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## Hookup Culture in Gay Men: An Application of Minority Stress Model, Just World Belief, and Attachment Style on Interpersonal Relationship Choices

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Hookup Culture in Gay Men: An Application of Minority Stress Model,  
Just World Belief, and Attachment Style on Interpersonal  
Relationship Choices

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on applying three inter-/intrapersonal theories to the gay male hookup culture. Through the application of attachment theory, the *minority stress model*, and the *just world belief* (including the self-fulfilling prophecy), this literary analysis takes key components from each theory to examine the interplay between them and the effects that they have on gay men socially, behaviorally, and emotionally, and whether or not these effects contribute to engagement in the hookup culture and their contribution to other relationship patterns. It is hoped that this application and analysis will lead to further research in this area to help reduce social stigma, prejudice, and discrimination through the aid of helping to understand the motives behind which people act.

*Keywords:* gay, men, hookup, hookup culture, casual sex, attachment, minority stress, just world

## Introduction

Throughout history, each generation (i.e., Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials) have found inventive ways to increase communication, socialization, and relationships between fellow cohort members. The shifts in demographics, social views, and technology have allowed for a change in beliefs with Millennials towards casual sex as a way to relate with others. Despite these recent cohort shifts, homosexual men continue to be perceived as significantly more promiscuous than their counterparts (i.e., heterosexual individuals). Throughout the 1980's, the HIV/AIDS epidemic sparked the stereotype of homosexual men as more promiscuous, as homosexual men, in particular, were the ones who succumbed to this mysterious disease. The stereotype that homosexual men were more prone to engage in frequent and multiple partner-based sexual behaviors seemed to be a direct result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Parker & Aggleton, 2003). These stereotypes about homosexual men seem to be supported by research in that homosexual men reported higher levels of casual sexual behaviors across all genders, sexes, and sexual orientations comparison groups (Howard & Perilloux, 2016).

Casual sex and promiscuity are sources of contention between peers. While some people hold strong beliefs about the idea of sex between people who are in monogamous relationships, there are others who believe that casual sex with people in which there are no ties is a perfectly healthy way to express sexuality (Williams, Prior, & Wegner, 2013). The question that remains is what are the various effects between the two; is having sex in a partnered, monogamous relationship superior for one's development, or are the effects of casual sex with someone in which there are no relational ties after the encounter (i.e., hookups)

the same in terms of development? Research in this area has been wanting; with few studies addressing the role of hookup behaviors in the various types of interpersonal relationships and the effects these hookup behaviors have on one's development. In addition, to date, there have been no studies conducted that analyze these relational patterns and their effects on gay men.

### **Hypothesis**

In this paper, I will explore the reasons why I think that the hookup culture exists and the effects that it has on the identity of homosexual men. It is my intent to answer the following: what are the social, emotional, and behavioral effects of the hookup culture on the identity development of gay men and, what are the precipitating factors that lead people to engage in casual sex rather than seek out a monogamous relationship? Starks and Parsons (2014) identify unique social challenges those in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community face that may impact an individual's decision to engage in or seek out a relationship or to choose to pursue non-monogamous sexual relationships. Members of the LGBTQ community face many adversities throughout their development, which can result in identified differences and alienation from others, which include maltreatment from parents and peers (Gwadz, Clatts, Leonard & Goldsamt, 2004). Based on these aforementioned factors I hope to explore how challenges that are faced early on in an individual's development have an impact on the schemas and thoughts gay men have about the self, and how these self-schemas translate when relating to others. I will also examine if there is an interplay between attachment style that is formed in childhood and the effects that it has on emotional satisfaction within relationships during adulthood. There are many variables that lead people to express their behaviors differently, relate to others emotionally, and decisions that people

make that affect them socially. The aim of this paper is to examine these many facets and see if there is a tie between these factors and the use of hookup culture as a means of developing one's identity.

### **Key Terms**

Examination of various research articles has revealed limitations of operational definitions across studies. I will address some of the key terms that will be expanded on further in this research. A hookup is defined as the various types of sexual behaviors that take place outside of a monogamous relationship as a means to meet one's sexual needs (Mark, Garcia & Fisher, 2015). Sexual hookup behaviors are defined as mouth-genital connections (i.e. oral) or penetrative sex with a partner. Based on research by Mark, Garcia & Fisher (2015), I have opted to define a relationship as a committed, exclusively monogamous relationship between two partners. Friends With Benefits (FWB) are individuals who are in a simultaneous interpersonal relationship (i.e. friendship) and a sexual relationship with no desire to extend the interpersonal relationships to a deeper level of commitment. A 'one-night stand' is defined as a sexual encounter with a person whom there is no pre-existing relationship and which no further encounters persist after the first encounter. A 'Fuck-Buddy' (FB) is a relationship between individuals that have limited interpersonal depth and which the primary focus of interpersonal interactions is for repeated sexual encounters without a deeper level of connection. A person's identity is defined as the various qualities, values, and beliefs that one holds about the self.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper will examine information that relates to Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment as a means of bonding and relating with others. I will be including the *Minority*

*Stress Model* (MSM) developed by Meyer (1995) and the effect that MSM has on people socially and emotionally. The idea behind minority stress is that holding a minority status leads to cognitive dissonance and therefore leads to extra stress brought on by holding a different status in society (Meyer, 1995). The last theory I will use is Lerner's (1965) *Just World Belief*, and whether or not intrinsic values people hold lead them to seek out situations that reinforce those values applied to the self and the beliefs individuals hold about how their world works around them (Lerner, 1965).

