females. More specifically, we wanted to determine which variables would predict number of casual sexual partners and number of hook up partners, as well as what differentiates those women who were willing to engage in sexual intercourse, or “go all the way,” during hook up situations.

It is impossible to explore the sexual attitudes and behaviors of young women without first considering the impact of sexualization and sexual objectification, which permeate the lives of young women in our society. Sexualization occurs when women are regarded as sex objects

and are evaluated solely in terms of their physical attributes (APA, 2007). Women learn from an early age that outward physical attractiveness, overwhelmingly defined by unachievable cultural beauty ideals, determines their self-worth (APA, 2007). According to the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007), sexualization can occur through any one of the following four means: equating a woman's value with her sexuality, defining attractiveness by sexiness, imposing sexuality on a woman, or the process of sexual objectification, which refers to the treatment of women as mere bodies to be consumed by others (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997).

Research has consistently shown that sexualization has negative effects on women's physical and psychological health, sexuality, and attitudes and behaviors (for a review, see APA, 2007). For example, sexualization has been linked to the development of eating disorders, low self-esteem, and depression in young girls and women (Thomsen, Weber, & Brown, 2002; Tolman, Impett, Tracy, & Michael, 2006). Sexualization has also been shown to reduce the ability of young women to develop a healthy concept of sexuality and of themselves (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006). Sexual objectification is a particularly well-researched component of sexualization. Sexual objectification is most often enacted through the objectifying gaze, or a visual evaluation of the body, and through the visual media (e.g., advertisements that emphasize women's bodies or individual body parts; Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). This constant inspection of the female body may force women to comply with external societal pressures, leading to the internalization of an observer's perspective on their bodies, known as self-objectification (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Research shows that self-objectification further contributes to depression, eating disorders, and sexual dysfunction among young women (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997; Frederickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Noll & Frederickson, 1998).

Despite the negative consequences of sexualization and sexual objectification, many women willingly participate in the beauty industry and even engage in self-sexualizing behaviors (i.e., acting in ways that encourage sexualization such as wearing revealing clothing; Nowatzki & Morry, 2009). This is because women may receive more attention from, or wield more power over, men who find them sexually attractive (Liss, Erchull, & Ramsey, 2011; Nowatzki & Morry, 2009). Although this power comes at the cost of being objectified, some women may feel empowered by embracing sexualization (Liss et al., 2011). In other words, some women may enjoy sexualization and even deliberately seek male sexual attention as a way to confirm their attractiveness (Liss et al., 2011).

In a recent study exploring the concept of enjoyment of sexualization, Liss et al. (2011) found that some women did report enjoying the receipt of sexualized male attention. Also, women who reported greater enjoyment of sexualization were less likely to adhere to some traditional feminine norms, namely being modest and sexually faithful (Liss et al., 2011). This suggests that women who enjoy sexualization may have no qualms about drawing attention to themselves and are less concerned about keeping sexual intimacy contained within a committed relationship (Mahalik et al., 2005). It is important to emphasize, however, that enjoying sexualization is an attitudinal construct (Liss et al., 2011), and no previous research has investigated whether having such an attitude might translate into observable sexual behaviors.

Self-sexualization, on the other hand, is a behavioral construct (Nowatzki & Morry, 2009). For example, it has been shown that women who chose to consume sexually objectifying media were more likely to participate in a variety of self-sexualizing behaviors (e.g., entering a wet t-shirt contest; Nowatzki & Morry, 2009). However, to the best of our knowledge, no research has examined how participating in self-sexualizing behaviors or enjoying sexualization

influences young women's actual sexual behaviors. We felt that these variables, which both reflect the impact of sexualization, would be able to explain a portion of the variance in women's sexual behaviors. More specifically, we hypothesized that women who reported greater enjoyment of sexualization would report a greater number of casual sex and hooking up experiences. We also hypothesized that women who reported a greater willingness to participate in self-sexualizing behaviors would be more likely than women who did not self-sexualize to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors.

It is also necessary to consider that young women's sexual attitudes have grown increasingly more permissive over the past four decades (Paul & Hayes, 2002; Wells & Twenge, 2005), and permissive sexual attitudes tend to predict engagement in uncommitted sexual intercourse (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987; Paul et al., 2000). Although women's increased permissiveness and sexual activity should theoretically reduce the gender gap in sexual expression (Petersen & Hyde, 2010), the sexual double standard continues to thrive for women (Paul & Hayes, 2002). This is because, according to Western sociocultural norms, sexual experiences are a reinforced aspect of masculinity but are still considered a violation of acceptable female sexual behavior (Paul & Hayes, 2002).

