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**“You’re So Pretty for a [Insert Racial Slur]” – A Study on Hookup  
Culture at a Small PWI**

by

Simran Subramaniam

Presented to the  
Department of Sociology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
With Honors

Trinity College,  
Hartford, CT

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Stephen Valocchi

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## **Introduction**

American Pie, Animal House, Old School, 22 Jump Street, Neighbors, Legally Blonde, House Bunny... I can probably go on and list every mediocre college film I watched in my formative high school years. I came into college feeling as though I had been indoctrinated into the culture because I had done my research. I was prepared to be in the basement of a fraternity. I could just picture myself in the sea of sweaty bodies; an alcohol-fueled craze of head banging to songs you shouldn't head bang to, jumping way off beat to crazy techno drops. The dark walls and crowd are illuminated just by the flashing red, green and blue light. Did I mention all of this needs to be visualized in slow motion? I could see the streams of beer flying through the air, keg stands being done in the corner, a fraternity brother crowd surfing. I could see strangers grabbing one another, a kiss in the heat of the moment, bodies grinding together in a not so PG-13 way. I could picture just how a boy caught sight of a girl dancing across the room. The camera pans from his look of awe, to the girl in the distance whipping her hair (that stays perfectly in place, mind you) laughing to her friends. I could see him approach her, begin to dance, and when she reciprocates he swoops in and plants one on her lips. About 10 minutes later, he leaves with her. His friends laugh and high five him as he puts his other arm around her, and she's rolling her eyes at her friends who tease her, telling her to "Have funnnn!".

I shouldn't have been surprised, but it was a rude awakening when I, the main character, realized my movie actually didn't fit into the genre of the movies I had watched in preparation. I remember times where I felt humiliated standing outside a fraternity with my friends. While groups of white women walked in, they kept telling us we had to wait because they were at capacity. I remember times where men approached me, vile insults disguised as compliments. I remember times where I was reduced to my body and skin, just a little brown girl.

I remember all my white peers discussing the boys they had a crush on, the ones who kept looking at them in class, the ones who kept asking them to go on dates with them. I remember talking to other women of color about how degraded we felt at Trinity, how our treatment dehumanized us and how we could only come to each other because not everyone understood how we as women of color stand out on campus.

Sex and hooking up was meant to be a place of pleasure, sex was meant to be desire and fantasy rolled into one, open to all. Booze and boys were meant to be a fun addition to our college experience, not another layer of institutional powers that regulated our access to an already exclusionary college environment.

## **Literature Review**

### **Hooking up**

While definitions vary from researcher to researcher, a hookup can be generally understood as casual sexual activity between individuals without expectations of commitment (McClintock, 2010; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000).

Hookups can take place in different relational contexts; one-time sexual encounters (a “one night stand”), one time or repeated sexual encounters initiated over the phone (a “booty call”), or repeated sexual encounters with a partner they maintain a platonic relationship with (“friends with benefits”) (Jonasan, Li and Cason, 2009).

### **Hookup culture and Sexual Scripting**

From the perspective that hooking up is a type of sexual behavior, “hookup culture” refers to the phenomena by which hooking up has become a part of the sexual and social cultures of institutions, like college campuses. This means that colleges not only provide the opportunity for a sexual encounter, but their structures also clearly regulate and enforce certain sexual behaviors. (Lisa Wade, 2017). Simon and Gagnon’s sexual scripting theory is the framework I utilize to understand hookup culture. According to the sexual scripting theory, sexual behaviors are dictated by “scripts” or schemas; a tool to organize and interpret sexual encounters to make meanings of it. Scripts vary historically and culturally which determine expectations for appropriate and inappropriate which leads to a normalizing and stigmatizing effect, thus ensuring conformity to norms. Hookup culture in college is derived from the over metaphorical social scripts that students learn and incorporate into their functions with their social group, which means that the sexual

scripts must be examined under a lens that contextualizes the script to the place, the people and power.

Simon and Gagnon describe 3 types of sexual scripts; cultural sexual scripts, interpersonal sexual scripts and intrapsychic sexual scripts. Cultural sexual scripts refer to guides that exist at the collective level of life. These however do not necessarily determine sexual behavior, rather, “The enactment of virtually all roles must either directly or indirectly reflect the contents of appropriate cultural scenarios. These cultural scenarios are rarely entirely predictive of actual behavior, and they are generally too abstract to be applied in all circumstances” meaning that while they determine the overall set of roles and relationships between them, they are too vague to give real direction with regards to sexual behavior in a specific encounter.