### **Theory of Attachment in Relation to Sexual Behavior**

Social science researchers have used multiple theories to analyze the ways that gay men interact with each other in relationships. Attachment theory is used to describe the behaviors that humans use to relate to one another. John Bowlby (1969) was the leading researcher behind attachment theory, while Mary Ainsworth (1978) conducted the observational studies that demonstrated how attachment theory and style applied to children with regard to interactions between children and their primary caregiver. Ainsworth (1978) was able to note three observable attachment styles: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and anxious-avoidant. Since Ainsworth, Carlson (1998) had proposed the existence of a fourth attachment style: anxious-disorganized.

Secure attachment is characterized by the ability to be comfortable in close emotional relationships with others and the belief that others will meet your needs (Ainsworth, 1978). Children are able to build this kind of connection with their primary caregiver when the caregiver responds in a consistent and supportive manner to a child's needs (Ainsworth, 1978). An anxious-ambivalent attachment style is characterized by one who is not comfortable with

close emotional relationships, but will desperately try to seek out reassurance from another person in order to meet their need for connection (Ainsworth, 1978). Children build an anxious-ambivalent attachment style when their caregiver responds inconsistently to a child's needs (Ainsworth, 1978). Children start to realize that the patterns in which their caregiver responds are unpredictable, which they learn to believe that people will not always meet their needs when presented. Often times a person with an anxious-ambivalent style will present behavior that can be perceived as clingy or overly sensitive. An anxious-avoidant attachment style is characterized by the inability to become close with others, while believing that one's needs are not important and relies solely on self-sufficiency (Ainsworth, 1978). This style develops when a caregiver never meets a child's needs. The child learns to believe that their needs are not worthy of attention, so instead do not bother to seek out others to meet their needs.

The last proposed style, anxious-disorganized, is characterized by fear of the person who is supposed to care for the child (Carlson, 1998). Children develop this attachment style by having a caregiver who is emotionally or physically abusive (Carlson, 1998). Children look to their primary caregiver for security, while the caregiver is simultaneously the abuser. Children learn to fear their attachment figure but must continue to rely on them to meet their basic survival needs. While their mind tells them to run to safety, the abusive security person is the one that they want to run to.

Attachment style is ingrained within us – it is our instinct that aids in need acquisition throughout development. Children must count on their caregiver to meet their needs to ensure survival. As adults, the attachment style learned in formative years may have lasting consequences on relationships, as some may still harbor maladaptive relational patterns. Those



who seek to have their needs met by others during formative years may cultivate the same behavior that aided in need acquisition and attention from their caregivers as they age, which may lead to relationship strain and cause unintentional problems.

Effects of attachment style on adult relationships is an interesting paradigm. The style that we developed in childhood is inherently unconscious and remains there unless brought into consciousness to be changed. This can lead to problems in relationships that one does not fully realize as a result of attachment anxiety. Those who experience attachment-related anxiety might not fully understand their actions. When our attachment instinct is activated, those with a secure attachment style are able to rationalize that their partner will meet their needs. If there is disordered thinking, as with an anxious-ambivalent style, a person may have a problem articulating or trusting that a need is being met. Those with an anxious-ambivalent style have a priority to reestablish a connection with their partner immediately when they feel distressed, whether it follows a conflict or not, and may face panic if the connection is delayed. While those with an anxious-avoidant attachment style will primarily want to disconnect from the partner, presenting as cold and emotionally unavailable to those that are just trying to meet their need.

Attachment style is not a fixed characteristic. Attachment style is a learned behavior, but the ability to learn the new behavior of trust in another to meet needs in a healthy and realistic way is possible through relationships with those that are securely attached (Keren & Mayseless, 2013). Relinquishing vulnerability to be held in the hands of another person can be a difficult task for someone with anxious-ambivalent attachment, especially if individuals are

motivated by the fear of losing their partner. Their counterparts, those with anxious-avoidant attachment, are motivated by the fear of becoming too close to someone.

In the past several years, researchers have examined how attachment style may play out in the daily lives and behaviors of gay men. In terms of anxious-ambivalent attachment style, gay men are more likely to forego condom use in a situation out of fear that they will lose a partner if they decline unprotected sex (Starks & Parsons, 2014). The decision to forego condom use to those with an anxious-ambivalent style increases feelings of the highest level of intimacy. Those who forego condom use believe that by fulfilling their partners wishes their partner will want them more – despite personal safety and health risks. Those who have an anxious-avoidant attachment style are also more likely to meet the needs of another person at the expense of foregoing their need to be independent in order to keep the relationship, while keeping their partner at a distance (Starks, Castro, Castiblanco, & Millar, 2016). When the relationship becomes too intimate and too close, the anxious-avoidant individual will react in a way that maintains distance in the relationship or possibly break off the relationship.

