

US Black college women's sexual health in hookup culture: intersections of race and gender

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Abstract:

Approximately 60–80% of college students in the USA report a hookup experience in the form of a casual sexual encounter between individuals without the expectation of a dating or romantic relationship. Given the potential health risk posed by these sexual encounters, the need exists to critically examine this cultural phenomenon on college campuses. Yet, the existing hookup literature is overwhelming White and often exclusive of historically marginalised populations such as Black women. Accordingly, this paper examines the role of the intersecting identities of race and gender and other social factors that influence the sexual health and wellbeing of Black women on US college campuses. Specifically, we explore issues related to the gender ratio disparities present on college campuses, relationship power imbalances, inconsistent condom use and low sexual-risk perception. Moving forward, hookup research needs to utilise an intersectional approach; we offer specific suggestions for the important inclusion of Black women in the broader hookup discourse and future research.

Keywords: Hookups | sexual health | Black women | college students | USA

Article:

Hookups – casual sexual encounters without the expectation of a dating or romantic relationship (Garcia et al. [43]) – have become increasingly prevalent on college campuses in the USA. With 60–80% of students reporting at least one hookup during their college career, the hookup is often touted as a hallmark of the college experience and a potential impediment to traditional dating and courtship (Calzo [21]; Fielder and Carey [36]; Paul, McManus, and Hayes [71]). These sexual encounters, which can include coital and non-coital behaviours, are a unique point of study as they provide developmentally appropriate avenues for sexual experimentation, agency

and pleasure (Arnett [12]; Dworkin [33]; Paul and White [70]). Yet, the normalisation of hookup culture on campuses may facilitate participation in high-risk behaviours that are deleterious to the sexual, emotional and physical health and safety of students (Fielder et al. [38]; Flack et al. [39]; Garcia et al. [43]; Olmstead et al. [66]).

Hookup research has been instrumental in shedding light on the possible sexual risks and benefits associated with these events. However, scholars have critiqued the literature's overwhelming focus on White students and its underrepresentation of other social identities, such as race, that influence students' sexual experiences (Alleyne and Gaston [6]; Paul, McManus, and Hayes [71]; Uecker and Regnerus [83]). These critiques are valid in their call for diversity and broader representation, and some researchers have included race, in addition to gender, in their analyses (Allison and Risman [8]; McClintock [62]; Owen et al. [68]). While efforts have been made to include race, one shortcoming is the treatment of gender and race as independent categories of analyses as this ignores how individuals simultaneously embody different aspects of racial and gender identities. It is the intersection of these identities that shape individuals' sexual experiences (Bowleg [18]). Thus, the exclusion of these identities and their intersections as points of analysis may prove counterproductive to health promotion efforts if populations disproportionately affected by negative sexual health outcomes are overlooked. One population whose sexual health and wellbeing is greatly influenced by the intersection of race and gender, yet frequently excluded from hookup literature, is Black women.

The underrepresentation of Black women in hookup research is problematic in light of data documenting the burden of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV on this population. Although young women aged 15–24 bear the brunt of Chlamydia and gonorrhoea infections among the sexes, Black women outpace their White counterparts in infection rates (CDC [22]). While Black adults age 15–24 are disproportionately impacted by STIs, Black women face higher rates of Chlamydia and gonorrhoea compared to Black men (CDC [22]). Besides gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men, Black women surpass their gender and racial counterparts in HIV acquisition (CDC [23], [24]). Alarming, HIV/AIDS is the fifth leading cause of death among Black women aged 25 to 34 in the USA and it is estimated that 1 in 32 Black women will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetime (CDC [24]; Heron [50]), many of whom are likely to have been infected while in college (Ferguson et al. [35]).

Given that Black college women are simultaneously affected by the sexual health disparities faced by women and Black adults, these intersecting identities need to be examined for how they together produce and maintain sexual health disparities. Thus, intersectional research examining the multiplicative effect of race and gender on hookups is necessary to support a complete understanding of the associated health outcomes among college students (Hamilton and Armstrong [49]).