In encounters, social actors are transformed to an actor that plays a certain role in the time-space context of the encounter. These scripts, in context of encounters are referred to as the interpersonal sexual script. Individuals make sense of themselves vis a vis an interpersonal script invoked in an encounter between two people. Interpersonal scripts are dynamic since social actors create interpersonal scripts by adapting the cultural guidelines to the specifics of a sexual encounter.

Intrapsychic sexual scripts refer to the way in which we learn, internalize, and adapt previously adopted scripts, through our specific experiences and encounters. Intrapsychic scripts include fantasies and memories.

Hookup culture, from the perspective of sexual scripting, is then the predominant cultural sexual script. Wade discusses in her book a shift from dating culture within which sexual relations occurred to hookup culture wherein sexual relations are appropriate to take place casually, not requiring long-term commitment. Therefore, I understand hookup culture as the emergence of new

kind of sexual script in which hooking up is prioritized, and understand that it is institutionalized and mediated in specific contexts like college.

### **The role of Culture and Dimensions of Power**

Recently, researchers have expanded on the demographic correlates of casual sex to show that not all college students participate equally in hookup culture; there are distinct gender, racial/ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic boundaries that delineate participating in hookup culture.

Given that residential spaces and party spaces facilitate where hookups are initiated or take place, past research has examined residential campuses and “party schools” determining them to have a significant role in providing opportunities for hookups (Bogle 2008, Allison and Risman 2014). Allison and Risman found that campus residency and proximity to campus life indicated social class differences between participants, therefore allowing class-privileged students to access and participate in hookup culture. Students from working class backgrounds tended to either focus on their academics or had alternative housing to on campus residency.

There are also clear gender inequalities in hooking up. In “Is Hooking Up Bad for Young Women?” (Armstrong, Hamilton, and England 2010) and “Gendered Sexuality in Young Adulthood Double Binds and Flawed Options” (Hamilton and Armstrong, 2009) discuss the sexual double standard and the prevalence of the “Slut Stigma” on college campuses. They followed up with a class analysis of the slut stigma, finding that women from both upper- and working-class backgrounds employed the slut stigma to reinforce their class position and logic of participation (Elizabeth A. Armstrong, Laura T. Hamilton, Elizabeth M. Armstrong, and J. Lotus Seeley, 2014).

While their sample was all white, in Allison and Risman's research, class inequalities showed a racial imbalance between the two groups, with Latina women being overrepresented in the working-class group; a group that tended to participate in college hookup culture less than women from privileged classes.

Studies on racial and ethnic differences in hooking up similarly show that white students, especially white men, have the highest rates of hooking up on college campuses and non-white students either tend to opt out of hooking up or are excluded by nature of a predominantly white student body (Bogle 2008, Glen and Marquardt 2001, Wade 2013). However, despite the research on sexualization, sexual stereotypes (standards of beauty, exoticism and fetishism researchers have not investigated the differences in gender while considering race and hooking up. Additionally, while research tends to describe a group's avoidance of hookup culture along racial differences, I will attempt to highlight how racial and gender inequalities are compounded in a way that determines opportunities and experiences of hooking up.

### **Sexual Racism**

Sexual stereotypes of Black women as discussed by Collins, discussed a distinctly classed representation of Black femininity and sexuality. As Collins explains it, Black women are considered unattractive or less attractive to White women as traditional femininity is attributed to them. As a result, they "compensate" by using their hypersexuality to "catch" men. From here the stereotypes turns into sexually promiscuous to the stereotypes of the "Welfare Mother" or "Baby Mama". Black women's promiscuity is often referred to as "Freaky" often implying they are willing to take sexual risks, enjoying rougher sex, or engaging in what might be considered taboo sexual behavior.

Latina women similarly have classed representations of sexuality that stem from both colorism and social position. While upper class, typically lighter skinned Latinas are immersed in a classed purity culture as an aspiration to achieve the femininity status of White women. On the other hand, darker skinned women who might also be from working- or middle-class backgrounds are the sexual “Other”, the deviant reserved for the pleasure of men, which has evolved into the popular culture stereotype we see today of a feisty and hypersexual Latina woman.

Asian representations of sexuality are more complicated given that Asian often refers to East Asian rather than South Asian representation. Asian femininities are considered attractive as they are codified as docile, however fall in the category of femininity performances by working class or other women of color often termed as “de-emphasized femininity” or “marginalized femininity”. Theorists like Said also emphasize how Orientalism and the “othering” of the East and bodies in the east extend to sexuality, simultaneously showcasing female bodies as exotic, and sexual deviant for the pleasure of White men, yet to be protected and saved from the transgressively masculine Asian male.

