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Applying the social cognitive theory to the hookup culture embodied in the Undergraduate students of James Madison University

Jacqueline M. Crawford
James Madison University

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Applying the Social Cognitive Theory to the Hookup Culture
Embodied in the Undergraduate Students of James Madison University

An Honors Program Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Health and Behavioral Studies
James Madison University

by Jacqueline Marie Crawford

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Health Sciences, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program.

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

HONORS PROGRAM APPROVAL:

Project Advisor: Dr. Katherine Ott Walter

Philip Frana, Ph.D.,
Interim Director, Honors Program

Reader: Dr. Andrew Peachey

Reader: Dr. Maria Theresa Wessel

PUBLIC PRESENTATION

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract	4
Introduction	5
Literature Review	11
Methodology	21
Results	26
Conclusion	35
References	43

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Abstract

The hookup culture on college campuses is creating a social shift away from traditional dating. The social influence of this culture could potentially be explained through the use of the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The SCT examines the effects of peer influence, environmental influence, and personal beliefs on individual behavior. The current study applied the SCT to the hookup culture embodied in the undergraduate student body at James Madison University. Research found that many students may be influenced by their peers and environment to participate in this culture and students misperceive the hookup behavior of their peers. These results can be used to create safer sex promotion and educational measures in order to reduce students' high risk sexual behaviors. Future studies might benefit by focusing on behavioral differences between social groups, such as fraternities, athletics, and across majors to determine if there is a social group that faces greater subjection to high risk sexual behaviors.

Chapter I

Introduction

The hookup culture in undergraduate students has been cause for discussion in recent years. A “hookup” is an ambiguous term that has varying connotations depending on the individual. For example, a student’s definition of the activities involved in a “hookup” can range from kissing to sexual intercourse (Monto & Carey, 2014). The ambiguity of this term presents misperceptions among students, leading an individual to believe more of their peers are participating in high risk sexual behaviors than actually are (Monto & Carey, 2014). However, despite the controversy over what truly constitutes hooking up, studies suggest traditional relationships, in which both partners are committed to only each other, have declined and casual sexual encounters are more prevalent (England & Thomas, 2006).

England and Thomas (2006) found that 44% of students in their sample of undergraduates were in a relationship that started as a hookup. The traditional date between college students is potentially being replaced by a hookup, which may or may not lead to a romantic relationship (England & Thomas, 2006). England and Thomas (2006) are among many researchers to conclude that the origin of a relationship is changing from dating to hooking up. A national sample of individuals between the ages of 18-25 who graduated from high school and attended one year of college were surveyed regarding their experiences with the hookup culture (Carey & Monto, 2014). Carey and Monto’s (2014) findings support the notion that “norms

surrounding sexuality are changing” (p. 614). This social shift away from traditional dating is accompanied by the potential for students to be exposed to an increased amount of negative health outcomes associated with frequent casual sexual encounters. High risk sexual behaviors can result in various negative outcomes, such as interpersonal problems, regret, and social conflicts (Garske & Turchik, 2009). Two of the most widely reported outcomes include sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies (Garske & Turchik, 2009).

As this behavior has undergone a social shift, the SCT may help explain peer influence on students’ behavior. The SCT proposes an individual learns how to behave by being in a social environment (Bandura, 1989). Observational learning, behavioral capability, reciprocal determinism, reinforcements, self-efficacy, expectations and expectancies are the six constructs of the SCT used in this study to examine the influences and reasons for student behavior (“The Social Cognitive Theory,” 2013).

The purpose of the current study was to determine the extent of hookup culture embodiment in the undergraduate student population of James Madison University (JMU). The researcher wanted to gain insight on the population’s attitudes toward this culture and the supposed prevalence on a college campus. If this behavior is mainstream, then undergraduate students may be influenced by their peers and environment to participate in high risk sexual behaviors. Moreover, the current study examined the potential health effects individuals could face as a result of high risk sexual behavior (i.e., sexually transmitted infections, alcohol use,

etc.). Research questions for this study were framed around the six constructs of the SCT.

- Observational learning
 - What sexual behaviors do students define as hookup behavior?
 - How frequently do students believe their peers hookup?
 - Do students have misperceptions of the frequency of peers' hookups and hookup behavior, including alcohol consumption during hookups?
- Behavioral capability
 - How many students perform safer sex practices?
- Reciprocal determinism
 - Do peers and/or environment influence students to hookup?
- Reinforcements
 - Are students expecting positive outcomes that could potentially influence them to hookup?
- Self-efficacy
 - How confident is the participating student in their ability to practice safer sex while participating in this culture?
 - How confident is the student that they can hookup without developing feelings for their hookup partner?
- Expectations
 - What do the students hope to experience if they hookup?

- Expectancies
 - What outcomes of this behavior mean the most to the student?

The aforementioned questions provided a framework for the study and helped gain feedback on the extent of undergraduate participation in the hookup culture. These results could potentially be beneficial in addressing misperceptions that perpetuate high risk sexual behavior.

Research conducted by Carey and Monto (2014) supported the existence of changing sexual norms, however, because the current study was limited in application to the undergraduate population of JMU the results cannot be generalized. Limitations of the study conducted by Carey and Monto (2014) arose from the exclusion of students past their first year of college and thus their sample contained only students who were not exposed to the entirety of the undergraduate experience. Students exposed to a variety of influences have more opportunities to participate in the hookup culture as they progress through college. Carey and Monto's (2014) sample contained students from several universities (religious affiliated and same gender), which may have skewed the results. Narrowing the participant population to JMU students reduced exposure biases and produced more specific data to examine the JMU hookup culture.

