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Great Sexpectations: Analyzing the Influence of Expectation and Desire on Sexual Behaviors Performed in Hookups

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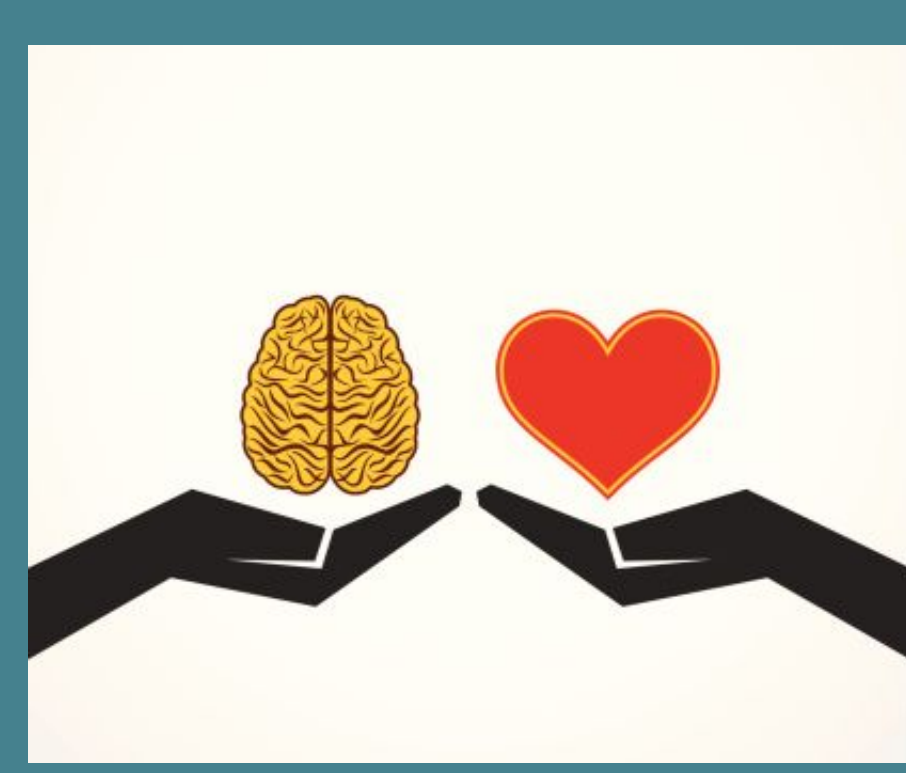
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Introduction

Hookups are a part of the overarching culture of college students. Due to the frequency with which students hook up, it is important to understand the scripts that underlie hookup behaviors. Prior research has noted that there are cultural taboos about open communication during sex, and this is a difficulty that students must navigate (Heldman & Wade, 2010). Partners may then be led to rely on unexpressed expectations to guide behavior within the hookup. However, these expectations are often skewed, as students tend to overestimate the frequency of sexual behaviors performed by their peers (Heldman & Wade, 2010). Scripts are formed from these perceived cultural norms, and they are closely-followed by young adults (Wiederman, 2015). Therefore, though it would be ideal for one to only engage in the sexual acts they most desire, script-driven high expectations may lead to the performance of less-desired acts.

Research has shown that repeated engagement in non-preferred sexual acts can have a negative impact on students, regardless of gender (Heldman & Wade, 2010). However, Sexual Script Theory says that many still endorse the traditional sexist idea that women have the role of providing sexual pleasure, while being uninterested in pleasure for themselves (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). People also endorse the sexual double standard, or the idea that women are sexual “gatekeepers,” who bear the responsibility of deciding the sexual acts performed (Seabrook et al., 2016). Therefore, considering the traditional sex roles with which women are expected to comply, it is possible that expectations may lead to disproportionate numbers of female compliance with less-desired sexual behaviors, compared to males.

Hypotheses

H1: Females will engage in highly expected, less-desired acts more often than males.

H2: Individuals, regardless of gender, will report greater hookup regret when they have performed a highly expected, less-desired sexual act.

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Results

Percentage of Participants Who Performed Highly Expected, Less-Desired Sexual Behaviors, By Gender