In this paper, we briefly discuss intersectionality and its utility for hookup research. We then review current hookup literature focused on gender and racial differences and advocate for an intersectional approach that includes Black women and considers their experiences with: (1) gender ratio disparities, (2) relationship power imbalances and (3) inconsistent condom use and low sexual-risk perception on college campuses. Finally, we discuss implications for the sexual health of Black college women and future research directions.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that directs attention to the multiplicative effects of systematic, institutional oppressions that operate at both micro and macro levels to produce and maintain social inequalities involving race, class, gender, sexuality and other dimensions (Bowleg [18]; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall [25]; Crenshaw [29]). Rooted in the work of Black Feminist and Womanist scholars, the core tenants of the framework posit that social identities are multidimensional, interdependent, and intersecting; that people of marginalised or disadvantaged groups should be a focal point of interest; and that multiple social identities converge at the micro level and intersect with structural and institutional factors at the macro level to produce and reproduce social disparities (Bowleg [18]).

As such, the intersections of race and gender could prove deleterious to Black women's sexual health. Intersectionality theorists assert that Black women are simultaneously included in and excluded from the racial and gender groups to which they belong (Collins [26]; Townsend [82]). On account of being female, Black and college students, Black college women face multiple behavioural and social risk factors for HIV and STI acquisition (Alleyne [5]; Alleyne and Wodarski [7]). Similar to general college populations, Black college women's risk is shaped by several behavioural and development factors such as multiple/concurrent partnerships, inconsistent condom use, feelings of invincibility, and low risk perception (Dworkin [33]; Paul and White [70]; Stinson [78]). At the same time, social factors common to women and Blacks, for example: mass incarceration (Davis and Tucker-Brown [31]), poverty (Kaiser Family Foundation [55], [56]), gender-ratio imbalances (Dauria et al. [30]; Newsome, Airhihenbuwa, and Snipes [64]) and power disparities (Collins [26]), also shape their risk.

An intersectionality perspective centres, not essentialises, Black women's experiences with their sexuality, understanding that Black women share a collective experience but are not monolithic. It is imperative to note that race and gender are not the only intersecting social identities that influence Black women's sexual health. Sexual orientation (Timm et al. [81]), class (Higgins and Browne [51]), immigrations status (Hoffman et al. [52]) and transgender identity (Stevens, Bernadini, and Jemmott [77]) are all social identities that exacerbate, or ameliorate, Black women's HIV and STI risk. Certainly, Black women on US college campuses embody several social identities beyond race and gender, which add multiple layers of complexity when investigating their sexual practices and behaviours, including hookups. These other social identities deserve a closer examination; however, a thorough investigation is beyond the scope of this paper.

Gender, race and hookups

Taking into account the high percentage of US college students reporting a hookup experience and the possible sexual risks posed by these encounters, more hookup research inclusive of Black women is needed. The little that is known about Black women and hookup culture is often gleaned from the small body of disjointed studies that have included Black participants. Several studies have documented gender differences in hookup experiences among college students;

however, very few have explored racial differences. While further research is warranted, these studies provide a useful starting point for understanding Black women's hookup experiences.

Gender

Although men and women report similar rates of hooking up (Owen et al. [68]), researchers are particularly interested in how women fare in hookup culture. Studies indicate that women are more likely impacted by gender ratio disparities and sexual double standards, negative emotions, sexual victimisation and adverse sexual health outcomes (Bogle [16]; Downing-Matibag and Geisinger [32]; Eshbaugh and Gute [34]; Flack et al. [39]; Grello, Welsh, and Harper [46]; Uecker and Regnerus [83]). Women account for approximately 56% of the US undergraduate population (Snyder and Dillow [76]); however, research has shown they wield relatively little sexual power on college campuses (Bogle [16]; Rhoads [72]). The gender ratio disparity on campuses is purported to influence sexual relationships as the overabundance of women affords men more power in negotiating partner selection and relationship formation, thus creating more sexually permissive climates that are not mutually beneficial for women (Bogle [16]; Uecker and Regnerus [83]).

Adkins and colleagues ([3]) found that students who attend schools with higher ratios of women to men reported more sexual partners, more hookups, and were more accepting of casual sex relationships. However, under the guise of permissibility, sexual double standards (e.g., the loss of respect for women who hookup) still exist, and women are often denigrated for their casual sexual activities (Allison and Risman [8]; Crawford and Popp [28]; Gilmartin [44]; Smith, Mysak, and Michael [74]). Women seeking sex outside relational confines face being labelled a 'slut' or 'whore', while men are given more leeway and are often encouraged to pursue sex and not love (Crawford and Popp [28]; Stinson [78]).