Though the limitations of the study by Carey and Monto (2014) were addressed in this study, the current study does have limitations. One limitation included nonrespondents who received the survey, but chose to not complete it. Additionally, the current study included students from one university therefore the

results cannot be generalized to all college students. Those who completed the survey may have been more invested in the hookup culture and thus represented the portion of the population who participate in high risk sexual behaviors.

The findings of this research could be used to develop prevention measures to decrease the prevalence of high risk sexual behaviors. Identifying and informing students of possible misperceptions of peer behavior might result in a decrease in high risk sexual behavior if this behavior is socially influenced.

Definitions of Terms

High-Risk Sexual Behavior: any behavior that places an individual at an increased probability of negative outcomes associated with sexual contact, including HIV, STIs, and unintended pregnancies (Cooper, 2002).

Hookup: any sexual act from kissing to sexual intercourse that is performed outside of a committed relationship (Monto & Carey, 2014).

Traditional Relationships: both partners in a relationship are committed to only each other (England & Thomas, 2006).

Observational learning: an individual learns by observing people's behavior and the outcomes of that behavior (Bandura, 1989).

Behavioral Capability: the knowledge and skills that an individual has that allows them to successfully perform a behavior (Bandura, 1989).

Reciprocal Determinism: observational learning, behavior, personal factors and thought, and environment all influence and interact with each other (Bandura, 1989).

Reinforcements: outcomes that serve as incentives for continually performing a behavior (Bandura, 1989).

Self-Efficacy: an individual's belief that they can successfully perform a behavior and attain set goals (Bandura, 1989).

Expectations: probable outcomes of behavior that have been learned through observation or direct experience (Bandura, 1989).

Expectancies: the value that an individual places on an outcome ("The Social Cognitive Theory," 2013). Individuals are more likely to perform a behavior if they value the outcome (Bandura, 1989).

Chapter II

Literature Review

History of Relationships

Aspects of intimate relationships among young adults have become more variable throughout the past few decades (Cann & McAnulty, 2012). Relationships in the past began with courtship and evolved into relationships that started with dating (Cann & McAnulty, 2012). According to Cann and McAnulty (2012), this advancement in relationship origin is associated with social changes such as the increase in gender equality, the rise in divorce rates leading to fear of commitment, and the introduction of technology. These associations continue to cause relationships to change as gender equality continues to increase, marriage becomes less of a priority, and technology continues to advance (Cann & McAnulty, 2012).

Many of these changes can be attributed to the 1960s. During the 1960s, young adults experienced a sexual liberation era as feminism moved into the limelight, college party atmospheres developed, and birth control became available (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, & Merriwether, 2012). Feminism and birth control have both led to a decrease in what is known as the “double standard” (Clark & Hatfield, 1989). In the past, sex was assumed to be more important to relationships for men than for women and women were told to save themselves for marriage (Clark & Hatfield, 1989). However, findings indicate that women and men have similar sexual experience and the need for and importance of sex is universal between both sexes (Clark & Hatfield, 1989). The acknowledgement that sex can be initiated and

wanted by both sexes has led to a greater acceptance of varying sexual behaviors, even at an early age (Clark & Hatfield, 1989). Sexual norms have continued to change and have possibly led to the behavior termed “hooking up.”

Hookup Culture

“Hooking up” has been defined in various ways by researchers and by the public. Some definitions state that a “hookup” involves sex between two uncommitted individuals who do not expect anything further to come from the encounter, while other definitions of a hookup do not necessarily involve sexual intercourse (Stinson, 2010). The ambiguous definition of a hookup may be problematic for young adults, as they may perceive their peers are more sexually involved with one another than in actuality. On the other hand, the ambiguity allows individuals to remain discreet about the actual actions performed during their hookup. The specific definition used does not affect the fact that most researchers concur that hooking up is a normative behavior among young adults (Stinson, 2010). The current study defined a hookup as a casual physical encounter (from passionate kissing to penetrative sexual intercourse) with an acquaintance or stranger without commitment or the promise of a relationship.

Different from dating, hooking up does not involve the gradual getting to know someone before performing sexual acts and does not involve commitment or emotional intimacy (Stinson, 2010). Hookups often end when “one person leaves, passes out, climaxes, or the encounter is interrupted” (Stinson, 2010, p. 99). The lack of affection and communication during a hookup usually results in the hookup

partners having no further involvement with each other (Stinson, 2010). As compared to the desire for the emotional aspect in dating, hooking up is based on the desire to sexually satisfy oneself. Sometimes relationships may develop where individuals continue to hookup with the same person. Individuals may call their partner a “friend with benefits” or a “hookup buddy” in a relationship of this sort. However, some may dispute against combining this form of a relationship with the hookup culture because of the friendship characteristic that often develops, which possibly implies an emotional connection between the individuals (Carey, Carey, Fielder, & Walsh, 2013).

Hooking up in the College Environment

As students transition into college, they develop their identity by exploring their sexuality (Ghaidarov, Hummer, Kenney, LaBrie, & Lac, 2014). The transition from living at home under the supervision of adults to being autonomous and creating their own schedule frees students to partake in sexual opportunities (Ghaidarov et al., 2014). This new freedom can result in students’ engagement in the hookup culture.

