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Hookups

Youth sexuality and social change

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INTRODUCTION

Tony was a young man from Southern California, tall with sad and droopy eyes. He seemed to look straight through you, contemplative and a little reserved; many perceived him to be slightly mysterious. Tony, like most of the freshmen students I interviewed, came to the San Francisco Bay Area to attend college with the expectation of beginning a new phase in their lives. For the first time in his life, he lived away from his parents. He could uncompromisingly do what he wanted, make new friends, take interesting courses, explore life-style options, party and get drunk, and of course, experience sexual adventures with a variety of partners. Tony had his first college hookup at the beginning of the first semester.

It was the first week in the dorms. That is kind of the week that everybody gets crazy, because it's like the first time that a lot of these people have ever been really... what is the right word? Independent, I guess? So, everybody was getting really, really drunk and that is when most hookups happened; at that point in the year. And my roommate and I met these two girls who lived together down the hall from us, and we kind of split up. We each went for one. We had them come over to our room and watch a movie together, and we hooked up (Tony).

Narratives of college as an arena in which casual sexual adventures are extremely common are omnipresent in popular culture. From Tom Wolfe's bestsellers *Hooking Up* (2000) and *I am Charlotte Simmons* (2004), to MTV's series *Spring Break*, the lives of young men and women are depicted as a 'lurid carnival' (Wolfe, 2000) of seemingly uncommitted, free-for-all sex. The days of conventional dating have allegedly passed, and this extends beyond college. In series like *Seinfeld* and *Friends*, the protagonists had a seemingly never-ending string of flings and casual sex partners. From these cultural messages, audiences get the impression that this is the new norm of intimate relations for young Americans in the new millennium. At least a fraction of the American population seems to have this idea. A blossoming self-help industry

emerged that promised young men and women easy roadmaps for navigating this new sexual landscape. Some self-help literature (mostly aimed at women) showed readers how to find ‘Mr. Right’ within this environment of uncommitted liaisons; others (mostly aimed at men) propagated dubious interactional techniques to live the life of a modern-day Casanova. In his renowned 1992 book, *How to Get the Women You Desire into Bed*, Ross Jeffries explained to his worried audience:

What I am about to show you will allow you to create very powerful feelings of being turned on and excited in almost any woman you can spend time with. You don't have to rely on luck, or that special "chemistry" or "spark." [I] will show you how to create that in about ten minutes time, with almost any woman you want, in almost any circumstances. Instead of dates that end up with a polite peck on the cheek, you'll end up taking it as far as you want to go, regardless of how the woman felt about you before you used these techniques on her (Jeffries, 1992).

Hordes of young men were inspired by narratives like this and partook in what came to be known as ‘seduction communities’, loosely organized groups in which young men tried to learn the embodied competences of heterosexual flirtation and sexual escalation. While most men who were attracted to these communities only got briefly involved before realizing that reality did not quite match these lascivious expectations, some took it very seriously and dedicated years to them. Some of these men claimed that these communities filled the emptiness in their lives.

There is definitely some tall tailing going on. But the other thing is that I've done a number of things, that when I talk to guys about it, they'll say it's impossible. Owen Cook [renowned "dating" coach] came up with this theory which he named the secret society, that is that only 1% of the population fucks 50% of the girls and I think there's some truth in this. I mean I had at least 130 one-night stands, and I can see other guys doing that as well (John).

On the other side of the globe, Norton, a sophomore student at the University Hong Kong, like Tony, had a casual sexual adventure with a fellow student. By the end of his freshman year, he and a female friend had progressively become closer. Right before the summer break, before she planned to fly out for a year abroad, Norton and she were at his dorm. His roommates had returned to their family homes, and the couple sat in private, talking about their plans for the coming year. Norton liked her and found her attractive, but he also knew that a relationship between them would not work at this stage because a boyfriend in Hong Kong did

not align with her career plans. Nonetheless, things between them escalated that evening, and they had intercourse. Norton felt torn about the episode and struggled to find words to describe the encounter. 'We are not really friends, we are not... a couple, and yeah that's weird.' Norton tried to forget about it, and only confessed the incident to a few close friends. Even with a researcher, who could relate to his experience and expressed no moral objections to these episodes, Norton felt burdened to discuss the situation. 'Do we have to talk about this?' Norton asked, explaining, 'I don't like this kind of relationships, [...] because I think this is not good.'

