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Boys Just Want to Have Fun? Masculinity, Sexual Behaviors, and Romantic Intentions of Gay and Straight Males in College

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Scholars studying college student sexual culture in the United States largely frame men as being detached from emotions, unconcerned with relationships, and in pursuit of sexual conquests. By expanding the examination of college sexual culture, an environment often associated with meaningless sexual encounters, this article tests those stereotypes in gay and straight men. We evaluate sexual behaviors, social opportunity structures, and romantic attitudes of gay and straight males in college. We find evidence that both supports and contradicts existing literature on masculine stereotypes for both groups of men. We also find that gay and straight men report different sexual scripts and romantic desires.

KEYWORDS *College students, gay male, heterosexual male, higher education, masculinity, romantic relationships, sexual behavior, sexual scripts*

Much of the literature on college student sexual culture has drawn primarily from the perspectives of young, straight women. The experiences of gay and straight men in framing romantic and sexual relationships while in college remains an area ready for academic expansion. Scholars know much less about the ways in which men characterize their sexual experiences and social gratification in relation to college sexual culture, and have even less knowledge about the ways in which the experiences of gay men may

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influence their sexual and romantic opportunities. Although prior research has documented gay adolescents exhibiting a variety of forms of sexual and relationship patterns, most research on college student sexual culture leaves the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) population unanalyzed. This article aims to expand the literature on college student sexual culture for gay and straight men and to answer this question: Do gay and straight males exhibit similar scripts of sexual behaviors and romantic intentions within the culture of college student sexuality?

Using the Online College Social Life Study (OCSLS) as a tool to examine college student sexual culture, we explore sexual behaviors and romantic intentions of gay and straight males in colleges across the United States in the years 2005 to 2010. In the analyses that follow, we investigate masculine stereotypes associated with sexual activity by comparing attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics of gay and straight males who have participated in nonrelationship sex while in college. Bivariate analyses comparing the two groups show male sexual and relationship behavior can be grouped into three categories: (1) variation in sexual behaviors between gay and straight men; (2) differences in opportunity structures; and (3) the disconnect between romantic attitudes and sexual activity. We discuss these trends and illustrate some of the noteworthy bivariate relationships with figures. We focus on statistically significant results determined by group means comparison tests between the two populations; however, in separate models, these results hold up even after controlling for the differing characteristics of both populations.¹

FRAMING COLLEGE SEXUAL EXPERIENCES FOR GAY AND STRAIGHT MEN

Although the romantic and sexual experiences of gay men have been left out of many studies examining college sexuality, what we know about the behaviors of young, gay men is largely structured around risk paradigms: scholarship that views sexuality through the lens of health promotion and risk prevention. This research focuses on issues such as suicide (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009; Li Kitts, 2005; Saewyc, 2007; Silenzio, Pena, Duberstein, Cerel, & Knox, 2007), sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS (Garafalo, Herrick, Mustanski, & Donenberg, 2007; Harper, 2007; Rhodes, McCoy, Hergenrather, Omli, & Durant, 2007; Saewyc et al., 2006), substance abuse (Easton, Jackson, Mowery, Comeau, & Sell, 2008; Kipke et al., 2007; Marshal, Friedman, Stall, & Thompson, 2009; Rhodes et al., 2007), and victimization (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Saewyc et al., 2006; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005). Within this literature, there is a lack of academic focus around the processes leading up to romantic relationships for sexual-minority youth (Diamond, 2003; Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999; Eyre, Arnold, Peterson, & Strong, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2003;

Smith, Guthrie, & Oakley, 2005). Due to stigma associated with alternative youth sexualities and a generalized notion that sexuality is a matter that only adults understand (Álvarez, 2006; Savin-Williams, 1996), information scholars have about the ways that young gay males construct their dating and sexual lives comes from a limited amount of research (Eyre et al., 2007); studies that focus on sexual and romantic scripts for younger gays largely utilize adults reflecting on their youth (Smith et al., 2005).

From research that has been done on young gay males and sexual/romantic interactions, we know a few findings. From the research that has been done on young gay males and sexual/romantic interactions, scholars have found sexual and romantic relationships are limited but present. Diamond and colleagues (1999) note that sexual-minority youth exhibit a variety of relationship patterns including sexual relationships, dating relationships, romantic relationships, and passionate friendships. However, stigma attached to early gay relationships and difficulty finding a same-sex partner keep young gay males from experiencing as many romantic and dating relationships as their straight peers (Bogle, 2008; Diamond, 2003; Diamond et al. 1999; Remafedi, 1990; Savin-Williams, 1996). In addition, scholars have documented tensions between competing norms of the gay and straight dating worlds that contribute to the range of experiences for gay youth. Eyre and colleagues (2007) observed that young gay males in San Francisco tried to include a strict policy of monogamy into their relationships, creating conflict between ideas of “prestige sex” with multiple partners and heteronormative conceptualizations of coupling. Mutchler (2000) supports Eyre’s claims of competing romantic and sexual tensions in gay youth. Most of Mutchler’s interviewees demonstrated scripts ranging from a strong desire for monogamous, romantic commitments to participating in a range of noncommittal sexual behaviors. In the end, however, conflicting ideas between the cultural assumption of an active male sex drive and pursuits of monogamous relationships left “many young gay men feel[ing] frustrated by their attempts to find romantic love” (Mutchler, 2000, p. 36). In a recent study using the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health to compare romantic attitudes between gay and straight young adults, the authors found that although majorities of each group believe that monogamy, love, and lifelong commitment are very important ingredients to a successful committed relationship, gays still value monogamy and lifelong commitment less universally than straights do (Meier, Hull, & Ortyl, 2009).

Few of these studies explicitly focus on young, gay men in college. One exception is a brief mention of interviews with gay students in Bogle’s 2008 study of college hookups. Bogle paints a picture of college student sexual culture that does not include gays on campus, thereby limiting their romantic and sexual possibilities. Rhodes and colleagues (2007) also compare sexual behaviors between gay and straight male college students. In their study, Rhodes and colleagues (2007) document that gay men report more infrequent condom use and more nonrelationship sexual partners over a

30-day period than their straight peers. Here we see that studies of gay men in college frame them as either facing a deficit of sexual opportunities or engaging in behaviors warranting the attention of scholars out of the risk paradigm perspective. In reference to the latter, Mutchler states that “the assumption of the male sex drive, however culturally constructed, is so ingrained in Western culture that it has become a cliché frequently used to . . . perpetuate the myth of gay male promiscuity” (2000, p. 35); these depictions emphasize the quest for anonymous sex with a complete lack of romantic intentions (Rhodes et al., 2007). Gay men, in this view, are in pursuit of hypermasculine prestige sex and seek to bolster their reputation by having frequent sex with attractive partners (Eyre et al., 2007). Rhodes and colleagues (2007), however, explain gay men’s sexual behaviors through theories of masculinity. They posit that gay men, in not meeting masculine gender expectations, reaffirm their masculinity by engaging in frequent sex with multiple partners, expressing lesser romantic desires, and taking part in more risky sexual behaviors.