Hooking up is often associated with partying and the use of alcohol, especially amongst college students (Stinson, 2010). Reduced inhibitions and increased confidence, both of which are effects of alcohol, may cause an increase in hookups. According to research done by England and Thomas (2006), students see the role of alcohol as both positive and negative. Some admit to drinking in order to reduce their inhibitions and become more confident, while others think alcohol

causes people to get sick or engage in behaviors they otherwise would not (England & Thomas, 2006). The combination of drinking and being in an environment where hooking up is common can lead an individual to engage in high risk sexual behaviors. Alcohol consumption before a sexual encounter can increase the chances of an individual engaging in the act with someone they do not know well or do not know at all (Blayney, Crouce, Gilmore, Lewis, & Litt, 2014). Fielder and Carey (2010) conducted research on first-semester college females and found that 64% reported consuming at least one drink before a hookup. Additionally, alcohol consumption may lead to less communication between partners regarding sexual risks and an increased chance of having unprotected sex (Blayney et al., 2014). Studies also show that alcohol use is associated with a greater number of sexual partners throughout one's lifetime (Blayney et al., 2014).

Costs and Benefits of Hooking Up

Students can experience a range of outcomes from hooking up. A majority of students describe their hooking up experiences as positive and leave them feeling empowered, attractive, and excited (Napper, Montes, Kenney, & LaBrie, 2015). On the contrary, other students report having negative hookup experiences, some of which can leave the individual with lasting effects.

Students have expressed feelings of embarrassment, loss of self-respect, and regret following a hookup (Napper et al., 2015). In a study examining the prevalence of sexual regret among 138 female and 62 male Canadian university students, around three quarters of the students responded with having at least

some regret (Fischer, Worth, Garcia, & Meredith, 2012). Women reported more regret than their male counterparts (Fischer et al., 2012). Furthermore, women reported feeling regret over being used or feeling shameful, while regret felt by the men tended to be over the choice of sexual partner and their unattractiveness (Fischer et al., 2012). Additional negative psychological effects, such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, have been reported (Napper et al., 2015). Research supports the link between the number of hookup partners and increased depressive symptoms (Napper et al., 2015).

Psychological effects are not the only costs of hooking up as it is also related to multiple other health risks (Napper et al., 2015). Unprotected sex and sex under the influence are often commonalities among high-risk sexual behavior (Napper et al., 2015). In a study, which surveyed 118 first-semester female college students, 0% of students reported using a condom while performing oral sex and 69% responded using one for vaginal sex (Fielder & Carey, 2010). Unprotected sex leaves individuals at a higher risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection and having an unexpected pregnancy. The students also reported having consumed an average of three alcoholic beverages prior to hooking up (Fielder & Carey, 2010). The use of alcohol presents problems with attaining consent from a partner and thus can increase the likelihood of sexual assault. Additionally, alcohol use is associated with spontaneous hookups and further increases the likelihood that safer sex practices will be neglected (Napper et al., 2015).

Because the hookup culture is socially influence, an individual's social relationships can be affected. One's reputation can be altered after hooking up and it has been found that women face a greater risk of ruining their reputation if they engage in hooking up (Napper et al., 2015). Though the presence of a sexual double-standard is decreasing, women still face this greater risk (Napper et al., 2015).

The Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura developed the SCT as a way to relate an individual's health behaviors to their knowledge of the risks and benefits of that behavior (Bandura, 1989). Additionally, the SCT is used to illuminate outside influences on an individual's behavior (Bandura, 1989).

An individual's knowledge of health risks and benefits are key when discussing health behavior change (Bandura, 1989). It is more likely an individual will change their behavior if they are aware of the costs and benefits of that behavior. Knowledge is not the only factor that is associated with health behavior. Bandura (1989) placed a large emphasis on additional influences that affect health behavior. Bandura (1989) termed this phenomenon as triadic reciprocal determinism, in which behavior, thought-processes and other personal factors, as well as the environment all influence each other. Reciprocal determinism is one of the six constructs of the SCT and describes how people produce and are products of their environment (Bandura, 1989).

Individuals observe parents, peers, and the media and learn about behaviors through the experiences of others (Blayney et al., 2014). From observing these

models of varying behaviors, individuals form expectations for the behaviors prior to engaging in them (Blayney et al., 2014). This can be termed 'observational learning' and is another construct of the SCT (Bandura, 1999). Observational learning relates to the constructs, expectations and expectancies, as an individual may expect outcomes to occur based on what they observed happen to their peers and may place varying amounts of importance on these outcomes (Bandura, 1999). An individual's own experience of the behavior could be positive and result in the maintenance of that behavior or it could be negative and the individual would be less inclined to repeat that behavior (Bandura, 1999). These outcomes of the behavior can be described as the construct, reinforcements ("The Social Cognitive Theory," 2013).

Peers in an individual's proximity often have the greatest influence and could lead to an overestimated or underestimated perception of how common a behavior is (Blayney et al., 2014). For example, research has shown that college students tend to overestimate alcohol consumption and the frequency of high risk sexual behavior in which their peers partake (Blayney et al., 2014). According to the SCT, since college students perceive their peers to participate in these activities at a higher amount and often model after them due to their proximity, students are more prone to engage in these behaviors (Blayney et al., 2014). On the contrary, students tend to underestimate peer norms for safer sexual practices, such as the use of condoms (Blayney et al., 2014). This underestimation may result in a student not practicing safer sexual behaviors.

The Social Cognitive Theory and the Hookup Culture

The SCT has many implications for why individuals perform certain behaviors and has been used in research for decades. Applying the SCT to the hookup culture could be beneficial in its examination. As students enter university they become introduced to all sorts of new experiences, such as partying, drinking, hooking up, stressful schedules, etc. Students develop learned behaviors from their peers and may begin to practice high risk behaviors. The SCT is composed of several constructs to help explain the behaviors of university students in regards to the hookup culture.