Starks and Parsons (2014) conducted a study to analyze the effects of attachment style on the partnership and sexual relationship quality in gay men. Starks and Parsons (2014) were interested in the way that secure, anxious-ambivalent, and anxious-avoidant attachment styles tied into communication, sexual frequency and risk taking. They introduced the idea that perhaps social challenges unique to gay men had effects on potential relationship partners and the enactment of romantic relationships (Starks & Parsons, 2014).

Starks and Parsons (2014) suggested that there is a link between adult attachment style and sexual behavioral patterns with partners. Securely attached gay men were found to have

the most sex and higher levels of communication with partners (Starks & Parsons, 2014). Men who were anxious-avoidant reported lower communication skills and the least amount of sexual activity, which was attributed to the fear of self-disclosure and trust in another (Starks & Parsons, 2014). Anxious-avoidant attachment is strongly and positively correlated to the number of casual unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) partners (Starks & Parsons, 2014). Anxious-ambivalent men in this study did not differ from their securely attached counterparts in regards to casual UAI partners (Starks & Parsons, 2014). In general, those who were partnered regardless of attachment style compared to those who were unpartnered also reported lower anxiety as a couple (Starks & Parsons, 2014).

Starks, Castro, Castiblanco, and Millar (2016) conducted a study that looked further into UAI partners and internal working models of condom use through the lens of attachment theory. Starks and colleagues (2016) posited that insecure attachment styles would affect communication skills and the expected use of condoms in adult relationships. They asked HIV-negative gay and bisexual men to self-report on measures of attachment style, expectations of condom use, communication skills, self-assessed mate-value, and recent UAI partners (Starks et al., 2016).

An anxious-ambivalent attachment was linked to a lowered perceived ability to effectively communicate to partners and resist pressures to forego or negotiate condom use (Starks et al., 2016). Anxious-ambivalent attachment style is preoccupied with the idea that others who are socially desirable will not be available in regards to future relationships, and are more motivated to forego condom use to preserve their relationship (Starks et al., 2016). Those with anxious-ambivalent attachment fear that requesting to discuss and negotiate sex will

further alienate partners and lead to a greater willingness to oblige to their partner's requests (Starks et al., 2016). Therefore, this leads those with anxious-ambivalent attachment styles to engage with and oblige to partners stated and perceived requests to prevent anticipated rejection.

An anxious-avoidant attachment was associated with high levels of discomfort with emotionally close behaviors since they have the notion that others are not trustworthy or reliable (Starks et al., 2016). Those high in anxious-avoidant attachment behave in ways that create and further emotional distance them from partners and is associated with lowered sexual frequency, but higher rates of extra-relationship casual sex and UAI (Starks et al., 2016). This is an interesting dynamic when the aim is to remove themselves emotionally while the belief is widely held that foregoing condom use is the most intimate state one can achieve with someone sexually.

Attachment style has been a fundamental theory in how children not only relate to caregivers in formative years but also have a lasting impact on both platonic and romantic relationships throughout the life span. The ideas and beliefs that are formed during this period create the internal working models that persist far beyond childhood and adolescence. I will expand and theorize about how attachment style, along with other psychological phenomena, contributes to the various types of relationships observed in gay men.

### **Minority Stress Model and Sexual Behavior**

There are numerous factors that contribute to the well-being of individuals. Intra- and interpersonal factors play a large role in the way that individuals evaluate, interact with, make a

judgment of, and interpret the self. In this discussion, I will explore issues related to interpersonal factors (those that take place through interactions with others) and intrapersonal factors (factors internalized in the self based on interactions within groups or with others). The two constructs are difficult to separate due to the internalization and evaluation of the self, based on the interactions with others and societal views.

Social scientists have long searched for theories that help explain various behaviors with gay men; one such theory is Meyer's (1995) minority stress model. Minority stress is the psychological stress that is derived from holding a minority status within society (Meyer, 1995). Meyer (1995) examined how holding a minority status affected the mental health of gay men. Holding a minority status puts one at odds with dominant cultural beliefs, and therefore has a negative effect on one's psyche. Meyer (1995) examined three factors that contribute to minority stress: internalized homophobia (the inward direction of negative social attitudes), stigma (social labels of individuals), and prejudice events (the experience of discrimination and violence directed towards oneself).

According to Meyer (1995), internalized homophobia is the process of acceptance of societal 'deviant identities' that is a threat to the psychological well-being of the person who holds the deviant titles. The internalization of societal messages results in an increase of stress from the socially stigmatized and deviant title. To put it plainly, vicariously holding the social construct of gay has inherent prejudice from society, which in turn increases the stress gay men experience when this stress is turned inward. Stigmatization is the process an individual experiences when a 'label' has been placed on them by society (Meyer, 1995). Individuals in these stigmatized groups conform to imposed stereotypes, either consciously or unconsciously,

as either a pseudo or self-fulfilling prophecy. Stereotypes are “a belief about the personal attributes of a group of people” (Myers & Twenge, 2017, p. 256). Stereotypes are sometimes overgeneralized, inaccurate (sometimes accurate), and resistant to new information (Myers & Twenge, 2017). Prejudice is a “preconceived negative judgment of a group and its individual members” (Myers & Twenge, 2017, p. 256). Further, discrimination is an “unjustified negative behavior towards a group or its members” (Myers & Twenge, 2017, p. 256). Prejudice is the attitude and discrimination is the behavior acted upon those attitudes. Overall, Meyer (1995) reported that these aforementioned factors have an effect on psychological well-being and that minority stress is a prevalent problem among gay men. Meyer (1995) proposed that public policy needs to address the factors that contribute to minority stress, such as implementation of gay-affirmative programs and education about anti-gay violence and discrimination to help move the public forward in their ideas towards homosexuals to reduce the effects of minority stress, the impact this stress has on individuals, and to make public health recommendations.