Hong Kongese freshman student Sandy had a similar experience. Like Tony and Norton, she too came to college with the expectations that a new life phase had begun, marked by her eighteenth birthday. 'I didn't start going out till I was 18, which was when I got into university [...] and then I was like let's go out and explore.' Exploring for Sandy entailed going to the nightlife district of LKF, to party and drink, socialize to meet new people, and flirt and have sex.

One [occasion] was with an exchange student from Texas. I met him through my friend who is a full-time student here [University Hong Kong –this is a pseudonym-] and she decided to bring him to the party in LKF [nightlife district], and then everybody was drinking and we were flirting around. And then we went back to his dorm and we had sex (Sandy).

Sandy felt torn about this episode, as a result of conflicting cultural messages about what it meant to be a young woman at the start of the 21st century. Sandy spent most of her childhood in America and moved back to Hong Kong as an adolescent. She had many international students as friends, as well as local Hong Kong Chinese. She grew up amidst two traditions with different sexual norms.

I wasn't too sure about how to feel. In Chinese tradition, you should always make sure that you have sex after marriage. I was always taught that, but when it [the pre-marital hook-up] happened I was really shocked. I was thinking "oh my God what happens now? What did I do?" So, I asked my mother for advice.

Her mother reacted surprisingly understandingly, contrary to her expectations. She thought that her mother would be 'extremely mad', but instead she 'just sighed' and said 'okay, it happens'. However, this soft reaction did not mean that her mother approved of Sandy's experiences with casual sex. In the days and weeks following Sandy's confession, her mother kept a close check on her whereabouts. 'She would just ask me "who are you going out with? Where are you going? And how long?"

And she wanted to know all these details. “Is it a girl or is this a guy?” Although Sandy was annoyed by her mother’s interferences, especially since she seemed so understanding and had not judged her, they brought clarity to her perspective on sex and relationships. ‘Now I know myself a bit more. You have to experience these things to know what you are looking for. I wouldn’t do it casually anymore.’

‘Scripts’ of youth sexuality (Gagnon and Simon, 1973:20) travel through all corners of the world, and mass media and the transnational movement of people are important vehicles in this process. America’s global dominance in the entertainment industry is felt in nearly all places around the globe. Youth in Australia, Asia, Africa and Europe are exposed to the ‘lurid carnival’ of casual sexual relations among young adults that are depicted in American movies and TV shows. The question is whether these local audiences adopt these ideas about intimacy, relationships and sex, contest them, or creatively rework them in their own sexual cultures. In addition to mass media, people are vehicles for these tropes. A class of privileged, often highly educated denizens is increasingly geographically mobile, following work, leisure and educational opportunities around the globe. These individuals also bring with them cultural templates of intimacy, some of which include a decoupling of sex and relationships, and share these with interlocutors in their new places of residency. Through these interpersonal exchanges, tropes of youth sexuality travel, at times verbally and at times through intimate contact. While in some regions these templates might remain in the realm of ideas and fantasies, in others they might become models for practice.

