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### Power, Pleasure, and Privilege: defining DePauw's hookup culture and its mental health implications

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Power, Pleasure, and Privilege:

defining DePauw's hookup culture and its mental health implications

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Lily, Grace R, Grace G, Jillian, Cati, and Ayo, my closest friends. You all are the reason life is worth fighting through, you have each impacted me in such a way that I will never be the same. Never have I been as loved and supported as I am by you, so thank you for making my life brighter than it has ever been.

### **Dedication**

For all DePauw students, the stigmatization of  
open communication can only be changed by you.

### **Warning**

Before reading any further, I caution readers to know that some of the content and themes discussed in the coming pages may be triggering for a variety of reasons. Some potential triggers include but are not limited to substance abuse, rape, and sexual assault. Please consider your mental health when choosing to proceed.

### **Disclaimer**

Though I will critique and critically analyze DePauw's mental health services, I feel as though it is necessary to say that my counselor has been extremely helpful to me, and counseling services have been, for the most part, a positive experience for me; however, that is not the case for everyone, and services can always be improved.



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Hookup culture is not primarily about sex, pleasure, connection, or freedom. Hookup culture is about power—how power is used, distributed, and desired. Previous work in hookup culture discusses a discourse of desire; however, the root and nature of this desire are unclear. I posit that hookup culture, as it currently exists, is strongly related to rape culture. In this thesis, I will explicate my anecdotal, qualitative, and quantitative evidence supporting this hypothesis.

### **Why am I interested in hookup culture?**

The road to deciding on my thesis topic was wide, as I had difficulty narrowing down my topic area (considering how broad my final topic ended up being this should be no surprise). My very first actual topic idea was a broad perspective on the impact of college culture on mental health. I eventually narrowed it down to hookup culture after listening to a webinar by Lisa Wade (one of the leading voices in the study of hookup culture). This webinar randomly came up during my training for my position in the Indiana Department of Health (STD surveillance student investigator for SSuN). It was the first time I started to realize that I wasn't alone in or at fault for my experiences with hookup culture. This glimpse of understanding planted a curiosity in my mind about how hookup culture truly and holistically impacted not only myself but also my peers.

Now you know how I thought of the topic, but the why is a bit more personal. I am a DePauw student and hookup culture is central to the DePauw experience and has become synonymous with the college experience across the US, yet no one wants to talk about it. If the colloquial understanding of college as a time of transformation and development is true, then, people should be prepared for, be informed about, and be supported throughout, as hookup

culture is institutionalized and complicated. I came to DePauw without having any idea what hookup culture would be, and I did not think I would hookup with some random person. But different types of social pressure and the desire to fit in and have fun made it too hard for me, and about two-thirds of college students across the US (Wade and Recalde), not to conform to this collegiate norm.

### **Why mental health?**

Mental health permeates all parts of our existence: it dictates how we experience events and perceive the world around us. Thus, major components of the college experience, like hookup culture, should be analyzed so we can know how to best be supported through it and understand what it is to us. I will especially consider substance use/abuse, sexual harm, depression, and anxiety, as they were the mental health factors that came up in my research and the ones I suspected would be most integral to the hookup culture conversation.

Hookup culture and mental health are connected by the intimacy of experiences with them. But they are also linked by how participation in hookup culture can impact mental health and how mental health issues can lead to decisions that are not in an individual's best interest within hookup culture. Additionally, both hookup culture and mental health are highly stigmatized topics, no one really wants to talk about them, and because of this their intersection and impacts on each other have largely been ignored in academic circles.

### **Why does this thesis matter?**

As I said at the start of the last section: mental health permeates all parts of existence. But, that's not it. The relationship between hookup culture and mental health, two things that whether they like it or not impact every student at DePauw, is something no one wants to talk

about. Nearly every component of it is taboo in some way; however, ignorance is never the answer. I will make concrete recommendations in this paper's final pages for DePauw's administration, counseling services, and Greek communities/boards to try and address a few ways DePauw can better enable students to take control of their existence in hookup culture.

### **Methods**

This thesis is an ethnography, though my immersion into DePauw and its hookup culture wasn't simply for this research. Rather than shying away from my stake and position within this research, it will be a key piece of it through the use of autoethnography (a reflexive immersion into personal experience). However, I have also worked to decentralize my own bias with a survey, observations, interviews, and an intensive literature review. Aside from balancing my own biases, each type of method served a specific function towards the end goal of recommendations to better student life on campus.

The autoethnography component gives me a space to reflect on my own experiences and understand that I'm not alone in those experiences, while also analyzing or processing the impacts hookup culture has had on me. Though my positionality complicated parts of writing this, as I have a feminist, progressive lens and have had horrible experiences in hookup culture, my existence within it meant that students were more likely to respond to my survey and interview requests, and, more importantly, feel more comfortable knowing that another student was going to be the one using the information collected (not DePauw itself).

The survey attempts to get as broad a response group as possible to be able to define a hookup and hookup culture at DePauw, while the interviews provided more space for in-depth responses, stories, clarifications, and more targeted questions based on what circles an individual

was in (such as a fraternity or sports team). These two methods dictate how I determined which potential recommendations were most appropriate for DePauw.

Encompassing more personal methods discussed above is an intensive literature review of research about hookup culture and some foundational knowledge for considering campus mental health. The literature review also informs my recommendations and supports the urgent need for understanding and change.

### **Limitations**

Despite trying my best to limit them, limitations are an inevitability of any research. I have not only acknowledged but utilized some of my limitations; however, not all of them have a function. As I mentioned in my methods, I am inherently biased by my own experiences in hookup culture. Though I know and understand the different sides of hookup culture and strive to consider various points and thoughts in my research and presentation of material, I cannot change the positive or negative ways hookup culture has impacted me. To account for this limitation, I will situate you within my hookup culture experience and provide an in-depth firsthand analysis of the impact of hookup culture on mental health.

The rest of my limitations are situated around my sample and the generalizability of my results. My survey had 61 responses and 6 more in-depth interviews. Though the sample size of the interviews is far too low if it were the primary information collection method, it is not. My interviews function as a supplement to the survey and allowed for more story-telling than just answers. The participant pool for both the survey and interview was limited exclusively to current DePauw students over the age of 18, hence my results and recommendations will be DePauw-specific (though my approach could be utilized at other institutions). Additionally, since

participation was voluntary, my sample has self-selection bias (respondents chose to answer the survey and/or be interviewed). This likely means that respondents had a strong opinion about the impact of hookup culture on mental health or know me personally. However, the personal perspectives provided still offer a meaningful look at DePauw's hookup culture.

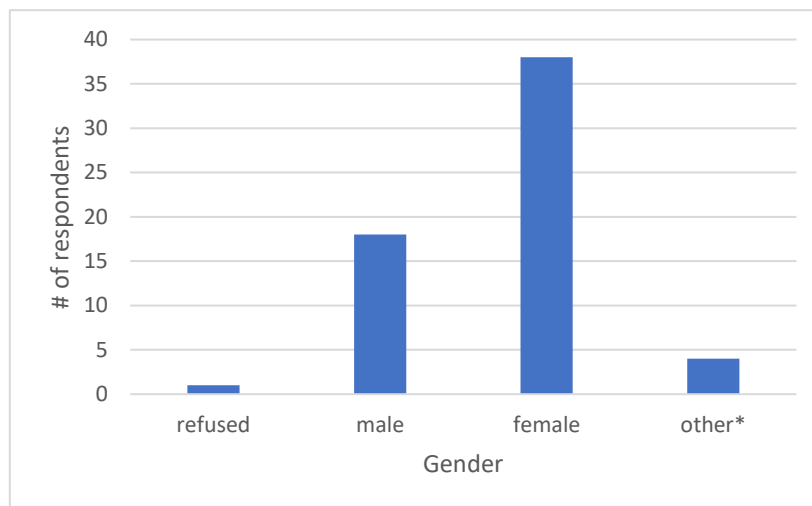
All the limitations thus far were entirely anticipated; however, one last limitation did surprise me. Many respondents didn't necessarily know how to answer all survey questions, especially the second question: how would you describe your identity? Multiple people asked me how I wanted them to respond and at that point, I decided not to explain further. This question intended to understand the perspective individuals were coming from and how they interpreted their own perspective/identity; most people took it to mean simply gender or race, but that's not all there is to an individual's identity. I believe that the lack of understanding of how to answer the identity question reflects a lack of understanding as to what contributes to who a person is. By the time I get to recommendations, I hope you'll think, just as I do, that this lack of self-understanding and inability to conceptualize one's own identity is likely correlated with hookup culture.

## Demographics

As previously mentioned, I had 61 survey respondents and multiple questions aimed at unpacking the perspective they come from. I have included some of the demographic breakdowns below to set up a discussion of sampling bias. Though sampling bias can be a limitation, I have intentionally separated it from the limitations section as it provides a perspective that speaks to hookup culture and the people in it (by choice or otherwise).

Figure 1. Number of respondents for each gender category seen. 38 respondents identified as female, 18 as male, 1 refused, and 4 fell under the category of other\*.

\* Includes the responses: non-binary, transmasc, and someone who simply answered cisgender)



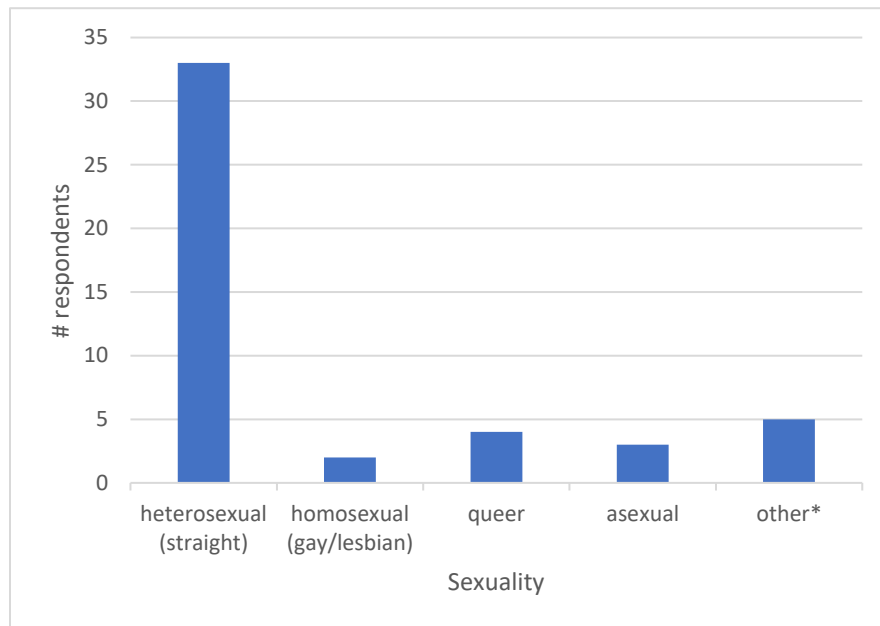


Figure 2. Number of respondents for each sexuality category seen. 33 respondents self-identified as heterosexual/straight, 2 as homosexual/gay/lesbian, 4 as queer, 3 as asexual, and 5 self-identifications fell under the category of other\*.