Students can learn the benefits and costs of hooking up through direct experience. Benefits of hooking up can include sexual satisfaction or a decrease in loneliness, if just for the night. Costs that an individual can experience range from contraction of a sexually transmitted infection, unwanted pregnancy, feelings of regret to depression. In addition to direct experience, an individual can learn from their peers about the hookup culture through observational learning. It is unlikely that an individual will directly observe others hooking up, but it is likely that an individual will hear of hookups occurring around them. This further demonstrates that individuals may be unaware of the actual frequency of specific sexual behaviors due to the ambiguity and secrecy surrounding the term 'hookup' and, for example, may believe that students had sex when they might have just shared a kiss.

These methods of learning are associated with the SCT construct, reinforcements. The costs or benefits resulting from a hookup can determine the

chance that an individual will hookup again. If an individual had a pleasant experience where the benefits of hooking up outweighed the costs, then the individual might be more likely to hookup again. Peer influence also is associated with this construct, as a peer may have experienced an outcome that affects an individual's desire to hookup. For example, if a student hooked up with someone and they experienced an unexpected pregnancy, then their peers who know of this may feel less inclined to hookup out of fear that they too may experience an unwanted pregnancy. Knowledge of this experience could also influence an individual to insist on using birth control methods during sexual encounters.

The relationship between an individual, their peers and the environment is referred to as reciprocal determinism. This construct describes the direct relationship between an individual and their environment. The environment around an individual influences their actions and in turn the individual affects the environment (Bandura, 1989). This applies to the hookup culture at university, as an individual who observes a party atmosphere and is influenced to drink and/or hookup may become more inclined to participate in this behavior and thus perpetuate the culture's existence.

An individual may hookup because they expect something to come from that behavior. The SCT labels this aspect of one's behavior as one's expectations ("The Social Cognitive Theory," 2013). Expectancies are associated with these expectations and are defined as the importance that an individual places upon each outcome of a behavior (Bandura, 1999). Students participate in the hookup culture

for various reasons. In a study by Fielder and Carey (2010), 58% of students reported hooking up to satisfy a spontaneous urge, 56% because of their partner's attractiveness, 51% due to intoxication, 33% because of their partners willingness, and 29% in order to feel attractive. Overall, the most frequent motive was sexual desire (Fielder & Carey, 2010).

Self-efficacy is the belief in oneself to successfully be able to perform a behavior (Bandura, 1989). In the present study, one's self-efficacy was questioned in regards to whether they can or cannot refrain from hooking up and whether they are confident in their ability to practice safer sexual behaviors.

Though there has been much research on the hookup culture, the application of health behavior theories has been minimal. Applying the SCT will add to research by helping explain this socially influenced culture. The SCT can be applied to the hookup culture at JMU to help illuminate what influences students to partake in this behavior and examine whether students are safe when they engage in sexual behaviors. Additionally, this study can potentially bring light any misperceptions students have of their peers' behavior.

Chapter III

Methodology

Procedures

Data were collected using Qualtrics, an online survey tool. James Madison University's Institutional Review Board approved the study (No. 16-0327) A link to the survey, as well as a consent form, was sent to all undergraduate students' university email address. A reminder email was sent two weeks after the first email. Participants were given a week following this second email to complete the survey before the survey was closed. Student's rights and protection were ensured, as their responses were anonymous. Additionally, because the survey contained explicit language, including questions about specific sexual situations, resources for support were provided in the event that participants experienced any adverse feelings as a result of taking the survey. Data were collected during the 2016 spring semester.

Participants

Participants in the study included all undergraduate students who were at least 18 years of age. Of the 18,365 students sent the link to the survey, 941 completed the survey. Questions regarding demographics included student's age, classification, biological sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity.

Instrument

The instrument was adapted using several existing surveys in order to measure the six constructs of the SCT.

Observational Learning

Observational learning was difficult to assess. This is due to the fact that students are more likely to hear about hook ups as opposed to actually observing them. Students' perceptions of their peers' sexual behaviors as well as their own reported behaviors were examined using an adapted version of the "Descriptive Norm" section in the instrument used by Barriger and Vélez (2013) in their study on hooking up.

Prior to asking questions about sexual behaviors and hookups, students were asked which sexual behaviors they considered to be hookup behaviors (passionate kissing, French kissing/making out, non-genital touching, genital touching, receiving oral sex, giving oral sex, and sexual intercourse). Four questions asked the students about their hookup behaviors as well as their perceptions of their peers' behaviors in the last three months. Validity and reliability were not presented for this survey section.

Behavioral Capability

Twenty-two questions asked students about their hookup behavior through an adapted version of the "Sexual Risk Survey" published by Garske and Turchik (2009). The "Sexual Risk Survey" examines Sexual Risk Taking with Uncommitted Partners, Risky Sex Acts, Impulsive Sexual Behaviors, Intent to Engage in Risky Sexual Behaviors, and Risky Anal Sex Acts with documented Cronbach's alphas of .88, .80, .78, .89, and .61, respectively (Garske and Turchik, 2009). Behavioral

frequencies within the last three months are measured on a scale of 0 to 7 or more times.

Reciprocal Determinism, Self-efficacy, Reinforcements, Outcome Expectations & Expectancies

Reciprocal determinism, self-efficacy, reinforcements and outcome expectations, and outcome expectancies were examined by asking questions adapted from the “Survey Instrument for Safer Sex Among College Students” by Kanekar, Sharma, and Bennett (2015). The instrument used in the study had Cronbach alphas greater than .70 and .40 for factor loadings, which indicated that its reliability and validity, respectively, were sufficient (Kanekar, Sharma, & Bennett, 2015).

Reciprocal determinism was measured by assessing an individual’s agreement levels when presented with hookup scenarios focusing on environmental and peer influences. Agreement levels were measured on a 5 point Likert scale from 1 to 5.