These racial stereotypes of sexuality have found themselves in the popular culture and contemporary forms of the stereotype grew out of popular representations. Black culture of music, dance and dressing and the commodification of Black culture into the mainstream have signalled Black bodies as the site of certain sexual pleasures. Similarly, TV representations of Latina women as feisty yet sexually seductive, with similar body standards, are pervasive.

Asian culture on the internet has seen a rise with the popularity of anime, Korean TV and music as well as fashion, leading to the rise of a niche group (mockingly referred to as “Korea-boos”) that fetishize not just individuals themselves, but the culture as a whole, commodifying it to their liking.

### **Intersectionality and standpoint**

I understand the experience of my participants through an intersectional lens. Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlè Crenshaw, refers to the idea that individuals with multiple marginalized identities experience compounded effects of structural inequalities given that they live within the intersections of different dimensions of power. Although officially defined by her, the concept of intersectionality was originally discussed in the Combahee River Collective, wherein Black feminist scholars understood that sexual politics under a patriarchy are as pervasive in the lives of Black women as the politics of race, which they push to be considered along sex oppression as they are experienced simultaneously.

Standpoint theory, termed by Patricia Hill Collins, understands that certain social groups experience the politics of sex, race, or class similarly and by acknowledging this situatedness, agree that history and experiences are subjective to the position from which they are experienced. Therefore, Black and Brown women, who belong to 2 marginalized groups create knowledge from a combination of two perspectives that intersect to structure their lives.

## **Methodology**

My research aims to systematically outline the negotiations of interpersonal sexual scripts by women of color who attend an elite small liberal arts college. I employed a qualitative approach, relying on both primary and secondary data. For primary data, I conducted 10 in-depth one on one interviews with women of color who are currently enrolled as full-time students at Trinity. In recruitment emails to women of color on campus, as well as snowball sampling, I asked for participants who considered themselves having been once-active participants or currently active participants in hook-up culture. Given that the dominant interpersonal sexual scripts on campus are largely heteronormative, I limited my interviews to discussing their experience of heterosexual hookups. Three participants did consider themselves queer but had had both same-sex and heterosexual hookups. All 10 participants were either juniors or seniors which gave me the opportunity to discuss how their patterns of negotiations in hooking up had changed over the course of time.

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour in which I asked them to generate their sexual scripts in context to the Trinity's social environment. Some participants who had never reflected on their experiences hooking up, reached out to me via text or email after the interview to offer more insight into their actions or experiences having had some more time to reflect on the questions I had asked.

I analyzed the data from their interviews thematically and theoretically using the scholarly theory of sexual scripting by Simon and Gagnon. The data from interviews was used to construct participants interpersonal conceptualizations of the sexual script, as well as their intrapsychic sexual scripts; their intrapsychic sexual scripts reveal how they negotiate the interpersonal script

that is defined by the social nature of their environment. In addition to the interviews, I utilized the data from secondary sources like college overview websites to describe the social environment, and the social and cultural norms of Trinity that go into the construction of interpersonal sexual script.

Using my data I attempt to show how the interpersonal sexual script of Trinity is marked by the institutionalized power structures of race, gender and wealth, which dictate access to and ease of participation in hookup culture. In learning participants intrapsychic sexual scripts, I identified negotiation tools or tactics that grant them, as women of color, access to participating in hookup culture at Trinity College.

I set to answer these 3 research questions (1) How is the exclusionary nature of interpersonal sexual script of Trinity College created and maintained by institutionalized power structures of race, gender, and wealth? (2) How is the interpersonal sexual script constructed to position women of color in a highly racialized and sexualized manner given institutionalized misogynoir and (3) How do intrapsychic sexual scripts provide women of color tools to negotiate their participation in hookup culture (a) *Who* is considered a potential partner (b) *Where, when* and *how* they find potential partners.

**Who is Hot and Who is Not?  
Size Matters**

“Honestly, I just really feel like there's nothing at Trinity for me. And it's just like, disappointing. But then also, I'm just like, this is a super small school” said Liquorice, an Afro-Latinx senior at Trinity College.