\*Included the responses: male, asexual bi romantic, demisexual, romantically straight, questioning

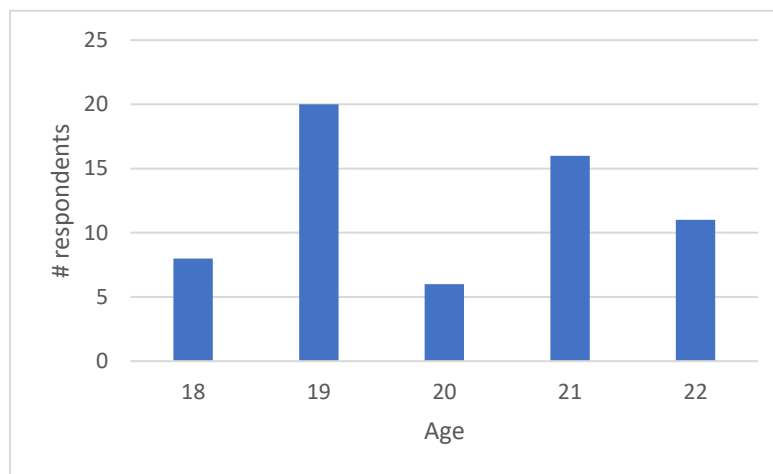


Figure 3. Number of respondents for each age seen. 8 individuals stated they were 18, 20 were 19, 6 were 20, 16 were 21, and 11 were 22.

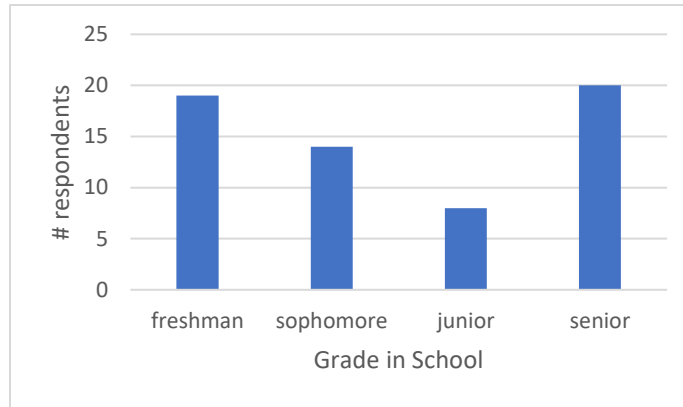


Figure 4. Number of respondents in each grade level. 19 individuals were first-year, 14 were sophomores, 8 were juniors, and 20 were seniors.

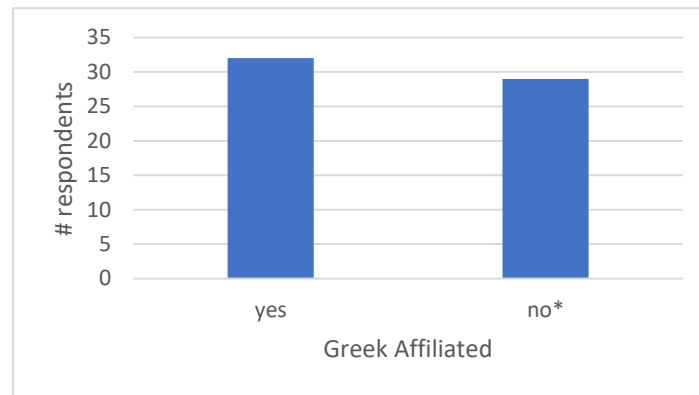


Figure 5. Number of respondents regarding Greek affiliation. 32 individuals said they were in a Greek house and 29 said they were not\*.

\* Includes individuals who replied “not yet” or that they dropped a Greek organization

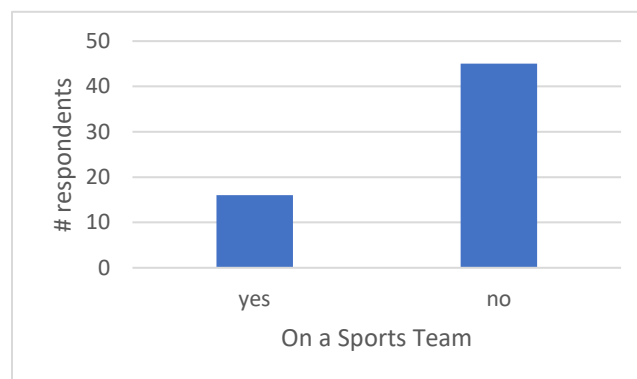


Figure 6. Number of respondents on a sports team. 45 individuals were not on a sports team and 16 were.



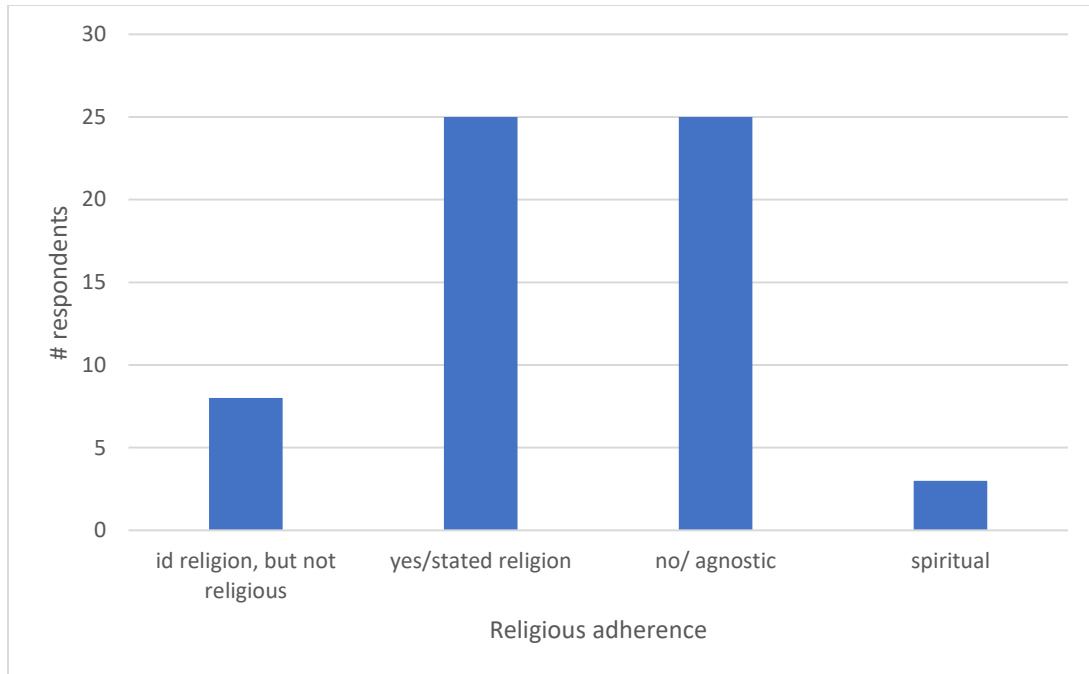


Figure 7. Number of respondents for stated religious adherence. 8 respondents identified a religion but claimed they weren't religious, 25 stated a religion or said they were religious, 25 were either agnostic or simply said, not religious, and 3 were spiritual but not religious.



# Survey Outline

If you would like to pick your own pseudonym (fake name), please enter one here

How would you describe your identity?

How would you describe your gender?

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

How old are you?

What is your class year?

Define what constitutes a hookup

Define what constitutes sex

Are you Greek affiliated?

Are you on a sports team?

Would you consider yourself to be religious and if so, what religion do you adhere to?

The following 6 questions may bring up distressing memories, you are under no obligation to respond to them.

How would you describe DePauw's hookup culture?

How would you describe your participation in DePauw's hookup culture?

How would you describe the effect of DePauw's hookup culture on your mental health?

Would you say DePauw is equipped to handle any struggles that may result from hookups?

Please elaborate on anything you think I should have asked about but didn't.

Thanks for completing my survey!

Figure 8. Outline of survey questions and descriptions. These questions were preceded by informed consent.

Most of the survey respondents were female (62.29%) (Figure 1); however, this is much higher than the proportion of female students at DePauw (50.58%) (*DePauw University Student Population and Demographics*, n.d.). The gender bias within my survey sample is telling of traditional gender norms which allow men to communicate less or at least communicate in a more indirect way than a survey (Poost 2017), especially with regards to discussing hookups with a woman.

When asked about sexuality most respondents said they were heterosexual/straight (Figure 2). In the context of hookup culture, this would be expected due to its heteronormative setting and history; more straight individuals are likely to be active within the hookup culture at DePauw and be more willing to discuss it.

I asked about both age and grade in school to have as much specificity as possible. Most respondents were 19 or 21 (Figure 3). However, the most notable feature of the grade distribution was that the junior class seems to have been underrepresented in my survey responses (Figure 4). I believe this sampling bias is the result of the first years being very interested in hookup culture and seniors being more likely to know me (with sophomores and juniors making up the two smallest portions of the sample). Other interpretations could include but are not limited to first years being the most likely to want to get involved, hookup culture being a novel experience for first years and so they have more interest, seniors hoping to pass down wisdom they've gathered over their time at DePauw, or even just happenstance around who saw the flyers and who didn't.

Perhaps one of the most surprising components of the sampling bias seen in my survey was that the proportion of students who were Greek affiliated (52.45%) (Figure 5) was substantially smaller than the proportion of students at DePauw who are Greek affiliated (69%).

The stigma of hookup and party culture, primarily at fraternities, and the lack of open communication inherent to hookup culture all suggest that those individuals most entangled in hookup culture are also the most likely to not talk about it. Similarly, to the underrepresentation of Greek-affiliated individuals on campus (and potentially for the same reasons), student-athletes are also underrepresented among my survey respondents (Figure 6).

The final demographic category I'd like to consider is religious adherence (Figure 7). Most of DePauw's students said they were not religious, and discussions of the role of religion in hookup culture and mental health will come up in chapter 3 where I consider religious adherence's impact on hookup culture participation/perception and how conflicted it can make individuals in hookup culture feel.

### **My Interviewees and Their Positionality**

In addition to the 61 survey responses, I also conducted six interviews that allowed for more detailed responses, probing, and clarification about responses. Yet again the demographics and positionalities of the individuals who volunteered to be interviewed are interesting, especially in the context of how they defined a hookup and sex (chapter 4). All the names I use throughout this thesis are pseudonyms (fake names) that either the interviewee chose or (if they didn't want to) I suggested, and they approved of during the interview. I will describe the demographics, identity, and positionality of each interviewee going in alphabetical order (by pseudonym) and excluding anything they shared that may jeopardize their anonymity.

First in alphabetical order is Bennie, who was, ironically enough, also my first interview. He is a white male first year in a fraternity who identified his sexuality as gay. Though he is social and outgoing, he chooses not to participate in hookup culture because he believes it leads

to less value and respect for sex and people. He also noted that hookups are more complicated and less available to the LGBT community on campus. However, he doesn't judge individuals who choose to actively participate in hookup culture and believes that the roots of why it exists can be traced to people being uncomfortable with intimacy. Bennie was frustrated by hookup culture because it feels like he is doing something wrong by not participating in it. Due to the anxiety, he felt when thinking about participating (having sex with random individuals with no romantic interest or trust), he couldn't quite understand how people could go through with being active participants in hookup culture.

Brandon is also a white male in a fraternity; however, that is where his similarities with Bennie end. He is a senior athlete currently in a relationship, who likes to stay involved on campus and interact with people. Though he has participated in hookup culture in the past, he feels neutral about it and didn't particularly enjoy participating. He sees hookups to quickly fulfilling a physical need/desire but also mentioned they can feel lonely as there's no real connection between the two individuals.