Considering the pervasiveness of these sexual double standards, research suggests that women are more likely than men to report negative emotions such as regret, guilt and shame after hooking up (Eshbaugh and Gute [34]; Glenn and Marquardt [45]; Grello, Welsh, and Harper [46]). One study found that nearly 48% of women surveyed reported negative emotional reactions (i.e., feeling empty, confused) following hookups as opposed to 26% of men who reported similar reactions (Owen et al. [68]). Although sexual double standards play a role in women's negative emotionality, there are other mechanisms that may increase women's risk. For example, unfulfilled relationship desires (Owen and Fincham [67]), sexual dissatisfaction (Backstrom, Armstrong, and Puentes [13]) and acquiescence to unwanted hookups (Flack et al. [39]) are all factors found to increase women's vulnerability to negative emotionality.

The sexual victimisation of women is also a concern for researchers (Adams-Curtis and Forbes [2]; Flack et al. [39]). Despite the high prevalence of hookups among students, not all encounters are wanted or consensual. A survey of 178 students revealed that 23% of women and 7% of men reported at least one incident of unwanted sexual intercourse; 78% of these incidents occurred during hookups (Flack et al. [39]). Similarly, Sutton and Simons ([79]) found that hookup participation was associated with an increase in sexual assault perpetration among men and sexual victimisation among women. Unwanted and nonconsensual sexual encounters are often attributed to alcohol use and misperception of partner sexual intent (Abbey [1]; LaBrie et al.

[58]; Sutton and Simons [79]). Alcohol use and hookups co-occur frequently and alcohol often impairs the ability to resist or consent to sexual activity (LaBrie et al. [58]). Further, men and women often differ in their behavioural expectations of hookup encounters, which could lead to the overestimation of a partner's comfort with sexual activities during a hookup (Fielder et al. [38]; Lambert, Kahn, and Apple [59]).

Women who participate in hookups may also be at increased risk for STIs and HIV (Downing-Matibag and Geisinger [32]), as penetrative hookups involving unprotected vaginal sex present a heightened risk to women compared to men. Biologically, women are more susceptible to STIs and HIV due to the anatomy and physiology of the vagina (McCree and Rompalo [63]). This risk is further exacerbated by inconsistent condom use. According to the American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment II ([10]), 62% of sexually active female students reported using condoms during their last vaginal sex episode (compared to 69% of male students). Furthermore, condom use frequency among college women decreases over time in both casual and romantic heterosexual partnerships (Walsh et al. [85]). This is partially explained by increases in hormonal contraceptive use (Jones, Mosher, and Daniels [54]), which protects against pregnancy but not STIs.

While the litany of possible negative outcomes of hooking up is evident, sexual pleasure, fun and desire for new experiences play a role in women's hookup behaviours. Some authors report that women enjoy casual sexual encounters as much as men (Snapp, Ryu, and Kerr [75]; Vrangalova [84]). Women often attribute more positive emotions or motivations to their hookup experiences than negative ones (Kenney et al. [57]; Lewis et al. [60]; Owen and Fincham [67]; Owen, Quirk, and Fincham [69]). In particular, Garcia and Reiber ([42]) found that 88% of women reported physical pleasure as motivation for hooking up, as well as emotional reasons (53%) and as a way to initiate a romantic relationship (50%). Similarly, Fielder and Carey ([37]) found that sexual desire was the most common motive for hooking up among their sample of 118 college women and that most enjoyed their most recent hookup and expressed little regret. Considering the conflicting research regarding women's emotional states following hookups, a more trenchant analysis of factors influencing their emotionality is needed.

It is clear that hookups are profoundly gendered experiences that can prove disadvantageous and/or beneficial for women. The gendered nature of hookups and the collective experiences of women within these sexual partnerships give context to the sexual risks and benefits Black women face on college campuses. However, gender differences provide an incomplete picture, as Black women are also members of a racial minority group, an identity that must be considered.

Race

In contrast to the attention given to gender differences in hooking up, racial differences are largely understudied, particularly among Black college students. The inclusion of race is warranted considering that research suggests that Black students define hookups differently than their counterparts (Glenn and Marquardt [45]; Paul, McManus, and Hayes [71]), are less likely to hookup (Berntson, Hoffman, and Luff [15]; Owen et al. [68]) and are more likely to engage in sexual homophily (Allison and Risman [9]; McClintock [62]).