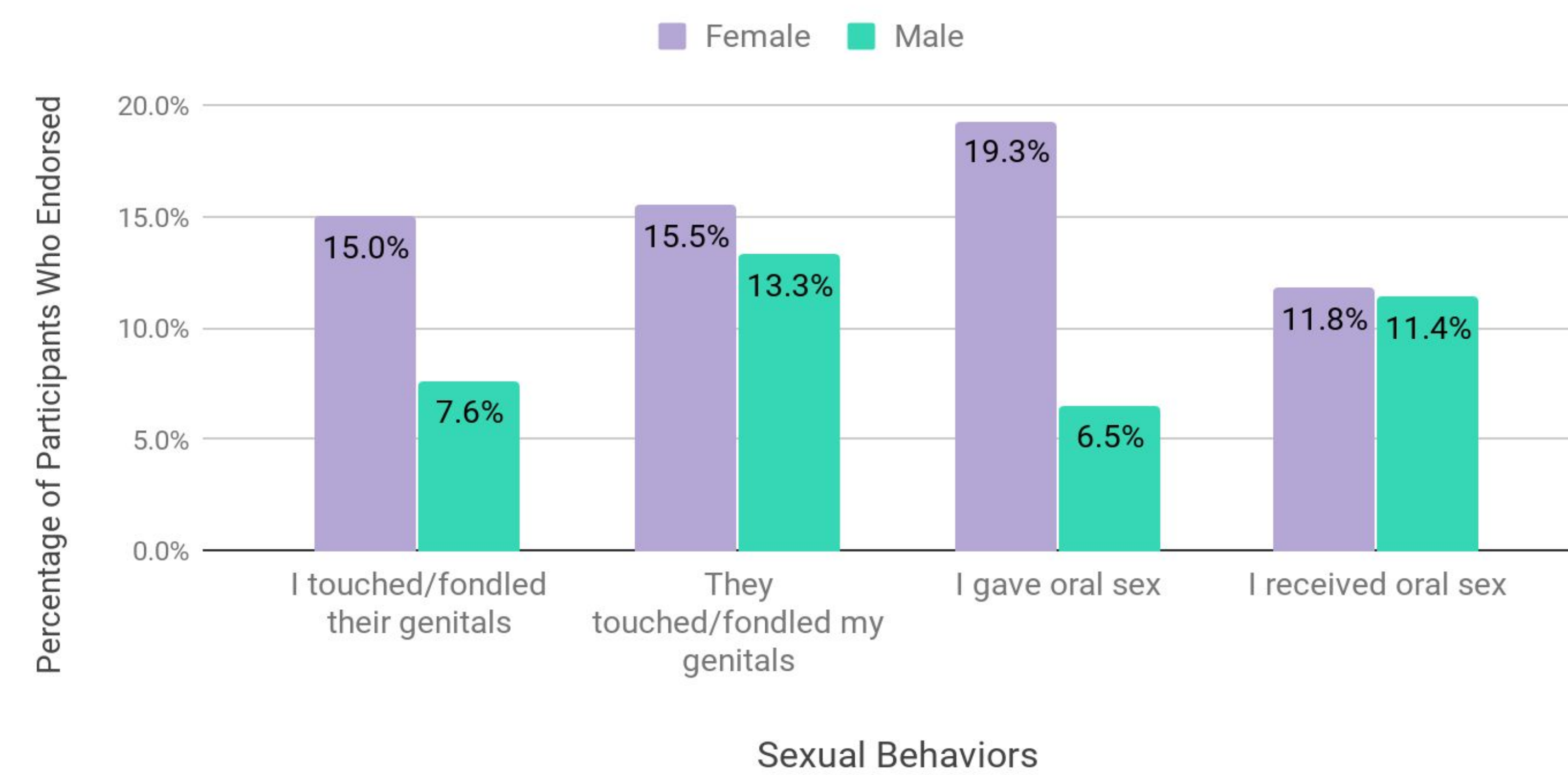


Figure 1. Percentage of participants with low desire, high expectation for the sexual act and performed the act.

Average Rating of Hookup Regret for Participants With Low Desire, High Expectation for Receiving Oral Sex