Indeed, past research has generally supported traditional sexual scripts for women in American society (Weaver & Herold, 2000). These conservative sexual scripts dictate that women should not be interested in casual sex, should not enjoy casual sex, should only desire sex when in a committed relationship, and should experience guilt if their sexual activities deviate from cultural norms (Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009; Weaver & Herold, 2000). The prevalence of this sexual double standard means that young women who openly engage in casual sex are often labeled irresponsible and promiscuous (Beres & Farvid, 2010) and are made to feel guilty about

hooking up (Bradshaw et al., 2010). The sexual double standard also means that women are judged more negatively than are men for having sex with many partners or for having sex outside of a committed relationship (Crawford & Popp, 2003). Moreover, the sexual double standard serves to control young women's behavior and marks female sexuality as deviant rather than natural (Attwood, 2007).

This is unfair for women, who are held to conflicting standards of femininity that demand they be both sexually desirable and chaste at the same time (Gilmartin, 2006). In other words, "girls learn to look sexy but say no, to be feminine but not sexual, and to attract boys' desire but not to satisfy their own" (Crawford & Popp, 2003, p. 24). Despite these exacting standards, college women usually anticipate positive social consequences, such as enhanced social status, and therefore positive emotional consequences (e.g., self-esteem and self-confidence) for engaging in casual sex (Paul & Hayes, 2002). Many young women even experience positive emotions during the sexual act (e.g., feeling chosen, noticed, and attractive; Paul & Hayes, 2002). Given these findings, it is possible that young women with permissive sexual attitudes would be the most willing to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors in college. Therefore, we hypothesized that women who reported holding more permissive sexual attitudes would be more likely to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors.

A second construct used to assess liberal sexual attitudes involves the disposition to respond positively or negatively to a variety of sexual cues (Fisher, Byrne, White, & Kelley, 1988). The tendency to respond positively to sexual cues has been shown to be consistently related to permissive behaviors, and is measured by the sexual opinion survey (SOS; Fisher et al., 1988). Individuals who score high on the SOS respond positively to sexual cues. As a result, these individuals tend to find sex more pleasurable, are more likely to seek out sexual

experiences, and generally have more positive feelings about their own sexuality and the sexuality of their partners (Fisher et al., 1988). We therefore hypothesized that women who held liberal sexual attitudes, as reflected by high scores on the SOS, would be more likely to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors.

Despite the fact that some women perceive positive emotional consequences for participating in casual sex or hooking up behaviors, the research concerning self-esteem among sexually active young women is contradictory and often inconclusive (Paul & Hayes, 2002). On one hand, women who self-reported higher levels of self-esteem also reported significantly more coital partners than did women with lower levels of self-esteem (Walsh, 1991). On the other hand, other studies showed that college students with a history of casual sex encounters had lower levels of self-esteem than did other students (Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Weaver & Herold, 2000). At the same time, other research has found no differences in psychological well-being between women with casual sexual partners and those with a committed partner (Eisenberg, Ackard, Resnick, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2009). Given this steady inconsistency in the literature, perhaps research should focus more on measures of esteem specifically related to an individual's sexuality.

Sexuality is a vital part of being a human being and can also influence many facets of both physical and mental health, such as one's self-esteem or self-confidence (Wiederman & Allgeier, 1993). The capacity to experience one's sexuality in a satisfying and enjoyable way is known as sexual esteem (Wiederman & Allgeier, 1993). People high in sexual esteem generally accept sexuality as part of their nature and have confidence in themselves as sexual beings, and this confidence can lead to a heightened sense of general self-esteem (Wiederman & Allgeier, 1993). Therefore, it is possible that young women who possess sexual esteem will be more open

to, and positive about, a variety of sexual experiences (e.g., casual sex and hook up encounters). Indeed, previous research has shown that sexual esteem was positively related to sexual risk taking, defined as a greater likelihood of engaging in casual sexual relations (Seal, Minichiello, & Omodei, 1997). However, the frequency of those casual relationships (i.e., number of casual sex partners) was not assessed. We hypothesized that women who reported higher levels of sexual esteem would be more likely to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors.

Another concept that can influence a woman's sexual esteem is her level of sexual agency or sexual assertiveness. Sexual assertiveness is an important component of a woman's sexual esteem, and sexually assertive women generally report higher levels of sexual desire and sexual satisfaction (Hurlbert, 1991). Women who emphasized their own sexual desires generally gave more positive accounts of casual sex than did women who expressed a lack of sexual assertiveness and control over their casual sex experiences (Beres & Farvid, 2010). Therefore, it stands to reason that young women who report greater sexual assertiveness may be more likely to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors. Although previous research has related sexual assertiveness to sexual satisfaction and the appraisal of casual sex experiences generally, the current research hoped to expand on these findings by assessing whether sexual assertiveness could actually predict young women's number of casual sex experiences.

