

Report

Do you know who you're getting into bed with?

18/10/2013

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Hookup apps mean casual sex is on the rise, but does sex with strangers erode intimacy?
Adam Bronkhorst (2008) ©

Scope

Once reserved for hormonal teenagers, hookup culture is no longer restricted by age. It's socially acceptable for anyone who can't bear commitment, or simply doesn't have time for it. Working under a strict no-strings, no-bullshit policy, everyone involved is here for one thing only.

An evolution of dating apps and websites, the hookup app – the technological buffer for this new relationship paradigm – is a tool designed specifically for users to get laid and get out. But what does the rise of never-see-you-again sex mean for real relationships?

There's an app for that

Want to get laid tonight? There's an app for that. Since the proliferation of dating site apps, more and more people are managing their online dating needs with an app. [1] OKCupid and HowAboutWe are the 'vanilla' versions, where singles want to meet, stumble into courtship, or even fall in love. At the other end of the spectrum are those just looking for a hookup on mainstream sites like Match.com, where men often message women saying they are in town for a couple of nights and ask to meet for a drink. That's code for 'booty call'. [2]

But now there's no need for code, nor to make small talk or endless strings of text messages with strangers. Apps are removing the messy groundwork required to move straight to sex. [3]

Gay hookup app Grindr, and its straight sister Blendr, began the foray into no frills, no commitment, no hassle sex a few years back. *The New York Times* dubbed them 'minimalist sex apps', and the newest and hottest among them are making casual sex easier than ever. [4] But who do these apps appeal to?

"Apps are removing the messy groundwork required to move straight to sex"

Pure is marketed directly at the 'liberated woman' who has dispensed with the stereotypes associated with women and casual sex. [5] The app keeps it simple, with only a few options: your gender, your gender preference, and whether you'd rather have someone over or visit them. You're only shown potential matches within your radius, and can pick



Apps like Pure are making hooking up easy, anonymous and popular with Millennials
Pure (2013) ©

explaining their female-targeted approach. [11]

David Meh, a retired adult film producer, disagrees that women will shepherd these apps. He believes that irrespective of societal changes about sexual behavior, women unconsciously want solid, quality DNA in a partner to further their gene pool, and typically want to get to know a guy. On the other hand, he claims, men crave a variety of sex with a variety of partners, while still being pair-bonded with one special woman.

Meh theorises that these apps only serve to make casual hooking up anonymous, accessible and affordable. He believes that men often project the illusion of monogamy to their significant other, because that's what's expected – but he claims that “men are biologically wired to cheat.” As a result, says Meh, these hookup apps are perfect for married men. [12]

So does that mean less women will use them? Mobile app monetisation company Flurry found that dating app usage is 64% male and 36% female, while a 2010 Duke University study found that men are more willing to use location-based dating apps for hookups. [13][8]

“It's highly improbable men will encounter different women who want random sex every night on these sites,” says Meh. “Women aren't designed to seek sexual variety.” So who does use the apps? Meh's experience with hookup apps has turned up women who are “not very attractive”, “swinging”, and “unstable”. [12] But is this the reality for everyone? According to one male Tinder user from the UK, “normal girls want nothing more than a bit of fun. It's become hip, so girls aren't ashamed to use it”. [12] Another described the women on Tinder as “chicks who are really keen.” [12] As casual sex – and the apps that enable it – becomes normalised among young adults, the pool is widening. And is there really any difference between using these apps and a meaningless hookup at a party?

partners with 'okay' or 'no way'. There are no profiles, and no lengthy conversations. And, like Snapchat, there's a time-limit – everything's deleted within the hour. [6]

But while Pure emphasises anonymity, there's a growing number of apps that focus on the opposite. Tinder uses Facebook profile pages to like or pass on matches, reporting half a million active users, 50 million matches, and an average age of 23. [7] In an attempt to curb fake profiles, Coffee Meets Bagel offers up Facebook friends of friends as potential matches. [8] Bang With Friends is designed around the Facebook Friend system, letting you browse your own Friends stream to select people you'd like to have sex with. [9] And widely regarded as a 'gold-digging hookup mecca', Hitch.me connects to your LinkedIn profile to search for 'professionals' – like doctors or lawyers – to match you with. [10]

What about women?