Though both Brandon and Chad are male fraternity members, Chad was one of the interviewees I was particularly interested in considering how different his interview and answers were compared to four out of the other five (such as Brandon's). Chad identified as an international student, a human soul in a male body, who if he had to have an answer considers his sexuality to be either bisexual or pansexual (though he prefers to not put his sexuality out there). He strongly disliked hookup culture as it felt like a "perverted way" to go about relationships with people; sex simply for the sake of sex felt like it was missing something, perhaps the connection. This dislike of and lack of active participation in hookup culture made him feel alienated from aspects of the American college experience. He considered the roots of

hookup culture to be consumerism due to the desire for instant gratification that is central to a hookup. An interesting point he also brought up was that he believed hookup culture was very American, that it doesn't happen like this in other countries and as a spiritual individual part of why this could be due to the US lacking a spiritual/religious foundation.

Gavin was far more like Brandon than Chad but is a sophomore. As a white, straight, male in a fraternity who is also a gym bro (goes to the gym consistently at the same time aiming for muscle development and knows how to achieve his gym goals), Gavin is exactly who you would expect to participate in hookup culture and reap the most benefits from it. Despite his demographics lining up almost exactly with an individual who would have the most power in hookup culture, he has a love-hate relationship with it and doesn't follow traditional hookup scripts. During his freshman year, he was in a 'situationship' (a relationship between two individuals that is some combination of friendship, romantic interest, and a hookup) that ended very poorly and harmed his mental health. But it also led to the development of personal standards, a better understanding of what he wanted, and how to exist in hookup culture. Even though hookup culture can be messy because of drama and gossip, he was very clear about how exciting it could be, how normalized as "cool" it has become, and that it can help alleviate loneliness. This is all contextualized by the ways he breaks the rules of hookup culture (unknowingly), namely by looking for clear and honest communication.

Kognity was the most unique interview I had, aside from their identity being unique, their responses to define sex and a hookup are remarkable. I believe their positionality contributes to why not only they answered the way they did but also why the answers were so different from everything I read or was told. Kognity is a non-binary first-year, who uses they/them pronouns and described their sexuality as bisexual. They are not active in hookup culture and didn't know

much about it until coming to DePauw. They said choosing not to participate in the hookup culture at times made them feel like less of a college student (since it is expected), but they're mostly indifferent towards it – except for the drama it can cause, which they disliked. Something they also pointed out as an issue in hookup culture was how women often became viewed as trophies by men or as an achievement if they hooked up with them. When it came to considering why hookup culture exists, Kognity suspected that students were curious about it and that it might help alleviate stress.

Despite being the only woman I interviewed, Lexi's responses were very similar to Brandon's and Gavin's. She is a white, heterosexual athlete, who is currently active in hookup culture. She thinks hookup culture exists because people fear commitment, have more freedom than they've ever experienced before, and it acts as a space for exploration. Rather than discussing how she may or may not have originally felt about hookup culture, she stated that she's used to it, doesn't expect much from guys, and all around has adapted to it so it doesn't impact her mental health. Two things that were unique to her interview were that she specifically discussed how hookup culture promotes substance use and that guys only care about their own pleasure in a hookup.

## **Chapter 2: My Existence in Hookup Culture**

This has been the most conflicting section to write. This kind of autoethnography approach requires vulnerability and a reflective honesty within myself that isn't easy in any way (especially considering other people will read this). However, the perspective I come from and my experiences in hookup culture is for better or worse important for me to disclose to some degree as it has impacted my choice of topic, how I've approached the research, and even how I have written this thesis. I've already mentioned that I am inherently a biased writer and now I am going to tell you why.

### **Positionality**

I am a senior double major in anthropology and biology, as well as an honor scholar, at DePauw University (DPU). For the first three years here at DPU, I was a dual sport athlete on the soccer team and track and field team. I have also played for the US Virgin Island senior women's national team during my time at DPU. I am a member of a sorority, Alpha Chi Omega, and am also involved in some clubs on campus. Aside from academics and extracurricular activities I also have four jobs, only one of which I believe is worth mentioning as I will rely on the expertise I have gained from it at various points moving forward. That job is working for the Indiana Department of Health in STD surveillance. Regarding my more personal positionality, I am a cis-gender female who is bisexual and my religious identification is agnostic.

### **Participation**

You don't get a choice about being in hookup culture in college: it's pervasive and inescapable, but you can (typically) choose whether and to what extent you participate in hookups. Even then, the ability to choose to hookup or not isn't that simple. To a certain extent,



it is expected by some people or certain groups, and friendships and peer pressure will always influence how individuals act. When I first came to DePauw, my first group of close friends was surprised I had never hooked up with someone, and I was told by an authority figure that I had to work harder to fit in with them. “Fitting in” meant drinking, the most common thing they wanted to do, and hooking up, the most common thing they wanted to talk about.

There was also pressure from guys, who often expected their desires to be met and could become confrontational if there was hesitation. Fraternity houses more collectively would sometimes create environments that were extremely hard to escape. Examples I have experienced or been told by close friends include: blockading a door keeping a girl and guy in there, pounding on the door and yelling at the two people inside, and even guys trying to come in through both doors and windows while two people who had paired off at the end of a party may or may not have been hooking up. They would do everything possible to make leaving instead of hooking up or staying over as uncomfortable as possible for the woman.

As simply as I can put it I have participated in hookups during my time at DPU. It’s been a strange combination of choice, alcohol, pressure, anxiety-producing environments, and assault, but the reality of my active existence in hookup culture is unavoidable and undeniable.

### **Impacts**

The impact hookup culture has had on me is complicated (a theme you will see for the rest of the thesis). There are positives and negatives to it, just like there are to everything; however, if I were to say what the majority impact of hookup culture has been on my mental health, I’d have to say it has been detrimental.

On the positive side, it can feel very validating and a little liberating to partake in hookups. In some ways I think it's helped my confidence; however, I'm not sure if it's true confidence or playing into being sexualized. On the negative side, rape, sexual assault, consistent objectification, being used and lied to, the idolization of specific body parts, and the removal of any inclination toward sexual intimacy will all be with me for the rest of my life. Given the growth I've had at DPU in every way, I do have hope that I can continue to grow from where I am now and diminish the prominence of the effects hookup culture has had on my own mental health and understanding of healthy relationships.

As I said this has been an emotional roller coaster of an experience. It's forced me to reflect, analyze, remember, and more fully understand both my experiences and myself; and sometimes that has been difficult. I can't tell you how many times over the course of my thesis process I've cried while reading or writing (I mean I am right now). Being forced by my own mind to think about being raped and how the norms and structures of hookup culture and media portrayals of consensual and nonconsensual sex still to this day, make me feel wrong for saying the two instances in my past were rape. Reading about consent, desire, female sexual subjectivity, and the pressure to conform led to me looking back at how coerced, peer pressured into, and undesired all but maybe a handful of my sexual experiences have been. The articles put words to feelings I knew I had but had never known how to express. Now that I can I'm forced to live with these feelings fully conceptualized. But at the same time, it brought me a certain peace and reassurance in knowing that I'm not alone, it's not my fault, and I shouldn't feel bad for saying something is what it objectively is. Given how systemic and institutionalized hookup culture is, I never stood a chance.

### **Chapter 3: What Research Already Exists About Hookup Culture?**

“Social life is a twisted self-perpetuating cycle of unrealistic expectations and copious amounts of alcohol” (Wade 2017)

Part of the “twisted self-perpetuating cycle” that permeates and at times even dictates college social life, is hookup culture. Lisa Wade is one of the most prominent academics looking into hookup culture (as you might recall, a webinar she was a part of helped me decide on my topic in the first place). Regardless of who the author is or what angle someone is looking at hookup culture from, it is complicated. The extant literature is still in what I would consider the nascent stages and there are an infinite number of large-scale studies that could occur to gain an overarching understanding of it. But hookup culture will likely always be vague and variable to some degree; however, the following chapter is a starting point of existing understanding.

#### **Defining a hookup**

In almost every piece of literature I read, a hookup was reduced to “casual no-strings-attached sex with no expectation of commitment” - and it was common and most known in the college party setting - (Allison and Risman 2014; Bogle 2008; Hamilton and Armstrong 2009; Kimmel 2008; Kettrey 2018; Ford, England, and Bearak 2015; Wade 2017; Wade 2021). At some point, each definition included an accompanying statement along the lines of “but it’s also super uncertain.” The ambiguity of the term itself is by design within hookup culture, so, what is a hookup? All in all, a hookup is a vague and variable sexual experience. It’s part of a self-perpetuating loop triggered by the expectation of limited to no communication and imprecise

generalizations when “recapping” with others to allow for the manipulation of perception. But don’t worry, I know the previous two sentences leave a lot to be desired, so let’s delve into the plethora of definitions that exist for the term hookup.

Garcia, Reiber, Massey, and Merriwether (2012) claim that “the term hookup focuses on the uncommitted nature of a sexual encounter rather than focus on what behaviors “count”. A thesis written at Wesleyan University by Camila Recalde back in 2016 makes the same claim, almost word for word. Recalde and others consider there to be a spectrum: “student definitions of hooking up vary widely, inclusive of sexual activities ranging anywhere from kissing to intercourse typically initiated after one meets a partner of interest at a social event, such as a party (Bogle, 2007; England, Shafer, & Fogarty, 2003; Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, & Ward, 2009; Holman & Sillars, 2012)” (Pham). However, I point specifically made by Recalde that I strongly disagree with is that “it is up to the individual to determine what behavior within that spectrum counts as a hookup.” Hookups occur within a complex context that can’t be ignored, the hookup culture the hookup was in being only the first part of that context, friends also contribute or even dictate to a person if what happened was a hookup or not during the morning after recap. I’m not sure how to articulate my disagreement with Recalde’s point besides telling you a story from my own experience:

*One night, my freshman year early in the spring semester, I went to a fraternity party with my friends. Back then, this frat had parties in individual’s rooms, they were tightly packed, and the handles vodka purchased could make it around the room very quickly and frequently. Because it made parties less anxiety-producing and enjoyable and since I was trying to have the college experience my friends insisted on and said we were supposed to, that night, like many others, after a certain point has been entirely wiped from my memory due to overconsumption of alcohol. Pieces of what happened are there, but they don’t fit together, are temporally variable and incomplete, and are just flashes of my location. When I woke up the next morning, I was still at the fraternity in bed with one of the guys both of us with no clothes on. Later that day I was telling one of my friends (who*

*was also at the party) that I didn't remember seeing this guy, deciding to have sex with him, and that I wasn't even attracted to him enough to have pursued him. In response, she laughed and said that was funny and asked how the hookup was.*

To that friend and that guy, it was a hookup. It took me two years to acknowledge that, that night wasn't consensual and that it was rape. It is entirely inaccurate to reduce the realities of decisions to being what someone desires because sometimes it's not a decision, there isn't a choice involved.