Especially in East Asia, new templates of intimacy seem to find fertile ground. In recent decades, there have been drastic changes in intimate relationships throughout this region. The age of first marriage has risen dramatically, resulting in a prolonged period in which youth can explore intimate relationships relatively freed from former, adult expectations of finding a lifelong partner. At the same time, acceptance of premarital sex has risen, and an increasing number of young men and women explore their sexuality with different partners before committing to their future spouses (Davis and Friedman, 2014). Some studies suggest that in the urban centers throughout this region, sex is increasingly decoupled from intimate relationships for more and more of the ambitious, highly educated young professionals (Farrer, 2002; Moskowitz, 2008). A rapid increase in women’s autonomy and a reorientation of values, emphasizing personal fulfilment over social conformity, have been important factors in this change (Farrer, 2014:63; Yan, 2011). These developments parallel the social changes in America that have led to the emergence of a hookup culture across college campuses. It remains to be seen if these corresponding changes in East Asia have resulted in the emergence of hooking up as a dominant norm of intimate relationships among youth.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Of all the urban centers in East Asia, Hong Kong is among the cities with the most intense exposure to American tropes of youth sexuality. From its onset as a colony of the British crown, the city has always had a window open to the ‘west’. Although the city has a massive indigenous entertainment industry, the penetration of mass media productions originating in the western hemisphere has been much more severe than in other urban centers in the region. Through these media, narratives of seemingly hedonistic American youth sexual culture have found their way to the city. Furthermore, Hong Kong has long been a commercial hub, attracting entrepreneurial spirits from all regions of the world. These people have met in the city-state and exchanged ideas and practices, resulting in a true melting pot of traditions, both Chinese and Anglo-Saxon. Ideologies and practices of intimacy have been part of this enduring cultural exchange. Hong Kong continues to attract a large flow of professional expats, many of whom come from Anglo-Saxon countries. They work in the city, make friends locally, and at times forge intimate relationships with them. In addition to this flow of people from the western hemisphere, who introduce their culture and traditions to the city, a significant fraction of Hong Kongese youth have been introduced to western culture abroad, often through education in the United States, where they have been exposed to hookup culture. One question that this research addresses is whether this cultural exchange at home and abroad result in pronounced hookup practices among privileged Hong Kongese youth.

Tropes of youth sexuality do not only travel internationally but also within the nation. Youth across America are familiar with the campus hookup culture, either through personal experience, through media messages, or through tales of friends and acquaintances. However, it remains uncertain if this means that hooking up is a dominant norm of youth sexual relations outside of the campus arena. What we do know is that many students, especially women, hook up because they prioritize their own personal development during their college years and construe committed relationships as detrimental to their identity projects (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009; Wade, 2017). Relationships can be emotionally draining and demanding in terms of the time and energy invested in them, whereas hookups do not come with these costs and can still satisfy potent sexual needs. These explanations of hookup culture resemble the processes described in Giddens’ (1992) much-criticized work on the transformation of intimacy. He argues that increased female autonomy diminished dependencies within intimate relationships. Furthermore, the emerging pop-psychological ideologies of self-reflexivity –espoused within psychoanalyses and in much self-help literature- have been transposed to the domain of intimate rela-

tionships, fueling a culture of intimacy in which relationships are prolonged as long as they bring emotional and sexual satisfaction to partners (Giddens, 1992). While many scholars rightly criticized the sweeping generalizations contained in this work and, for instance, pinpointed the gendered material dependencies that persist in many intimate relationships (Jamieson, 1999), ‘a transformation of intimacy’ has indeed happened within the college arena. The question is whether this transformation is particular to these environments or transcends the campus arena and captures the relationship dynamics of young Americans outside of these institutions.

The rise of pop-psychological ideologies of self-reflexivity and related ideals of self-development are not universal processes. Scholars have therefore criticized Giddens’ work for being ethnocentric (Jackson et al., 2008). However, even within America, such a cultural shift has not occurred throughout the nation. It seems that Giddens was not thinking of religious communities in the Deep South when he wrote his seminal work on the transformation of intimacy. Rather, he might have thought of regions such as Northern California, where a self-help culture centered on personal growth and self-fulfillment is omnipresent. It is likely that in this region a large number of individuals prioritize self-development projects above the demands of a committed relationship and a hookup culture would emerge among young adults outside of the college arena. Hence, the San Francisco Bay Area seems like a logical site to study heterosexual hookup culture outside of college. In this dissertation, I ask if hookup culture is widespread within the campus arena and how predominant the norm of hooking up is in the intimate relationships of youth in the immediate surroundings of college campuses.