It is important to note, however, that it may be difficult for women to be assertive about their sexual needs when they are worrying about the appearance of their bodies. The processes of objectification and self-objectification can lead to body self-consciousness and anxiety about one's physical appearance (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). As a result, women who engage in self-objectification have been found to be less sexually assertive, both in casual sexual encounters and sexual experiences with a committed partner (Steer & Tiggemann, 2008).

Moreover, sociocultural forces in our country tend to undermine women's articulations of sexual assertiveness (Gill, 2008). For example, the visual media overwhelmingly presents women merely as objects for male consumption and pleasure, which serves to silence the sexual needs and desires of women, generally (Gill, 2008). Young women are constantly subjected to these cultural forces, which means they may not be getting the most out of their sexual encounters, casual or otherwise. Despite the existence of these societal pressures, we believed that young women who expressed greater sexual assertiveness would be more likely to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors.

Given the various factors that may influence young women's sexual attitudes and behaviors, the current research aimed to clarify which of the aforementioned variables actually predicted number of casual sex and hook up partners among a sample of college women. To summarize our correlational hypotheses, we hypothesized that (1) women who reported enjoyment of sexualization and willingness to participate in self-sexualizing behaviors would be more likely to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors, (2) women who reported holding permissive sexual attitudes would be more likely to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors, (3) women who reported more liberal sexual opinions would be more likely to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors, (4) women who reported higher levels of sexual esteem would be more likely to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors, and (5) women who expressed greater sexual assertiveness would be more likely to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors.

We tested the ability of several individual difference variables to predict young women's number of casual sexual partners and number of hook up partners above and beyond their permissive and liberal sexual attitudes using hierarchical regression analysis. We hypothesized

that enjoyment of sexualization and self-sexualization would be related to a greater number of casual sex and hook up partners. We also believed that sexual assertiveness and sexual esteem would add predictive power. Namely, we believed that sexual assertiveness and sexual esteem would be positive predictors of casual sex and hook up partners. We also tested the ability of those same variables to predict young women's willingness to engage in sexual intercourse during a hook up using hierarchical logistic regression analysis. The same procedure in regards to the pattern for entering the variables was used for the logistic regression.

Method

Participants

Participants were 192 heterosexual women between the ages of 18 and 27 ($M = 21.43$; $SD = 1.717$) who volunteered to participate in this study. For all analyses, we chose to exclude those participants who had never engaged in sexual intercourse because we were interested in the behaviors of sexually active young women. This left a sample of 164 sexually active, heterosexual, young women. The majority of these women were Caucasian (90.9%) and reported their socioeconomic status to be middle (43.9%) or upper middle (35.4%) class. Most of the women had some college experience or an Associate's degree (55.8%), 8.5% were high school graduates, 18.3% were college graduates, 12.5% were in graduate school, and 4.9% had a Masters level degree. Many of the women were not currently enrolled in school (31.7%), but the majority of the sample was currently enrolled in college: 2.4% were first-year students, 9.8% were second-year students, 11.3% were third-year students, 37.5% were fourth-year students, and 7.3% were fifth-year students. Finally, 35.4% of the women in our study reported that they were dating one person exclusively, while 25.6% of our participants were not currently dating

anyone. Additionally, 18.3% of our participants were casually dating one or more people, 9.8% were living with their romantic partner, 5.5% were engaged, and 5.4% were married.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through Facebook postings by the researchers. We requested that heterosexual women over the age of 18 who were interested in helping with a study about young women's sexual attitudes and behaviors follow a link to a secure online survey. The survey had been pilot tested to take between 20 and 30 minutes to complete. After consenting, participants anonymously completed the survey at their convenience in a location of their choice. If participants indicated that they were less than 18 years of age, their data was discarded prior to analysis. After reading an online debriefing statement, participants were given the option to indicate that they wanted their data removed from the study. Data from these participants was also discarded prior to analysis. Only two women asked that their data not be included in the study.

Measures

Permissiveness subscale of the Sexual Attitudes Scale. This measures an individual's attitudes concerning premarital sexual permissiveness on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*; e.g., "I do not need to be committed to a person to have sex with him;" Hendrick & Hendrick, 1987). Cronbach's alpha was .94 in the original study and was .93 in the present study.

Sexual Opinion Survey (SOS). This measures one's disposition to respond to sexual cues along a negative-positive dimension (Fisher et al., 1988), where higher scores indicate more positive sexual opinions and more liberal sexual attitudes. Participants indicated their agreement with items on a response scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; e.g., "The

thought of engaging in unusual sex practices is highly arousing.”). Cronbach’s alpha was .90 in the original study and was .91 in the present study.