There is also a claim to be made that there is a distinction between hooking up and a hookup: "Hookups are onetime events with no future or past, but the state of hooking up implies multiple past encounters and promises future ones" (Wade 2021). Regardless of whether it is hooking up or just a one-time hookup, they "occur on the dance floor, at the party, or elsewhere during or afterward" and the parties that tend to initiate them "occur at predictable times and places, reflecting an uneven distribution of sexual capital" (Wade 2022). The uneven distribution of sexual capital" is seen across not only gendered lines but also sexuality distinctions since not only do most studies only discuss heterosexual college students but hookup culture itself makes hookups harder for anyone who doesn't conform to heteronormative notions.

An additional component to defining a hookup is through constructing a kind of hookup script and its setting. Though oversimplified and kind of problematic, I believe a short excerpt from Recalde (2016) will suffice to outline a general hookup scene:

*After two people sense mutual interest in each other, the main question is determining where they go to engage in the hookup. Paul and Hayes's 2002 study of students' perceptions of hookups reported that 67% occur at parties, 57% at dormitories or fraternity houses, 10% at bars and clubs, 4% in cars, and 35% at any unspecified available space. The level of sexual interaction the partners want often determines the location of the hookup. In some cases, if they are going to "just kiss" or "make out" with someone, they feel no need to leave the social*

*event and thus initiate a hookup and a private room or corner. Other times, pairs will begin a hook up on the dance floor*

I think this brief hookup scene with variable paths is important to state because an individual partaking in a hookup not only has to work to navigate the scene but also must work to enact careless sexual activity, communicate to each other that the sex isn't romantic, plus have to perform the acts (pick someone one person and have them pick someone back) (Wade 2017).

Everything before this point (in this chapter) contributes to my attempt to create a conceptual framework of what a hookup is. However, as I said, it's complicated. So, as simply as I can make it: "hooking up is a "distinctive sex without commitment interaction between college men and women is widespread on college campuses and profoundly influences campus culture" (Glenn et al)" (Recalde 2016). But before I delve into what hookup culture is, there is an important aspect of defining a hookup that hasn't been fulfilled yet. If casual sex is the essence of a hookup, what even constitutes sex?

### **Defining The Act of Sex**

I have no idea how to define sex as a verb without some adjectives in coordination with it, and in everything I've ever read no one has tried to. However, in the heteronormative male pleasure-centric realm of hookup culture, sex/intercourse/going all the way, as taught to us starting in elementary school, refers to vaginal penetration with a penis. I don't like this definition because it's patriarchal and heteronormative, but considering this section is about how the literature I read defines sex, it's the most accurate to describe the unstated definition that was implied in most of the articles.

Why is it that sex doesn't have a precise definition? This question was answered in my research. For decades, parents or family members have given the job to talk about sex to the

school system (Bunnage 2014) and when teachers get to this topic, it's typically given very little time, very little detail, and exclusively from the heteronormative patriarchal perspective. So, kids go to the internet to learn about sex, this education comes from some form of porn, and the kids don't ever ask their parents about it because we're taught that it's "bad" or "wrong" to have sex or sexual thoughts (Bunnage 2014). This utter lack of clear, positive, and precise communication means that the more eroticized sexual experiences typically viewed are the norm (which is how a hairless body became "sexier" but I'm not going to get into the infantilization of women that occurs in the porn industry). The kind of communication and even the negativity around sex can be seen in the norms of hookup culture, the framework for hookup culture starts that early in development. Luckily, Bunnage offers a simple solution: talk about sex in an age-appropriate and positive manner throughout development.

Simply defining sex or understanding why we don't know how to define sex isn't enough. There are three other major points. The first two, consent and desire, don't traditionally contribute to defining sex, but ought to be a prerequisite to engaging in sex and continuously considered throughout the act; therefore, should be included in a definition. The difference between consensual and desired sex is profound: "To desire something is "to wish for it, to feel inclined toward it, or to regard it or aspects of it as positively valanced; in contrast, to consent is to be willing or to agree to do something'" (Peterson and Muehlenhard 2007, p. 73; emphasis in original)" (Kettrey 2018). Throughout my entire life Kettrey's paper, *"Bad Girls" Say No "Good Girls" Say Yes: Sexual Subjectivity and Participation in Undesired Sex During Heterosexual College Hookups*, was the first time I had ever seen not only the distinction between consent and desire stated but also desire as part of the conversation about sexual experiences. Though we claim to be in a progressive era, the distinction between coercion and

consent is not explained in detail or consistently throughout people's sexual development. Can we say consent wasn't coerced if there is no desire? Should the standard just be consensual, or should it be consensual, desired, and of sound mind? Unfortunately, nothing I read even really brought up these considerations in a proactive context, instead, it was all about the retrospective study of undesired sex. Thinking about sex as an act, is not just about what counts as the physical act of sex but also the emotional and mental components of what sex is. I believe the words desired, consensual, and sound of mind are good starting points for addressing how to define sex from more than just a physical perspective.

The third point revolves around deciding if it's a joint or individual experience, or even if it can only be one or the other. Poost (2018) states that casual sex is appealing as a method of "social mobility" and thus "becomes less of a joint experience and more pertinent to an individual as an experience for themselves." I pretty much agree with this claim; however, I think the literature shows the claim to be most accurate for the white heterosexual male experience as female sexual subjectivity is considered against the norm (Kettrey 2018). When defining sex, it is imperative to delineate if it is a joint or individual experience because the definition changes in each circumstance. If an experience is purely individualistic then the only considerations are regarding the individual's pleasure, desires, consent, and actions. It means that masturbation could be considered sex, because it is an intimate action taken by the individual to fulfill their own pleasures and desires. If we look to define sex as a joint experience it often leads to a far more complicated discussion of what physical actions constitute having sex. Most people and everything I read didn't even consider the potential for masturbation to be considered sex, and the public school system curriculum teaches us that the act of sex is a heterosexual experience for the purpose of reproduction and to a lesser extent pleasure. I could write an entire



thesis just about this idea of defining sex; however, that is not my purpose here and future research should look more closely at and explicitly state how the act of sex is defined.

### Sexual Fields

A theoretical conceptualization structure used by Wade in a 2021 paper utilizes sexual fields theory and suggests that hookup culture could be studied as a distinct sexual field (a structure that dictates sexual interactions and provides a partially standardized structure of analysis), due to its existence as a collective sexual experience. When it comes to describing what a sexual field is, I think Wade does it best with reference to some more canonic authors:

*“Posited by George (1996), elaborated by Martin and George (2006), and expanded by Green (2008a, 2008b, 2014), sexual fields are terrains of interaction structured by social institutions and enacted by individuals, that reflect distinct sexualities. A key disadvantage of sexual field theory is in its transcending mere descriptions of subcultures in favor of theorizing generic social processes by which sexual scenes are governed... According to Bourdieu, (1977) fields are terrains of interaction in which actors with varying levels of capital compete for a contested good. Sexual field theory, then, explores the nature of these terrains, the logics and values, and the interaction within them (Green, 2014).” (Wade 2021)*

An additional, important, component of sexual fields, that is especially important in the context of hookup culture, is that they have structures of desire. The structure of desire is a quality of the field, not necessarily relating to the desire of individuals in the field (Wade 2021).

This theoretical approach to defining and conceptualizing sex is important to consider in the context of hookup culture because it forces us to contemplate more questions that must be asked: is the definition of sex dependent on which sexual field an individual exists in, if an individual is in multiple sexual fields do they have multiple (potentially conflicting) definitions of sex, and can sex even be defined beyond the context of a specific sexual field? Wade, Bourdieu, Martin, and George don’t answer these questions; however, based on what they say, I am inclined to believe that an all-sexual fields encompassing definition of sex is impossible.

### **Defining hookup culture**

Before I get into what hookup culture is, I think it is important to define what a culture is. Cultures are comprised of “systems of shared ideas, systems of concepts and rules and meanings that underlie and are expressed in the ways that human beings believe” and they facilitate group cohesion, community, and continuity” (Bhui and Bhugra 2007). When someone is immersed in a culture one of two things will typically happen: enculturation or acculturation. Acculturation means the individual acquires “some or all of the cultural beliefs and behaviors of their new environment” and enculturation means “the individual slowly acquires the cultural ‘lens’ of that society” (Bhui and Bhugra 2007). One layer of abstraction above simply defining culture is to define campus culture: “deeply held meanings, beliefs, and values” of a campus (Chen, Romero, and Karver 2016). Before you make any judgments about students engaging in hookup culture (because society traditionally says its wrong), keep the cultural and contextual components of a hookup in mind because culture and context dictate all decisions (Eaton et al., 2015; Holman & Sillars, 2012; Reid, Webber, & Elliott, 2015; Pham).

Hookup culture is the set of norms, expectations, and practices that facilitate a hookup; for the most part, you decide if you want to hookup with someone, but once you go to college the only option is to exist in the context of hookup culture. Hookup culture and its norms create “an environment in which casual sexual activity is ideologically hegemonic and routinely enacted (for reviews, see Padgett and Wade 2019; Pham, 2017; Watson, Snapp, and Wang, 2017; Wood and Perlman, 2016)” (Wade 2021). The norms of hookup culture I keep mentioning are hard to do, but fairly simple to list: avoid commitment, avoid emotional intimacy, little to no communication, drunkenness, avoid being tender or caring, don’t hookup with the same person multiple times, and be less friendly after a hookup than you were before or would typically be

(Bogle 2008; Wade 2017; Wade 2021; Reiling, Barton, Becker, and Valaski 2018; Sweeney, 2014; Armstrong et al 2012; Currier 2013; Kimmel 2008). Because I can't emphasize how emotionless a hookup is supposed to be enough, I'd like you to read the following three quotes, from two articles by Lisa Wade, once and then a second time. When you read them a second time think about what this would mean in your own experience (past, present, or future), think about how vague it makes communication (since it's mostly done through action, and think about what sex described as nothing might feel like emotionally.

*“If sex can mean nothing, what does it mean to hold hands, caress someone’s face, eye contact, etc. it means more than sex” (Wade 2017)*

*“In hookup culture, sex was mundane; hand holding was special.” (Wade 2021)*

*“In hookup culture, not having sex is more intimate than having sex.” (Wade 2021)*

Hookup culture has multiple feeling rules—“standards used in emotional conversation to determine what is rightly owing in the currency of feeling” (Hochschild 1983)—and every person in hookup culture follows these rules through emotional management. However, in turn, the emotional management required by hookup culture “limits the range of vocabulary individuals can utilize to vocalize their mistreatment”, desires and needs (Recalde 2016). The vulnerability necessary to convey consent and desires, especially in an intimate space, is also vigorously rejected by hookup culture. Of course, the rules can be broken, but typically only in specific ways and very carefully. One such rule, perhaps the one most consistently broken, is that which dictates the restriction of repeat hookups. Avoidance of repeat hookups could be

considered an extension of the “post-hookup “cooling off” period: a deliberate, exaggerated aloofness meant to disabuse each other of the impression that a sexual encounter was significant” (Wade 2021). Because you must act less friendly after the hookup than before, hooking up with the same person more than once could convey more of a connection; however, it has also been shown that this is complicated (Wade 2017; Recalde 2016).

Since we are all human beings there can at times be a craving for emotional connection and communication that has no place in the hookup script (Recalde 2016; Wade 2017; Lovejoy 2015; Wade 2022; Epstein et al). The lack of communication “has inspired scholars to describe it as individualistic (Lovejoy 2015), competitive (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009), neoliberal (Bay-Cheng and Goodkind, 2016), and post-feminist (Butler 2013)” (Wade 2021), but for reasons we will discuss in the section focusing on gender, describing hookup culture as post-feminist is centralizing the idea that women should take on masculine traits and that these masculine traits are preferred.