A seven item measure was developed using a 5 point Likert scale from 1 to 5 in order to obtain a confidence level for practicing safer sex when presented with various hookup scenarios. Six of the seven questions asked about outcome expectations and reinforcements focusing on expected outcomes from a hookup. Responses were measured on a scale of 1 to 5 (*never to all of the time*). Lastly, a five item measure regarding outcome expectancies measured the importance of various

outcomes of hooking up on a scale of 1 to 5 (not at all important to extremely important).

Sections of various surveys were used in order to create an instrument that could be applicable to the constructs of the SCT and the hookup culture. The research questions for this study addressed the six constructs of the SCT: observational learning, behavioral capability, reciprocal determinism, reinforcements, self-efficacy, expectations and expectancies (“The Social Cognitive Theory,” 2013).

- Observational learning
 - What sexual behaviors do students define as hookup behavior?
 - How frequently do students believe their peers hookup?
 - Do students have misperceptions of the frequency of peers’ hookups and hookup behavior, including alcohol consumption during hookups?
- Behavioral capability
 - How many students perform safer sex practices?
- Reciprocal determinism
 - Do peers and/or environment influence students to hookup?
- Reinforcements
 - Are students expecting positive outcomes that could potentially influence them to hookup?

- Self-efficacy
 - How confident is the participating student in their ability to practice safer sex while participating in this culture?
 - How confident is the student that they can hookup without developing feelings for their hookup partner?
- Expectations
 - What do the students hope to experience if they hookup?
- Expectancies
 - What outcomes of this behavior mean the most to the student?

The current study hypothesized that students would have misperceptions of their peers' participation in the hookup culture. Additionally, it was hypothesized that students would be influenced by the environment and their peers to participate in the hookup culture.

Chapter IV

Results

A link to a survey assessing the hookup culture at JMU was first sent out to undergraduate students on February 3, 2016 and then again two weeks later in an attempt to gain more responses. A total of 941 respondents completed the survey. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for data analysis. Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and proportions were measured.

Demographics

This study consisted of 26.4% Freshmen, 21.7% sophomores, 23.1% juniors and 28.7% seniors. The majority of respondents identified as biologically female (869) with female gender identity (862) between the ages of 20-21 (44.4%). Ninety-two percent identified as heterosexual and Caucasian (83.7%). The demographic data is representative of the JMU population. Chi-squared analysis for the number of male and female participants in the current study compared to those expected in order to represent the males and females of JMU's undergraduate population showed a X^2 value of 127.368 and a p-value less than 0.0001, which indicated a statistically significant difference.

Observational Learning

When asked what students defined as a hookup, 49.7% of respondents reported that passionate kissing could constitute a hookup and 81.6% reported

sexual intercourse as a hookup behavior. When asked how many times respondents thought the typical JMU student hooked up in the past three months, 0.6% of the respondents said zero times, 24.5% said 1-2 times, 36.5% said 3-4 times, 23.6% said 5-6 times, and 14.8% said seven or more times (Figure 1).

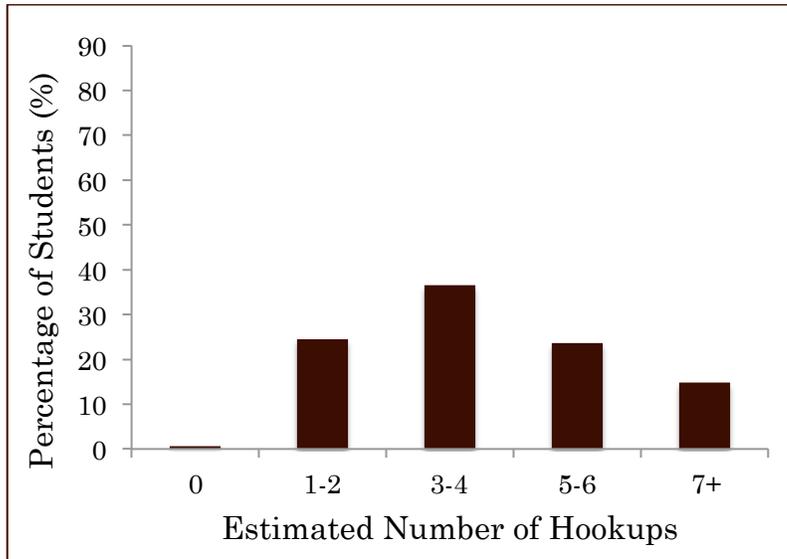


Figure 1. Students’ estimations of how many times the typical JMU student has hooked up over the past three months.

Respondent’s sexual behavior was assessed in order to illuminate misperceptions of peer behavior. Of the respondents, 32.4% did not have sex at all or were monogamous with their partner, 52.1% had sex with 1-2 different partners, 8.5% had sex with 3-4 different partners, and 7% had sex with five or more different partners (Figure 2). When asked how many times the respondents have hooked up but not had sex with someone they did not know or did not know well, 63.3% said 0 times, 21.7% said 1-2 times, 7.6% said 3-4 times, and 7.4% said 5 or more times. Twenty-one percent of respondents reported having sex one or more times with someone they did not know well or just met within the past three months (Figure 2).