Enjoyment of Sexualization Scale (ESS). This measure was used to assess the extent to which women reported enjoying receiving sexualized attention from men (Liss et al., 2011). Participants indicated their agreement with items on a response scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 6 (*agree strongly*; e.g., “I feel proud when men compliment the way I look.”) The ESS had acceptable internal consistency reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of .85 in the original investigation. Cronbach’s alpha in the present study was .86.

Sexualizing Behavior Scale (SBS). This scale was used to measure individual’s participation in self-sexualizing behaviors (Nowatzki & Morry, 2009). Using a scale ranging from 1 (*not very likely*) to 5 (*very likely*), participants indicated the likelihood of their participation in 20 activities. Ten of these activities were self-sexualizing behaviors (e.g., “flashing your breasts for the *Girls Gone Wild* videos”); other behaviors served as filler items and were not scored. Cronbach’s alpha was .78 in the Nowatzki & Morry (2009) study. Cronbach’s alpha was .75 in the present study.

Sexual Esteem subscale of the Sexuality Scale. This subscale was used to assess an individual’s sexual esteem (Wiederman & Allgeier, 1993). Using a response scale ranging from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*), participants indicated their agreement with five statements regarding their sexual esteem (e.g., “I think of myself as a very good sexual partner.”). Cronbach’s alpha was .94 in both the original investigation and current study.

Hurlbert Index of Sexual Assertiveness (HISA). This measure was used to assess participants’ self-described levels of sexual assertiveness (Hurlbert, 1991). Using a scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*all of the time*), participants indicated how often they agreed with 25

statements (e.g., “I communicate my sexual desires to my partner.”). The internal consistency reliability of this scale was .82 in the original study. Cronbach’s alpha in the present study was .90.

Sexual history and sexual experience. Participants also responded to a series of questions, written for the current study, regarding their sexual history (e.g., “Have you engaged in sexual intercourse?”), their casual sex behaviors (e.g., “Have you had casual sex with someone you knew for less than 24 hours?”), and their hooking up behaviors (e.g., “How many different people have you hooked up with?”). Casual sex was defined as “sexual intercourse with someone with whom you were not in an exclusive romantic relationship and, at the time of the sexual interaction, you had no mutual expectation of a romantic commitment.” A hook up was defined as “an event in which two people are physically intimate outside of a committed relationship and have no expectation of future encounters; some physical interaction is typical but may or may not include sexual intercourse.”

Results

Our sample reported fairly high levels of sexual activity. The majority of the women had engaged in casual sexual intercourse at least once (57.3%) and had experienced a hook up at least once (72%). Number of casual sex partners ranged from one to 28, while number of hook up partners ranged from one to 50. Many of the women who had experienced casual sex had also experienced casual sex with a person they knew for less than two weeks (64.5%). Among those women, 83.3% of them had experienced casual sex with a person they had only known for one night. Finally, of the women who had experienced a hook up, 51.3% had also experienced sexual intercourse during a hook up.

Correlations among study variables. Intercorrelations among all variables of interest can be seen in Table 1. Enjoyment of sexualization (1) was significantly related only to number of casual sex partners, but engaging in self-sexualizing behaviors was significantly positively correlated with both number of casual sex partners and number of hook up partners. As expected, (2) holding more permissive sexual attitudes was significantly positively correlated to number of casual sex partners and number of hook up partners. Similarly, (3) women who reported more liberal sexual opinions also reported a greater number of casual sex and hook up partners. There was also a significant positive correlation between (4) sexual esteem and number of casual sex partners. Contrary to our hypothesis, however, (5) sexual assertiveness was not related to number of casual sex and number of hook up partners.

Predicting number of partners. We ran two hierarchical regression analyses, one to predict number of casual sex partners and one to predict number of hook up partners, with the additional requirement that to be included in the analyses the participant must have experienced casual sex or a hook up at least once. We felt this was necessary because a percentage of our participants (even those that were sexually active) had never experienced a casual sex encounter (42.7%) or a hook up scenario (28%). We were not interested in assessing category membership based on a one-time experience, however. We were interested in predicting number of partners among those women who had already had at least one experience with casual sex or hooking up.

We entered the same predictor variables for both regressions. In the first step, we entered permissiveness and SOS scores because these variables have been shown to consistently influence casual sexual behaviors in the literature. Hence, we anticipated that these variables would explain a significant portion of the variance, but we wanted to see if we could predict numbers of casual sex and hook up partners above and beyond these variables. In the second

step, we entered the ESS and the SBS because we were particularly interested in whether young women's enjoyment of sexualization and willingness to self-sexualize would predict casual sex and hook up partners above and beyond liberal sexual and permissive attitudes. Finally, we entered sexual assertiveness and sexual esteem because we believed these variables could also explain a significant portion of the variance in number of partners above and beyond the variables associated with sexualization. We chose to enter sexual assertiveness and sexual esteem on a third step because we felt they did not clearly fit into the first two groupings. For example, permissiveness and SOS are both measures of sexual attitudes while the ESS and the SBS are both variables associated with sexualization. Sexual assertiveness and sexual esteem, however, are not measures of liberal sexual attitudes nor are they directly related to sexualization. Therefore, sexual assertiveness and sexual esteem were grouped separately to assess their unique contribution to explaining the variance in sexual behaviors.