Racial differences in hookup participation may be partially attributed to discrepancies in how students define 'hookup'. In their seminal article, Paul and colleagues ([71]) define 'hookups' as 'sexual encounter[s] which may or may not include sexual intercourse, usually occurring on only one occasion between two people who are strangers or brief acquaintances' (p. 76). In their findings, Black students reported less anonymity in their casual sex partnerships and perceived sexual encounters with acquaintances as more common than with strangers (Paul, McManus, and Hayes [71]). Furthermore, Black students viewed hooking up as a step in relationship formation rather than a discrete sexual experience. Glenn and Marquardt ([45]) described differences in how Black and White students define hookups; while hookups had a clear sexual connotation among White students, Black students noted hookups implied meeting up with someone or going out on a date.

Even in studies using similar hookup definitions, investigations of racial differences in hookup participation present conflicting results. Both Bogle ([16]) and Owen et al. ([68]) found that Black students are less likely to hookup than their White counterparts, while Brimeyer and Smith's ([19]) findings suggest that race is not a significant predictor in hooking up among college students. Berntson and colleagues ([15]) findings showed that non-White students were 2.87 times more likely to participate in a hookup than White students. Although there is a lack of consensus regarding hookup participation among Black college students, researchers agree that racial homophily on college campuses shapes the hookup experiences reported among Black students.

Bogle ([16]) argued that the racial composition of a campus is an important factor in hooking up, as students are more likely to hookup if they are around peers of similar racial backgrounds. McClintock ([62]) corroborates this argument in her study of Stanford University undergraduates where despite Black students' close physical proximity to non-Black students on the predominately White campus, Black students (especially Black women) were less likely to participate in interracial hookups. Similarly, Allison and Risman ([9]) found that racial homophily was ingrained in the friendships and organisational affiliations of students of colour. Consequently, these same-race social interactions affected hookup participation among students of colour by reducing their potential partners.

While research on racial differences in hookup experiences among college students adds another level of understanding sexual health among Black women on college campuses, race alone does not capture the gendered nuances experienced by Black women. Race is but one social identity that Black women embody highlighting the need for an intersectional approach to research and analyses that considers race and gender as interdependent and mutually constitutive factors.

Factors impacting Black college women's sexual health

The dearth of literature exploring Black women's hookup experiences is surprising considering their large numbers on college campuses and multiple sexual-risk factors. Black women's underrepresentation is likely due in part to the overrepresentation of White students in study samples and the exclusion of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as sites of investigation (Alleyne and Gaston [6]; Uecker and Regnerus [83]). This, along with the focus on

gender differences, has limited the exploration of the racial implications of hookup culture. A recent review of hookup literature revealed that Black women accounted for 5–21% ($n = 221$) of the sample populations under study (Hall and Tanner [48]). Very few studies have included both race and gender as points of analysis in hookup investigations and even fewer have treated race and gender as mutually constitutive rather than independent categories of analyses (Allison and Risman [9]; Brimeyer and Smith [19]; McClintock [62]).

Black women are faced with the task of reconciling their racial and gender identities within the social contexts of college campuses. In doing so, they negotiate a set of prescribed beliefs and norms regarding race, gender and sexuality that may be incongruent with the increasingly sexual permissive climates, behaviours and attitudes present on college campuses (Bazargan et al. [14]). A small but growing body of research has explored the behavioural and social factors influencing Black women's sexual risks within college contexts (Alleyne and Wodarski [7]; Foreman [41]; Hall, Lee, and Witherspoon [47]; Sutton et al. [80]). However, more research is needed considering the significant sexual health disparities. Specifically, research regarding gender ratio disparities, relationship power imbalances and inconsistent condom use and low sexual-risk perception is needed as they are all gendered and racial factors that shape Black women's sexual behaviour on college campuses (Alleyne and Gaston [6]; Foreman [41]; Hall, Lee, and Witherspoon [47]).

Gender ratio disparities on college campuses

Consistent with overall enrollment trends, Black women outnumber Black male students on college campuses. Of the estimated 2.8 million Black students enrolled in undergraduate institutions in 2013, 1.8 million (64%) were women (Snyder and Dillow [76]). The gender ratio disparity is also prevalent on the campuses of HBCUs where Black women account for 62–76% of the student body. Gender-ratio disparities on college campuses affect the sexual networks of students, for example they often increase the presence of causal relationships, such as hookups, and lower the expectations for committed, monogamous relationships (Alleyne and Gaston [6]; Ferguson et al. [35]; Hall, Lee, and Witherspoon [47]; Newsome, Airhihenbuwa, and Snipes [64]).