But while many have become more relaxed about casual sex, is the rest of society ready and willing for casual hookups to replace the relationship? Typically, women have far more concerns about safety, control and 'creep-factor' when it comes to sex with strangers. [8] But Pure's founders argue that the women trawling bars for one night stands would rather skip small talk and slip between the sheets –

“Normal girls want nothing more than a bit of fun. It's become hip, so girls aren't ashamed to use it”

Male Tinder user, UK (2013)

The new relationship paradigm

“The reason why there is a trend toward hookups is the same reason why there are more 'bad' boys and 'bad' girls: people are afraid of real intimacy,” says Carole Lieberman, a Beverly Hills psychiatrist. [12]

The closer you get to a partner in a romantic relationship, the more vulnerable you are, and the more likely you are to get your heart broken, says Lieberman. She thinks this fear of intimacy comes predominantly from the increased prevalence of divorce. Children of divorce have seen their parents' devastation – and are terrified of being hurt this way themselves. So, hooking up, with no strings attached, becomes a way to meet sexual needs without risking heartbreak. [12]

But, says Lieberman, “hooking up without real affection or love is very cold, shallow, empty and



Is technology affecting relationships by making hookups hassle-free?
Paramount Pictures Germany (2010) ©

Insights and opportunities

"Relationships are alive and well, and will be forever," says Masini. "[People] have a need to connect and share intimacies, and that's not going away." But they're undeniably changing, because now, technology can make various types of relationships a reality. [12]

Yet plenty of people just don't want a traditional relationship, and are happy to go the 'hookup app' route. They may be time-pressed business execs, married people, college students or young Millennials who don't want to invest in a real relationship for financial, personal, or psychological reasons. [12]



Relationships are changing, and hookup apps allow married people to seek multiple partners
Duane Brayboy, Creative Commons (2011) ©

'Hooking up with Tinder' (September 2013)

'BarEye: digitising the big night out' (August 2013)

depressing." [12] She argues that hookups are "impulsive behavior, like running to binge on junk food without remembering how sick and fat it made them, or getting drunk without remembering the hangover." [12]

Could these young professionals who say they want no-strings-attached sex just be too scared of commitment, vulnerability and love to know better? Lieberman believes so. She argues that it's the reason why many Millennials are making casual sex the new relationship paradigm. [12]

"People are busy and don't want to expend the energy necessary to go through the dating process and find a relationship that works," says author April Masini. Dating and relationships can be hard – but these apps are easy. Masini believes that once, the role was played by prostitutes and escorts – but now, "with these apps, we have legal, free encounters instead of illegal, paid ones." [12]

Hookup apps are designed for quick, anonymous sex. But there are those, according to Masini, who use them to search for something more. These people, usually women, believe they can turn a brief encounter into a lasting relationship – but, claims Masini, it doesn't generally work out. [12]

"People are busy and don't want to expend the energy necessary to go through the dating process and find a relationship that works"

April Masini, author (2013)

So what are the broader implications of the rise of hookup apps? Typically, it means only that relationships are being delayed. "Once people do realise they need real relationships, and they need to work for them, they're starting from way behind," says psychotherapist and author Tina Tessina. If people never get to their first real relationships until their 30s or 40s vs. their teens or 20s, they're coming in behind the curve. [12]

Tessina thinks once hooking up becomes void of pleasure and filled with dissatisfaction, disappointment and pain, people will again adapt toward finding a relationship. She believes that in the end, everyone comes to realise that happiness and importance lies in a healthy, loving, supportive relationship. [12] That kind of intimacy, security and joy is unlikely to be experienced on hookup apps.

Key statistics

- Tinder has half a million active users and 50 million matches [7]
- The average age on Tinder users is 23 [7]
- Dating app usage is 64% male and 36% female [13]

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