I am not claiming that the hookup script is new or that casual sex did not exist prior to the sexual revolution. The term ‘hooking up’ is relatively new and can refer to different sexual practices. A ‘hookup’ can mean the exchange of a kiss, engaging in oral sex, intercourse, or a combination of these activities. The phrase emerged at some point in the eighties (Murray, 1991), but the sexual script—the configuration of a sequence of sexual acts, and their social meaning (Gagnon and Simon 1973:20)—it denotes is much older (Reay, 2014). Sex without expectations of commitment, with little emotional intimacy, and undertaken for the sake of sexual pleasure, has been described in numerous studies. Commercial sex has often followed a sexual script that is similar to today’s hookup. Beyond the realm of prostitution, casual sex has appeared in ethnographies, for instance in Zorbaugh’s (1983)[1929] classical study on ‘furnished rooms’ in a working-class neighborhood in Chicago. This study considered an area with rooming houses where many unmarried working-class and bohemian youth lived independently from their families, where casual sexual affairs were allegedly common (1983[1929]:86). More has been written about casual sex

among men, for instance in public restrooms (Humphreys, 1970) and bathhouses (Weinberg and Williams, 1975). What is new is the emergence of casual sex as a dominant form of heterosexual intimate couplings among a significant fraction of the American student population. It is this new norm of heterosexual contact that is the focus of this research.

RESEARCH ON HOOKUP CULTURE

A dominant theme in research on hooking up, particularly among gender scholars, is the deconstruction of persistent gender inequalities in the practice of hooking up. A number of scholars, for instance, write about the firm double standard of hookup culture (Allison and Risman, 2013; Armstrong and Hamilton, 2013; Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009; Currier, 2013; Heldman and Wade, 2010; Kalish and Kimmel, 2011). Casual sexual experiences enhance the status of young men among peers, while women risk the 'whore stigma' (Pheterson, 1996). This label has severe social and psychological consequences for women. It damages women's reputation on campus; it constrains their sexual freedom (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009:598); it makes finding romantic partners more difficult (England, et al. 2008:538); it leads to social exclusion and feelings of marginalization (Armstrong et al., 2014:114-116); and, it increases risks of sexual violence, as men become more coercive in their pursuit, and female peers are less guarded (Armstrong et al., 2006:493). Another tenacious inequality of hookup culture pertains to the pleasure derived from the encounter. Both men and women, for instance, prioritize men's sexual pleasure (Currier, 2013:711). Men are more likely to receive oral sex than women (England et al., 2008:537; Kalish and Kimmel, 2011:147), and men are also more likely to experience orgasm (England et al., 2008:535).

Another dominant theme within studies of hookup culture, especially in social psychology, is the exploration of its alleged social, physical and psychological 'risks'. A number of reoccurring strands can be observed within this research. Numerous scholars have investigated the possible adverse emotional effects of hooking up. Some argue that a substantial fraction of youth that hook up experiences shame, embarrassment, regret, anxiety, psychological distress, low self-esteem and depression after the encounter (Bachtel, 2013; Eshbaugh and Gute, 2008; Fielder and Carey, 2010:1116; Grello, et al. 2006; Lewis et al., 2012; Napper et al., 2016:772; Owen et al., 2010; Paul, et al. 2000:85; Paul and Hayes, 2002:657-658; Vrangalova, 2015). A number of researchers argue that women experience greater risks of negative psychological outcomes due to hooking up (Grello, et al. 2006;

Owen et al., 2010; Paul and Hayes, 2002). Another strand of research explores the potential social ‘risks’ of hooking up. Some authors found that hooking up can negatively affect the relationship with a hookup partner, for example by ending friendships (Bachtel, 2013; Napper et al., 2016:772), although the same can be said of love relationships. Others explored the potential physical ‘risks’ of hooking up. Hooking up is linked to excessive drinking (LaBrie et al., 2014; Paul, et al. 2000:85), and excessive drinking correlates with unprotected sex in hookups (Downing-Matibag and Geisinger, 2009; Olmstead et al., 2015:186), which increases the risks of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (Bachtel, 2013; Fielder et al., 2014). There are also, though fewer studies that point to the potential positive effects of hooking up. This is especially striking since some research indicates that youth associate more positive than negative emotional reactions to hooking up (Owen and Fincham, 2011; Snapp et al., 2015). First and foremost, hookup culture enhances middle-class women’s career prospects by postponing committed relationships (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009). Second, hookups can be emotionally and physically pleasant. They can be emotionally satisfying, exciting and physically pleasurable (Bradshaw et al., 2010:666; Strokoff et al., 2015).