With an undergraduate class size of only 2,200 students, students frequently joke about the similarities between Trinity and elite boarding prep high school. Unlike boarding high schools however, Trinity as a college has little to no school spirit. Instead, you find that the sense of community on campus is boiled down to the social order and cliques on campus, that are heavily raced and classed communities. Fraternities, sororities, and the athletic teams wield a majority of the power on social gathering and organizing on campus. Many Greek life members are also on athletic teams. If you're uninvolved in either, access to those social spaces and therefore the network of peers, is granted if you associate or find yourself in a clique or circle of predominantly white upper-middle class students that talk and dress up to the standard at Trinity. These students are careful not to diverge from the largely accepted social culture of Trinity and invoke the social and sexual scripts of the majority. The social and sexual scripts that play out at Trinity can be attributed to the overall culture of Trinity that is geared towards benefitting the white and the wealthy students.

Outside of that mainstream, you will find a variety of cultural organizations and clubs that offer alternative social spaces and gatherings for students. The racial homophily at Trinity begins during pre-orientation activities that inevitably contribute to the creation of racially distinct spheres of social life on campus. There is a clear trend in who certain programs are oriented towards. For example, the P.R.I.D.E program (Promoting Respect for Inclusive Diversity in Education) and First Gen program are geared towards attracting largely students of color. According to the Trinity

webpage, P.R.I.D.E is “designed to help students of color and international students become acquainted with the campus and make a successful transition to Trinity’s academic and social environment.” The phrasing implies that the social environment and therefore the social culture is something people of color might have to integrate into, rather than finding a place for themselves as their authentic self. P.R.I.D.E often operates beyond just the Orientation period. Students come back as Leaders, to host and organize not just the Welcome Weekend program, but also put together events each week through the school year. These events range from more formal events like Q&A panels with significant individuals of color from their respective industries, or more community-oriented events like Bingo Nights, movie nights, and culturally relevant events or celebrations.

Students who participate in P.R.I.D.E by nature of their connection with other students of color and in meeting upperclassmen who serve as Leaders continue to operate within that social circle, often joining one of the cultural houses that they feel is best fit to their specific ethnic background. These organizations include the International House, La Voz Latina, Imani, Trinity African Students Association, Asian American Student Association, South Asian Student Association, Caribbean Student Association, and others. These organizations operate out of 4 houses on Vernon Street, offering a physical space for students of color to feel safe in as well as an alternative space to party outside of Greek Life. These organizations tend to host events that go beyond themed binge drinking. CSA and TASA host an annual fashion show that brings in African American and Caribbean designers from Connecticut and other states that are displayed by the students who walk the runway. Temple of Hip-Hop organizes a weekend worth of activities that celebrate music, dance and art through workshops, panels, dance contests and a variety of musical performances. During Black History month, LatinX heritage month, Women’s history month,

organizations collaborate and host events the entire month that brings students together over food, talks and presentations.

Additionally, organizations plan and organize a variety of their own events to bring together students of that background in celebration of a festival or just an opportunity to discuss ethnically relevant topics of politics with their peers, or simply enjoy their cuisines.

While the scope of social life for this group of people seems far more vast than Greek Life, the community is rather tight knit. Many individuals belong to multiple organizations and operate within the same peer network in each. P.R.I.D.E and MAC (the Multicultural Affairs Council) are head organizations through which people find a cultural organization that is best suited towards their taste, as well as creates a community between members of all cultural organizations. Those in attendance at these events are those on the E-board of the organizations, their general members, and members of other cultural organizations. At any cultural event, there will be few if not zero white students.

Esther is a Mexican Latina who is highly active in this community of students. She says, "...specifically as a Latina, the number of Latino students on campus are fairly, are like very, very small. And just in general, I'd rather have a friendship with them than anything past that just to like, not complicate that."

This notion was repeated by various other students who felt that even if they would prefer to hookup within their race, the social circle of students of color on campus was small which complicated their ability to simultaneously sustain both their platonic friendships and sexual relationships. Every other participant voiced that they felt like even if students of color were not directly involved with cultural organizations, the community of students of color tended to know almost everyone else who was a student of color.

Virgo is a senior and a student athlete on a predominantly white team. Like Sandy, who is a senior in a sorority, she talks about having two very different sets of social circles, one that is predominantly white and one that is more diverse. Both express that how they spend time with people in those circles are different, as well as the emotional depth of those relationships. For both, their “closer” friend circle consisted of other students of color. This friend circle was part of the larger social circle of people of color and therefore were connected to the community of color. On the other hand, their relationships with their teammates and sorority sisters, respectively, were more regulated. That element of their social lives involved being present at practices, locker room fun, team dinners and excursions, traveling for games, chapter meetings, chapter events and mixers with fraternities and formals. In essence, their participation in athletics and Greek life opened the doors for them to the more mainstream Trinity community, and rather than choosing one over the other, they participate in both social cultures prevalent on campus.