Straight men, on the other hand, are expected to occupy a place of sexual privilege, although that position is not as monolithic as sometimes thought (Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006). In college student sexual culture, straight men who are sexually active rarely bear the label “slut” and are often admired for their sexual prowess (Armstrong, England, & Fogarty, 2009; Attwood, 2007; Bogle, 2008; Mutchler, 2000). Straight men who engage in nonrelationship sex on college campuses are stereotyped as wanting to participate in uncommitted sexual encounters before settling down in relationships. They are expected to have more sex than relationships, experience more sexual gratification than their partners, and pursue relationships on their terms (Bogle, 2008). Within this framework, scholars have examined some of the sexual and romantic experiences of straight men within college student sexual culture. Much of this scholarship focuses on nonrelationship sex.

Though the definition has slightly different meanings from author to author, scholars contend that nonrelationship sex has replaced the date as the dominant script of sexual and romantic socialization for straight men in U.S. colleges (Armstrong et al., 2009; Bogle, 2007, 2008; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001); this phenomenon is often referred to in the United States, and in related academic literature, as a “hookup.” Literature on college student sexual culture frames straight men as avoiding emotional relationships, pursuing sexual pleasure selfishly, and participating in a culture of sexual triumphs. In addition, straight men in college are portrayed as privy to more sexual and social gratification than their partners before, during, and after sexual experiences (Attwood, 2007; Armstrong et al., 2009; Bogle, 2007, 2008; England & Thomas, 2007).

Although scholars of college student sexual culture agree that nonrelationship sex is widespread across college campuses in the United States,

they lack an agreed-upon definition for this phenomenon. Sexual script theory, however, posits that undergraduates, through interactions with other students around college campuses, would possess a shared set of guidelines regarding “where, when, why, and how sexually intimate interaction can occur” (Bogle, 2008, p. 8). In this theory, most undergraduates involved in college student sexual culture would recognize sets of norms and conventional methods allowing them access to sexual encounters; once in a sexual situation, partners would additionally have access to norms and guidelines about acceptable and unacceptable methods of interaction. These scripts establish “the boundaries and roles that determine control, power, initiation, pleasure and so forth” (Sanders, 2008, p. 401) and are evidenced in the dominant expressions involved in college sexuality (Armstrong et al., 2009; Bogle, 2008; England & Thomas, 2007).

A synthesis of scholarly ideas defines the dominant college student sexual script, the pathway to facilitating sexual encounters, as an interaction between two other-sex partners who meet during a social situation; usually, the potential partners have already identified or interacted with each other around campus, perhaps through the aid of a third party. These two consume alcohol to a point of intoxication, go to an agreed-upon location, and participate in a range of behaviors from kissing to intercourse, with men receiving more sexual gratification. This sexual encounter is normally considered “no strings attached” (Armstrong et al., 2009; Bogle, 2007, 2008; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003; Lewis, Lee, Patrick, & Fossos, 2007; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). Whereas sexual behavior for gay males is largely depicted through risk paradigms, the academic framing of straight nonrelationship sex on college campuses generally follows two competing schools of thought: risk or romantic intimacy. While some articles focus on aspects of both paradigms, scholars generally frame sex as either risky behavior or legitimate intimate relations between college students.

Viewed through the risk paradigm, straight college student sexual scripts are associated with dangerous sexual behavior that results in negative mental and/or physical health ramifications, and is often described as the consequence of substance use (Flack et al., 2007; Lewis et al., 2007; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Paul et al., 2000). Paul and colleagues (2000), for instance, define the act of college student nonrelationship sex as “a sexual encounter, usually lasting only one night, between two people who are strangers or brief acquaintances” (p. 76). They go on to define this behavior as “risky,” “spontaneous (i.e. something that just happens),” and “anonymous in that the partners . . . rarely continue to build a relationship, let alone see each other again” (2000, p. 76). The risk paradigm likens nonrelationship sex to one-night stands and frames studies of college student sexual culture as important to risk prevention and health promotion (Paul & Hayes, 2002). Through this research, we know that alcohol influences sex between straight

college students (Flack et al., 2007; Grello et al., 2006; Lewis et al., 2007; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Paul et al., 2000), condom use varies (Paul & Hayes, 2002; Paul et al., 2000), partners are often anonymous, and a majority of college students have participated in nonrelationship sex (Paul et al., 2000). Scholars also find that college students overestimate the amount of sexual behaviors their peers partake in while on campus (Lambert et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2007).

Scholarship within the romantic intimacy paradigm frames straight college student sexual scripts in a different way. These studies also find that the majority of college students have experienced nonrelationship sex (Armstrong et al., 2009; Bogle, 2007, 2008) and alcohol is involved (Bogle, 2007, 2008), but this orientation focuses on sex as a means for exploring sexual and romantic development (Armstrong et al., 2009; Bogle, 2007, 2008; Manning, Giordano, & Longmore, 2006). Manning and colleagues (2006) note that nonrelationship sex can be just as significant as relationships in building romantic skills among adolescents. In addition, they contest the anonymous characteristic of the college student sexual culture. In their 2006 study, Manning and colleagues found that "most teenage sexual experiences are among boys and girls who know one another and have known one another for some time" (p. 477). Bogle (2008) echoes this analysis by noting that even when college sex might seem anonymous, college students meet their sexual partner through peer networks. Armstrong and colleagues (2009) also find that repeat sexual encounters are common in straight nonrelationship sex. Despite this, scholars note a sexual double standard in play for straight women who participate in college student sexual culture. If a woman engages in sexual activity, she is considered promiscuous; if she does not have sex at all, she may be considered a prude. Straight men, on the other hand, may have sex as frequently as they choose without fear of a stigmatized sexual identity (Bogle, 2008; Mutchler, 2000). In addition, Armstrong and colleagues (2009) and England and Thomas (2007) find that even though nonrelationship sexual partners may have repeat encounters, men orgasm more frequently. In their study, which used earlier waves of the data we employ here, England and Thomas (2007) documented a significant gap in the amount of oral sex men and women gave and received during nonrelationship sex. When oral sex was a part of the equation, straight men received far more and gave far less oral stimulation than their partners did.

This sexual gendered inequality, however, may characterize nonrelationship sex more than longer-term relationships. Armstrong and colleagues (2009) found that straight men cared more about their partners' orgasms in relationships. Whereas men reported high rates of orgasm and oral sex in both nonrelationship sex and relationships, "Women orgasm only 32 percent as often as men in first hookups, but 79 percent as often in relationships" (Armstrong and et al., 2009, p. 5). In addition, evidence from straight adolescents in relationships has cast doubt on the assumption that boys are always

the more powerful actors. This emerging research shows that girls and boys are equally emotionally invested in relationships and that girls have more confidence and greater influence in negotiating boundaries (Giordano et al., 2006).

Based on the limited and sometimes conflicting literature related to gay male sexual behaviors, two sets of opposing hypotheses can be proposed. The first hypotheses come out of the deficit-of-opportunities literature. Given that structures facilitating romantic interaction are so much more a part of everyday life for straight men than for gay men, we can speculate the following:

H1a. Gay men in college will have fewer romantic relationships than straight men.

H1b. When gay men in college do report sexual activity it should be more likely to take place outside of traditional college social structures than for straight men.