### **Briefly Biological**

Up to this point, I’ve focused on the cultural, social science, and humanities perspectives regarding hookup culture; however, biological components affect every aspect of our existence, including hookup culture. A podcast including Dr. Wade and Dr. Moali in 2019, included a discussion about the relationship between nature and nurture and how inexact that relationship is. Our bodies have developed to view, interpret, and respond to social cues and opportunities. It can never be just social (nurture) because we are inherently biological beings, but it also can never be just biological because we exist in societies/cultures. In other words, our bodies are biological, but our experiences are social, making the relationship between nature and nurture difficult to

understand in the context of a culture (hookup culture) that can seem contrary to our biological and health interests. By considering the roles of evolution and disease in hookup culture we can begin to understand the nuances of the nature versus nurture relationship.

### Evolution

Just about any and every class that discusses the evolutionary history that led to *Homo sapiens sapiens*, has us think about how and when socialization and culture developed along this history. As social groups formed and developed (we believe) so did gender roles and expectations. Within those gendered expectations are mating habits and what modern academia thinks the biological underpinnings of those habits are. Simply put, it was in male individuals' best interests to mate with as many females as possible to increase the likelihood of their genetic material continuing in offspring and beyond; however, it was in female individuals' best interest to have a more monogamous mate to ensure food provision and safety during pregnancy and after birth. Aside from a desire to keep a mate, female individuals are also "predicted to be choosy concerning their mates because they invest more in each offspring and they stand to lose more if they make a poor reproductive choice" (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, and Merriwether, 2012) This idea that men should mate with as many women as possible but women should only have one quality mate can be seen to the present in gender stereotypes and supported by this supposedly foolproof biological argument.

If we believe that women should inherently need/want monogamy and a quality sexual partner, hookup culture seems to go against biology. However, a paper by Garcia, Reiber, Massey, and Merriwether (2012) makes a convincing argument as to why uncommitted sex doesn't inherently go against evolutionary biology. By first laying out ultimate level explanations (evolutionary biology) and then approximate level explanations (social cultural

contexts), they set the stage for our understanding of attachment fertility theory and the shifting ecological contexts culture is existing in. Technological developments, such as various contraceptive methods, have changed the biological context of reproduction, namely that reproductive outputs can be further optimized beyond the binary quality (female) versus quantity (male) argument in a way that is evolutionarily favorable. One theory presented, that I found particularly interesting, was the attachment fertility theory. This theory essentially states that there is a need for bi-parental care that has shifted evolved sexual patterns “from sex-distinct to sex-homologous mate selection mechanisms (Ziegler 2000).” In 2011 Pederson et al “applied attachment fertility theory and demonstrated relatively few sex differences, arguing that predictions from sexual strategies theory are not consistent with their data” (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, and Merriwether 2012). Instead, they posit “that short-term mating and other forms of mating outside of pair bonds are natural byproducts of a suite of attachment and caregiving mechanisms... selected for in human evolutionary history to ultimately enable men and women to seek, select, create and maintain a pair bond... pointing to an increasingly coherent picture of the underlying biological and chemical systems involved... that generally operate similarly for men and women (Pederson et al 2011 page 639)” (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, and Merriwether 2012). A key take away from all this evolutionary biology discussion is a singular point: “when long-term relationships are not possible or difficult to forge and maintain, both women and men may engage in short-term relationships” (Pederson et al 2011), or potentially termed hookups.

However, the changing evolutionary pressures, such as contraceptives, that have shifted the context of reproduction are recent in the evolutionary scheme of human existence. At face value, it doesn't seem like there's been enough time for contextual changes to have evolutionary effects. Two ideas successfully counter this argument against hookups potentially being

favorable in evolutionary terms: how short-term relationships were favorable before the change in evolutionary contexts and the de-centralization of biological evolution by social evolution. As Pederson et al (2011) suggested, in hunter-gatherer societies, short-term relationships (hookups) would have been advantageous if mate accessibility was low or if high-quality options were unavailable. In addition to this, I believe the decentralization of biological evolution by societal evolution and scientific advancement allows us to mitigate some traditional evolutionary considerations and thus creates a platform for an evolutionary argument/contribution that is pro-hookup culture.

### Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

A discourse about sexually transmitted diseases is largely absent from research on hookup culture, aside from the occasional mention of the risk of disease transmission due to having multiple partners and inconsistent condom use (largely attributed to the role of intoxication). This lack of consideration seen in the literature is reflected by a lack of consideration of STDs by most participants in hookup culture and college students in general. I believe being due to insufficient education and university programming about and tracking of STDs on campus. The choice by institutions to ignore STDs beyond providing testing and condoms seems contradictory to CDC recommendations. Women aged 19 to 24 are recommended to be tested annually, if they are experiencing symptoms of an STD (commonly including discharge and pain or burning during urination), and if sexual partners are inconsistent or high in number. Gay men have largely the same recommendations while straight men and lesbian women are also mostly the same except for annual testing is highly recommended (as the probability of infection is a bit lower in these populations).

Considering the high prevalence of gonorrhea and chlamydia in Indiana, and the syphilis outbreak in 2021 it would seem as though STD awareness and testing would be especially important to DePauw, a university in Indiana. One reason a discussion of STDs may be absent from the hookup culture literature and university educational programs is that most bacterial STDs (like gonorrhea and chlamydia) are asymptomatic; however, an additional reason is that “rates of infectious diseases follow patterns of inequity” (Unnatural causes: is inequity making us sick? PBS). Because the most marginalized groups bear the heaviest burden of infectious diseases (because of inequity), education and knowledge of treatment guidelines are largely ignored by something like hookup culture that is biased against marginalized individuals and reproduces inequality.

### **Other Interactions**

Though the way the following subsections interact with hookup culture isn't the most relevant to chapters 4 and 5 when DePauw's hookup culture is defined and considered. They were frequently referred to throughout my literary research and merit as their relevance to DePauw requires further research beyond baseline definitions and consideration of mental health that I establish.

### **Religion**

Religion is “some institutionalized set of beliefs and practices relating to a community” (Bartocci and Dein; Bhui and Bhugra 2007). The beliefs and practices of the most popular religions around the world all discuss sexual conduct in some way that often conflicts with the expectations of hookup culture (Wade 2017). However, there currently is not an accepted framework in the literature to consider religion in hookup culture. Despite not having solid



ground to stand on, there seem to be two ways religion can influence an individual in hookup culture: it is helpful to deal with and mitigate the pressure to participate in hookups and provide support throughout that decision or the religious lens can cause individuals to behave and think in unhealthy ways.

One such example of how religion may influence views regarding hookup culture in an unhealthy way is rape myth acceptance. Religiosity was shown to increase rape myth acceptance, which means, religious individuals were more likely to believe victims are at fault for their assault or rape (Freymeyer 1997; Gray et al 1990; Reling, Barton, Becker, and Valasik 2018). The structure of hookup culture necessitates a clear understanding of where the line between consent and non-consent is; however, not only is the distinction not clear in hookup culture, other societal influences and expectations make the distinction even more complex, especially when religion is involved since an inherent part of having faith are that scientific explanations and evidence don't necessarily dictate what one believes.

### Recaps

“Due to the ambiguous nature of the term “hookup”, it requires further questioning to uncover precisely how much sexual activity took place” (Recalde 2016) which leads to explicit erotic storytelling amongst friends. Hookup culture's sexual field reaches into residence and dining halls during “evening pre-parties in dorms and morning “re-caps” over breakfast” (Auster et al 2018; Wade 2017; Wade 2022) when friends consider what hookup potential the night may have or discuss hookups from the night before. Aside from necessitating further discussion, the ambiguity also allows “individuals to adaptively manipulate others' perceptions of their sexual behavior” (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, and Merriwether 2012) to best bolster their social capital in hookup culture (Wade 2017).

### Liberation and guilt

College is seen as a time to explore and the new sexual freedom, large pool of potential partners, alcohol consumption, and gendered sexual norms all make hookup culture a complex space to navigate as a place of sexual freedom but also limitation (Arnett 2000; Muehlenhard et al 2016; Kettrey 2018). One extreme and dangerous limitation of freedom is that “sexual mores permit young men to be sexual subjects/agents while prescribing young women to be passive sexual objects, young women may either feel guilty for feeling sexual desires or may learn to suppress their desires altogether” (Kettrey 2018). The rise of feminism in the 60s pushed for more sexual liberation (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, and Merriwether 2012); however, 90s women applied the logic of previous feminist revolutions and considered the way to be liberated to be acting like a man (Wade 2017) which conflicts with the gendered sexual norms that are still very present. The theme of women being more likely to regret hookups and feel a loss of respect was common in the literature (Wade 2017; Fisher et al 2012; Ford, England, and Bearak 2015; Wade 2021; Garcia, Reiber, Massey, and Merriwether 2012). “The de-prioritization of not only female pleasure, but also comfort, sheds light on how a seemingly “freeing” sexual landscape is latent with questionably immoral interactions that leave women devalued, displeased, and feeling “used” (Recalde 2016). However, gendered sexual norms are not the only reason for the conflict between liberation and guilt; “in an environment that promises freedom from emotions, to express feelings is to levy an emotional tax” (Wade 2021). Additionally, men could also experience a conflict between liberation and guilt when engaging in hookup culture, not because of gendered norms but because of personal context and background (such as religious belief) (Wade 2017).

## Pressure

Pressure can be exerted by peers, societal influence (everything aside from hookup culture), and by an individual on themselves. In the context of hookup culture, these pressures are often conflicting. One example of conflicting pressures provided by Wade in a short article from 2017 highlights the experience of an interview subject named Arman: he felt “stuck...between a sexually conservative background and a relatively sexually open world.” At a larger scale, “social roles and sexual scripts” (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, and Merriwether 2012) perpetuate gendered sexual expectations that make students believe they need to modify their experiences to avoid stigmatization, such as men overreporting oral sex and women underreporting engagement in sex (England and Bearak 2014; Pham). Discourses on sex, gender, and sexuality promote “the idea that sexual desire, pleasure, and agency are appropriate for young men, but not young women, and thus sex is something that young men try to obtain from young women, who should reject such advances to prevent experiencing negative consequences” (Kettrey 2018). The traditional gendered dynamic between men and women is at odds with the expectations of hookup culture and at the same time is reproduced within it, creating a complex and contradicting series of pressures for young adults to navigate. Aside from the conflicting pressures from societal influence and peers within hookup culture, there is also a bi-directional pressure within each individual: pressure from others to partake in hookup culture and pressuring others to partake in hookup culture.

The myriad of pressures experienced by students can be used to help identify the relationship between hookup culture and rape culture. Sexual assault and harassment occur on college campuses and can often begin as pressure to overconsume alcohol or hookup with another individual. At times the pressure can and does transition into force, thus finding ways to

reduce pressure or better equip students to navigate it could be a way to reduce sexual assault; however, this is **not** to remove blame from the perpetrator. This idea is meant to find new ways to empower students to have more control over their safety especially since a 2018 article by Lindo, Siminski, and Swenson found that “13.5% of senior undergraduate females and 2.9% of senior undergraduate males participating in the AAU survey reported that they had experienced nonconsensual penetration involving physical force or incapacitation since enrolling in college.”