It was evident then that the size of the school played a major role in determining how women of color went about engaging in hookup culture. By sheer statistics, there are far less students of color at the school, and even within the community there are distinct groups. Within the student of color community, there is a division between students who are of color and from the United States and students of color that are international students. Barring one participant who grew up outside the country and then immigrated to the States, my participants were all American. While involvement in organizations allows American students of color and international students of color to mix, their closer friend groups are usually indicative of their nationality status.

Therefore, the communities get even smaller, and as Juliet, a Black junior, put it, “I can count the amount of black men on my hand that go to this school.” The hesitation to consider that social circle as their potential hookup or dating pool was indicative to how the size of the school

impacted the sexual scripts and overall culture of hooking up at Trinity. There was a recurring theme of fear of being talked about within the community of color if they hooked up with multiple people. This fear is evidence of two unsaid and insidious elements of the culture of hooking up at Trinity and how they operate differently for women of color: 1) Slut Stigma and 2) Being In the Groupchat

When it came to slut stigma, participants voiced being afraid of being labeled a slut or someone who was passed around if they hooked up with too many people, revealing the gendered nature of the sexual script. For women who were not looking to hook up outside the community of color, this fear was impounded by the fact that the community of color was small and if they hooked up with multiple people within the community, it would appear as though they were “easy”. Women of color explained that white women had a larger pool of potential hookups, white men as well as men of color, and since the community was larger, they could go about hooking up with people who didn’t know each other to avoid being labeled a slut. This reveals that the Slut Stigma is not only revealing of the gendered nature of the script, but the racialized way in which it plays out given the size of the community.

Similarly, for women of color hooking up within their community, there was a fear that they would be “In The Groupchat” which implies that a strong element of hook-up culture was discussing hook-ups with their friends and social circle. For women of color, the overlap between friend circles was daunting as people were often friends with each other and expected that their name would come up in conversation leading to multiple people finding out they had hooked up with someone in common. They often claimed consequence to that would result in not just slut shaming, but would lead to them being referred to colloquially as a “homie hopper” or someone who was passed around by a friend group of men. Fears involved their sexual history and their

sexual activities being discussed among peers, and participants emphasized they preferred privacy when it came to what a hookup for them entailed. Additionally they felt that inevitably multiple women, some of whom are their peers might end up hooking up with the same few men and they felt this might damage their female friendships.

### **Private School Pipelines**

While we consider how the immediate college social circles are racialized and how they impact how people choose hook up partners, a theme that came up in conversation was their prior social circles and how they experienced hook up culture prior to coming to Trinity. This involved participants talking about the neighborhoods in which they had grown up, how they were racialized or not racialized and how their experience in high school influenced how they negotiated participation in hook-up culture at Trinity. Sexual scripts are impermanent and highly dynamic (Simon and Gagnon, 1986) and often relate to the cultural consciousness of a certain place. However, prior exposure to certain cultural sexual scripts made accessing and participating in Trinity's hookup culture easier for some than others. Their perceptions of how hook up culture operates prior to college influenced how they chose partners and if they were engaging in hook up culture in high school, they came into college having their own sexual script, some of whose scripts aligned with Trinity's typical ones.

There was a stark difference in how students who went to predominantly white high schools approached engaging in hook-up culture at Trinity vs those that grew up in predominantly black neighborhoods and attended more diverse schools. Within the category of predominantly white high schools, students who went to boarding school had vastly different experiences that they feel are repeated at Trinity College.

Women of color who attended predominantly white institutions or grew up in white neighborhoods, expressed that whether they did or did not hook up outside of their race, that they felt impacted by white beauty standards. Virgo said,

“I went to boarding school and it was a very similar environment to this. It was like 99%, white people and all of them like, look the same, they were all relatively fit, or like, the girls are skinny, and blonde, and just had this personality.”

Virgo went on to explain that although her peers had been hooking up throughout their 4 years of high school, giving them a chance to explore their sexuality, she only had her first hook up towards the end of junior year of high school. Sandy said, “We had, like 15 black kids. No more than that. My 4 years of high school, there were 4 black girls, including myself, never more, never less.” According to her, the compounded effect of being in the minority and the white beauty standards made hooking up harder for her and had an impact on her self-esteem and coming to college expected that the experience would replicate itself given that diversity was proportionally similar. Rani, a South Asian senior, said,

“I grew up in a very white town, and even though I went to high school in California, that was still pretty white. So like, in general, I feel like I'm used to being made to feel like I'm the other. I'm never the first choice.”