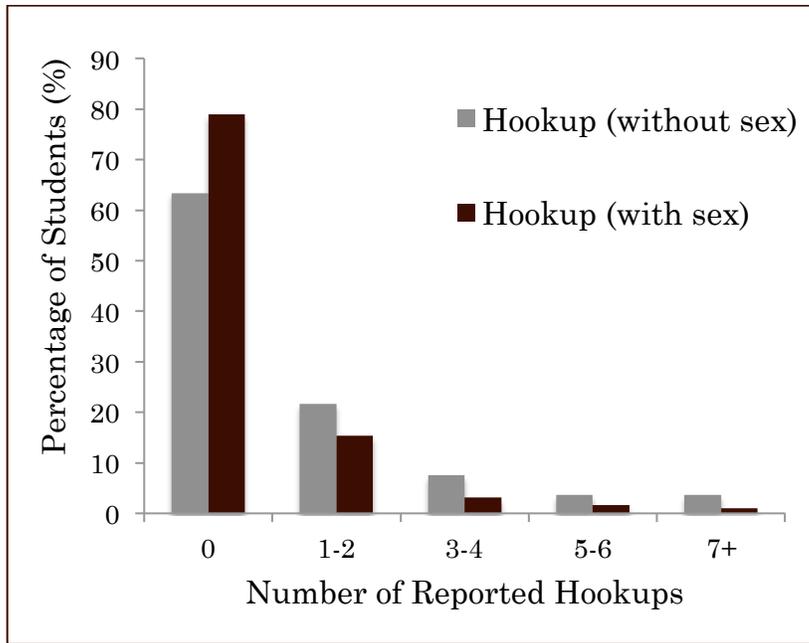


Figure 2. Students reported the number of times they hooked up including sex in the definition of ‘hookup’ and the number of times they hooked up not including sex in the definition of ‘hookup’ over the past three months.

The use of alcohol during sexual encounters was assessed. Over 90% of respondents estimated that the typical JMU student’s hookup experiences involved alcohol consumption often to all of the time. Respondents reported how many times they and their partner consumed alcohol before or during sex or sexual behaviors. Frequencies of zero times (37.5%), 1-2 times (28%), 3-4 times (18.4%), and 5 or more times (16.1%) were reported.

Behavioral Capability

The highest mean value (2.65 times within the past three months) was reported for giving or receiving fellatio (oral sex on a man) and the lowest mean value (1.42 times within the past three months) was reported for having vaginal sex without protection against pregnancy (Table 1). Over the past three months, 49.6%

of respondents did not have vaginal sex or did not have vaginal sex without a condom, 18.3% had vaginal sex 1-2 times without a condom, 7.1% reported 3-4 times, 5.4% reported 5-6 times, and 19.6% reported seven or more times. Over the past three months, 81.1% did not have vaginal sex without protection against pregnancy. Nineteen percent of respondents reported having sex with 1-2 new partners before discussing sexual history, disease status, and current sexual partners within the past three months. Seventy-one percent said that they did not do this within the past three months and 10.5% said they did this three or more times in the past three months.

Over the past three months, 63% of all respondents have given or received fellatio one or more times without a condom and 24.1% of those individuals reported having done that seven or more times. Fifty-seven percent reported giving or receiving cunnilingus one or more times without a dental dam or adequate protection and 20.6% of these individuals reported having done so seven or more times (Table 1).

Table 1. High risk sexual behaviors assessed students' behavioral capability for safer sex.

Question	Sample Size (N)	Item Mean	Standard Deviation
How many times have you had vaginal intercourse without a latex or polyurethane condom?	1056	2.27	1.57
How many times have you had vaginal sex without protection against pregnancy?	1056	1.42	1.03
How many times have you given or received fellatio (oral sex on a man) without a condom?	1054	2.65	1.61
How many times have you given or received cunnilingus (oral sex on a woman) without a dental dam or adequate protection?	1056	2.41	1.57
How many times have you had sex with a new partner before discussing sexual history, disease status and other current sexual partners?	1015	1.48	0.90

*Mean frequency of each behavior was recoded with 1=0 times, 2=1-2 times, 3=3-4 times, 4=5-6 times, 6=7+ times that the behavior was done within the last three months.

Self-efficacy

Respondents reported a 4.37 out of 5 for “*completely confident*” in their ability to insist on using birth control and/or an STI prevention method, such as a condom or dental dam, when the opportunity to hookup occurred. Respondents were “*least*

confident” (2.9) that they would not develop feelings for the individual following the hookup. Further results for self-efficacy are reported below in Table 2.

Table 2. Students’ self-efficacy regarding practicing safer sex behaviors.

If the opportunity to hookup with someone arises, I am confident that I can...	Sample Size (N)	Average Confidence Level	Standard Deviation
...wait to hookup with that individual until I know them better.	988	3.85	1.236
...ask about whether they have been tested for an STI.	988	3.19	1.407
...insist on using birth control and/or STI prevention method, such as a condom or dental dam.	987	4.37	0.990
...make the decision whether to hookup with the individual regardless of whether my friend(s) are encouraging me to hookup with the individual.	985	4.31	0.955
...not develop feelings for the individual.	985	2.89	1.350

*1=not at all confident, 2=slightly confident, 3=moderately confident, 4= very confident, and 5=completely confident.

Reciprocal Determinism

Agreement levels to various statements regarding peer and environmental influences were measured on a scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, 1 to 5, respectively (Table 3). Students did not report that their peers influenced them to hookup, as the lowest average score of 2.27 was in response to the statement: “my peers influence me to hookup.” The highest average score of 4.02 was in response to

the statement: “hooking up is a normal activity at JMU” and indicated that the JMU environment may embody a hookup culture. Of the respondents, 61.3% *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed* to the statement: “my peers influence me to hookup with others,” while 20.1% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* to this statement. Of the respondents, 79.6% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that hooking up is a normal activity at JMU. When asked how much they *agree* or *disagree* with the statement: “I am in the minority at JMU if I do not hookup with people,” 42% *agreed* or *strongly agreed*, while 34.5% *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed*. Thirty-one percent *agreed* or *strongly agreed* they have more opportunities at JMU to hookup with others than they would have at another university.

Table 3. Agreement levels to various statements of hookup scenarios measured peer and environmental influences.