### Race and Ethnicity

*“Sociologic approaches to ethnicity have been concerned with understanding how ethnicity relates both to social structures and to social relationships and identities. In this, sociology has attempted to provide a sensitive and contextual understanding of ethnicity, rather than resort to explanations based on stereotypes. Much of this work has demonstrated the social and economic inequalities faced by ethnic minority people and how economic inequalities and racism relate to ethnic inequalities in physical and mental health” (Iley and Nazroo; Bhui and Bhugra 2007)*

Hookup culture privileges “those with gendered, racial, and sexual capital” (Pham) which “manifests directly as an embodied cultural capital with the potential to be eroticized or de-eroticized.” (Wade 2022). For example, “young women of color or limited economic means are often denigrated as hypersexualized (Collins 2005; Elliott 2012; but see Espiritu 2007 for a discussion of norms regarding Asian women)” (Kettrey 2018) simply because of their embodied cultural capital. Furthermore, the sexual behavior of individuals of color “on predominantly White campuses are more apt to be scrutinized and viewed as reflective of their entire community, leading some to expressly reject hookup culture to avoid stigmatization (Kimmel, 2008)” (Pham). The result of this scrutinization is especially clear when considering Black versus White fraternity men on predominantly White campuses. A study by Ray and Rosow in 2010 “found that Black fraternity men were more apt to adopt a romantic approach toward women than their White male counterparts, who adopted sexually objectifying approaches”

(Pham). The authors suspected that the relative size of the communities of students on campus (Black vs White fraternity men) meant that any given Black male fraternity student had to focus more on protecting “their reputation as role models and leaders” (Pham) since everyone represented a higher proportion of the population.

### **Gender**

Both men and women are faced with social constructs that limit the range of behaviors “they feel comfortable doing without risking being ostracized” (Poost 2018). However, feminine traits and expectations are held to a higher standard than males in the context of hookup culture, and deviations from this reflect “the “stalled revolution” the idea that women have embraced traits and activities labeled masculine, but men have not done the inverse” (Wade 2021). The subordination of women to men is the foundation of gender hegemony (Schippers 2007) and, in the context of hookup culture, proper performance of femininity is necessary for social success (Pham). Many in hookup culture still hope to break away from the gendered reality of sexual subjectivity only being accorded to men and reach the ideal of sexual agency; ignoring the “interpersonal and institutional constraints related to ongoing oppression of all kinds. However, it does resonate with young people who are eager to feel “empowered” even as they capitulate to white supremacist, capitalist heteropatriarchy (Gavey 2012; Moran 2017)” (Wade 2022).

The de-prioritization of women’s needs, pleasure, and desires by male partners and the women themselves (Wade 2012; Recalde 2016; Armstrong et al; Glenn et al 2001), forms a feedback loop with the gendered pleasure gap expected in and reproduced by hookup culture, which maintains the privileging of male pleasure (Armstrong, England, and Fogarty 2012;

Pham). This feedback loop between male privilege and female de-prioritization has its foundations in the denial of female sexual subjectivity:

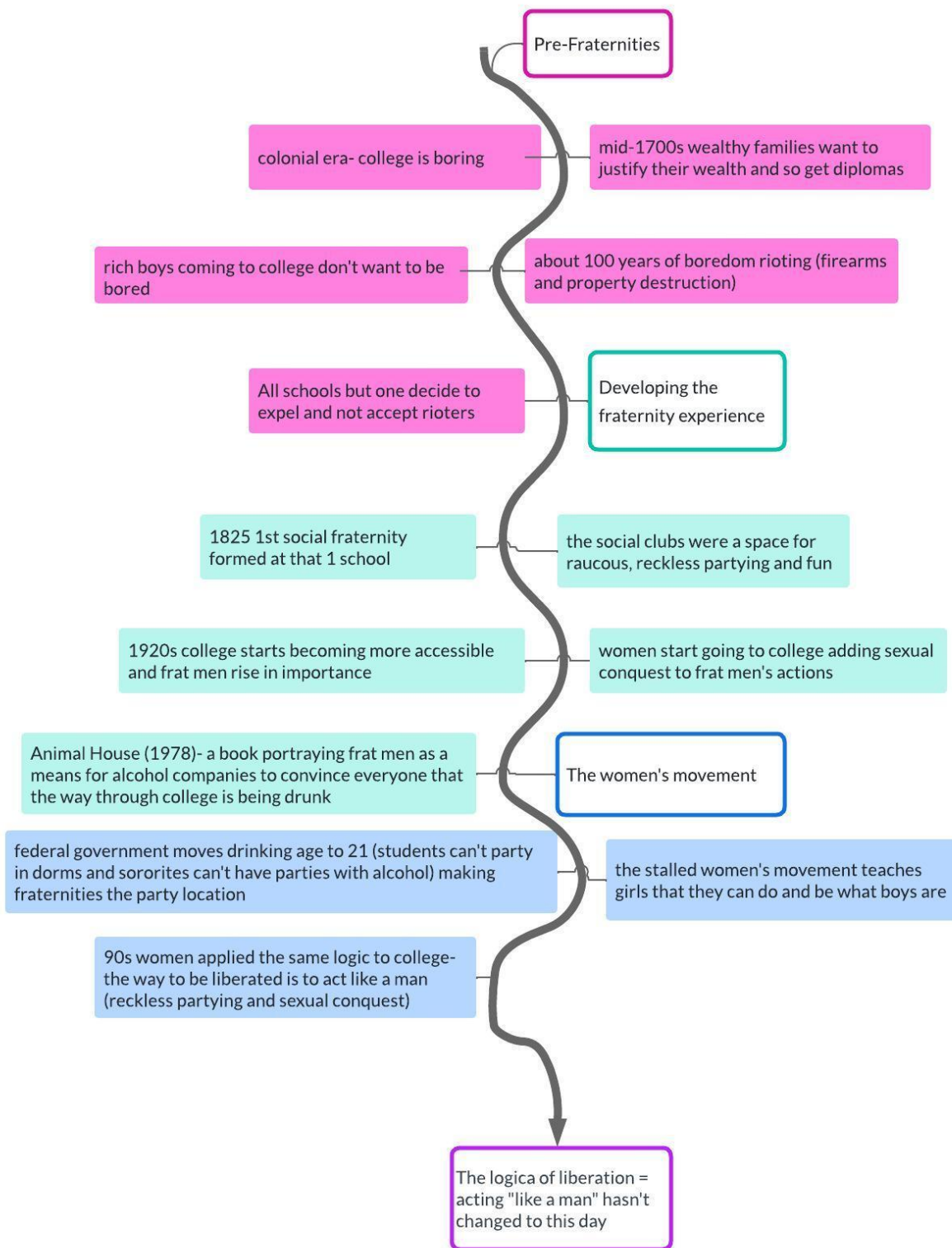
*“Young women's sexual subjectivity (i.e., desire, pleasure, and agency), once conceptualized as missing from popular discourse of sexuality (Fine 1988), has been made more audible by a media-fueled moral panic about the premature sexualization of girls (Egan 2013; Fine and McClelland 2006; Renold and Ringrose 2001). This discourse of sexualization does not ignore young women's sexual subjectivity; rather, it prescribes it as inappropriate by classifying young women along a continuum that ranges from “good girls” who are sexually innocent to “bad girls” who are sexually knowing (Bay-Cheng 2015; Renold and Ringrose 2011). Regardless of whether missing or explicitly prescribed, young women's sexuality is often discursively constructed within the confines of a masculine/feminine binary that minimizes young women's subjectivity while taking young men's subjectivity for granted (Holland et al, 1998; Jozkowski and Peterson 2013; Tolman 2012). Ultimately, such heteronormative discourse portrays young women as sexual objects that are pleasurable to young men, who are assumed to be sexual subjects/agents entitled to the pursuit of their own pleasure.” (Kettrey 2018)*

Thus any apparent breaking of traditional sexual norms by women participating in hookup culture is not only incorrect due to the lack of sexual subjectivity afforded to women but also because “embodied sexuality continues to be judged on the basis of gender suggest otherwise” (Connell, 2000; West & Zimmerman, 1987) (Pham).

The entire discussion of gender in hookup culture boils down to a reality identified by an interviewee in Lisa Wade's 2021 article. The interviewee, Deanna, “realized that she had thought their relationship was “equal”, but he had always claimed more power. “The hardest part of the whole affair,” she recalled, “remains seeing in an equal's eyes their opinion that I was inferior.” This sentiment perfectly articulates the gendered reality of hookup culture and often also rape culture.

## Fraternity parties

Figure 9. Outline of hookup culture development. This outline moves through the development of the fraternity as a social club, the development of college culture, the development of party culture, and finally how all these transition into the development of hookup culture. Adapted from a talk by Lisa Wade in 2017.



Fraternity parties deliberately create confusing and disarming atmospheres through the consumption of mind-altering substances and sensory overload, it's honestly fun; however, they also intentionally create "opportunistic spaces for heterosexual men to find sexual partners" by controlling who has access to the party (Pham). The specific context created for intense and large amounts of social contact is the ideal space for hookup culture (but also rape culture) (Lindo, Siminski, and Swenson 2018).

The literature is clear about the role of fraternity parties in hookup culture and Figure 9 outlines how hookup culture has its roots in fraternities. What the literature doesn't necessarily do is break down factors of fraternity parties and their existence on college campuses all at once, so the following subsections are dedicated to a few such factors that were highly discussed in my research.

#### Substance use

Sorority houses are strictly and harshly forbidden from having substances on the premises and serving free alcohol at a party they are hosting or allowing people to bring their own. This means that if women in sororities want to have the college party experience that is normalized and exceptionalized in college culture and hookup culture, they must do it at a fraternity (where men have all the power). So not only do women go to a male-dominated space with the intent of becoming intoxicated, but drunkenness/intoxication is also used to portray casualness in hookup culture.

Since alcohol "has direct pharmacological effects on aggression and cognitive functioning" (Lindo, Siminski, and Swenson 2018) it can yield overconsumption, sexual assault,



and regret or embarrassment. The process of conforming to hookup culture's norms endangers women and the insistence that substances are forbidden in sororities further endangers women as it means they must go somewhere else (a fraternity) to consume it and (hopefully) enjoy the effects it can have in moderation. A final note on sexual assault and rape in the context of substance use is that many sexual predators think that the odds of them being punished and the severity of the punishment will be lower if they, their victim, or both of them are intoxicated. Though this technically isn't true, the "say no to drugs and alcohol" movement pushed by the federal government has created an atmosphere around substances that is so negative and intense, the choice to consume is often more forcefully and consistently educated against than the definition of consensual sex.

### Sensory overload

Though the specifics of any given party's sensory experience are variable, a generic scene can be described by combining my own fraternity party experiences with brief descriptions from the literature:

*Sweat permeated the air as the smell of alcohol and something I couldn't quite identify encased everyone in a hazy, hot, wet bubble of movement. The vibrations of the music pulsed through the walls, floor, and bodies all pressed closely together in the dimly lit fraternity party space. The only means of seeing people and things was the random strobe lights around the room. Most people's bodies were turned to face their specific group of friends or toward the elevated surfaces spaced throughout the room. Most elevated surfaces were about a foot off the ground though others were as much as three feet off the ground and packed with moving people. On one larger one three women were smooshed behind a line of men trying not to be smacked by their erratic arm movements that could only very loosely be defined as dancing. The women on the dance floor and elevated surfaces danced in more erotic ways compared to the men who for the most part seemed to box themselves in an acceptable level of dancing engagement that is better described as bouncing.*

Particularly in the first few sentences of this sensory scene, it's clear that the common experience of a fraternity party is as discombobulating as possible.