When predicting casual sex partners, the first step accounted for 17% of the variance, $F(2, 78) = 8.04, p < .001$. In this step, only permissive attitudes significantly predicted number of partners such that more permissive attitudes were related to a greater number of casual sex partners. The second step contributed an additional 6% of the variance, a statistically significant increase, $F_{\Delta}(4, 76) = 3.16, p = .05$. In this step, the ESS significantly predicted number of partners such that higher ESS scores were related to more casual sex partners. Permissiveness remained a significant predictor. The third step accounted for an additional 12% of the variance in number of partners, $F_{\Delta}(6, 74) = 7.11, p = .001$. In this step, both sexual assertiveness and sexual esteem significantly predicted number of casual sex partners such that lower levels of sexual assertiveness but higher levels of sexual esteem were related to a greater number of casual sex partners. Permissiveness and the ESS remained significant predictors. The final model

accounted for 36% of the total variance in number of casual sex partners, $F(2,74) = 6.88, p < .001$. The complete results of this regression can be seen in Table 2.

When predicting hook up partners, the first step accounted for 5% of the variance, but this was not statistically significant, $F(2, 98) = 2.625, p = .07$. The second step contributed an additional 5% of the variance, a non-significant increase, $F_{\Delta}(4, 96) = 2.807, p = .06$, but the overall model did become statistically significant at this step, $F(4, 96) = 2.807, p = .03$. In this step, only the SBS significantly predicted number of partners such that higher SBS scores were related to more hook up partners. The third step also accounted for an additional 5% of the variance in number of hook up partners, a non-significant increase, $F_{\Delta}(6, 94) = 2.506, p = .08$. In this step, sexual assertiveness significantly predicted number of hook up partners such that lower levels of sexual assertiveness were related to a greater number of hook up partners. The SBS remained a significant predictor. The final model accounted for 15% of the total variance in number of hook up partners, $F(6,94) = 2.765, p = .02$. The complete results of this regression can also be seen in Table 2.

Predicting sex during a hook up. We ran a hierarchical logistic regression analysis to predict young women's willingness to engage in sexual intercourse during a hook up, which was coded so that 0 represented never having had sex during a hook up and 1 represented having had sex during a hook up. The complete results of this regression can be seen in Table 3. As with our previous regression analyses, we entered permissiveness and SOS scores in the first step of the model. At this step, permissiveness was significantly related to sexual intercourse during a hook up such that women with more permissive attitudes were more likely to experience sex during a hook up, and 63% of the participants were correctly classified. We again added the ESS and the SBS at our second step because we wanted to determine the extent to which self-

sexualization was uniquely associated with sex during a hook up above and beyond sexual attitudes. Neither the ESS nor the SBS enhanced the ability of the model to classify participants as having had sex during a hook up or not. At the third step, we entered sexual assertiveness and sexual esteem because we believed that young women who were willing to assert their desires during sexual activity and generally had positive feelings about their own sexuality would be more willing to engage in sexual intercourse during a hook up encounter. The overall fit of the model was improved at this step, and 65% of the participants were correctly classified. Both sexual esteem and sexual assertiveness were significantly related to sexual intercourse during a hook up such that women with higher levels of sexual esteem were more likely to have sex during a hook up while women with greater sexual assertiveness were less likely to have sex during a hook up.

Discussion

The goals of this study were to better understand if enjoyment of sexualization, sexual esteem, and sexual agency significantly influenced young women's casual sex and hooking up behaviors above and beyond the effects of liberal and permissive sexual attitudes. Our results indicated that when predicting number of casual sexual partners, enjoyment of sexualization did significantly improve prediction of an individual's number of partners. This suggests that young women who enjoy sexualized male attention may engage in casual sexual activity more frequently than do young women who do not enjoy sexualized male attention.

The ability of the ESS to predict a unique portion of the variance associated with number of casual sexual partners was a particularly interesting finding considering that the ESS was designed to be a measure of attitudes and not behaviors (Liss et al., 2011). Our data indicated that enjoying sexualization represents an attitude that may actually translate into observable

sexual behaviors. This may be consistent with research suggesting that being desired is a central component to women's sexual arousal (Meana, 2010). As such, it is possible that women who are aware they are being admired and desired sexually experience enhanced arousal and, therefore, desire sexual activity more so than do those women who are less aware of their sex appeal. However, because we did not measure arousal in the present study, future research should examine whether enjoying sexualization is actually related to self-reported increases in sexual arousal and the ability to achieve orgasm.