H1c. Gay men in college will express a greater desire for opportunities to pursue such relationships and interactions than straight men.

Alternatively, if gay men in college are more oriented toward prestige sex with multiple uncommitted partners, as the risk paradigm perspective emphasizes, we can speculate the following hypotheses:

H2a. Gay men in college will have fewer romantic relationships and at least as many sexual interactions as straight men do, if not more.

H2b. Gay men in college will express lesser desire for romantic relationship opportunities and greater desire for more uncommitted sexual interaction opportunities than straight men.

After first explaining our data source and methodological approach, we test each of these hypotheses in the analyses that follow.

Sample, Data, and Methods

The data come from the OCSLS, a survey that originated in 2005 at Stanford University and has since been distributed annually across 20 additional U.S. universities and colleges. Data collection is ongoing and, at the time these data were analyzed in 2010, the total sample size was 20,776 respondents. We restrict our sample size to undergraduate men who self-identify as either straight or gay for a sample size of 5,889 and 330 respondents respectively. Although the data were not drawn from a national probability sample, a major advantage of the OCSLS is its larger gay male college population than other studies (Eyre et al., 2007; Rhodes et al., 2007), allowing for more robust estimates. The data provide rarely available, detailed information about sexual interactions in relationships, dating, and

nonrelationship sex. The survey data were collected via a self-administered, 15- to 20-minute online survey. Respondents were recruited primarily through classes to answer fixed-response questions about their backgrounds, beliefs, and social and sexual experiences. Another advantage of the OCSLS is its high response rates (about 99% compared to 60% to 75% response rates of most existing studies), since almost all instructors required survey participation for course credit (students were given an option of an alternative assignment; very few students chose this alternative). It is one of the largest U.S. datasets to provide a perspective on college student sexual culture.

Table 1 compares the demographic profile of gay men to straight men in our sample. We denote statistically significant differences between subpopulations with symbols next to the variable name. Where applicable, we note the ways in which gay male demographics correspond to previous data collected in other studies. In Table 1, a picture emerges showing an ethnically diverse group of gay respondents who come from less affluent backgrounds and are higher achieving academically compared to straight respondents.

The majority of straight men (68%) who answered our survey are White. By contrast, 5% more gay men than straight men are Latino, and 4% more are Asian. The higher number of non-Whites among gay men is also supported in the nationally representative National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) data (Easton et al., 2008). Both groups are the same age, at an average of 20 years old.

Family background characteristics show that gay men have less educated parents and twice as many have mothers who did not graduate from high school. This socioeconomic class difference has been supported elsewhere in nationally representative data comparing gay and straight adolescents (Easton et al., 2008). Gay men in our sample are also less likely than straight men to have parents who are still partnered or married.

In terms of current characteristics, Table 1 indicates that three times as many straight men as gay men are athletes and 18% fewer straight men report a cumulative grade point average (GPA) above 3.5. Gay men also appear to be less religious than straight men, with about 10% more reporting no religious attendance. Other research has documented declining religiosity among gay males in the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Rostosky, Danner, & Riggle, 2008). The final variables in Table 1 list the colleges and universities at which these surveys were conducted. Of the 21 schools, 40% are located in the West, 30% are located in the Northeast, and 20% are located in the Midwest. Only two are Southeastern schools, and one is located in the Southwest. These schools represent a wide spectrum of private liberal arts colleges, state universities, and Ivy League institutions.

In the analyses that follow, we investigate the attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics of gay and straight males who have participated in college student sexual culture. We group our findings into the following three categories: (1) differences in sexual behaviors; (2) variation in sexual behaviors

TABLE 1 2006–2010 Social Life Survey of Undergraduates: Characteristics of Gay Men and Straight Men

	Gay Men <i>n</i> = 274	Straight Men <i>n</i> = 5106
<i>Demographics</i>		
Age ^Ω	20.3 years	20.1 years
Race		
White***	55%	68%
Black	7%	7%
Latino***	14%	8%
Asian*	18%	14%
Native American	0.4%	0.3%
Other	6%	4%
Foreign born ^Ω	16%	12%
<i>Family Background</i>		
Maternal Education		
No high school degree***	11%	5%
High school degree or some college	42%	41%
Bachelor's degree or higher*	47%	53%
Parents still partnered***	66%	75%
<i>Current Characteristics</i>		
	>.01	0%
High GPA (>3.5)***	39%	21%
Athlete***	4%	12%
Self-rating of attractiveness (1–10)**	6.9	7.2
No religious service attendance**	43%	36%
<i>Survey Year and Sites</i>		
Survey Year (2006–2010)	2007.4	2006.7
Institution		
Stanford**	18%	10%
Indiana	5%	6%
Arizona	4%	6%
Stony Brook*	0%	4%
Ithaca*	8%	3%
Evergreen College	2%	0%
U. California, Santa Barbara	9%	12%
U. of Massachusetts***	13%	21%
Ohio State U.	4%	7%
Whitman	3%	4%
Foothill*	3%	7%
Harvard**	4%	1%
UI Chicago	6%	7%
Framingham	4%	3%
Radford	1%	1%
Beloit	2%	1%
U. California, Riverside	3%	2%
U. Pennsylvania	2%	2%
U. Washington ^Ω	6%	3%
U. California, Merced	3%	1%

Two-tailed tests for difference between gay and straight males: *** $p < .005$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, ^Ω $p < .10$.

between gay and straight men; (3) a difference in opportunity structures; and (4) the disconnect between romantic attitudes and sexual activity. In the interest of clarity, we show bivariate tabulations that compare the two groups of men; however, we note that each of the bivariate differences between gay and straight men we show here holds even after controlling for all characteristics shown in Table 1. Thus, for each relationship we analyze, we have run separate multivariate logistic and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models (not shown) to ensure that such relationships are strong even when taking into account gay and straight men's differing demographic characteristics—and indeed, they are, as we note in each figure. Because this article is an overview spanning three different dimensions of behaviors and beliefs, for simplicity's sake we show only the bivariate relationships. In the analyses that follow, we discuss these trends and illustrate with figures some of the particularly noteworthy relationships.