### Sporting events

The role of sporting events in hookup culture was not mentioned frequently, but rather very in-depth by one paper that specifically focused on the connection between spikes in the incidence of rape and collegiate sporting events (especially football). Lindo, Siminski, and Swenson (2018) found “that football game days increased reports of rape victimization among 17-24-year-old women by 28%.” Additionally, they found that “prominent games--as measured by team rivalries and games against ranked opponents--have especially large effects on reports of rape” (Lindo, Siminski, and Swenson 2018). The results of this paper suggest that the Monon Bell game (the only televised Division 3 sports event) hosted at either DePauw University or Wabash College would likely increase the incidence of rape and assault and further research into this possibility by these institutions is necessary. Scaling back from the paper's focus on rape incidence, broader themes of increased partying, increased alcohol consumption, and increased number of hookups are all connected to the social practices of game days.

### Institutional support

The kind of parties described throughout this thesis, particularly in the last few subsections, “are built into the rhythm and architecture of higher education. They occur at designated times, such that they don't interfere with (most) classes, and are usually held at large, off-campus houses... This gives the institutions plausible deniability, but keeps the partying close enough to be part of colleges' appeal” (Wade 2017). Institutions want hookup and party culture, because social experience is something many look for in a college, but they don't want

responsibility for it. Plus, given the influence of white fraternity's alumni networks (Ray 2013; Pham), protecting fraternities and looking the other way when rules are broken is in the financial interest of an institution.

### **Mental Health**

Hookup culture is to blame “for the anxiety, disappointment and even sexual violence that students experience within it” (Pham, 2). Something about the culture, that everyone is forced to interact with, is the problem- not necessarily the hookup itself (Wade 2017). For example, the conflicting pressures within hookup culture and societal expectations can increase student stress and dependence on (potentially unhealthy) coping habits. Research regarding women specifically suggests that the norm of engaging in undesired sex “has been associated with a range of negative outcomes for young women including lowered subjective wellbeing, limited ability to negotiate condom usage, and increased risk of sexual victimization (e.g., forced sexual activity) (Blythe et al 2006; Inpett at al 2005; Krahe at al 2000)” (Kettrey 2018). As is the case with most of the topics discussed in this chapter, there is not an accepted framework in the literature on how to consider mental health in hookup culture – though it is interesting and suggestive that the only references to it are consistently negative for both men and women.

### **What's missing from the literature?**

Academic discussions of hookup culture are still in the early stages of acceptance and understanding; therefore, a lot is missing or insufficiently considered. Fitting with the norms of hookup culture most of what is missing can be found in the experience of disadvantaged individuals. The experience of the LGBTQIA+ community, racial minorities, and various religions in hookup culture are all but absent from the literature. Additionally, the impact of

hookup culture on academic success, body image, mental health, and STD transmission are absent from the literature save for a sentence here and there in a random article. Though Lisa Wade frequently mentions the institutionalized components of hookup culture any amount of university accountability is absent as is an intensive review of individual institutions to evaluate both what their hookup culture is and how it impacts their students.

#### **Chapter 4: Hookup Culture at DePauw**

There is a growing literature looking into hookup culture but it's mainly at a large-scale view. The more specific information you want, going from a country level to a personal level, the less accurate it likely is. Hookup culture, the experience of existing in hookup culture, and potentially the experience of hooking up is different for every single person (if they gave you a complete and honest answer). Everything in the literature is either very broad, specific to a certain topic, or, in one case, specific to another school. Also, I was unable to find something that specifically discusses mental health in hookup culture. All in all, an intensive look at the literature is essential for any thesis but in this instance, it won't have an answer for DePauw's hookup culture. Even though there isn't just one, any type of answer as to what the hookup culture at DePauw is like and how it impacts mental health can only come from the students in it.

In the following sections, I will discuss the results of my surveys and interviews with DePauw students as well as weave in my own experience and observations. I am specifically making assertions about DePauw's hookup culture and though it may apply to other institutions the data only supports claims specific to DePauw's sexual field.

#### **Defining a hookup and defining the act of sex**

I did not directly ask survey respondents to define sex or a hookup because I wanted to have the potential for me to probe and clarify what the respondent meant; therefore, these answers are primarily based on the six interviews conducted. However, observation, experience, and implied definitions from survey responses also support the answers the interviews provided.

### DePauw's definition of a hookup

Five of the six interviews defined a hookup as intercourse or sex (without elaborating on what that meant). Three of the six interviews highlighted that sex was the primary intention and that there was no attachment or commitment. Brandon and Lexi specified that a hookup could constitute anything from making out to sex and Brandon took his description further by suggesting that there was romance but not commitment involved. However, the notion of a hookup being romantic was adamantly disregarded by Bennie, who stated that he chose not to hookup explicitly because he valued romance and trust when being intimate with someone. Gavin also brought up an interesting point that he believed that consent was established as the pair were walking to/in his room.

I was especially interested in Kognity's definition of a hookup as they were the only interview that did not even include the word sex in his definition. Instead, they stated the physical component as simply being actions for the purpose of pleasure. They also emphasized the one-time occurrence of a hookup, which helps with different distinctions between experiences but isn't necessarily a requirement for a hookup. However, when considering creating a definition of a hookup for DePauw Kognity's response isn't the most helpful. In DePauw's hookup culture, a hookup would be defined as anything from making out to sex, with intercourse being the most expected outcome.

### DePauw's definition of the act of sex

Bennie, Brandon, Gavin, and Lexi all said (almost word for word) the same definition of sex: penetration of the vagina by a penis. However, Brandon also referred to vaginal penetration as "normal" sex, thus further emphasizing the heteronormative understanding of sex by

DePauw's students. Chad originally had essentially the same definition as Bennie, Brandon, Gavin, and Lexi, but decided to elaborate that the act of sex constituted anything more intimate than making out. Based on these five interviews and the implied definition of sex in the survey responses, the way DePauw's hookup culture defines sex is extremely simple and verbatim from the first sentence of this subsection: penetration of the vagina by a penis.

However, I would be remised not to highlight the reality that this definition isn't universal across the student population and even the individuals who directly stated it as such were hesitant or a little uncertain with how to respond. One interviewee, Kognity, had a definition that I personally really liked, and thought was the least heteronormative, assault culture definition I had ever heard:

*“two people consent to commit any acts where body parts touch for the purpose of pleasure”*

This is the definition of sex I wished DePauw's hookup culture has; however, perhaps there is hope for DePauw's hookup culture to define sex more like this in the future.

#### How these two definitions compare

When it comes to considering how their definitions of a hookup and sex compare, Chad had a unique perspective; however, it wouldn't be the most applicable to DePauw as a whole. Chad believed that sex could take on many forms, motives, or purposes and that a hookup is one form of sex. But with what he considers to be sex a hookup would not be the same—sex is an act of pleasure but also vulnerability with another person physically and spiritually—he sees it as a way to connect, and hookups avoid connection. The best way to compare the definitions of sex and a hookup is by combining Brandon, Gavin, Lexi, Kognity, and Bennie's comparisons as they

either touch on different components of the difference or were saying the same thing. Though DePauw would consider a hookup or sex to be pretty much the same or would assume that if two people hooked up it means they had sex. Lexi and Kognity suggested that a hookup could just be making out while Brandon and Gavin were clear that claiming making out as a hookup was misleading. These two conceptualizations co-exist in DePauw's hookup culture and the lack of precision in the difference and similarity of a hookup and sex is by design because then the individual recapping their experience can adaptively manipulate what the person listening thinks. It is important to note a point by Bennie: a hookup presupposes a certain environment that sex doesn't, typically a party.

### **Why do you think hookup culture exists at DePauw?**

Three very simple concepts can be seen by combining all the interviews: commitment, normalization, and instant gratification. Bennie, Lexi, and Kognity all discussed the idea that at this life stage people are afraid of commitment and intimacy and that it's too difficult to achieve. We can then add on how normalized hookups have become; they're considered part of the college experience. Gavin, Kognity, Brandon, and Chad all implied that it's almost expected you hookup. Finally, Brandon and Chad discussed the desire for instant pleasure in our consumeristic society; a hookup is fast and convenient and thus desirable.

### **How do DePauw students describe our hookup culture?**

In my survey, I asked respondents how they would describe DePauw's hookup culture. The survey responses, except the ones that implied they didn't know, can be split into four very broad categories: positive, negative, descriptive, and comparing big and small campuses. Most responses fell within the negative and descriptive categories and the category with the least



number of responses was positive (only three). Though I am not disregarding that hookup culture at DePauw can be positive, considering it as a collective experience dictates that a positive description of hookup culture at DePauw would be incorrect.

### Descriptive

A summary of all the responses categorized as descriptive would yield a broad view definition that is mostly free of personal perspective: hookup culture at DePauw is a primarily white heteronormative experience that is highly prevalent across campus and often most obvious in the context of alcohol, drugs, Tinder (social media), and fraternity parties. The experience of hooking up can occur in one of two styles: a consistent hookup (in some cases referred to as a situationship) or a one-night stand. However, the need for specific views cannot be understated when it comes to a holistic understanding of DePauw's hookup culture. The following three descriptions are exactly how the individuals responded:

*“With straight hookups with people you don't know from like class or as a friend it mostly centers around meeting someone at a party and going to their room with them, I think it's probably more common that the person is in the Greek house the party is at but it's not always that way. It also tends to be that if it's someone you don't already know they'll just approach you in the party environment, often while you're dancing and then try to dance with you and if you dance with them they kind of take it as that you're into them. The straight hook up culture is very frat party centered from what I've seen”*

*“DePauw's hookup culture is very heteronormative in its nature. It also mostly encompasses domestic students. Many people go to parties as a means of hooking up with others. Also, online dating apps such as Tinder in many cases serve the purpose of hookups. Many students hookup at DePauw under the influence of alcohol &/or illegal substances which may lead to sexual harm”*

*“DePauw's hookup culture encourages casual sexual encounters and even sexual assault. I would say this is mostly but not exclusively through Greek affiliations. It encourages meaningless sex that has no emotional attachment. Hookup culture is for temporary fun or pleasure for oneself or to be a part of or fit into society's culture”*

All three highlight themes of assault culture: consumption of substances in high amounts, only considering one's own desires, and indirect communication that is assumed and played out physically. Despite the number of responses that discuss sexual assault is low, the severity of the themes presented in those responses merit discussion of assault culture when considering how to describe DePauw's hookup culture.