Similarly, high levels of sexual esteem significantly predicted an individual's number of casual sex partners. This suggests that young women who have positive feelings about their sexual experiences and feel they are competent sexual partners may engage in casual sexual activity more frequently than do young women who have negative feelings about their sex lives. This finding is consistent with previous research regarding sexual esteem showing that heightened sexual esteem led to more expansive sexual expression (Heinrichs, MacKnee, Auton-Cuff, & Domene, 2009). Interestingly, the same study found that sexual esteem was facilitated by the positive effect of advances, attention, and interest from men (Heinrichs et al., 2009). It is therefore possible that enjoying sexualization and having sexual esteem are mutually reinforcing. In other words, receiving sexualized attention may increase sexual arousal which, when combined with more sexual self-expression, leads to more casual sex experiences.

Sexual assertiveness also significantly predicted an individual's number of casual sex partners. However, the directionality of sexual assertiveness was the opposite of what we expected. Greater sexual assertiveness actually predicted fewer casual sex partners in our regression analysis, despite being positively correlated with casual sex partners at the bivariate level. This suggests a suppressor effect whereby removing the variance associated with enhanced

desire for casual sex (i.e., the variance explained by permissive sexual attitudes, enjoyment of sexualization, and sexual esteem), sexual assertiveness was left to explain the unique portion of the variance associated with being able to say no to casual sex. This is a particularly interesting finding considering that previous research on sexual assertiveness has shown that women were reluctant to refuse unwanted sex because traditional gender roles emphasize female sexual passivity (Morokoff et al., 1997). Furthermore, past research has emphasized that sexual assertiveness often leads to increased sexual desire (Hurlbert, 1991) and more positive casual sex experiences (Beres & Farvid, 2010), suggesting that our findings are rather unique.

Our results also indicated that, when predicting number of hook up partners, willingness to engage in self-sexualizing behaviors significantly predicted an individual's number of partners above and beyond the effect of liberal sexual opinions and permissiveness. We thought it was particularly interesting that self-sexualizing behaviors only predicted number of hook up partners while enjoyment of sexualization only predicted casual sex partners. This is a key distinction that suggests having positive attitudes about one's sex appeal (ESS) and actually behaving in self-sexualizing ways (SBS) may have differential effects on sexual behaviors. Engaging in self-sexualizing behaviors is inherently more performative than merely enjoying one's own sexiness (Evans, Riley, & Shankar, 2010) and is more common among women who frequently viewed magazines and television programs portraying highly sexually objectifying content (Nowatzki & Morry, 2009). Therefore, it is possible that young women who self-sexualize are simply putting on an act of sexiness in an attempt to emulate the images they see in the media. However, if their actions inevitably place them in the midst of a sexual encounter, these women may not truly enjoy this sexiness. As a result, these young women might go through the act of a hook up in accordance with their act of being "sexy" but then refuse to actually engage in casual sex.

Sexual assertiveness also significantly predicted an individual's number of hook up partners. However, the directionality of sexual assertiveness was again the opposite of what we expected. Greater sexual assertiveness actually predicted fewer hook up partners. This demonstrates the same suppressor effect described above.

Finally, when predicting sex during a hook up, our results indicated that high levels of sexual esteem significantly predicted category membership such that women high in sexual esteem were more likely to have experienced sexual intercourse during a hook up situation. This finding may indicate that women who self-sexualize experience more hook ups generally, but only those women who truly enjoy their sexual experiences and have confidence in their sexual abilities are willing to "go all the way" during hook up encounters. Also, sexual assertiveness significantly predicted those women who reported having had sex during a hook up. Again, the directionality was the opposite of what we hypothesized so that women who reported greater sexual assertiveness were actually less likely to have experienced sexual intercourse during a hook up.

Although we had anticipated that sexual assertiveness would have the same effect as enjoyment of sexualization and sexual esteem on young women's willingness to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors, sexual assertiveness was non-significantly related at the level of the bivariate correlations. Notably, however, sexual assertiveness became a significant predictor in each of the three regression analyses, and the directionality was the opposite of what we expected. In other words, the same suppressor effect was found in all of our significant results. This may well be due to the fact that there is a duality in the concept of sexual assertiveness. Part of being assertive means speaking up when you desire sex while the other part of being assertive means being able to effectively say no when you do not. However, because our

measure of sexual assertiveness was a more global means of assessing assertiveness about sexual activity, this duality was not initially reflected.