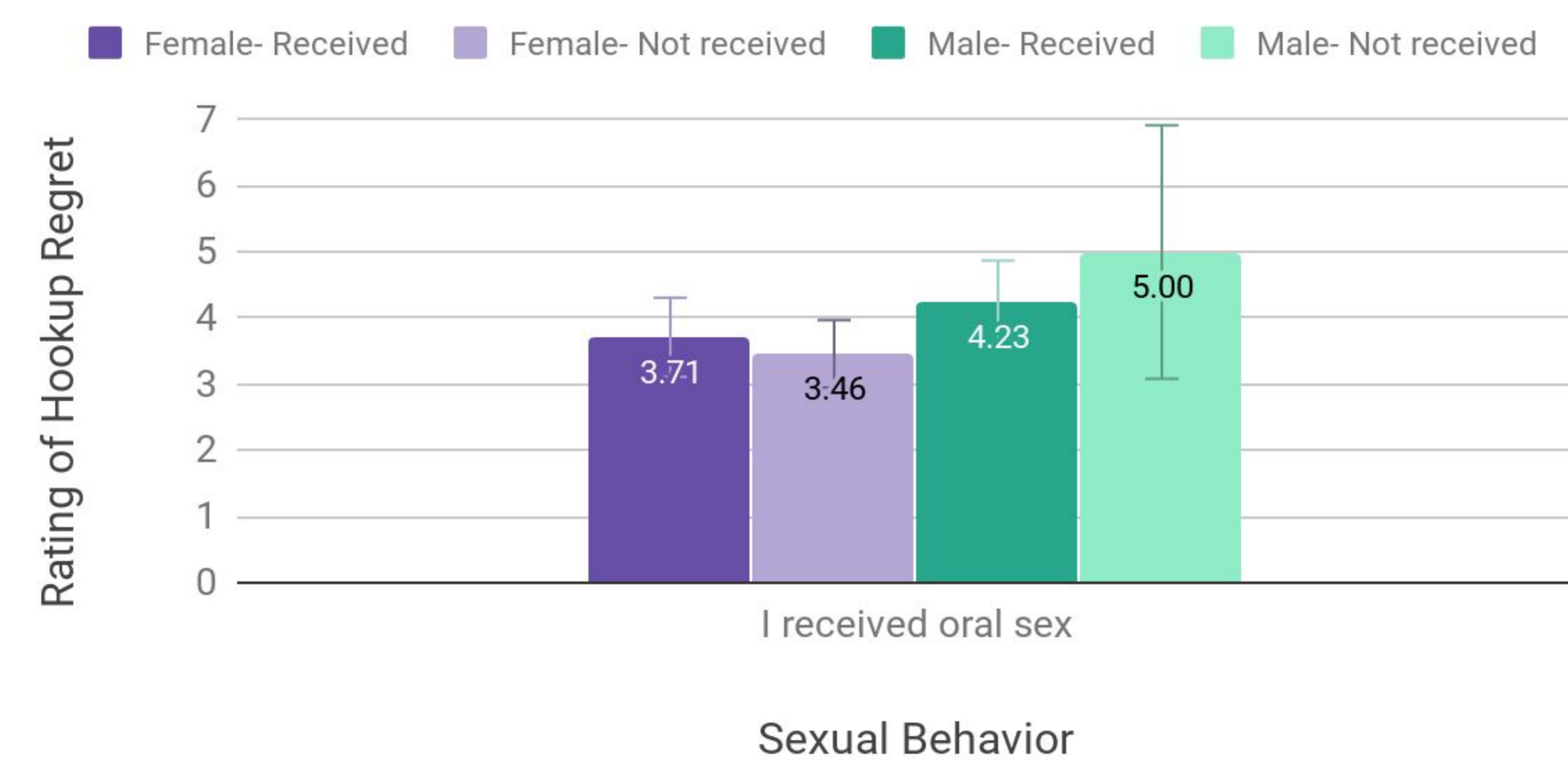


Figure 2. Amount of hookup regret for participants with low desire, high expectation for receiving oral sex.

Average Rating of Hookup Regret for Participants With Low Desire, High Expectation for Touching/Fondling Partner's Genitals