RESULTS

Sexual Behaviors

Relationship and nonrelationship sex for both gay and straight males are represented within Figure 1. The survey question about nonrelationship behavior framed the question in terms of whether respondents had ever “hooked up” in college with someone with whom they were not already in an exclusive relationship. “Hooking up” was self-defined by the respondents, with the survey instruction: “Use whatever definition of *hookup* you

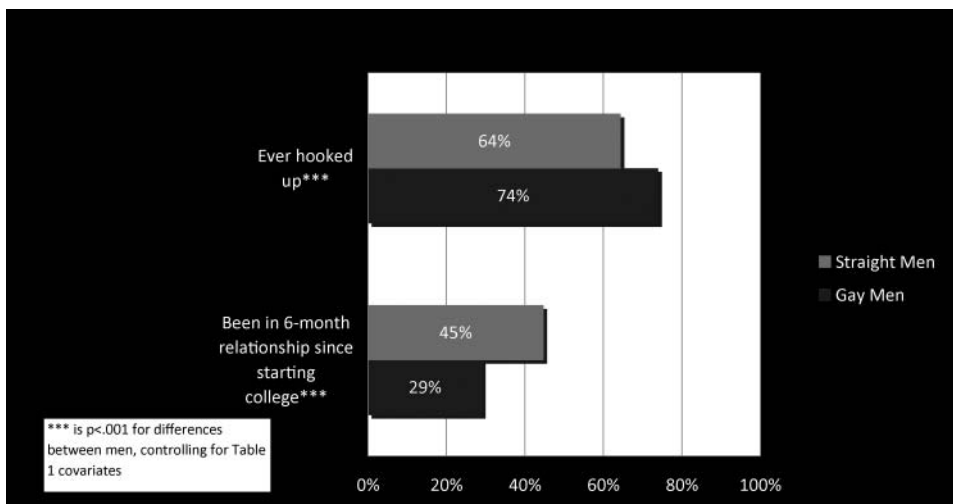


FIGURE 1 College social life survey: Gay men versus straight men—Hookups and longer-term relationships.

and your friends use.” For relationship status, the question asked respondents if they had ever been in a relationship since starting college that had lasted more than six months. In answer to both of these questions, we see high participation in sexual behaviors and lower participation in lasting relationships for both gay and straight men participating in college student sexual culture. Although a little less than half of straight men had a six-month relationship while in college, 64% have experienced nonrelationship sex. While 74% of gay males report participation in nonrelationship sex, less than one-third report being in a six-month relationship since starting college.

In addition, gay males who have engaged in nonrelationship sex are significantly less likely than straight males to know their partners prior to the sexual episode and have fewer repeat sexual encounters than their straight male peers. Measurements of anonymity in Figure 2, taken from the OCSLS question asking whether respondents knew their partners the day before the sexual encounter, show that while straight males report an average of 3.4 anonymous partners over the course of their sexual experiences, gay males report an average of 4.6. There is no significant difference between gay and straight men, however, in the number of partners with whom men have had vaginal/anal intercourse.

Figure 3 displays oral sex behaviors for men. In this figure, the results show data from the OCSLS question asking respondents whether they had oral sex in their last hookup encounter. For those respondents in our sample who reported that they had, we constructed a variable examining whether they had given oral sex or received oral sex during the sexual encounter. Oral sex in connection to nonrelationship sex was more common for gay men than straight men, at 74% and 45%, respectively. As Figure 3 illustrates, straight men reported giving their partners oral stimulation 55% of the time but received oral stimulation 90% of the time; gay men who participate

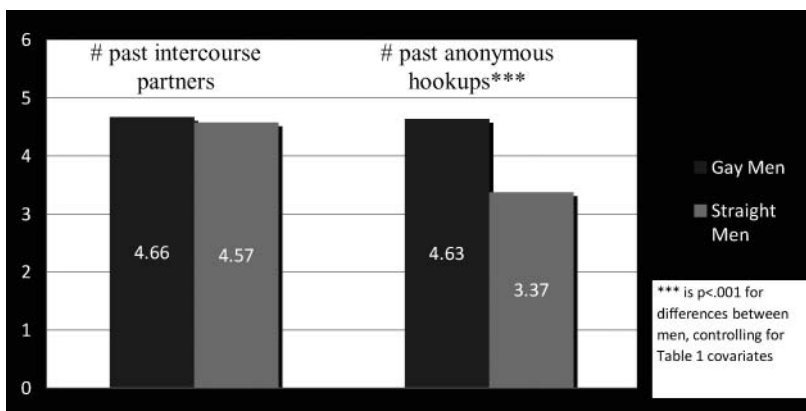


FIGURE 2 College social life survey: Gay men versus straight men—anonymous sex and number of partners.

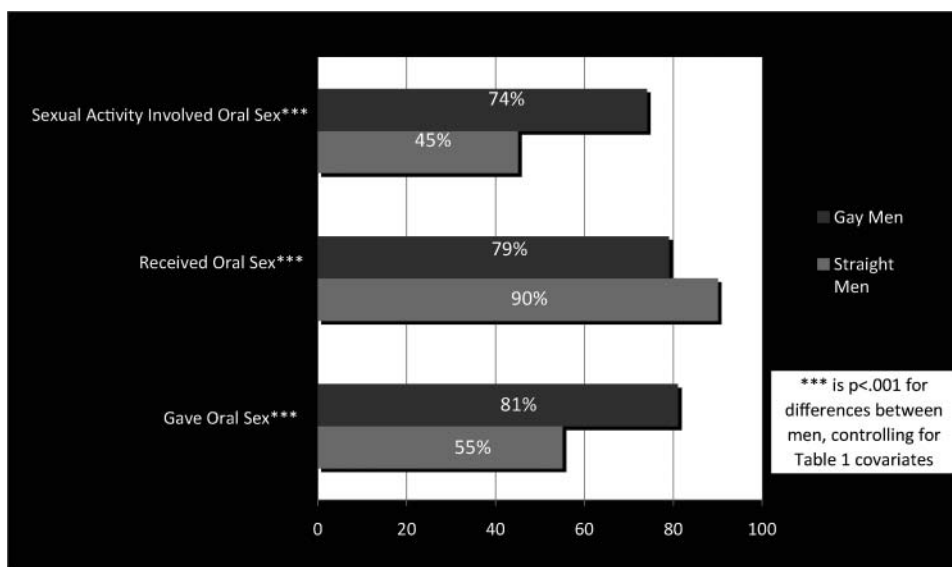


FIGURE 3 College social life survey: Oral sex behavior.

in nonrelationship sex received oral sex 79% of the time and gave oral stimulation to their partner 81% of the time.

Opportunity Structures

Figure 4a, which displays data from the OCSLS asking respondents where they met their sexual partners, illustrates the variations in respective markets for college males. Straight men in college were more than two times more likely than gay men to meet their sexual partners through work. In addition, while gay male respondents reported meeting their sexual partners in class 8% of the time, straight men met their partners in class 19% of the time. Figure 4a also shows that gay men met their nonrelationship sexual partners in ways that occurred outside of everyday interactions on campus. Here we see that gay men were nine times more likely than straight men to meet their partners through a personal ad or dating service. Gay men also exhibited higher percentages of utilizing clubs or teams to meet sexual partners than straight men. Furthermore, gay men were more likely to report employing “other” means of meeting. Upon coding these open-ended responses of other ways to meet, substantially more gay men reported meeting sexual partners online, while less than 1% of straight men reported similar use of technology.