This finding indicates that future research regarding female sexual agency may benefit from using more complex measures of sexual assertiveness that allows for differentiation of assertiveness in regards to asking for what one wants sexually from assertiveness related to refusing what one does not want sexually. For example, the Sexual Assertiveness Scale (SAS; Morokoff et al., 1997) was developed to measure multiple aspects of assertiveness. The SAS consists of four factors assessing initiation of wanted sexual experience, refusal of unwanted sexual experience, prevention of pregnancy, and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. However, the items on the SAS are designed for women in a relationship with a committed partner (Morokoff et al., 1997). Clearly, this measure would have been ineffective in a study dedicated to the experiences of women engaging in sexual intercourse with a non-committed partner, hence our decision to assess sexual assertiveness in a more general sense. Perhaps future research could adapt the SAS to assess those factors among women experiencing a variety of sexual relationships.

Future research should also explore the extent to which the ESS, the SBS, sexual esteem, and sexual assertiveness predict the quality of the sexual interactions during a hook up. More specifically, it would be interesting to see if our predictor variables also influence different outcomes as far as the amount of pleasure and satisfaction derived from casual sex and hook up encounters. Furthermore, the current research did not assess emotional outcomes following engagement in casual sex and hooking up behaviors. As such, future research should also consider whether these variables influence why some young women experience positive emotional consequences (e.g., sexual satisfaction, enhanced self-esteem) following casual sex

and hook up encounters while other young women experience negative emotional consequences (e.g., regret, shame, lower self-esteem).

As with all research, there are limits to the conclusions we can draw from these results. The generalizability of our findings is limited by the demographics of our sample, which was heterosexual and largely White and middle to upper-middle class. Young women with a variety of backgrounds and sexual orientations may display a very different pattern of casual sex and hooking up behaviors. Future research should examine casual sex and hooking up behaviors among a sample of women who are more representative of the general population. Furthermore, our findings are limited to young women. Research generally indicates that older women are often not subjected to the same influences of sexual objectification (Tiggemann, 2004; Tiggemann & Lynch, 2001), and therefore, enjoying sexualization or engaging in self-sexualizing behaviors may not accurately predict their casual sex and hook up experiences. However, sexual esteem and sexual assertiveness are more likely to be variables that persist, and possibly change, across different age cohorts (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila, 2009; Menard & Offman, 2009; Meston, Hamilton, & Harte, 2009). It might also be interesting to try to replicate our unique findings concerning sexual assertiveness among older women who may be more discriminating in their decisions to engage in casual sex and hooking up behaviors. For example, previous research has found that women who perceived a potential casual sex partner to be sexually skilled were more likely to engage in intercourse with that person (Conley, 2011). Since older women typically have had more sexual experience and more knowledge about what they desire from a sexual encounter, it is likely that they would also be more assertive when it comes to rejecting unwanted sexual advances. Future research should, therefore, explore the

impact of sexual esteem and sexual assertiveness on the casual sexual experiences of women of all ages.

It is also possible that the women who took our survey may have hesitated to fully disclose the extent of their casual sex and hooking up behaviors. Despite our emphasis on anonymity, we were asking highly personal questions, and as a result, some women may have reported fewer casual sex and hooking up behaviors in order to appear less sexually permissive. In fact, research has shown that women tend to consistently underreport their number of sexual partners (Wiederman, 1997). This is likely influenced by the sexual double standard in our society, which dictates that women should be sexually chaste and experience guilt if their sexual activities deviate from cultural norms (e.g., having a large number of sexual partners; Hamilton & Armstrong, 2009; Weaver & Herold, 2000). Given our focus on young women's number of casual sex and hook up partners, it was important to be aware of this potential bias in self-reported sexual experience. This is also an example of socially desirable responding, which is a risk for all studies that rely on self-reports of sexual behaviors. Social desirability bias occurs when research participants respond in ways that make them look good rather than being honest (Sieving et al., 2005).

Furthermore, our findings may also be limited by the volunteer bias, which occurs consistently in sex research (Wiederman, 1999). Given the sensitive nature of sexual information, respondents who voluntarily respond to self-reports of sexual activity may be systematically different than non-volunteers (Wiederman, 1999). In fact, research has shown that both men and women who volunteered for sex research were more likely to have had sexual intercourse, were more likely to report permissive attitudes, and were more likely to indicate greater sexual esteem (Wiederman, 1999).

Despite these limitations, our findings are important because they confirm the documented impact that sexualization and sexual objectification can have on young women's ideas about sexuality (Impett et al., 2006), and expand on that knowledge by showing how sexualization and sexual objectification can have real consequences for young women's actual sexual behaviors. It is generally accepted that most young women in our society are exposed to sexualization in one form or another (APA, 2007). We are bombarded with images of women in sexualized poses nearly every time we turn on the television or read a magazine (Gill, 2008). The impact of these images will vary, of course, but those young women who do succumb to the pressure of unattainable cultural beauty ideals may self-sexualize in an attempt to gain male validation that they are worthy of attention (Paul & Hayes, 2002). As indicated by our research, this self-sexualization may lead these women to have more hook up experiences while enjoying this sexualization may lead them to have more casual sex partners. This suggests that factors specific to women (i.e., sexualization and sexual objectification) may be contributing to the dramatic increase in young women's casual sexual activity (Wells & Twenge, 2005).