Internalized homophobia, stigma, and prejudice were shown to increase distress in gay men, while decreased participation in and identification with the gay community was shown to have an indirect relationship with these factors (Meyer, 1995). Prejudice, stigma, and internalized homophobia increase stress in a gay man’s life; further, this stress perpetuates distance of attendance and participation in the gay community. Gay men who reported ‘high’ to ‘very high’ levels of minority stress did so at a rate of two to three times greater than those who reported low levels of minority stress (Meyer, 1995). These results illustrated that as minority stress increased gay men had a higher risk of psychological distress (Meyer, 1995). Overall, internalized homophobia, stigma, and prejudiced events all predicted psychological distress in

gay men; those who had some connection to the gay community helped to mitigate minority stress, which ultimately lowered the effects of a minority status. Humans are social beings who crave connection and intimacy with others – especially others who are like them. Communities provide individuals with a sense of connection, belonging, validation, and support; which in turn, these supportive factors may help alleviate the negative effects of minority stress.

Meyer's conducted his study over two decades ago and reflects the social issues gay men faced in the 1990's. Since Meyer's developed the minority stress model, there have been a number of policy changes that have been beneficial to the homosexual community. The suggestions that Meyer proposed in his research may have had an impact on societal policy changes absent over the last few decades; however, there underlies prejudice which further perpetuates distress for gay men. As a society, we have increased protection for sexual minorities through the implementation of more regulation around hate crimes and discrimination based on sexual orientation. Despite public policy changes, underlying social prejudice remains. Meyer (1995) offered little guidance on how to address minority stress at a societal level, but rather made acknowledgment of the domains that needed focus to reduce the psychological impact of minority stress and improve the mental health of gay men. Would this include advocacy through the aid of counselors to help with mental health issues? Or would it involve guidelines to safely explore sexuality, which may have been impacted by HIV/AIDS and how people view themselves?

The minority stress model does not account for all the factors that contribute to distress in the lives of gay men. I have discussed the intrapersonal factors (e.g., prejudice, stigma, and internalized homophobia) that are addressed by Meyer's through the minority stress model.

Now I would like to shift focus to interpersonal factors that contribute to distress. The just world belief is the idea that the world is fair and just, and that people get what they deserve (Lerner, 1965). There are a few social phenomena that need to be addressed with interpersonal factors. Before Lerner, Festinger (1954) proposed that goals are more attractive if someone goes to considerable lengths to try to achieve it. If someone does not believe they have the skills to successfully achieve a task, they will put in a great deal of effort and performance evaluation to match reality with their beliefs that the task is achievable. The reason that this is observed is the cognitive dissonance (or discomfort) that people experience if they earn something that they don't think they worked hard enough for. If people go through extraordinary effort to achieve a task when they perceive they will not do well, the extra effort is enough to justify the end result as positive or negative. They make their reality (the extraordinary effort) match the internal feeling (perceived deservingness) in order to reduce cognitive dissonance. Yaryan and Festinger (1961) have demonstrated that if someone has spent a lot of time in preparation for an event, they are more likely to persuade themselves that the event will happen. The process of matching environmental cues and internal feelings in a given situation can be attributed to an individual's self-appraisal of 'goodness' and their beliefs about the desired outcomes based on their self-evaluation. More simply put, if an individual believes they are 'good' they would expect 'good' outcomes. Lerner (1965) was one of the first to expand on previous research and proposed that people will experience less dissonance and arousal if they know that their efforts lead to a desirable outcome. If a person experiences this dissonance, they should be motivated to try to reduce the dissonance they feel so that their interpretation better fits the discrepancy between the effort and the outcome



(Lerner, 1965).

A person takes into account the outcome of a social event in order to make sense out of what he has observed or is believed to deserve (Lerner, 1965). The outcome was established to be fortuitously related to the person in the situation at hand (Lerner, 1965). Lerner (1965) explained this as: "people deserve what happens to them; once I know what has happened to someone I will be more comfortable if I can believe that he has earned it" (p. 360). Lerner (1965) interjects it is probably more comfortable to believe that people in a seriously deprived state earned their condition by some personal failure than to believe that deprived people are fortuitous victims of some social processes over which they have little personal control. A person's cognitive interpretation of an event, either accurate or distorted, enables them to make sense of environmental cues in order to resolve conflicting information between cognitive, behavior, and feedback from others.

The just world belief can tie back into the social phenomenon known as the self-fulfilling prophecy. Robert K. Merton (1948), a sociologist, first identified the effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy. W.I. Thomas, the dean of American sociologists, stated: "*if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences*" (Merton, 1948, pp. 504). If a person ascribes meaning to a certain event, then the behavior and consequences that follow will be determined by the ascribed meaning to the event (Merton, 1948). In other words, if a person sees an event as undesirable they may unconsciously drive their behaviors that will eventually lead to the outcome (and consequences of that outcome) that they did not want to happen in the first place.