Although the majority of men in our sample engage in nonrelationship sex with fellow students, more gay men than straight men find partners outside of their schools. In Figure 4b, which captures the question from the OCSLS asking students if their hookup partners were students from their

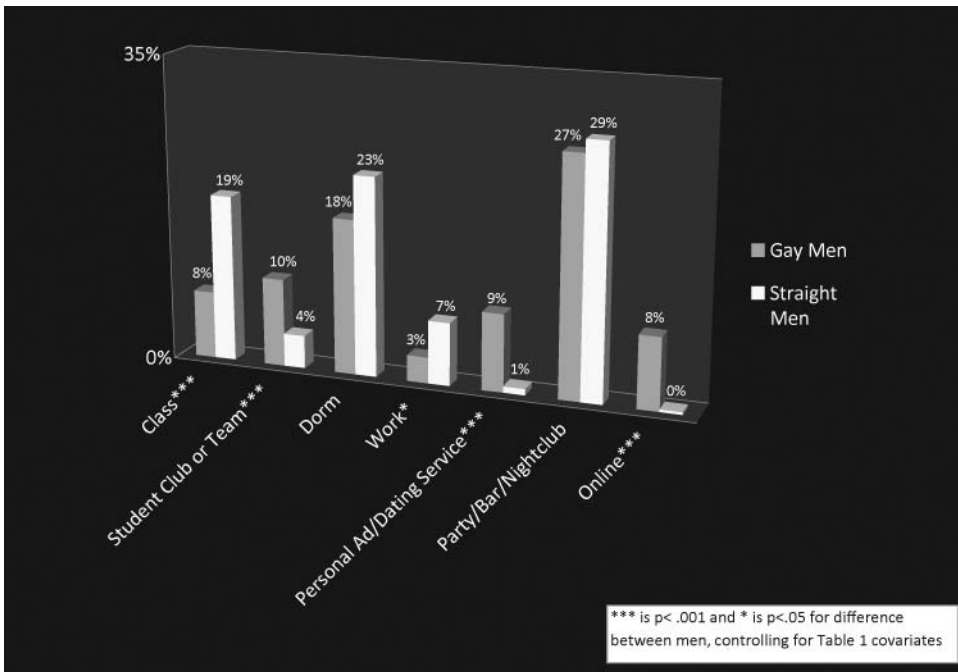


FIGURE 4a College social life survey: Location sexual partner met.

schools, we see that 63% of straight men report having sex with a student from the same school, compared to 54% of gay men.

Figure 4c displays the results of the OCSLS question asking respondents where they were just before the sexual encounters occurred. Here we see a connection between college student sexual culture and parties, bars, and dorm life. There are, however, significant differences between straight and gay respondents. Figure 4c, for example, shows the smaller influence of alcohol-related establishments on the college student sexual script of gay males. While 18% of gay males were with their partners at a bar prior to a sexual experience, more than half were in locations not typically associated with the consumption of alcoholic beverages. As an example of this, Figure 4c shows 33% of gay males, compared to 21% of straight males, were with their partners in a nonparty, dormitory atmosphere prior to nonrelationship sex. Higher percentages of straight males are represented in almost every party-related category of Figure 4c. The most notable party contrast for gay and straight males is found in the fraternity party, with 16 times more straight males reporting being with their partners at such events prior to engaging in nonrelationship sex. This contrast between straight and gay and alcohol use is further illustrated when the number of drinks associated with nonrelationship sex is analyzed. Straight men in our sample reported an average of six drinks, while gay men reported an average of three.

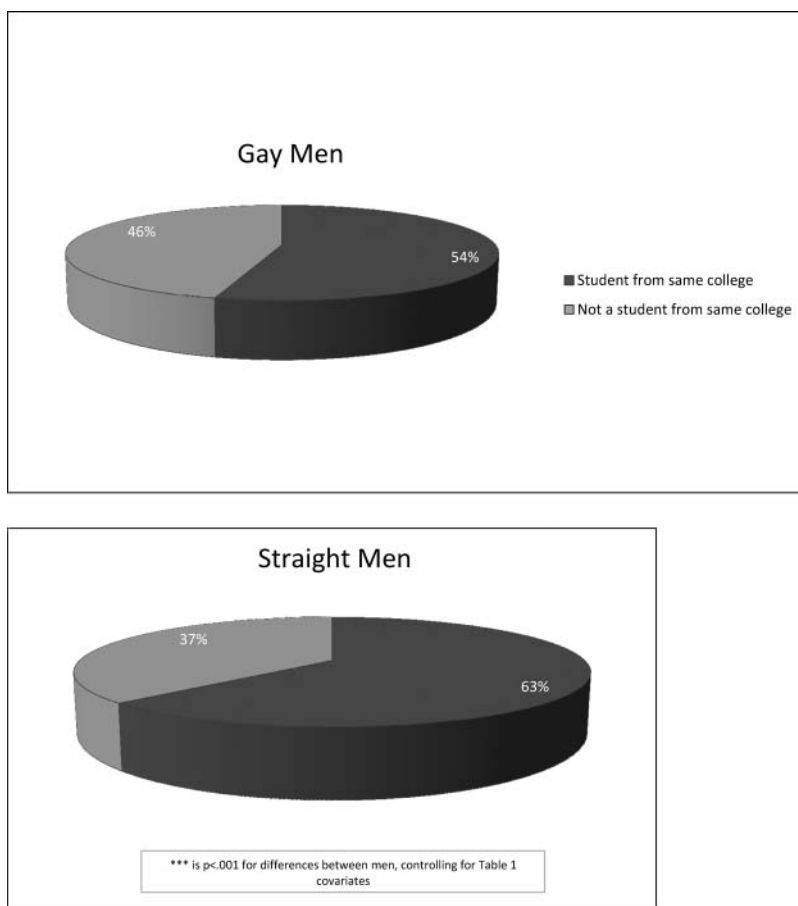


FIGURE 4b College social life survey: Identity of sexual partner.

Romantic Attitudes

Our final bivariate tabulations examine emotional stereotypes associated with college male student sexual culture: the emotionless, unattached, sexual conqueror. Figure 5a displays results from the OCSLS examining romantic and sexual attitudes. These questions asked respondents to evaluate statements based on a 4-point scale (*Strongly agree* to *Strongly disagree*). The first statement, “I do not want a relationship so I can hook up,” presents answers from gay men that contradict some displayed behaviors in Figure 1. Although our data have shown that 75% of gay men participate in nonrelationship sex, a little less than one-third who have hooked up report a desire to avoid relationships for uncommitted sex. Straight male respondents, despite experiencing nonrelationship sex less frequently, report these same desires about 44% of the time. One of the most notable differences in the response to this question is found in the *Strongly disagree* category. In this response we see

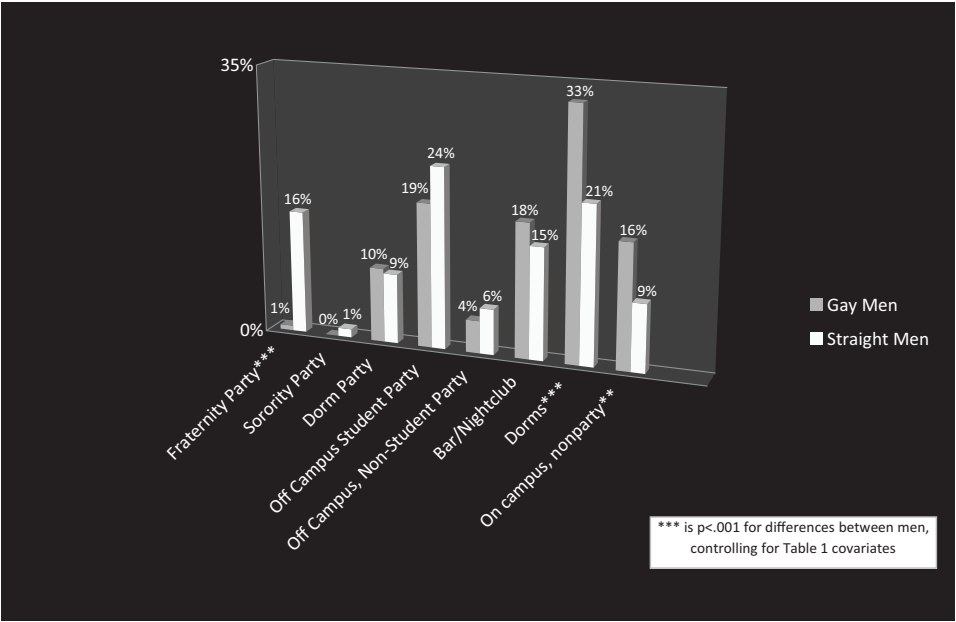


FIGURE 4c College social life survey: Location before sex occurred.