Although young women who engage in casual sexual encounters do not appear to be at greater risk for psychological harm than sexually active women in more committed relationships (Eisenberg et al., 2009), it is necessary to address that fact that increased casual sexual activity may carry risks. First, casual sexual encounters in college may be more risky because they are often accompanied by increased alcohol consumption (Ven & Beck, 2009). Research showed that 64% of hook ups in college were accompanied by alcohol use, with an average of three alcoholic drinks consumed before sexual activity was initiated (Fielder & Carey, 2010), and alcohol consumption has been shown to reduce effective contraceptive use (Fortenberry et al., 2010). An obvious result of failed contraceptive use is increased risk of pregnancy and increased

risk of spreading sexually transmitted infections. Second, some young women may experience false perceptions of self-empowerment from flaunting their sexuality or imitating the sexualized images they see in the media (Gill, 2008; Lamb, 2010). These young women might feel prepared to court sexual male attention, but if they engage in casual sex or experience a hook up when not prepared to face potential consequences, negative emotions could result (Grello et al., 2006). If young women are going to embrace their sexuality and potentially self-sexualize, they need to be aware of the potential consequences and take responsibility for protecting their physical and psychological health.

It is also necessary to consider that there are other means of sexual expression for sexually active young women without committed partners. In one study, highly sexual women who reported sexual esteem and positive attitudes towards casual sex also reported positive feelings toward personal sexual behaviors (i.e., masturbation; Wentland, Herold, Desmarais, & Milhausen, 2009). Masturbation is a healthy sexual activity that has no potential consequences and can serve as an alternative to casual sex and hook ups (Hogarth & Ingham, 2009).

Ultimately, it is crucial for young women to understand that casual sexual encounters are not the only way to feel chosen, noticed, and attractive. Closeness and sexual intimacy are not necessarily confined to committed relationships, but true affection arises from open communication, self-disclosure, and, above all, mutual respect.

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Table 1

Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Casual sex partners	-							
2. Hook up partners	.30***	-						
3. Permissive attitudes	.48***	.30***	-					
4. Sexual opinions	.32***	.19*	.51***	-				
5. Enjoyment of sexualization	.26**	.14	.27**	.29***	-			
6. Sexualizing behaviors	.23**	.34***	.37***	.37***	.49***	-		
7. Sexual esteem	.26**	.15	.18*	.20*	.16	.27**	-	
8. Sexual assertiveness	.02	.01	.15	.43***	.08	.24**	.55***	-

Note. $n = 138$; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2

Regression Analyses Predicting Numbers of Casual Sex and Hook Up Partners

	Casual Sex Partners		Hook Up Partners	
	β	<i>p</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Step 1:				
Permissiveness	.36	.003	.17	.15
SOS	.11	.35	.09	.45
Step 2:				
Permissiveness	.32	.006	.13	.26
SOS	.12	.28	.04	.73
ESS	.28	.02	-.09	.39
SBS	-.06	.60	.27	.02
Step 3:				
Permissiveness	.30	.005	.09	.44
SOS	.22	.06	.13	.29
ESS	.23	.03	-.13	.22
SBS	-.11	.31	.28	.01
Sexual esteem	.40	.001	.18	.13
Sexual assertiveness	-.29	.01	-.26	.03

Table 3

Hierarchical Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Sex During Hook Up

Variable	Step 1 <i>B (S.E.)</i>	Step 2 <i>B (S.E.)</i>	Step 3 <i>B (S.E.)</i>
Permissiveness	.77 (.37)*	.74 (.37)*	.61 (.39)
SOS	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.03 (.02)
ESS		-.04 (.29)	-.23 (.31)
SBS		.29 (.40)	.29 (.44)
Sexual esteem			1.13 (.39)**
Sexual assertiveness			-.07 (.02)*
	$X^2(2) = 11.24^{**}$ Cox & Snell $R^2 = .10$ Nagelkerke $R^2 = .14$	$X^2(4) = 11.78^{**}$ Cox & Snell $R^2 = .11$ Nagelkerke $R^2 = .14$ $X^2_{\Delta}(2) = .54$	$X^2(6) = 22.78^{**}$ Cox & Snell $R^2 = .20$ Nagelkerke $R^2 = .26$ $X^2_{\Delta}(2) = 10.99^{**}$

Note. chi-square values reported in the table represent values from the omnibus goodness of fit test; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ based on Wald statistics.