Research to the alleged ‘risks’ of casual sex for youth falls in a tradition of what Schalet (2011) calls a ‘dramatization’ of the sexuality of youth in America, whereby the difficulties and conflicts of youths’ sexual practices are emphasized (2011:17); a trend that seems to have amassed weight in the last two decades (Halperin, 2017:7). The development of youths’ sexuality is envisioned as a time in which uncontrollable biological forces potentially overpower individual’s moral imperatives. This can result in various detrimental health outcomes, such as unwanted pregnancies, STDs and a disregard of sexual consent. Furthermore, sexual relations among youth are envisioned as a battlefield in which young men pursue sex and young women want relationships (Schalet, 2011:17). Youths’ sexuality is seen as a genuine problem that needs to be studied as such, in order to formulate effective policy measures and recommendations to parents and educators on how to control their sexual expressions, thereby restricting their sexual agency (Halperin, 2017:7).

Why is youth sexuality equated with ‘risks’? This question is increasingly daunting considering the steady decrease of most problematic aspects of youths’ sexual practices. Teen pregnancy rates in America have been dropping for years, although they remain high in comparison to other developed economies (CDC, 2016; Schalet, 2011, 2011:4). Similarly, reported incidences of sexual assault have been declining in the last decades (BJS, 2014:3). Within the tradition of researching the ‘risks’ of youth sexuality, there is a large focus on college students. An example is the vast amount of research on college hookup culture. But why do college youth

attract so much attention from researchers? They do not experience the bulk of the most problematic aspects of sex. Rates of unwanted pregnancies and of reported sexual assault incidents are lower among college-going youth than among their peers outside of the academy (CDC, 2016; BJS, 2014:4). Part of the answer is likely that researchers tend to investigate phenomena that happen under their noses, and the sexual practices of students are an easily accessible domain. But this, I argue, is likely one side of the answer. Another is that the sexual culture of a large fraction of the college-going youth has, for a long time, contrasted the sexual norms of adults -including adult researchers. It is this contrast that fuels the interest of many.

Fewer scholars have tried to explain why hookup culture emerged, although a number of scholars have formulated tentative explanations. Some point to the rise of an imbalanced sex ratio on many campuses (Bogle, 2008; Heldman and Wade 2010:328; Kimmel 2008:202; Regnerus, 2012). Within this line of reasoning, concomitant with the 'dramatization' of youth sexuality (Schalet, 2011:17), sexual relations among youth are construed as a site of strife in which men and women want different things. Men want casual sex, and women want relationships. It follows that since men are in short demand on most campuses, they have the power to define the terms of these encounters. As a result, casual sex has become the norm on many campuses. A number of research findings complicate the 'battle of the sexes' argument. The sexual arena of youth is not a battlefield where men and women want different things; many women want to hookup just as much as men do (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009), and many men desperately want relationships. Others have also criticized the simplified perspective on human sexual and relational needs. Men and women alike have multiple sexual urges and relational needs, and both sexes want sexual excitement, commitment and emotional intimacy at the same time (Paik, 2013:177). Committed relationships, dates and hookups are templates for intimate behavior that coexist (England et al., 2008:540; Luff et al., 2016).

FROM DATING TO HOOKING UP

Historically, the transition from dating to hooking up -which likely started in the late sixties but did not appear as a dominant norm on campuses until the eighties- seems to overlap with the trend that sex ratios on most campuses tilted towards a majority of women. However, the market narrative neglects the dramatic social and cultural changes that happened within the realm of gender relations in the second half of the 20th century. One major shift has been the relaxation of restrictions on female sexuality. In the preceding dating regime, light sexual activity, such as kiss-

ing and petting, was acceptable for women, but heavier practices were not. Men, on the other hand, did not face such restrictions; thus, women were responsible for the safeguarding of sexual boundaries when dating. The accomplishments of second-wave feminism have, amongst others, resulted in a gradual lifting of these restrictions on the sexuality of young, unmarried women. As a result, premarital sex became acceptable for both men and women.