### Negative

Adding experiential perspective to the definition at the start of the previous subsection provides a narrower view of DePauw's hookup culture: hookup culture at DePauw is a primarily white heteronormative male-centered experience that is both toxic and highly prevalent across campus as active participation is necessary for social relevance, it is often most obviously played out in the context of alcohol, drugs, gossip, tinder (social media), and fraternity parties. Personal accounts are again necessary to fully grasp the negative realities of DePauw's hookup culture:

*"DePauw's hookup culture seems very hierarchal to me, as someone who's not deep within it. Hookups are very influenced by which frat or sorority a person is in-- it's clear that a lot of it is based on what their brothers/ sisters will think about the situation, whether they're in higher social standing ('top house') or not, etc. We're also such a small school. I see hookups at DePauw as a huge web of interactions, with almost everyone on campus being connected. (Maybe that's just the public health major in me LOL). It's inescapable... I'm used to my friends knowing people through one-night stands, but the idea of doing a class project with an ex makes my skin crawl. Hence why I don't sleep with my fellow Tigers."*

*"It's very present but in my experience, it depends on who is hooking up with whom. I feel like it is very random who is shamed from hooking up with people and who is not, based on what sports team, sorority house, grade, or friend group you're in. Men, I feel, don't get shamed as much, but there are still guys I know that are referred to as f boys or players because they get with a lot of women. Overall, I feel like it is toxic"*

*"I don't go out to parties at all, so I don't have many opportunities to meet potential romantic or sexual partners. So much of the social activity on campus is centered around drinking and Greek Orgs and I don't feel safe in those spaces. Being Queer and Black is an obstacle in and of itself because there are few safe"*

*spaces on campus from sexuality and drinking culture. Those things are very intertwined here”*

Social hierarchies, gendered shame, race, and sexuality dictate every individual’s social capital on campus and how these negatively impact lived experience are personal and inescapable regardless of if one chooses to actively participate or not. Simply going to DePauw means you’re in hookup culture, even if it’s not a safe space for you.

### Comparative: large schools vs small schools

Though I won’t create a new definition of DePauw’s hookup culture based on the responses categorized as comparative; considering the size of the institution is not only fascinating but also shows how a specific hookup culture definition (DePauw’s) can be utilized to conceptualize how to define hookup culture in a different sexual field (larger institutions). DePauw’s hookup culture gives off big school energy but with too few people to “not have strings attached” regarding a previous hookup. Whether it be a situationship, seeing/working with past one-time hookups, or gossip about who has hooked up with who spreading across campus, the realities of big school energy at a small institution can be brutal. The stakes of any given hookup are higher at DePauw than at a big college because almost everyone either knows each other or knows of each other (there aren’t complete strangers here). The result of having such an all-encompassing hookup culture at a small college is that “some negative consequences are amplified that wouldn’t otherwise be as much of an issue.”

### **How does hookup culture affect your mental health?**

Because survey respondents explicitly asked to know about people’s subjective experiences in hookup culture, I’ve included the following series of quotes. I understand that it might not all be worded perfectly or have good grammar, but I think it is more important to let

people's stories be told in their own words to get as close as possible to that subjective experience, after which I will discuss some more general points that were made across the total 61 responses.

*“Very negative effect. I was almost thankful the pandemic struck campus as I was forced to go home and had no possibility of engaging in these toxic behaviors.”*  
*“Its effect has been arguably bad. The pressure to be appealing to people is hard, and rejection is unpleasant. I am a nervous person and I have a tendency to stress out over social interactions which can make the whole thing kind of a painful experience. There have also been times when I have engaged in a hookup, not because I wanted to, but because I felt I should, because I am a man and I am supposed to want casual sex all the time, or because I didn't want to upset someone by rejecting them. I suppose that's more my mistake in not setting firmer boundaries, but it is hard to try to engage in hookup culture without hurting anybody's feelings (including my own), which is something I try to avoid.”*

*“Before I learned how to navigate it, it really messed with me and made me have a lot of self-doubt and self-image issues. I would wonder if that's all relationships would be for me in college and if I wasn't worth dating. I had broken up with my high school boyfriend at the beginning of my freshman year and hadn't been single for a while, so it took some adjusting. The first person I participated in hookup culture with really messed with my head and image because I wasn't equipped to be a part of hookup culture. Now that I've adjusted to the culture of it and how I like to participate and how I don't, it doesn't really affect me I don't think”*

*“Horrible. Little to no people look for meaningful connections as a starter. This makes me feel abnormal for seeking genuine and/or spiritual connection w/ individuals who interest me. Also, emphasis on body type and physical health definitely contributed to a decline in my mental health as I do not have the best relationship with my body. It's harder to make genuine connections even just friendly connections when initiating contact w/ someone may be taken as showing sexual interest.”*

*“it made me feel empty and ashamed; one situation I was involved in and never consented to the hookup so that left me with some trauma”*

*“I'm indifferent, but I worry for my sexually-active friends engaged in hookup culture. They all seem to find partners who are unfamiliar with basic sex education/etiquette.”*

There was only one respondent that explicitly said hookup culture had a positive impact on their mental health; two additional women said that it led to them finding their current

boyfriends, so it was, in a way, positive. The remaining 58 responses reside on a spectrum from no effect to causing depression. The hookup culture was described as stressful, anxiety-producing, and exerting a lot of pressure. It changed how people felt about sex, making it distant from feelings and connection. It made people afraid of being judged and used for their bodies, and in many cases bred self-doubt, competitiveness, and even shame. Furthermore, it had the potential to damage friendships and made romantic relationships feel unattainable or not worth it. Simply put, hookup culture seems to harm mental health at DePauw.

### **Is DePauw equipped to handle any struggles that may arise from hookups?**

Making matters worse, most agreed that DePauw as an institution is not equipped to deal with hookup culture or struggles that may arise from specific hookups. However, most also believed the women's center, mental health services, and physical health services are very helpful and good with the clause that they are underfunded and understaffed (which makes me question why the university is pouring all its money and time into a business school when there are far more pressing issues of health and safety). It was repeatedly mentioned that more education on safe and healthy sex and power dynamics is needed, that condoms and emergency contraception should be more easily available/restocked, and that existing resources need to be better advertised and utilized. A final point worth mentioning is that a few people noted that the Greek counsels and culture perpetuate the struggles associated with hookup culture rather than working to alleviate them.

### **Respondents elaborate on anything they wanted**

Some survey respondents specifically chose this space to comment about how hookup culture takes something they think should be special and makes it superficial. Students at DePauw want to know why hookup culture is promoted so much and question if DePauw as an institution does enough sexual education and has an institutional structure that promotes safe sex and behaviors. They're curious about what other people's honest subjective experience has been like and want a deeper understanding of how race, ethnicity, accent, body shape, gender, sexuality, and time at DePauw impact how an individual is affected by hookup culture.

However, the most common topic individuals chose to elaborate on when asked was some variation on the role of alcohol in hookup culture. They looked at DePauw's party scene and questioned if people go to a party with the expectation of it ending with a hookup. They see how normalized intoxicated sex has become and worry about sexual assault, sexual harassment, and unsafe sex practices that increase the chance of disease transmission. These fears around sexual harm are furthered by a consensus among the students that Title IX as a policy and regulatory position in the institution is woefully inadequate and often going to do more harm than good for a survivor of sexual harm.

## **Chapter 5: Recommendations for DePauw**

DePauw needs to increase its students' control over their own health and safety, while also creating an institutional structure that shows students that the university is there for them as people, not just what they pay to come here.

### **Recommendations for the Administration**

I believe that of the three groups I'm making recommendations for, DePauw's administration is most at fault for the negative impacts (sexual assault, rape, and general mental health issues) of hookup culture on campus. However, I have three clear, immediately actionable recommendations that would begin to move our institution in a better direction.

*(1) Create a separate office to address sexual assault, rape, and sexual harassment issues.*

Currently, Title IX is the administrative office that handles sexual assault, but Title IX legislation isn't primarily about sexual assault. A new office that is specifically created for dealing with and helping individuals through sexual assault and any legal actions that may be taken when an individual is assaulted is needed in a less isolated area/building than the women's center and a more inviting/trusted one than DePauw police.

*(2) Invest in training and educational resources specifically designed for DePauw*

*(centralizing student's voice) on consensual, desired, and sound-of-mind sex.*

High-quality, consistent, and required training and educational resources are needed to create a consensual, desired, and sound-of-mind foundational understanding of sex. This content must be designed by and for DePauw with maximum student involvement.

*(3) Increase the resource allocation (aka funding) for mental health services.*

The mental health services at DePauw are understaffed and thus not funded enough to effectively do their job.

A few ways funding could be made available for these recommendations, without increasing the institution's yearly output of money, are very simple and logical if the institution is primarily a place for growth, not a business. By investing less in things like the alumni building (the nicest and best-maintained building on campus), more resources would be available for improving the safety and well-being of people paying to go to DePauw now. Additionally, choices made by the board of trustees that would direct most of the institution's time and funding could be democratized by sending out a vote to all the current students. If this had been done for the design and money being put into the new school of business, the institution, for example, could have likely already hired quite a few more counselors and positively impacted the lives of students that already go here, rather than the ones the school is re-designing itself to try and convince to come here.

### **Recommendations for Counseling Services**

Based on my survey responses, the DePauw student community isn't being sufficiently aided through the various mental health struggles that hookup culture brings. However, many of the issues aren't based on the quality of services when an individual can make consistent appointments with a counselor that they feel is right for them. Increasing the number of students who feel as though counseling services are appropriate and helpful for them requires the administration to put more funding into DePauw's mental health services. With this funding, it seems as though the first step should be to increase the number of counselors and broaden the identities of the new hires. The second step towards improvement would be more resources and education about safe, consensual, desired, and sound-of-mind sex, that is presented in the way



students want. To determine the best presentation methods further discussion and student involvement will be necessary from across campus (and the administration and counseling services will have to use the recommendations).

### **Recommendations for the Greek Communities/Boards**

Though many of the rules that are supposed to govern fraternities and sororities are similar, the enforcement and overview of those rules are entirely different. The Greek community and various executive boards on campus must enforce rules and regulations in a more equitable manner (rather than only truly regulating sororities). Within the Greek community itself, expectations must be set and accountability ensured by all who participate. By choosing to join a Greek house, you are stating that you all have shared values and thus if a house chooses to keep a member who violates others, that house is stating that they are okay with those kinds of violations.

Additionally, there are no same-scale alternatives to fraternity parties, thus if people want to be part of DePauw's social scene, they must willing to go to locations that may reject them, make them uncomfortable, and where predominantly white men have all the power (even more so than usual). Alternatives that are controlled by more diverse identities must be made available to maintain the desired college experience but in a context that is geared towards harm reduction.

### **Closing Thoughts: power, vulnerability, bias, and variability**

I truly love DePauw, the friends I've made here and the professors I've had are awe-inspiring mentors. However, DePauw's hookup culture is something I hate. The way power and privilege are abused to take advantage of vulnerability is terrifying. Hookup culture is complicated and any given individual's experience and perspective will be different, but whether your experience will be mostly positive or mostly negative is biased by your identity.

I set out to do a lot with this thesis, and I think I have, but if you're only going to remember one theme from all of it, it should be the relationship between rape culture and DePauw's current hookup culture. The similarities aren't permanent because culture can change. The potential for a casually kind, consensual, desired, and sound-of-mind hookup is so strong, but it will take work and the creation of a sexual culture that is different from the one we have now. I don't know how to get to that new culture and my time at DePauw is almost over, so I can't be the one to fight for it. Even though the students will ultimately decide what this new culture is, the institution itself will ultimately decide whether or not we get there. All my recommendations and comments are from and for the institution of DePauw, which requires more than the sum of all the students. The institutional structure dictates the power distribution on campus and thus who's privileged and who isn't, which ultimately decides who has a pleasurable hookup culture experience and who doesn't.

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