She went on to discuss how growing up around mostly white people and learning that she was not the beauty standard affected her confidence, and also made her wary to even approach white men in fear of being rejected. This was a common theme for all women of color, even those who had not grown up around primarily white. This is testament to cultural sexual scripts that maintain Whiteness on the beauty hierarchy by deeming them most attractive and therefore the ideal sexual partners. Participants referenced those Eurocentric beauty standards, explaining that White women were put on a pedestal by both White men and men of color. Rani also said that

knowing she was not the first choice in high school expected that when she came to Trinity, she would have a similar experience in regards to being the “other” or the second choice.

Sandy, Virgo and Emma attended predominantly White boarding schools. Each of them attested to the similarity of the culture of hooking up at Trinity and their respective boarding schools. Like at Trinity, they were a minority. Emma said, “I went to private school my entire life so all I really saw were like, white guys like the same kind of environment here, like, exactly the same. Just replicated on a college level.”

What distinguished them from those who only attended day school was their knowledge of how hook up culture works in predominantly white boarding schools, that are often marked as elite. In comparison to the 3 girls who attended white public high schools, Sandy, Virgo and Emma were more comfortable with hooking up with white men, whereas Rani, Michonne and Kate were more wary. The lack of separation of space between home and school at boarding school is not unlike that at Trinity College. Students live in close quarters and are likely to know people across grades and with extracurriculars and sports, there is a similar sense of community like there is at Trinity. Given that there are more restrictions when it comes to leaving the campus of a boarding school, students like Sandy, Virgo and Emma’s potential pool was restricted to the men on campus. This also gave them insight into how the sexual scripts of hooking up work in a campus setting and how sexual scripts of hooking up work at a predominantly white institution. When they eventually came to college, they had a sense of how the culture of hooking up worked before they got there. What these students essentially gather at boarding schools is the cultural capital to then navigate hooking up at college. Cultural capital, theorized by Bourdieu, refers to the way in which individuals learn taste, skills, mannerisms, style and other ways to assimilate or integrate themselves into social groups, often to gain social mobility. Degrees from similar institutions also

solidify a sense of group identity and for students like Virgo, Sandy and Emma, provide them with a way to navigate institutions like Trinity that create student bodies of people from similar high school backgrounds. Emma was vocal that she knew how to operate in white spaces because of her high school experience, talking extensively about how girls dressed a certain way (“preppy”, in her words), and that it was mutually agreed by white men and women that it was the most appropriate way to dress. She incorporated dressing that way into her habitus, and knew that it granted her social acceptance into certain social circles.

On the other hand, women who attended predominantly white public schools had more opportunity to look outside their school peer network, and having not observed or participated in hookup culture that was similar to that of Trinity, they were more taken aback by how sexual scripts operated on campus. For example, through high school, Rani was content using dating apps to hook up but preferred men of color except for South Asian men. In college, she discovered that she did in fact feel attraction to South Asian men. Between high school and college, she was consistently wary of hooking up with White men because of how she had been made to feel growing up around them and in college, felt that it had more to do with the economic affluence of the White men who attended the school, than their race as a standalone itself. This theme resonated with a few other participants who said that they did hook up with White men, but those men neither attended Trinity nor fit into the tax bracket or socio-economic background that is typical of White male Trinity students. Esther said, “The majority of the White people I actually hooked up with were off campus. And they tend to be more from a different background, like a more middle class or low income background, or a working class background, so it kind of makes them a little bit more relatable to me in that sense.”

What Esther referred to as relatability stems from the misrecognition of certain tastes and lifestyle behaviors that came with having social capital and therefore cultural capital. Her similar economic background to the White men she did hookup with, gave her cultural capital to socialize and interact with them, rather than the upper-class White men that typically go to Trinity. Similarly, Emma knew that her ability to navigate hookup culture as a Black woman was because of her boarding school experience, stating “I think a big difference is, and I learned that too, a lot of the people of color who come here usually don't have private school backgrounds and come from public school. So like, I've always had this like, like you say, this proximity to whiteness” The specific aspect of Whiteness that Emma was referring to was not just the learned sexual script that came from her schooling experience in an elite institution, but also the cultural capital that makes adapting to the sexual script more easy. It was easier for her to assimilate to the culture at Trinity because her prior experience made it relatable for her to navigate. She went on to mention that although she finds the culture of Trinity relatable and easy to navigate, she is hyper aware of having to exist between two worlds in college; one that is occupied by the majority and the other that is occupied by the community of color. It is clear then that hook up culture at Trinity within the campus is accessible to those who have an understanding of the particular sexual script, and subscribe to it by using that script when they engage in hookups, whether they personally agree or disagree with its roots.