Gender ratio disparities and the resulting sexual networks may be especially deleterious to the sexual health of Black women. A 2010 study of 44,165 undergraduates attending 110 US colleges and universities revealed that Black women report similar numbers of sex partners as their White counterparts and are more likely to use condoms and get tested for HIV (Buhi, Marhefka, and Hoban [20]). However, Black women were more likely to report a STI diagnosis within the last school year. Considering Black women's proclivity for sexual homophily (Allison and Risman [9]; McClintock [62]), the underrepresentation of Black men on college campuses, and higher STI rates among young Black adults, Black women's sexual risk may be tied not only to their number of sexual partners but who they choose to partner with. The context for Black college women may increase their likelihood to engage with a partner who participates in high-risk sexual behaviours such as multiple sexual partnerships, substance use or sex with other men (Alleyne and Wodarski [7]; CDC [24]; Ferguson et al. [35]).

Relationship power imbalances

Gender ratio disparities often produce complex relationship patterns that yield more power to male students (Alleyne and Gaston [6]; Ferguson et al. [35]). The disproportionate number of Black women to men is advantageous to Black men, as they have more options and power when selecting sexual partners (Alleyne and Gaston [6]; Bogle [16]). In their study of HBCU students, Hall, Lee and Witherspoon ([47]) found that Black women expressed interest in committed relationships but often engaged in casual, non-monogamous relationships or hookups because men on campus were less interested in commitment. Because of Black men's limited numbers and value on campuses, the sexual partnering and behaviour of Black women desiring heterosexual partnerships may conform to the preferences of their male counterparts (Alleyne and Gaston [6]; Ferguson et al. [35]; Hall, Lee, and Witherspoon [47]).

A study conducted by Ferguson and colleagues ([35]) among Black HBCU students revealed that women desiring to participate in the campus dating scene were often required to navigate 'man sharing' – the practice of engaging in a sexual relationship with a man who is concurrently involved with other woman/women. Faced with a limited number of suitable male partners and competition from other female students, 'man sharing' presents an option for women seeking heterosexual romantic and sexual partnerships. Notably, 'man sharing' is not always voluntary, as some women unknowingly date men who are involved with other women (Airhihenbuwa et al. [4]; Newsome, Airhihenbuwa, and Snipes [64]). Conversely, women choosing not to participate in 'man sharing' must consider other dating alternatives (e.g., dating outside the university community) or abstain from dating (Ferguson et al. [35]).

The campus culture and practice of 'man sharing' presents a sexual health risk as men's relative power may influence safer sex practices, such as condom use, among Black women. For instance, women may forego condom use to secure emotional attachment, increase relational intimacy or avoid rejection from their partners (Foreman [40], [41]). Further, the existing power imbalances often lessen women's ability to negotiate condom use and discuss safer sex openly due to fear of losing a partner to another woman and social norms regarding appropriate sexual behaviour (Bontempi, Eng, and Quinn [17]).

Inconsistent condom use and low sexual risk perception

Data illustrate Black college women's elevated risk for STI and HIV acquisition, yet some women perceive themselves at low- or no- risk (Annang, Johnson, and Pepper-Washington [11]; Bazargan et al. [14]). These perceptions are typical as college represents a developmental period marked by increased independence from parental guidance and sexual exploration and experimentation involving high-risk behaviours such as inconsistent condom use and concurrent sexual partnerships (Dworkin [33]; Manning, Giordano, and Longmore [61]). Although Black students are more likely to use condoms than their White counterparts (Buhi, Marhefka, and Hoban [20]), a recent study of 279 first-year college women found that condom use declined for both Black and White students over the course of their first year of matriculation (Walsh et al. [85]). The decline in condom use among Black women is particularly concerning given some women's low STI/HIV risk perception despite the high-risk behaviours of their sexual partners and previous STI diagnoses (Alleyne and Wodarski [7]; Sutton et al. [80]).

One study revealed that 73% of Black participants reported moderate- to high-risk sexual behaviours, such as multiple partners, young age at first intercourse, anonymous sex and anal sex; however, none perceived themselves at high risk for STI acquisition (Roberts and Kennedy [73]). Another survey of 432 Black college women found that 6% suspected that they had sex with a man who has sex with men, 26% reported having sex with someone who was previously incarcerated and 40% reported having previous STI diagnosis, yet, 94.5% of respondents felt they had little to no risk of HIV infection (Norwood [65]). Black women's inconsistent condom use, engagement in potentially higher-risk sexual behaviours, and limited sexual networks further demonstrate the need for their inclusion in hookup research.