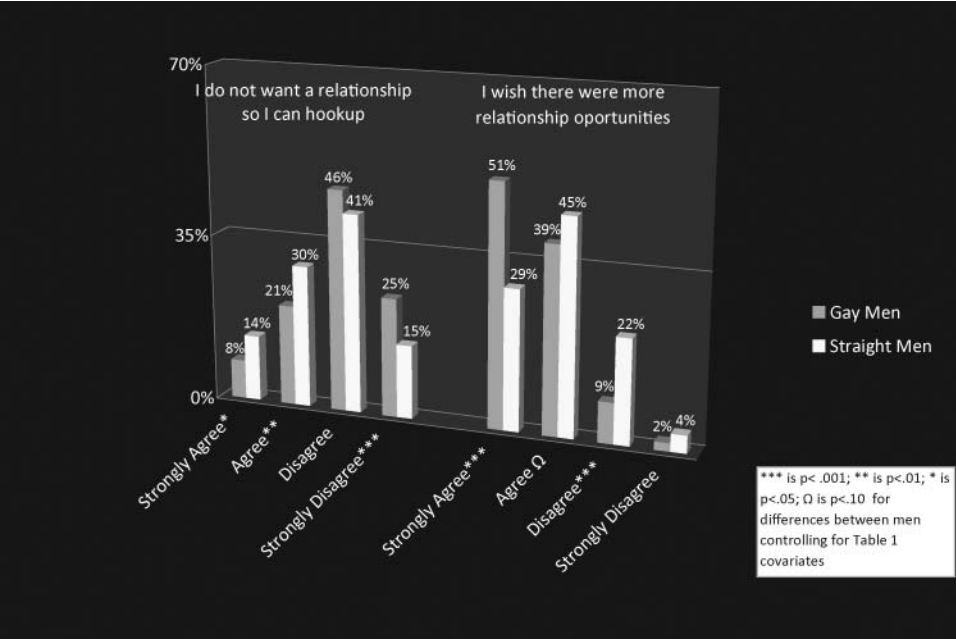


FIGURE 5a College social life survey: Relationship attitudes and hooking up.

that 15% of straight males strongly disagree with the prompt, while 25% of gay males respond in the same way. Overall, these results show gay men reporting more frequent responses of opposition and less frequent responses of approval to this statement of relationship avoidance than straight men.

The next question, displayed in Figure 5a, asked respondents to evaluate the following statement: "I wish there were more relationship opportunities." Gay men, again, displayed measurably stronger responses for increased romantic possibilities than straight men. While the majority of our straight and gay male respondents agree with the statement in some sense—a total of 74% and 90%, respectively—more gay men long for increased relationship opportunities. This distinction in intensity is particularly evident for both groups of men in the category *Strongly agree*. We see in Figure 5a that 29% of straight males strongly agree that they long for more relationship opportunities, but over half of gay males answer the same way. This is an important difference, one that might also speak to inequalities in the partner selection markets of gay men on college campuses.

Figure 5b shows that the majority of our male respondents place intrinsic value on relationships as structures of dependability. In Figure 5b, respondents evaluated the statement, "An advantage of relationships is emotional support." Gay men in college strongly agree with the statement at a rate of 70%, surpassing the 55% rate of straight men.

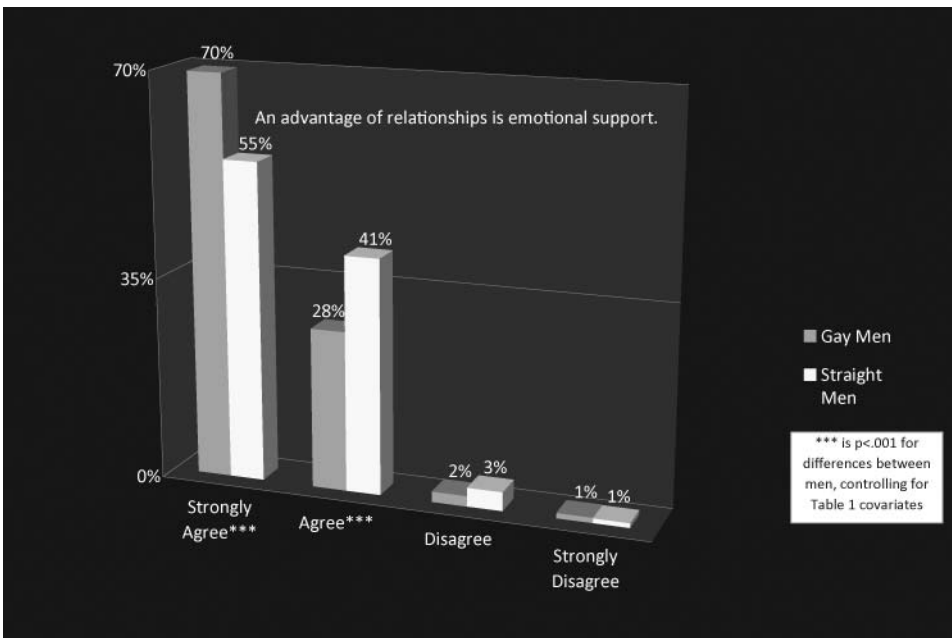


FIGURE 5b College social life survey: Relationship attitudes—relationships as potential emotional support.

DISCUSSION

Prior research on college sexuality would lead one to expect certain behaviors of men on college campuses in the United States. In assessments of college student sexual culture, straight men have been depicted as sexual conquerors, free to explore their sexual urges without stigma. As is evident through the many studies of gay youth and risky sexual behavior, gay men are also framed through this lens of risky sexual conquest. Strong desires for relationships and emotional investments are left for women to desire. The results of the Online College Social Life Study, however, both support and contradict existing research around these masculine stereotypes. In thinking back to our two opposing hypotheses, we find more support for the deficit-of-opportunities literature set of hypotheses than we do for the risk paradigm literature. The main exception to these hypotheses is that gay men are no less likely than straight men to have sexual interactions.