Kate is a South Asian senior and like Rani, grew up in a predominantly white town and went to a predominantly white high school. “I had just naturally grown up thinking that I was, like, unattractive. And I think this is something that other brown women experience when they grow up in predominantly white spaces, and I don't think it had fully occurred to me that it wasn't like a me issue.” What Kate means when she refers to it as a “me” issue is the internalizing of the idea that

she was unattractive as a result of her race, when in reality it was the beauty standard and the culture of where she had grown up and the highschool she attended. She said that she was surprised when she came to college and found that men were perceiving her as attractive. She did however say that typically it was men of color who found her attractive and approached her rather than white men, which still reaffirms that the culture of hooking up at Trinity is guided by the similar standards in predominantly white spaces. Like Rani, Kate also expressed having felt belittled by white men prior to Trinity which is why she was wary of considering them a potential partner. On her trip to Cancun for spring break however, she found that how White men approached her was vastly different, seeing her as attractive without ever racializing her appearance or making assumptions about her because of her race. This further goes to show that the sexual script that is relevant to hooking up at Trinity is also related to the mainstream culture of Trinity which is marked by Whiteness and Wealth.

Michonne, Diana, Liquorice, Juliet, and Esther grew up in predominantly Black and Brown neighborhoods and with the exception of Michonne whose school was predominantly white, they attended far more diverse highschools. Having been surrounded by their own community growing up, they explained having felt attraction towards only men of color, typically Black and Latino men. Diana additionally spent part of her childhood outside of the United States and upon immigrating to the States attended a diverse international school and found that her attraction then began to extend to Asian men as well. Apart from Rani who did begin to prefer South Asian men once she got to college, Diana was the only student who explicitly mentioned her attraction to Asian men. The history of how Asian and South Asian men's attractiveness or masculinity have been defined and perceived definitely plays a large role in them being neglected to be mentioned as potential partners by women regardless of race.

Like the women who attended predominantly white day schools, they had little knowledge of how sexual scripts of hooking up operated at Trinity. They cited that they had never really been approached by white men prior to Trinity and their own preconceived notions of what white men wanted from them or why they were *really* attracted to them made them wary of hooking up with White men at Trinity. Out of the 5, even though they have all been approached by white men, only 2 of them actually hooked up or continue to hook up with White men on campus. Esther referenced one particular man that she hooked up with who although was White, was ethnically Greek and partook in his heritage and culture very vocally. She said,

“The only reason I did hook up with him was because I was like, he's a little bit more ethnic. Like he's what we would call “spicy white”. So that definitely made me feel a little bit more comfortable. But even with that experience, he specifically made it a point to pick up his Puerto Rican girlfriend and that he knew a little bit of Spanish and stuff like that.”

There is an underlying assumption from all these women that the White men at Trinity identify strongly with Whiteness, rather than the various ethnic backgrounds of these white men. That assimilation to Whiteness is an indicator of their choices in who is considered a potential partner, and by subscribing to the sexual script of Trinity's hookup culture, they can say who they consider attractive without explicitly saying it. That assimilation to Whiteness and identification with it, is considered evidence of their subscription to norms of Whiteness including racial hierarchies and subscribing to values of elitence.

## Racial Double Standards

“Junior year, I just feel like something shifted in me because I was just so tired of having to, like, compete with these like white girls that black men kept going to and I just felt defeated because I'm trying to compete with all these white women that like black men especially”

Juliet toured Trinity before she chose to attend. She recalls the day she was on campus and admitted that on every tour, she was checking out all the men, and weighed that into her final decision. She was stunned by how many Black men she saw on Trinity's campus compared to some of the other she toured, and were arguably way cuter than the others. Having grown up in New York around largely Black and Brown men, she knew hooking up would be easy at Trinity given she saw that she had many options. But she was in for a shock when she finally came down in the fall, joking that those Black men were planted on campus by Trinity to incite interest. Still content that there were some Black men, she was in for a second shock when she realized they were not into her.

Liquorice also described the way in which hookup culture was different for her and her Black male counterparts,

“I said hookup culture only benefits the white and the wealthy but I think especially at PW eyes like it also benefits specifically black men, especially that are like the ones that are athletes like football players. And especially here like not for nothing, but like the black men here. Love them some white women, and vice versa. But Jungle Fever is a big thing here too. And it's like goes back to the conversation about like fetish fetish fetish isolation. Like the white women definitely fetishize black men here. And the black men feed into it, and they find a way to justify it. Like they say to me, *Oh white women are just easier to deal with* or something and its like why? Cause black women won't let you walk all over them?”