‘The accomplishments of second-wave feminism’ is a rather concealing phrase to denote a whole range of changes in the realm of gender relations. One major change has been the astonishing increase in the number of women that found paid employment from the early sixties onwards. The lifting of marriage bars opened up career trajectories for married women. In the following decades, many women found paid employment, giving women unprecedented financial autonomy and access to an important source of self-respect and emotional fulfillment that was previously restricted to men. Additionally, an increasingly large number of young women found their way towards tertiary education, enhancing future career prospects. Furthermore, there were massive ruptures within the realm of intimate relations. Laws against sexual abuse and harassment were put in place, which gave a clear signal that physical violence within intimate affairs was unacceptable. Birth control became generally available, enabling more women to plan their careers and eliminating the risk of unwanted pregnancies from sexual experimentation. In combination, these dramatic social changes enabled women to chart the courses of their own lives.

Many young women seized these opportunities and prioritized their own development above the ‘emotion work’ of committed relationships. In previous decades, a dominant culture of romance on campus pressured female students into committed relationships, and within these affairs the career ambitions of women eroded (Holland and Eisenhart, 1990). Currently, college has become a time to pursue one’s own interests for many ambitious young women. This cultural shift was augmented by the changing economic tide of the seventies. Economic conditions deteriorated, and youth faced more precarious and financially insecure futures than prior generations. The following decade of Reaganomics did little to change this situation. On the contrary, a new wave of neoliberal policies washed over the country, reducing social welfare expenditures and deregulating and privatizing important industries. An ideology of economic individualism rose to prominence as a rationale for directing and evaluating life options. There was a cultural shift in campus culture that social historian Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (1987) calls the rise of ‘grim professionalism’—a term first used by former Yale president, Kinsman Brewster (Horowitz, 1987:245). College, first and foremost, became a place to secure middle-class careers, rather than a place to develop a political conscience or formulate idealistic

aspirations for the betterment of society, as was a key goal of students of the preceding error (1987:251). This greater focus on learning vocational skills did not mean that students forwent the social scene on campus and dedicated all their time and effort to studying. College was still a place for meeting new people, having fun and exploring sexual options, now within a context of relaxed restrictions on female sexuality.

Within these environments, hooking up emerged as a script of the intimate coupling of youth. In the following decades, it emerged as a dominant norm on some college campuses. A question remains about the extent to which hookup culture is confined to these particular environments. Some authors suggest that the infrastructural arrangements of residential colleges are necessary conditions for the emergence of an omnipresent culture of casual sex (Allison and Risman, 2014; Bogle, 2007; Ray and Rosow, 2010). On these campuses, youth of around the same age live in close proximity to each other, outside of the controlling gazes of parents, at an age when most are unmarried and sexually active (Kalish and Kimmel, 2011:140). These college environments are generally perceived as safe havens in which youth feel a general sense of familiarity with each other because they have similar aspirations and because they are in a similar place in their lives (Bogle, 2007:781-782). College campuses are tightly integrated communities in which friend groups are entwined, and even strangers often share mutual acquaintances. Socializing with peers often happens at alcohol-infused get-togethers in a state of careless fun. It remains questionable if these conditions are necessary for the emergence of hooking up as a dominant norm of intimate coupling among youth. In any case, this 'infrastructural argument' cannot explain the emergence of hookup culture, since these infrastructural arrangements have been present for around a century, and hooking up only recently became a dominant sexual norm on college campuses.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

I start my exploration of the conditions under which hookup culture emerged with a historical analysis. This exploration starts at the turn of the 20th century. This time roughly corresponds with the origin of youth as a distinct life phase and a general group with its own culture and distinct sexual norms, in the upper and middle-classes. These new sexual norms emphasized an arrangement of what came to be known as 'dating', a form of youth courtship that was separate from the adult expectations of finding a marriage partner. From that point onwards, I delineate the larger social and

cultural transformations in which the shift from dating to hooking up occurred.

The second chapter researches intimate relationships at Bay Area University – pseudonym-, a commuter college in the greater San Francisco region, in order to explore the infrastructural argument in depth. If the particular spatial, social and cultural arrangements of residential colleges are necessary conditions for the emergence of hookup culture, does a different sexual culture or norm emerge on commuter college campuses? To what extent is there a hookup culture at Bay Area University? I argue that hooking up is confined to particular niches of college life and is not central to the college experience at BAU. The campus arena is fissured by the social grid of class, gender, race and age, and the complex intersection of these structures means that only a particular fraction of the student population hookup, predominantly White (upper)middle-class students in their freshman and sophomore years. Within this chapter, I describe how this structuring works, and how gender shapes the hookup experience.