The self-fulfilling prophecy acts as a bridge between the intrapersonal factors of the

minority stress model and the interpersonal factors of the just world belief. These constructs are difficult to separate due to the complex interactions between others and the interpretations and evaluations that one has of the self. The information one takes in from internalized homophobia, prejudice, and stigma leads to interpretation and internalization that directs their self-view and in turn affects behavior. The stress of the minority status causes an individual to create a negative self-evaluation, thus results in behaviors that are congruent to societal views.

### **Hookup Culture in the Gay Community**

An evolutionary approach to mating suggests that throughout human development, certain changes have taken place to ensure successful mating between people (Howard & Perilloux, 2016). Strong sex differences between various domains have been documented such as differences in sexual jealousy, desire for casual sex, interest in visual stimuli, mate preferences for social status, mate preference in physical attractiveness, and perception of target's sexual interest (Howard & Perilloux, 2016). Looking at homosexuality from an evolutionary perspective, it doesn't make much sense that homosexuality would continue, however, rates of homosexuality have stayed consistent over time (Beard, Dahlhammer, Galinsky & Joestl, 2014). There have been biological and genetic factors that have been proposed and supported, along with social development that is at play in orientation as well (Howard & Perilloux, 2016). Men, evolutionally, have lower opportunity costs of mating and have evolved to be less discriminating (Howard & Perilloux, 2016).

Although not exclusive, mating is more closely tied to one's sex at birth than to the sex of whom one is attracted to (Howard & Perilloux, 2016). Research has shown that women are

the limiting factor in sexual encounters, but in dyads where a woman is not present (i.e., gay men's relations) this is not an inhibiting factor (Howard & Perilloux, 2016). Gay men did not underestimate nor overestimate potential partners committed or sexual intent (Howard & Perilloux, 2016). With this, it is proposed that humans have not evolved specific homosexual mating psychologies and that men (especially gay men) have more canalized sexualities (Howard & Perilloux, 2016). This may fit in well by showing that gay men are evolutionarily predisposed to wanting more casual sex, like their heterosexual counterparts, and that they are able to experience this casualness more freely since women are not a limiting factor in meeting sexual needs/desires (Howard & Perilloux, 2016).

As gay men did with the Internet, adapting it earlier than other groups, modern technology devices have moved to the forefront of sexual partner seeking and has pioneered the way for and a new era of connectedness with others. There have been other effects that have come along with this change, such as new sexual practices, new attachments, and new distributions of intimacy (Race, 2015). Mobile devices have allowed for new ways of fitting into the gay community, such as 'checking-in,' which is using devices to feel as if you are using these sex-instigating avenues as a way of personally validating yourself and being socially recognized (Race, 2015). This new technology has led to objectifying others and turning sex into a commodity (Race, 2015). There has also been an 'absence of regulation,' monogamy, between gay male relationships due to the multiplicity of gay relations, such as hookups (Race, 2015). Changes in sexual attachment and detachment are also taking place and have changed with the introduction of this technology (Race, 2015). Online mobile hook-up apps typically serve to frame sexual encounters as those that are 'no-strings-attached' or commitment free (Race,

2015). Being able to have instant gratification through these devices has only led to a greater sense of isolation, and has also created ways to separate people into subgroups (e.g., bears, twinkles, poz, etc.; Race, 2015).

Analyzing infrastructure of intimacy achieves three things, a) draws attention to material technologies, b) how encounters are facilitated, and c) how these devices are now shaping the look of sexual relations (Race, 2015). It also brings to the forefront the different kinds of erotic attachment that people find necessary in life, but the ways that institutions of intimacy are being downplayed, especially since monogamy and marriage are monopolizing the discourse of gay life. Race (2015) introduces a good point and a closer look at the ways that people are shaping intimacy and sex through new technological avenue and what social effects may be presented as a result of their development.

In the United States, committed romantic relationships are generally perceived as the most appropriate context for sexual relations, especially in marriage (Mark, Garcia, & Fisher, 2015). Sex within committed relationship has been considered to be healthier and superior to casual sex (Mark et al., 2015). Within recent years, casual sex has started to become more of a social norm (Mark et al., 2015). Casual sex has begun to change people's sexual scripts, especially the emerging-adult population, with 60-80% of college students engage in some sort of sexual hookup (Mark et al., 2015). Most studies that have looked at satisfaction have mainly looked at heterosexual relationships. Mark and colleagues (2015) make sure to compensate for the relatively small samples of homosexual relationships in other studies. Research has also shown that sexual satisfaction is linked to communication, attachment, sexual desire, sexual compatibility, emotional awareness, personality factors, and emotional well-being (Mark et al.,

2015). Research has also supported that married people experience greater physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction than their cohabitating or single counterparts (Mark et al., 2015). Partners are reported to be more sexually attentive to their partner's needs within the context of marriage and committed relationships in general (Mark et al., 2015).