Statement Presented	Sample Size (N)	Average Agreement Level	Standard Deviation
My peers influence me to hookup with others.	973	2.27	1.186
Hooking up is a normal activity at JMU.	975	4.02	0.820
I have more desire to hookup with others when I have been drinking.	973	3.37	1.274
I am in the minority at JMU if I do not hookup with people.	974	3.09	1.202
I have more opportunities at JMU to hookup with others than I would at other universities.	974	2.92	1.066

*1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

Outcome Expectations

Fifty-four percent of respondents *never* or *rarely* expected a relationship to develop after a hookup, 30.4% *sometimes* expected a relationship, and only 15.8% *often* or *all of the time* expect a relationship to occur. Twenty-one percent of respondents reported *never* or *rarely* expecting to be sexually satisfied in a hookup, 37% said *sometimes*, and 41.7% said *often* to *all of the time*. Seventy-five percent *never* or *rarely* expect their social standing and acceptance to improve among their peers if they hookup, 19.9% expected this to *sometimes* occur, and 5.6% expected this to occur *often* or *all of the time*. Majority of the respondents (52.4%) *never* or *rarely* expect to be more confident if they hookup with someone, 30.3% responded *sometimes* expecting to be more confident following a hookup, and 17.2% expect this outcome *often* or *all of the time*. Of the respondents, 36.5% said they will *never* or *rarely* hookup with someone and not expect to feel regret (Table 4).

Table 4. Beliefs and expectations about the benefits of hooking up.

If I hookup with someone, then I expect...	Sample Size (N)	Mean Expectation Value	Standard Deviation
...a relationship will develop after the hookup.	958	2.50	1.079
...I will be sexually satisfied.	957	3.19	1.039
...my social standing and acceptance will improve among my peers.	955	1.88	0.941
...that I will be more confident.	956	2.41	1.115
...that I will not regret that behavior.	956	2.87	1.184

*1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, and 5=all of the time

Outcome Expectancies

Thirty-one percent reported *not at all important* or *very unimportant* that a relationship developed following a hookup, while 24.8% believed it was *very important* or *extremely important*. Of the respondents, 67.1% said it was *very important* or *extremely important* to feel pleased or sexually satisfied with a hookup. Additionally, 61.3% said that it was *not at all important* or *very unimportant* that to feel accepted by their peers following a hookup (Table 5).

Table 5. Outcome expectancies of hookups.

Hookup Outcome	Sample Size (N)	Mean Importance Level	Standard Deviation
A relationship developing from the hookup.	943	2.84	1.105
I will feel pleased or sexually satisfied.	944	3.67	0.904
I will feel more accepted by my peers.	943	2.09	1.040

*1=not at all important, 2=very unimportant, 3=neither important nor unimportant, 4=very important, 5=extremely important

Chapter V

Discussion

Previous studies applying health behavior theories to the hookup culture at universities were minimal. Such theories could be beneficial in explaining various aspects of the culture. This study focused on applying the SCT to the hookup culture. Using the SCT to help assess students' participation in the hookup culture could potentially illuminate students' main influences. The current study focused on peer and environmental influences. Knowledge of the effects of these main influences could be used as a focus for educating and informing students of the negatives and potential risks associated with hooking up.

A survey sent to all undergraduate students at JMU assessed the hookup culture. The survey included questions formed around the multiple constructs of the SCT: observational learning, behavioral capability, reciprocal determinism, reinforcements, self-efficacy, expectations and expectancies ("The Social Cognitive Theory," 2013).

Observational learning through peers was a difficult construct to measure as hookups usually occur out of sight of other people. Therefore, instead of examining direct observational learning, this study examined student's perceptions of their peers' behavior in an attempt to measure what behaviors students estimated to be occurring around them. Findings suggest that students overestimate their peers' hookup behavior. This could be associated with the ambiguity of the term 'hookup'. About half of the respondents (49.7%) defined passionate kissing as a hookup

behavior while almost four-fifths (81.6%) defined sexual intercourse as a hookup behavior. If students discuss hooking up with others without explicitly stating the details, then about half (49.7%) of the individuals they talk to may be thinking they are talking about passionately kissing while the other half think they are discussing high risk sexual behavior. This construct illuminated the ambiguity of the term hookup and related to observational learning, as students could believe that riskier sexual behaviors are the norm and might model after their peers. Furthermore, if individuals overestimate the frequency of their peers' sexual behavior, then they might feel comfortable with riskier behavior because they think they are still being less risky than their peers.

Behavioral capability is based on the student's knowledge of a behavior and ability to perform a behavior successfully. When applied to the hookup culture, this construct focused on students' ability to use safer sex practices. Results indicate students expose themselves to health risks, as some were found to inconsistently use safer sex practices. Many students (50.4%) reported having vaginal sex one or more times without a condom, with 19.6% of these respondents reported doing so seven or more times within the past three months. Though some of these respondents may have been in monogamous relationships in those past three months, others may not and thus subject themselves to risk. The average confidence for insisting on using birth control and/or condoms (4.37) was high, despite the lack of reported condom usage. This indicated respondents were knowledgeable about the benefits of using birth control and/or condoms, but did not always use them.

Additionally, 19% of respondents reported having sex with 1-2 new partners before discussing sexual history, disease status, or current sexual partners, while 10.5% said they did this three or more times. These results are disconcerting, as students may be exposed to various STIs unknowingly and potentially spread them to multiple people before showing symptoms or getting tested. Therefore, discussion of disease status before hooking up can reduce risks. Students' behavioral capability has the potential to improve, as not all students reported practicing safer sex measures despite being confident in their ability to do so. This construct of the SCT could be studied more to examine why students who are capable of performing safer sex behaviors choose not to do so.