In the third and fourth chapters, I explore the extent to which hooking up is a frequently enacted sexual script in intimate encounters of youth outside of the campus arena in the Bay Area. My focus is on ‘seduction communities’ of ‘game’ practitioners. These practitioners are men who study, practice and teach heterosexual flirtation and sexual escalation. This men’s movement entered the mainstream after the international bestseller *The Game: Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists* (2005), in which *New York Times* journalist Neil Strauss describes his years of involvement with this community and his fantastic transformation from a man with little sexual options to a renowned *pickup artist*. I find this self-label rather complacent and prefer to use the term ‘game’ practitioner. I follow a group of these men in their efforts to initiate sexual encounters with women in the ‘urban erotic contact zone’ of San Francisco, comprised of bars, clubs, cafes, shopping malls and high streets. I have loosely modelled this concept on Nagel’s (2003) ‘ethnosexual contact zone’ to describe urban spaces in which flirtatious interactions between strangers are relatively common. In the third chapter, I ethnographically explore the pedagogical path of ‘game’ practitioners. I argue that as neophytes become players of the ‘game’, their immediate goal of finding sexual partners is suspended, and a focus on the acquisition of heterosexual competences takes priority. In their unique realm, in which flirtatious and sexual interactions with women are construed as a ‘game’, players accrue status through an ostentatious demonstration of heterosexual skills, and hooking up frequently is a powerful narrative of expertise. Players of the ‘game’ present an extreme case for investigating the existence of a hookup culture in the domains immediately surrounding college. If hookup culture exists outside of the college arena, I would expect to find it among these men. In the fourth

chapter, I explore the sexual scripts that competent players of the ‘game’ in the Bay Area enact through a focus on their rituals, techniques and tactics of heterosexual contact. Despite their devoted efforts to live the life of a modern-day Casanova, their sexual adventurousness is the exception rather than the rule, and sex within the ‘game’ is not always casual. Hookup culture outside of the campus arena is a myth rather than reality, but that does not stop hordes of young men from dedicating the best years of their lives to a seemingly futile quest of the ‘game’.

The global diffusion of the hookup script will be the theme in the second part of the dissertation. My focus will be on Hong Kong, a region that has, on the surface, seen many similar changes in gender and intimate relationships as America. Chapter five explores the larger social and cultural transformation within the city-state in which changes in youth sexual cultures are embedded. Privileged women in Hong Kong also venture towards higher education *en masse* and pursue outstanding careers after college. At the same time, intimate relationships have changed dramatically, premarital sex has become more acceptable and the age of first marriage has risen (Davis and Friedman, 2014). As a result, young men and women experience a prolonged period of relatively unencumbered experimentation with sex, intimacy and relationships. Subsequent chapters focus on whether they do this within dating, hooking up or other intimate arrangements.

Chapter six empirically explores the sexual culture on a largely residential college campus in Hong Kong. At UHK – pseudonym-, hooking up is a known, but seldom enacted script; it is the practice of distant others, of foreign students that occurs on other campuses around the world. Students at UHK have a distinct dating arrangement called *ceot pool* – 出 (ceot1) pool-. The last empirical chapter explores dominant sexual mores within another domain frequented by youth in Hong Kong, the urban erotic contact zone, comprising bars, nightclubs, cafes, restaurants and high streets. Once again, the focus of this chapter will be on ‘game’ practitioners. These mainly include expat men from Europe, America and Australia along with Hong Kong Chinese men who have spent their formative years in Anglo-Saxon countries and are thus primed towards casual sexual encounters with Hong Kong Chinese women. Again, if heterosexual hookup culture existed in the nighttime arena in Hong Kong, I would expect that ‘game’ practitioners would experience most of it. The question is whether their interactions in the nightlife follow a hookup script. At this point, the answer will not be surprising. Players of the ‘game’ seldom engaged in hooking up, and most of their intimate interactions followed a different sexual script, despite efforts to forge casual sexual relations.

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