On average, uncommitted casual sex contexts lead to more sexual satisfaction as opposed to emotional satisfaction (Mark et al., 2015). Men tend to rate higher sexual and emotional satisfaction from casual sex contexts compared to women (Mark et al., 2015). Lesbian women reported the least amount of both sexual and emotional satisfaction from casual sex contexts (Mark et al., 2015). Gay men overall had the greatest emotional and sexual satisfaction from casual sex encounters (Mark et al., 2015). Mark and colleagues (2015) were not able to address other factors that may influence self-reports, such as the role of alcohol or drugs. According to Mark et al. (2015), previous research has been able to support the claim that sexual regret with uncommitted sexual encounters is linked with heavy alcohol use or the lack of condom usage, although the rating is buffered if the quality of the sex received a 'good' rating. Also, other studies have shown that women, in particular, are more likely to have greater sexual regret than their male counterparts (Mark et al., 2015).

While Mark and colleagues (2015) did a good job in compensating for the lack of research done on homosexual relationships, they supported the already in place stereotypes of gay men deriving more pleasure and satisfaction in the context of casual sex and that lesbian women are the opposite in which they don't receive much pleasure or satisfaction in casual contexts.

## Discussion

In this discussion, I will examine the social, emotional, and behavioral influences on gay men's engagement in the hookup culture. I will also address why I believe these factors have an effect on gay men and propose reasons why they seek out more casual sex than monogamous relationships. Through a gay men's identity development framework, I will theorize how identity influences how gay men relate to one another, and how this relational pattern feeds back into the schemas that they develop about themselves, along with how they view societal pressures.

### Social

There are numerous inter- and intrapersonal factors that are conducive to societal influences between gay men and the hookup culture. Before the intrapersonal factors take place, people develop their view of the social world through the interpersonal interactions that they have with their caregivers. Caregivers help children build their attachment by the way they respond to a child's needs. When the caregiver does not respond to a child's needs, the child may internalize the belief that someone may not always be there for them when they are in times of trouble. Attachment style formation in early development has a significant effect on how an individual relates to romantic and/or sexual partners later in life.

Imagine being a gay man who grew up in a home with a belief system that was negative towards homosexuality. Further, imagine being a child from the same home who has a maladaptive attachment style as the result of parenting. What impact would these factors have on the adult gay man with regards to relationships? Doesn't society say that gay men can't have

long-term relationships? That gay men are only interested in casual sex? Is there another motive behind this individual's statement? What if all they are really after is just sex?

As previously mentioned, the *minority stress model* (Meyer, 1995) is one intrapersonal factor that draws from the internalization of societal prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes by minorities, or in this application gay men. When these three factors come together, a person starts to integrate their experiences into themselves to make sense of the world around them. Their views have already been colored by their interactions with caregivers, so the social experiences that they do integrate into the self will be influenced by how they already conceive the world around them. There are numerous social stigmas and stereotypes that surround not only the homosexual community at large but also specific beliefs about gay men. Common stereotypes, to name a few, include: gay men being promiscuous, the immorality of homosexuality, gay men being unable to maintain long-term monogamous relationships, and gay men will contract HIV. These stereotypes all point to negative characteristics that are attributed to gay men. A gay man can internalize these societal attitudes and in turn, use them against himself because society is telling him that his identity revolves around these stereotypes. When a label is accepted as part of one's identity it can have a negative effect on how that person views the label upon which they've chosen to identify. When a society is telling you that the life you live is immoral, the stereotypes and attributes may become real in their effect by the actions that individuals take, whether consciously or unconsciously.

In addition to intrapersonal factors, these interpersonal factors further contribute to internalization of stereotypes by the beliefs expressed by others through the *Just World Belief* (JWB; Lerner, 1965). Individuals may, consciously or unconsciously, buy into societal norms or

shared beliefs about the morality of their sexual orientation and impose the just world belief on others. The interplay between inter- and intrapersonal factors contribute to social views of the hookup culture through the stereotypes imposed on gay men that gay men are promiscuous and that they are not able to have long-term monogamous relationships. In turn, gay men may start to act out societal stereotypes because they are under the belief that whatever comes their way is justified. Gay men may buy into the stereotyped social ideas of promiscuity and casual sex as a way to meet societal expectations.

### **Behavioral**

There are both inter- and intrapersonal factors that influence the behavior that gay men exhibit in regards to the hookup culture. As previously discussed, attachment theory shapes how one relates to others and partners. Individuals who are anxious-ambivalent or anxious-avoidant may exhibit behaviors that negatively impact their relationships. Anxious-ambivalent individuals are preoccupied with the notion that their partners are unavailable or will abandon them (Starks & Parsons, 2014). They may question motives behind their partner's actions even if no motive is present. Anxious-ambivalent individuals have a heightened sensitivity to changes in relationships and pay great attention to small details that are present in their partner's words and actions. This attachment style is characterized by seeking out reassurance from partners repeatedly even if there is no notable change or shift in the relationship. Their hypervigilance leads them to display protest behaviors to regain their partner's attention, such as calls and text messages, even if their partners have expressed that this behavior is inappropriate.

