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### Marginalized Communities and Hook Up Culture:

People are packed into a basement like sardines. The music is so loud the floor, slick with spilled drinks, vibrates. Colorful strobe lights flash, illuminating dancing students and beer pong tables. Boys grab girls by the waist and start dancing with them or kissing them, no talk of consent. The heat is almost unbearable and there is something toxic in the air. This is a frat party, a hot bed for hook ups, but a whole spectrum of identities is missing from the crowd.

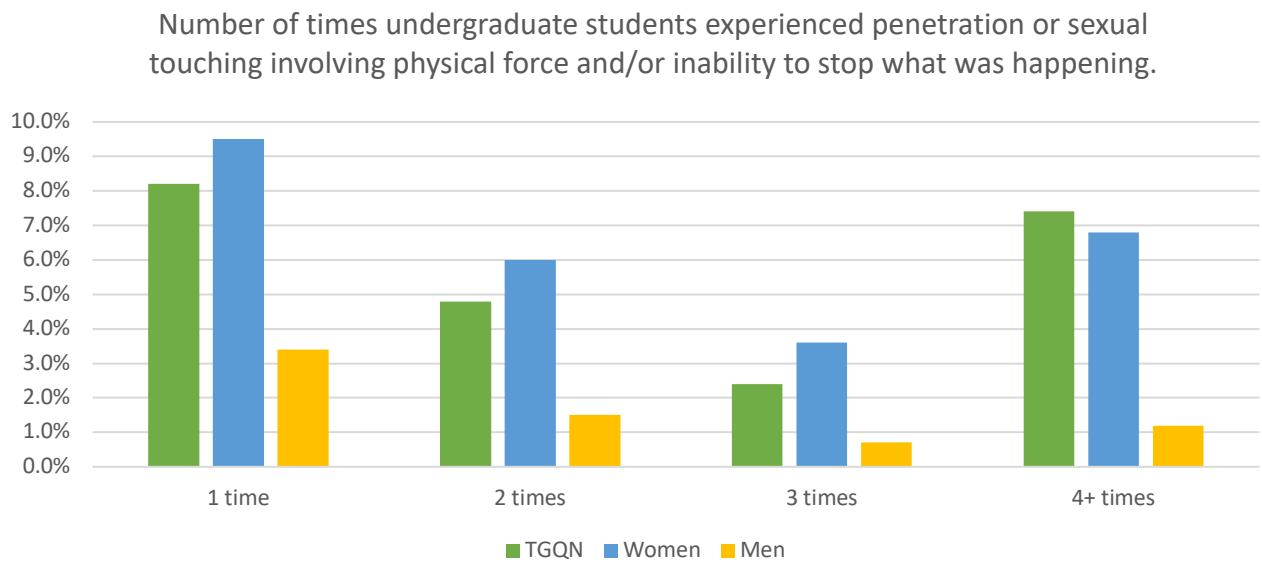
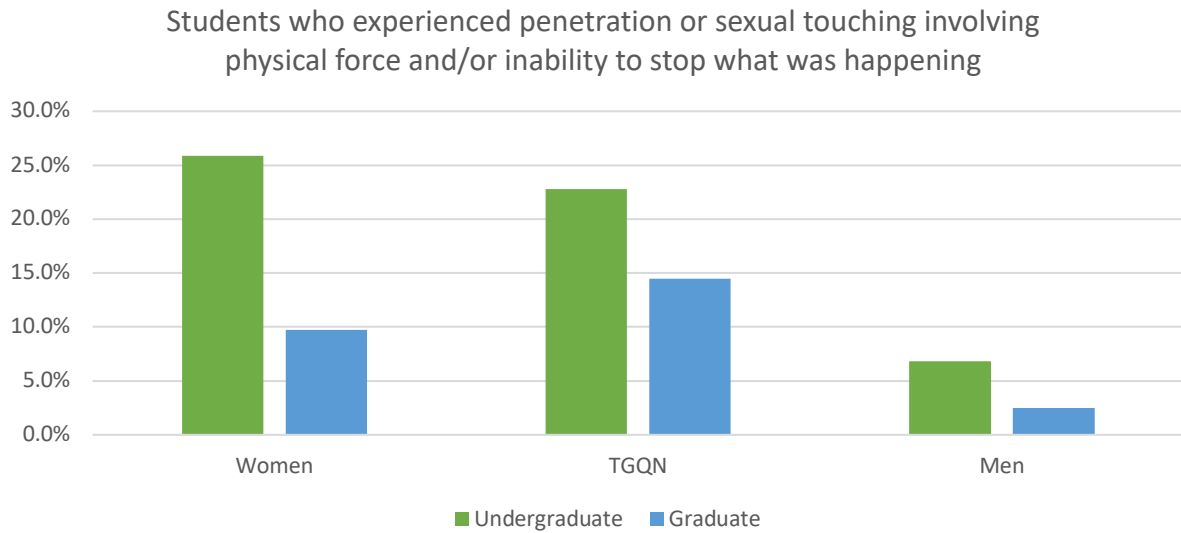
There are two main dialogues surrounding hookup culture. The first focuses on the liberation and sexual empowerment women gain from casual sexual encounters with men. The second is about the havoc these occasional relationships wreak on interpersonal relationships and women who struggle to find committed relationships on college campuses. These scripts ignore the nuances that arise in non-hetero, non-cis gender communities; they ignore the obstacles and dangers as well as the empowerment and prevalence of hook ups in these groups.