When examining the construct, reciprocal determinism, both environmental and peer influences were assessed. The majority of students (61.3%) did not feel as though their peers were a major influence on their hookup behavior. Reciprocal determinism presented an issue in its application to the hookup culture, as peer influence is a major aspect of the construct. Though students reported their peers did not influence them, it was found that students perceived their peers to hookup more frequently than they actually did. This indicated that students might be influenced to hookup because they think their peers are doing it more than they are. Previous findings indicated that individuals who overestimated their peers' sexual behavior were found to have increased levels of experience with sexual behavior (Doornwaard, ter Bogt, Reitz, & van der Eijnden, 2015). It is possible that the students in the current study hooked up at the frequency they do because they

overestimate peer behaviors. To examine this possible occurrence at JMU, future studies could include a follow-up study on individuals at JMU to see if their behavior changed as a result of JMU's hookup culture.

According to the findings of this study the environment does influence student behavior. Results regarding situational perceptions showed that 79.6% *agreed or strongly agreed* that hooking up is a normal activity at JMU and 42% *agreed or strongly agreed* that they are in the minority at JMU if they do not participate in hookups. The environmental influence on hookup culture was further supported as 30.9% *agreed or strongly agreed* they have more opportunities at JMU to hookup with others than they would have at another university. Additionally, 57.5% *agreed or strongly agreed* they have more desire to hookup with others when they have been drinking. This presents additional risks to students as previous research supported the notion that safer sex practices were less likely to be used when alcohol was involved (Napper et al., 2015). Students who reported that their peers do not influence them to hookup might still be influenced to drink and party by their peers. When this is the case, students are then in a position where they are more inclined to hookup. The findings associated with reciprocal determinism could be used to undermine the misperceptions that students have of the frequency of hookups around them. Knowing that their peers are not as actively participating in the hookup culture may influence students to hookup less.

Results pertaining to the construct, reinforcements, showed that 36.5% of students will *never* or *rarely* hookup with someone and expect to not feel regret. This regret is a negative outcome of hooking up and might deter individuals from engaging in the behavior. Additionally, students had an average confidence level of 2.9 out of 5 (N=985) when asked whether they were confident they could hookup without developing feelings for the individual. This lower confidence level could indicate that students may experience distress and disappointment if the other individual does not develop mutual feelings following a hookup. This might result in individuals not wanting to continue hooking up with others for fear that they may develop unrequited feelings again.

Students' expectations and expectancies for participating in the hookup culture were broad. Of the respondents, 53.8% said they *never* or *rarely* expect a relationship to develop after a hookup. This possibly contrasts with the findings of England and Thomas (2006), who claimed that hooking up has replaced dating, as students in this study do not hookup in order to develop a relationship. If hooking up has replaced dating, then students would report hooking up in order to develop a relationship with someone. Yet, students in the current study did not expect a relationship to develop from a hookup. Additionally, only 41.7% expect to be sexually satisfied from a hookup, which was inconsistent with their expectancy level for this outcome, as a majority of students (67.1%) placed much importance on being pleased or sexually satisfied from a hookup. Majority of respondents (61.3%) did not place much importance on feeling accepted by their peers following a hookup, which

was consistent with student's expectations of a hookup, as 74.5% of students did not expect that a hookup would improve their social standing and/or peer acceptance. These results paralleled the finding that many students did not see the direct influence that their peers have on them and thus may also not report the importance or peer influence. The current study found a majority of students do not expect positive outcomes from hooking up. Students are thus exposed to health risks despite not expecting positive outcomes typically associated with hooking up. Future studies should explore the benefits students do expect from hooking up.

Results regarding the final construct, self-efficacy, showed that not all students were completely confident in their ability to practice safer sex behaviors during hookups. Most students were confident they could insist on using a condom and/or STI prevention methods, but did not feel confident asking a hookup partner whether they had been tested for STIs. The lowest confidence level was reported when the students were asked if they were confident that they would not develop feelings for an individual following a hookup. These confidence levels showed that students might not have the self-efficacy required to be as safe as possible if they decide to engage in the hookup culture.

The current study found that there was a discrepancy between students' actual behavior and what they perceive to be occurring around them. This misperception tied into observational learning. Since students do not physically observe hookups happening, they are unaware of the actual behaviors. They have misperceptions of the hookup culture because they do not physically observe it

happening and therefore are unable to learn all its characteristics. Students learn about their peers' behaviors in a misconstrued way due to the ambiguity of the term 'hookup.' To combat this issue and potentially decrease students' misperceptions, aspects of the construct, observational learning, should be the main focus for safer sex promotional efforts. Aspects such as the ambiguity of the term 'hookup' and student's misperceptions of their peers should be the main focus.

Future studies could benefit from gathering a larger and more diverse sample. This study had 75.2% female, 24.3% male, 0.2% intersex, and 0.3% preferred not to disclose, which was statistically different than the population of JMU. Future research could study a more representative sample or a broader population including other universities. Studies might also benefit from looking at differences between groups of students such as athletes, fraternity members, unaffiliated students, among majors, etc. Previous findings support the belief that individuals are influenced by the peers that are in close proximity to them and it may be possible that different groups within the population experience differing levels of influences (Blayney et al., 2014). Therefore, it may be possible that students in different groups have different perceptions and hookup frequencies and some may require greater focus than others.

To conclude, applying the SCT to the hookup culture at JMU was beneficial in examining the various aspects of students' behavior. Students were found to have misperceptions of the actual hookup culture among their peers and might be influenced by their peers and the environment. These findings can be used to

develop safer sex promotional measures for students in order to reduce their misperceptions and potentially reduce high risk sexual behavior.

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