In the hookup culture, an anxious-ambivalent attachment style predisposes individuals to engage in riskier sex by forgoing condoms to retain their partner's interest (Starks et al.,



2016). Anxious-ambivalent individuals feel pressure to give in to their partner's wants and needs over their own because they view going against their partner as a potential threat to the security of their relationship. The anxious-ambivalent individual's behavior has been molded to give in to others and disregard their own needs because they cannot trust that a partner will want to keep them around if they don't succumb to the partner's desires. Their behavior is shaped by the fact that their needs have been disregarded in past relationships and they continue to apply this view to future relationships. These behaviors may reduce cognitive dissonance by accepting that their needs are not as important as their partners since this is the view that they already hold about themselves. The hookup culture can play a factor in this if individual's meet for casual sex in the goal of purely having their needs met. At the point in which someone asks them how they wish to go about things in a hookup, they may be met with discomfort resulting from cognitive dissonance by the notion that someone may be interested in what they need and want.

Individuals develop an anxious-avoidant attachment style as the result of caregivers not acknowledging their needs. As a result, individuals with this attachment style start to believe that they do not have any needs, a characteristic that follows them into adulthood. The hookup culture may provide the anxious-avoidant individual a sense of autonomy through strings of sexual partners with little to no emotional connection. These one-night stands and the engagement in sexual acts with multiple partners may never hit a level deep enough with one person to where it threatens to become emotionally involved. The behavior of engaging with multiple partners in casual sex may become reinforced because it provides a positive experience that fits their previously established worldview, and therefore may increase their

willingness to continue participation in the hookup culture. Starks & Parsons (2014) provide support for this concept in that avoidant men viewed casual sex more positively than their secure or anxious-ambivalent counterparts.

The behaviors that these individuals exhibit begin to have very real effects that may work at the unconscious level. Attachment theory begins to interplay with the self-fulfilling prophecy in the way that behaviors are exhibited. Anxious-ambivalent individuals may fear that they are irritating their partners by repeatedly asking for reassurance in a relationship to make sure that their relationship is safe. In this effect, it begins a feedback loop by a person asking for reassurance, getting the reassurance that then causes them to feel like they are being annoying by asking, and then beginning the cycle of asking all over again to maintain reassurance that they aren't annoying. This behavior in itself may irritate partners that are not as receptive or understanding of their significant other's needs. If reassurance is met, then the anxious individual may be relieved, but left unmet may cause them to harbor more anxiety. Those with this attachment style may seek out individuals to constantly fill the need of reassurance that they are important, regardless of the number or frequency of sexual partners.

As anxious-avoidant individuals seek to confirm that they do not have existing needs, engagement in hookup culture may work as a negative feedback loop. In order for avoidant individuals to feel as though they do not have needs, they may seek out casual sex partners that attempt to meet those needs so that the avoidant individual can deny their existence. Sexual communication is particularly low in avoidant individuals (Starks & Parsons, 2014), which may reinforce that there are no needs to be communicated in the first place because the needs are not present in these individuals. However, avoidant individuals also report having the lowest

amount of sex, which may reinforce their views of independence and self-sufficiency (Starks & Parsons, 2014). This lack of communication may be demonstrative of holding in self-disclosure as a means to protect their belief that their needs are not there.

Another interpersonal factor that holds behavioral influence is the self-fulfilling prophecy, which can work at both an unconscious and conscious level. When examined from a conscious perspective in regards to sexual risk taking, there are individuals who actively seek out other individuals who are HIV-positive in order to increase their odds of contracting HIV. This behavior is referred to as 'bug-chasing'. One of the stereotypes that plague the homosexual community is that gay men will contract HIV. In order to relinquish the fear of catching HIV, some individuals will purposefully seek to contract this disease in order to not have to continue to worry about whether or not they will contract it in the future. If they already know that they are HIV-positive, the fear is extinguished. This will confirm societal beliefs and reduce dissonance by confirming what the individual already knows based on what they've been led to believe in society.

### **Emotional**

Lastly, there is continuation between intra-and interpersonal factors that lead to an emotional effect on gay men and the hookup culture. Beginning with attachment, the main focus of a baby is to communicate that their needs are or are not being met through crying. Caregivers come to the rescue of the child by comforting them and figuring out whether it needs to be changed, fed, or cuddled. In situations where needs are not met, adults will seek out situations that also do not meet their emotional or sexual needs in relationships. Their working models of how others behave and their internal working model of the self has been

skewed towards a negative reaction and interpretation of others actions and behaviors because of the treatment that they received from their parents as a child.

Communication with other individuals can become a challenge depending on an individual's attachment style someone harbors. Anxious-avoidant gay men have the lowest scores of communicating with partners (Starks & Parsons, 2014), especially sexual partners. By working towards effective communication of one's wants and desires, the individual would first have to accept that there are existent needs to be communicated. Avoidant individuals may find this task too uncomfortable and withdraw from potential partners early to maintain their independence in dealing with their own problems. They present themselves as cold and unavailable to their significant others, or potential partners because it reinforces their self-sufficiency and perceived absence of needs.