Frat parties are considered the epitome of heterosexual hook up culture. “I perceive them to be very binary places, not a lot of LGBTQ visibility,” says Sam Berston, director of Sexual Assault and Health Peer Educators (SHAPE) at Northwestern University. In Berston’s mind, this low visibility deters the LGBTQ+ community from going frat parties or using them to find potential partners. Low visibility poses another obstacle that comes with non-heterosexual hook ups: not only do you have to find out if someone is interested, you also have to find out their sexual orientation or, for those who are gender non-conforming, you have to determine if there are conflicts between your gender identity and their sexuality.

No hook up comes without risk, physical or emotional. The risks that transgender or nonbinary individuals face are immense. Transphobia exists within the LGBTQ+ community as well as without. “The interest and investment [gay men] have in hooking up is with people who have specific body parts. If you don’t have those body parts there’s always going to be a risk,” says Adam Davies, a member of student government at Northwestern University. “The risk might just be them saying, ‘I’m not interested anymore’ or it could be a safety risk.”

Conflicts between gender identity and sexuality often result in violence. If someone who is trans or nonbinary hooks up with someone and they don’t disclose their gender identity, they risk their lives. Furthermore, trans and nonbinary communities can’t count on the law to ensure their safety. For example, in 2014, US Marine Scott Pemberton strangled a transgender woman, Jennifer Laude, to death after taking her to a motel and discovering her gender identity. He then successfully claimed self-defense. The Gay Panic Defense strategy is a legal strategy that claims a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity is to blame for the perpetrator’s violent reaction. Legal tactics like the Gay Panic Defense justify sexual violence against non-hetero, non-cis gender communities. This is something Davies says he always has in the back of his mind when hooking up.

Statistics show that transgender and non-binary populations often suffer from higher levels of sexual assault. Kyra Jones, Assistant Director of Sexual Violence Response Services at Northwestern University, offers her explanation: “We don’t treat marginalized folks like they have agency over their bodies or that they’re not worthy of autonomy or of love or care or safety. And I think that is why there is more sexual violence against them.” While his attitude is not caused by hook up culture, it is not immune. This thinking makes hook up culture a significantly more hostile environment for marginalized groups.



*Statistics from the 2019 Association of American Universities (AAU) Campus Climate survey. 33 universities across the country participated.*

Keeping an open line of communication is central to hooking up safely in the LGBTQ+ community. Shreya Chimpiri, a sophomore at Northwestern University, says, “In my mind, if you’re not open to talking about sex you probably shouldn’t be having sex in the first place. If people are

hesitant to talk about it, I refrain from sexual contact because I know they're not ready." Kevin Park, a freshman at Northwestern University agrees. He likes to have a plan before he hooks up with anyone. Davies also has a similar view, "Any hook up should have a script before you do it, where you talk about what each of you is invested in. I think that's what every hook up should look like."

Despite these obstacles, hooking up is still very popular, particularly in the gay community. "There's a lot of pressure to just have anonymous sex," says Berston. "I think it's just like the history of how LGBTQ people have congregated in the past. Since it emerged as a sexual culture, I think that carries through a lot of the time." In recent years, hooking up has boomed with inception of LGBTQ+ dating apps like Grindr, Jack'd, Her and Chappy.

With popularity comes greater scrutiny; people view hook ups in widely different ways across the LGBTQ+ community. Park has a technical view: "Hooking up is strictly fulfilling your sexual needs. It's just being hungry so you eat food. You do it because you're hungry in a sense." Meanwhile Davies thinks hook ups are overwhelmingly positive, "As a person who's trans and navigating the world, hooking up can be really empowering. My body is not supposed to be sexually pleasurable or desirable to people, so hooking up is a way to go against that narrative and find agency again."

Hook up culture encompasses a wide range of people and identities and the dialogues surrounding hook up culture should be as varied as the people that engage in hook ups. While for some they may never be fulfilling and for others empowering, they have found their place at the heart of nearly every community's sexual health. Park says, "They have a time and place. Sometimes

in life you need some body and sometimes in life you need somebody. If they're smart and if they explore and live their life, people find exactly what they need.”

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