In terms of straight men, we found that nonrelationship sex was more prevalent than relationships, keeping with scholarly assertions that nonrelationship sex is the dominant form of sexual socialization on college campuses (Armstrong et al., 2009; Bogle, 2007, 2008; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Paul et al., 2000). Most of the straight men in our sample, however, also experienced relationships. These results point to college-educated, straight men participating in a college student sexual script with strong ties to romantic couplings but stronger ties to nonrelationship sex. Although little prior research has examined gay college student sexual culture, our results also point to a college student sexual script for gay men in college in which nonrelationship sex is normative; the trend toward romantic coupling, however, is not reflected in the data for most gay men involved in college student sexual culture. The majority of gay men in our sample were less likely to report a lasting relationship since entering college; gay men in our sample also had fewer romantic relationships and than their straight counterparts. This is similar to the observations of Eyre and colleagues (2007), where relationships were fleeting and prestige sex was abundant and aligns with H1a and H2a from our study. In addition, this calls into question the findings of Bogle (2008), who asserts that gay students are excluded from the dominant trends of college student sexual culture, which she refers to as *hooking up*. With a high rate of nonrelationship sex rate and many of those sexual encounters occurring with a fellow student, evidence from the Online College Social Life Survey points to a strong participation in college student sexual culture for gay men that exists both inside and outside of the campus environment.

In addition, the sexual behaviors of gay and straight men presented some key findings in the examination of college student sexual scripts. The number of partners with whom men have had intercourse, a key component of hypothesis 2a, shows no significant difference between gay and straight men. Despite evidence suggesting gay men may engage in more intercourse

than straight men, there is only qualified support for this within the data. In addition, the examination of oral reciprocity between nonrelationship sexual partners yielded interesting results. To measure the proposed lack of reciprocity previously documented by scholars of college student sexual culture, we invoke the arguments of England and Thomas. In their 2007 study, which examined hookups on college campuses, England and Thomas documented an orgasm gap, with straight men climaxing more frequently than straight women during sexual encounters. This was still the case for straight men in the most recent version of the sample we analyze here. Breaking down giving and receiving behavior, however, results in a distinct difference between gay and straight men in college: straight men who participated in oral sex during nonrelationship sex display the anticipated oral selfishness, while gay men do not. Here the script for gay men differs immediately in a greater focus on oral sex reciprocity. There are a number of possible explanations for this phenomenon.

Variation in oral sex participation could be the result of sexual risk assessment for nonrelationship sex partners in an AIDS-aware atmosphere. As a substitution for intercourse and a move toward safer sex, nonrelationship sex in which anal intercourse was replaced with oral sex would provide participation in sexual activities with a lower risk of HIV/AIDS transmission. It is also possible, with the stereotype of the male sex drive Mutchler (2000) discusses, that gay men engaged in nonrelationship sex are looking for an assured orgasm. The correlation between oral sex and orgasm demonstrated by England and Thomas (2007) makes a case for participation in oral sex as an alternative to intercourse that could lead to an improved frequency of sexual gratification.

In keeping with the findings of Rhodes and colleagues (2007), gay male students in our sample were slightly less likely to know their partners the day before a sexual encounter. Although these results seem to imply that gay men's sexual scripts are normatively anonymous, we hypothesize that the alternative methods gay men pursue to meet partners and the smaller overall success rate within dominant college partner selection markets may be driving this increased anonymity as well as the smaller number of lasting relationships. The sheer difference in population size between gay and straight men speaks to distinctions in partner selection markets on campus. Straight men in pursuit of a college education are part of a larger straight structure of sexual and romantic opportunities. "Instead of socializing in dating pairs . . . [straight] college students tend to 'hang out' in groups at dorms, parties, or bars" (Bogle, 2008, p. 29). These group scenarios provide opportunities for straight nonrelationship sex and romantic relationships to develop (Bogle, 2007, 2008; Armstrong et al., 2009). As previously mentioned, a consistent element of the college sexual script is that interactions typically occur after potential partners have already identified each other and flirted around campus. This often involves a prior friendly relationship between

partners or the aid of a peer network. Though some experiences with non-relationship sex are indeed anonymous, the ways in which our participants met their respective sexual partners call into question the assertions of risk paradigm scholars who define nonrelationship sex as a completely anonymous experience (Paul et al., 2000). Our results support hypothesis 1b and align themselves with deficit-of-opportunity literature for young, gay men. Clearly, straight men have more opportunities to meet potential opposite-sex partners during everyday interactions, reducing the potential for anonymous sexual encounters; gay adolescent men, as a much smaller population on campuses, do not have the same ease of access to partner selection markets.

The ways in which partners meet on college campuses continue to support the strength of H1b. Although there are some similarities in the ways that gay and straight males meet potential sexual companions, gay males in college also engage in distinctly different ways of connecting with same-sex partners. By utilizing personal ads, the Internet, and interest-focused clubs and teams, gay men demonstrate an alternative entry point to college student sexual culture than their straight peers. This suggests the dominant partner selection market in college caters mainly to straight students but also points to an adaptive sexual script for gay students. While our findings support Bogle's assertion that gays experience a constrained potential for meeting partners on campus, gay men appear to access opportunity structures not strictly limited to the campus locale; they operate within and outside the dominant romantic and sexual systems on campus. By utilizing methods of partner selection that are not constrained by campus ties, gay men tap into local networks of peers who share their sexual orientation.

Further evidence of this difference in partner selection markets and college student sexual scripts is displayed in Figure 4b. In this figure we see that straight students are more likely than gay students to experience nonrelationship sex with another student from their campus. This difference, again, could be the result of smaller pools of potential partners for gay men in college environments or the result of gay partner selection markets that extend beyond college campuses. Increased tactics for meeting partners outside of campus networks broaden the net gay male students are casting, increasing the likelihood of meeting nonstudents for sexual encounters. It is likely that gay men who attend rurally located schools with fewer off-campus social outlets face even more constrained opportunity structures than gay men enrolled in more urban locations.²

Differences in romantic and sexual opportunity structures for gay and straight men are also evident in the variety of locations where students meet before the nonrelationship sex occurs. Our data support prior research documenting college student sexual culture's association with parties, bars, and dorm life (Bogle, 2007, 2008; Flack et al., 2007; Grello et al., 2006; Paul & Hayes, 2002). Here our data reflect a college student sexual script for straight students that is normatively associated with locations where alcohol is readily

available. Based on past research connecting nonrelationship sex in college student sexual culture to the consumption of alcohol, these findings for straight men are not surprising (Bogle, 2007, 2008; Flack et al., 2007; Grello et al., 2006; Paul & Hayes, 2002). Bogle (2007) asserts that "without alcohol as a social lubricant, it is unlikely that college students would be able to signal interest in a hookup and deal with the potential for rejection inherent to this script" (p. 777). What is surprising, however, is the smaller influence of alcohol and alcohol-related establishments on the college student sexual script of gay men. While straight male respondents show a clear association between alcohol-related establishments and nonrelationship sex, especially in relation to Greek college systems, gay respondents do not display this same strength of association in their normative scripts.