Anxious-ambivalent gay men do not significantly differ from their secure counterparts in terms of communication level with partners (Starks & Parsons, 2014). This may be due to ambivalent men expending an immense amount of effort to maintain their relationship the way that it is to prevent those small changes that they are worried they will sense. However, individuals choose their partners based on early developed schemas of themselves as they relate to others. Therefore, it is not uncommon for ambivalent men to chase after avoidant men, ultimately failing in their endeavor. Avoidant men try hard to keep their partners away and to maintain a level of cold and harshness in their relationships – the exact characteristics that ambivalent men fear, and what the ambivalent views as a working model of what other individuals look like (them being cold and unavailable). The ambivalent man will work extra hard to keep the avoidant individual's attention and interest, but since the avoidant man is not

interested in becoming emotionally involved he will usually break-off the relationship. This reinforces both working models of others and of self from within both the ambivalent and avoidant attached people. In terms of the hookup culture, if an anxious-avoidant individual decides to only have a one-night stand with an anxious-ambivalent individual, the anxious-ambivalent individual may interpret the situation as no one is interested in them romantically enough to be with them in long-term relationships. The idea of 'I knew they weren't interested in me' stems from the ambivalent man's models as he expected that much of other people. This will continue to reinforce seeking out situations that confirm that people will remain cold and unavailable to him. In the case that either of these attachment styles become involved with a secure attachment figure, they may be able to build a secure attachment bond with their significant other.

These emotional aspects tie into the *minority stress model* (Meyer, 1995). The views of worthiness that one holds about the self have been internalized based on societies stigmas and stereotypes that have been fed to individuals throughout their lifetime. People may relinquish their true wants and needs in favor of going with what they know in order to save themselves the trouble of becoming emotionally vulnerable. Gay men may start to expect that other individuals like them are only good enough for one thing, such as the stereotype surrounding promiscuity. If an individual views sex as the only thing that a gay man is good enough for, the gay man may accept this at face value. A gay man may never try to challenge these societal views because they may try to avoid further hurt and adversity that they've experienced throughout their lifetime from other individuals. The hookup culture is a space that has already

been created for them to be able to express their views that they already hold true and have internalized.

### **Future Research**

Finding individuals to participate in studies regarding their sexuality is a controversial topic in the field of psychological research. There are many factors that need to be considered when conducting psychological research, such as, ethical and humane treatment, stigmatization and participation, especially when examining the LGBTQ community. An overwhelming number of studies in this research area come from self-report measures, which may result in self-serving biases in responses. In addition to these self-serving biases, self-report measures have a level of subjectivity that can be influenced by an individual's beliefs. Given the nature of LGBTQ research samples of convenience are frequently used as a result of the hidden population that the LGBTQ community encompasses. This sampling method can skew data in that it may not be representative of the LGBTQ community or specific subgroups within the LGBTQ community. Depending on the sample and environment of a particular venue data may be biased due to demand characteristics and self-selection biases of the participants. If researchers were to conduct a study on people at a venue that is typically used for seeking casual sex, then people who seek casual sex are more likely to be there and hold different beliefs about sex than someone who seeks more committed, monogamous relationships with other men. In addition, the LGBTQ community has many hidden populations that make conducting comparison research difficult. Those who are in monogamous relationships are not frequent users of community safe places (e.g., bars, nightclubs, etc.) thus creating a difficult population to be included in comparative research.

In moving forward with the hookup culture and its effects on gay men, I intend to look further into the unconscious factors that precipitate engagement in casual sex. The component of interpersonal attachment style that people develop with their caregivers sets up how they will interact with others throughout the lifetime. By examining someone's attachment patterns, I will focus on how gay men make use of these views and integrate them into the self and examine whether or not they use the hookup culture as a means to validate the beliefs that they hold about the self. I will use the just world belief as a starting point to examine whether the outcomes that people experience make them feel as if the world is a just place. How does participation in the hookup culture verify the attitudes that individual's hold about themselves? How does an individual's attachment pattern affect the attitudes that individuals seek to verify?

Continued research in this field may help to understand some of the effects that the hookup culture has on the people who engage in it, especially LGBTQ members. Research may help to uncover the unconscious drives behind an individual's motivation to seek out situations that confirm their identity. Further, examining this topic more in-depth may help to decrease the stigma that surrounds the gay hookup culture. There are, however, a few questions left to be addressed in this circumstance. Where does the hookup culture stem from? Is the popularity of casual sex in gay men a by-product of the just-world belief? Gay men may be seeking out these situations so that they can reduce their cognitive dissonance and confirm their already held beliefs about the self. Is the gay hookup culture a factor of the individual? The attachment that children build with their caregivers may predispose those who don't develop a secure attachment to create a way that they can have their needs met as adults. Lastly, is the hookup culture part of a larger systemic issue? Does the pressure from society to conform to societal

norms create large amounts of stress on the individual where they unconsciously engage in activities that they do not realize are self-fulfilling? While both long-term monogamous relationships and casual sex are both accepted forms of expressing sexuality, more research into the area of LGBTQ issues may help to reduce the stigma, prejudice, and discrimination that gay men face in society.

### **Conclusion**

The application of the *Minority Stress Model* (MSM; Meyer, 1995), attachment theory, and the *Just World Belief* (JWB; Lerner, 1965) provide an interesting perspective when it comes to examining the social, emotional, and behavioral effects that the hookup culture has on gay men. Once interpersonal factors are established early in life, they affect how societal messages that are internalized through an intrapersonal lens are analyzed with the MSM and JWB. The behaviors that individuals exhibit may be attributable to by-products of these beliefs about the self, but beg the question of whether or not larger systemic issues have a role in their presence. The hookup culture may continue to be an outlet for people to make sense of their world, unconsciously or consciously, and to interpret their view of themselves and their expectations of other people.



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