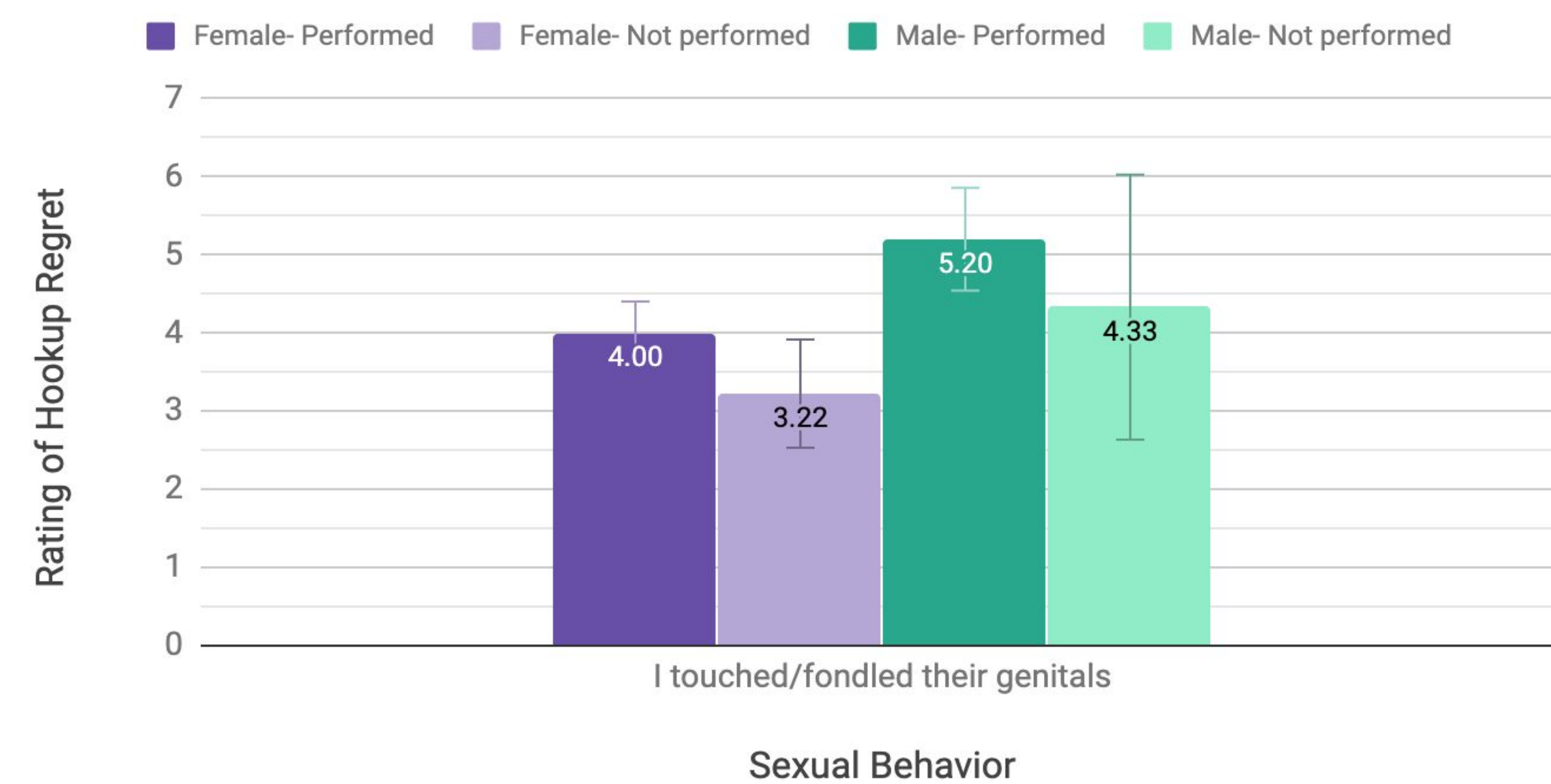


Figure 3. Level of regret for participants with low desire, high expectation for touching partner's genitals.

Methods

Participants:

Students at a midsize Northeastern university were recruited for an online survey. Survey completion fulfilled a research requirement for several introductory courses at the university. Data was compiled from 5 semesters of survey data, taken between 2015 and 2018.

- Of a total of 1767 participants, 60.2% (279) identified as female, and 39.8% (156) as male.
- 74.3% (1313) identified as exclusively heterosexual, 20.6% (363) as not exclusively heterosexual or homosexual, 2.4% (43) as exclusively homosexual, and .9% (16) as asexual.
- 69.2% (1222) identified as white, 5.1% (90) as Black/African American, 15.1% (266) as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 9.6% (170) as Mixed race/other. 11.4% (202) identified as Hispanic or Latin@.

Procedure:

Participants took part in an online survey through Qualtrics. Participants were given information about the study, and gave their consent. Students were given the definition of a “hookup” and asked whether or not they had hooked up in the past. They were then asked to answer questions rating their level of want and expectation for sexual behaviors in their last hookup. They were also asked to rate their level of overall regret for the hookup. Participants were then debriefed.

Measures:

Participants checked off sexual behaviors that they engaged in during their most recent hookup. They rated behaviors for level of “expectation,” and “want” on a Likert scale. Overall hookup regret was also rated on a Likert scale. Examples are as follows:

- During your last encounter with a hook-up partner what kind of sexual experiences did you have?
- How much did you want this to happen? How much did you expect this to happen?

Conclusions

H1: Consistent with H1, results showed that females in the low desire, high expectation group engaged in the non-preferred sexual act more than males in the same group.

- Chi-squared analysis showed that the difference between men and women was significant for the behaviors “I touched/fondled”, “They touched/fondled”, and “I gave oral sex”, and approached significance for “I received oral sex.”
- These findings may suggest that females may feel stronger pressures to engage in highly expected, less-desired acts than males. This finding is in line with traditional sexual scripts and the role of the woman as the “gatekeeper” in sexual scenarios.

H2: Somewhat consistent with H2, greater hookup regret was associated with performance of a highly expected, less-desired act for the “I received oral sex” and “I touched/fondled” groups.

- A between-groups ANOVA suggested a significant relationship between level of regret and receiving oral sex and touching/fondling one’s partner when there was high expectation, low desire for the act. This relationship was not significant for “I gave oral sex” or the “They touched/fondled” behavior groups.
- Engaging in non-preferred acts may be related to a more negative or regretful experience for males and females. However, the non-significant groups may suggest that some non-preferred behaviors may contribute more to feelings of regret than others.