This may appear to take the possibility of alcohol consumption outside of party atmospheres for granted. When respondents reported alcoholic intake in association with their sexual activity, however, straight men reported drinking twice the amount that gay men did in association with nonrelationship sex. This supports prior scholarly claims of the alcohol-fueled nonrelationship sex for straight men (Bogle, 2007, 2008; Flack et al., 2007; Grello et al., 2006; Lewis et al., 2007; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Paul et al., 2000) but calls into question whether such a norm can be assumed for the sexual scripts of gay men. If neither alcohol nor parties are as instrumental in facilitating sex for gay men, these conclusions continue to suggest that the normative college student sexual script and opportunity structures for gay and straight men differ in substantial ways.

In addition, our results point to a college population of gay men who are not, as stereotypes might suggest, only seeking meaningless sex. Indeed, our data illustrate a large majority of gay men who not only are limited in their opportunity structure for the pursuit of relationships but who deeply desire more opportunities for intimate relationships at their respective campuses. As these desires for relationships and emotional support are not traditionally associated with masculine stereotypes, our results contradict the hypermasculinity explanations of Rhodes and colleagues (2007) and call for an examination of the ways in which gay men in college student sexual culture construct their romantic opportunities. Young gay men, by being largely restricted from the institution of marriage, do not necessarily face the same pressure to marry and pursue family life with a romantic partner; however, their desire for relationships is evident in the responses in our sample. Although Eyre and colleagues (2007) and Mutchler (2000) note that the majority of relationships pursued by adolescent gay men were often fleeting, it is clear that gay college student sexual culture intersects with a desire for lasting relationships. This desire for romantic opportunities displayed by both gay and straight men in our sample shows a competing relationship between normative masculinity associated with masculine stereotypes and opposing desires for romantic couplings. These results support hypothesis

1c and call into question the claims of risk paradigm scholars as well as hypothesis 2b; future studies should by scholars of college student sexuality should continue to build upon this finding.

Increased desires to cultivate romantic and emotional connections by gay men, however, should not be interpreted simply as a higher desire for relationships. Instead, these results must be viewed within the context of differential partner selection markets. Straight men have a more expansive structure in place to pursue potential relationships on campus; are more likely to interact with potential partners through classes, work, or around campus; and have a well-documented structure of peer-to-peer information (Bogle, 2007). This, in turn, may leave straight respondents feeling more satisfied than their gay peers with their current sexual and romantic environments and lead to comparatively fewer strong responses to questions about changing the available structures. Gay men, in finding less romantic success in both dominant and alternative partner selection markets, would demonstrate stronger responses for obtaining more relationship opportunities in campus settings. That being said, it is interesting to note the sheer number of straight men who wish for more romantic prospects on campus. These results call into question stereotypes around romantic intentions and support research showing that men are as invested in relationships as women are (Giordano et al., 2006). Even though the partner selection markets for straight men are comparatively more successful than those of their gay peers in producing relationships, the romantic possibilities for heterosexual men on campus also appear to be limited by the dominant college student sexual culture of nonrelationship sex.

CONCLUSIONS

Through examining the experiences of men within college student sexual culture, our results for both gay and straight men point toward two clear and distinct conclusions. On one hand, respondents display participation in sexual scripts that support many masculine stereotypes; on the other hand, these same respondents display romantic desires that veer away from traditional notions of masculinity. The latter of these findings are similar to those of Giordano and colleagues (2006) and Hamilton and Armstrong (2009), who note that young men are more interested in relationships than previous studies would indicate. Our results extend these findings to include gay men. Although the majority of men in our sample are active in college student sexual culture, those men overwhelmingly report strong desires for relationship experiences. This speaks to a contradiction between stereotypical sexual expectations for young men in college and the very real romantic desires that they are less likely to divulge. As scholars move forward in the study of college student sexual culture, it is important to reexamine the distinctions

among masculinity, behavior, and desire. In doing so, we resist the stereotypical assumption of the male sex drive to better understand the intricate relationships between men, sexuality, and romantic desire.

In understanding the very different opportunity structures that gay men and straight men encounter within college student sexual culture and the yearning for more relationship opportunities both populations experience, there are clear paths to growth on college campuses. As gay men face a much more individualized path for meeting like-minded partners for sexual and romantic opportunities, college administrators and LGBTQ support groups should take this newfound knowledge as an opportunity to provide healthy environments for gay men in college to expand their interpersonal growth opportunities. The use of clubs and teams would be a simple way of doing this. In increasing the visibility and funding for clubs, colleges send a clear message that they care about the intellectual and interpersonal growth of LGBTQ students. At the same time, providing similar, alcohol-free settings for straight students may help them satisfy more of their desires for the development of relationships. In addition, by partnering with university organizations to promote interpersonal growth, college health professionals could gain easy access to populations who need guidance with issues of sexual health. Although there are some differences in the ways that gay and straight men engage in sex while in college, the clear message from these data is that both populations are heavily involved in college student sexual culture. Health professionals should use this knowledge to expand their discussions of sex on college campuses and provide the information and resources necessary for healthy sexual practices for both LGBTQ and straight populations.

With this being said, it is also important to note that our study is limited in a number of ways. First and foremost, our discussion is both limited and enhanced by a discussion of the term *hookup* broadly defined. In keeping with the variation of definitions regarding what a hookup can be in college student sexual culture, our study benefits from a wide range of opinions on the subject matter; however, when scholars lack an agreed-upon definition of the concept, it leaves room for misinterpretation of the phenomenon. We hope that our synthesized definition captures the complexity of the hookup involved in college student sexual culture and call to scholars to rigorously define the hookup when referencing it within academic literature.

In addition, while our article adds to the overall literature on college student sexual culture for men, there is still much room for growth in the examination of sexual and romantic scripts for LGBTQ youth. In forthcoming research, we extend our analyses to gay and straight women in college. This future examination of college student sexual culture, however, is still limited to the experiences of self-identified straight and gay students in specific college settings; we cannot extend our analyses to all U.S. college populations and certainly not populations outside the campus environment, which leaves

many of the sexual and romantic experiences of LGBTQ youth out of the scope of our conclusions. The limitations of the OCSLS also prevent us from analyzing the experiences of queer-identified students, as the survey was not designed with the option of identifying as queer. In addition, small sample size limitations do not allow us to include an analysis of bisexual and transgendered individuals. It is our hope that scholars will continue to examine the populations of young adults that we are limited from studying with the OCSLS and expand upon the experiences of bisexual, transgendered, and queer youth. We call upon scholars in the study of young adult sexuality to increase academic knowledge around these additional populations, both qualitatively and quantitatively, by creating a more robust set of comparisons. In doing so, such studies will not only aid academic knowledge but may also change the very ways in which college life professionals, health professionals, and LGBTQ advocates approach and they frame discussion and policy pertaining to LGBTQ youth.

NOTE

1. All bivariate results shown in this article are also statistically significant when modeled as outcome variables in logistic and OLS multivariate regressions controlling for compositional differences between the gay and straight populations, such as socioeconomic status, age, GPA, region, and others. Because each of the 25-plus bivariate relationships shown in this article corresponds to its own regression model, there is simply not enough room to include them in an overview article such as this one. However, we note this here to emphasize that the results we provide here are robust even to the controls for the characteristics shown in Table 1.

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