Moving forward

The context of college campuses requires an expanded approach to hookup research. Currently, hookup research remains largely White and not reflective of the sexual experiences of other populations (e.g., Black women). Researchers note the lack of racial/ethnic diversity in samples (Alleyne and Gaston [6]; Allison and Risman [9]; Kenney et al. [57]; Paul, McManus, and Hayes [71]), yet very few studies focus on Black women, or Black students in general. This absence persists in light of scholars' suggestions of possible differences in hookup experiences among White and Black students (Owen et al. [68]; Paul, McManus, and Hayes [71]). The underrepresentation of Black women in current literature makes comparisons in hookup experiences difficult. Instead, the data resulting from predominantly White samples creates generalisations and assumptions regarding prototypical hookup behaviours and experiences among college students, which may inadvertently mask important racial/ethnic differences in hookup attitudes and behaviours. The masking of Black women's experiences could lead to overlooking possible risk and protective factors to promote their sexual and reproductive health.

Employing an intersectional approach, researchers should seek to increase the number of Black participants and investigate their conceptualisations of 'hooking up'. Very little is known about hookup behaviours, attitudes and experiences among Black women and their relationship to sexual risk, and a large-scale study involving a representative sample of Black college students is warranted. Using a mixed-method approach, a study of this type could examine the validity of claims that Black and White students differ in their hookup attitudes and experiences. Importantly, samples must include students matriculating at both predominately White institutions (PWIs) and HBCUs to explore Black women's differential experiences on campuses where they are a minority and majority presence. The racial and sexual composition of college campuses influences the sexual experiences of the students (Adkins et al. [3]; Allison and Risman [9]; McClintock [62]; Uecker and Regnerus [83]), thus, HBCUs may differ in their sexual climates and networks and have unique implications for Black women residing on those campuses. Understanding experiences of Black women in both settings could offer important insights into differences and similarities exhibited between other racial/ethnic groups.

Future research should also consider the current ambiguity of the term 'hookup' and the implications this may have for Black students. Black students may view hookups as a step toward romantic relationships rather than discrete sexual experiences (Paul, McManus, and Hayes [71]). If this is the case, Black female students may not view their specific behaviours and partnerships as hookups (with the associated risk), but as a stage in relationship development or

maintenance. Thus, 'hookup' may not be an appropriate term for the casual sexual practices among this population and a more comprehensive definition may be needed. Understanding this population's conceptualisations and definitions of 'hooking up' can move researchers toward the development of more appropriate language to be used when investigating hookup culture among this and other populations.

Intra-campus (among minority serving organisations) and inter-campus (across PWIs and HBCUs) partnerships should be established to facilitate this research. On many campuses, Black women may be a hidden or hard-to-reach population that is unlikely to be reached through means of recruitment typically used by hookup researchers (i.e., convenience sampling). Considering barriers to recruitment such as distrust of research intentions and privacy concerns (Corbie-Smith, Thomas, and St. George [27]; Hussain-Gambles, Atkin, and Leese [53]), researchers should forge meaningful relationships with people and organisations that have ties to the community of Black college women. Intra-campus partnerships with organisations such as Black student unions, historically Black sororities and university offices of diversity and inclusion could prove invaluable to researchers seeking to recruit from this understudied population. Further, inter-campus partnerships spanning both PWIs and HBCUs could prove beneficial for researchers. In the process of inter-campus collaboration and data sharing, researchers at each institution could offer perspectives relevant to the sexual behaviour of students on their campuses and the social contexts in which the behaviours take place. Both partnerships could lead to the increase of Black women in hookup studies through trust building and the development of culturally competent studies that take into account the unique experiences of this population.

Conclusion

In the context of the substantial sexual health disparities facing young Black women, their inclusion in broader hookup discourse is imperative. A more nuanced and focused investigation of their needs is necessary as the intersecting biological and social aspects of being female, Black and a college student clearly affect sexual health. Centring Black women's unique experiences in hookup research could provide insight into protective and risk factors and have implications for culturally competent programming and interventions. While we specifically focused on the intersection of race and gender, we understand that Black women are certainly not the only group embodying traditionally marginalised identities on college campuses. There are multiple, intersecting social identities that shape one's sexual experiences. Thus, acknowledging the similarities and differences between young people from diverse ethnic, racial, gender, class and sexual orientation groups is also essential for informing interventions to reduce the burden of sexual health disparities facing young people, especially those who are disproportionately affected by negative sexual health outcomes.

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