Other participants also mentioned the fetishization of Black men on campus, especially athletes and members of Greek life, by White women. Likewise, Black men similarly fetishized white women, and since it opened their potential pool, had more opportunities, and preferred to hook up with White women.

Virgo additionally discussed the social consequences of hooking up for White women and Black women in interracial encounters.

“If they’re usually hooking up with white men, they think they did something by going to hook up with a black guy and think that they're all that for that. It's so interesting. And it makes me think there's motive behind that. Just subconsciously thinking that, they’re appearing a certain way. Like *I'm down with the shits cause I'm hooking up with a black man*. But if you're a black woman, like you don't want to be seen hooking up with a white guy, even though it's like we are in a PWI. And I feel like that kind of puts tension between the spaces of like hookup culture.”

Therefore, the fallout for women of color was higher than for white women participating in hookup culture. Juliet went on to discuss how she then negotiated hooking up at college since Black men were limited. She negotiated the issue of having a limited pool since she felt that the few Black men on campus liked white women by allowing herself to expand her potential partner pool to White men as well. She phrased it as having to “step outside her comfort zone” indicating that she felt like she had no choice but to widen her pool to truly participate in hookup culture at Trinity.

Students also talked about feelings of racial validation that influenced who they chose to hook up with. Emma and Sandy having been surrounded by elite white peers through high school both referenced feeling guilty that they felt validated when they hooked up with white men. Sandy expressed that she knew her preference for white men as a potential partner stemmed from having grown up as a Black woman around predominantly White people.

“Like white men have this specific hold on my like, mentally in my head. And I think it was more so just like growing up in white spaces, like all my life. like first grade first, like kindergarten. So now like, I was just like, always, either outnumbered or just like no one else. Like, they're people who are who around me that just like, again, that network they look like me. And it was a point where I got whitewashed. And then I was also thinking that I was assimilating in a good way but then, but it was do more damage than good.”

Emma narrated the incident in which she first realized that instead of having simply grown up around white people, it was a sense of validation she had chased from them for not being considered desirable growing up.

“I always thought it was because I had really bad self esteem issues. And I always felt like hooking up would make me feel better about that. Especially because with my high school experience, I feel like I was never like desired or an option by these white guys. Now it's like this validation thing for me and especially freshman year I just would get with like, as many like white guys as I could just to know I could do it, because it was like yeah, at least someone wants me. Then one time I was hooking up with this guy. And not to be absolutely rude, but he was so ugly. And just like that, I just knew what it was. I wasn't attracted to him at all. It was my second semester of freshman year, he was in a fraternity, and I was just like, like, this is a way in, but also like, it made me feel like I accomplished a goal. I always think of that.”

So why is it different for men and women of color? I argue that part of it is the double standard of both misogyny. Esther admitted that often when she saw women of color hooking up with white men, she felt annoyed by it thinking they might be reaffirming sexual stereotypes or accepting the invitation to be fetishized. Virgo similarly expressed earlier the double standard of women of color being seen with a white man as stigmatized whereas both men of color and white women ascend social hierarchies if seen with one another; men of color due to their sexual relationships with white women, and white women because they are deemed “progressive” or “non-racist” for having hooked up with a man of color, subverting racist stereotypes of white women who have to fear men of color.

Virgo, who is biracial, expressed that having both her Blackness contested often resulted in her feeling validated when she hooked up with Black men. Simultaneously, she said that White men who didn't know she had “grown up white” (she later clarified she meant that she had grown up upper-middle class and that to Black peers, raised her to a White status) approached her as Black. She simultaneously understood that on both ends, it was her racial ambiguity as a light-skin

that made either approach her in the first place; white men in particular were particularly surprised during interactions to learn she was from similar economic backgrounds to them challenging their ideas that students of color are often low-income students.

Finally, Esther made an important observation about a common phrase women of color use to describe someone who had a preference for white men,

“I know we constantly make jokes about being colonized and conquered in our taste if we like white men and like to say they’re colonizing us, but it is rooted in us knowing that white men fetishized women of color and there is an long history of subjugation and violence.”

## **(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (To Party!)**

### **We Want to Paaartayy**

Despite being located in a small but urban city, a majority of the college social scene is limited to Trinity's campus. Additionally, the social spaces and scenes at Trinity are largely intended to serve only students. The public bar most frequently attended by Trinity students, Tap Cafe, is directly adjacent to the campus. Even though there are two undergraduate colleges near Trinity, University of Hartford and the Hartford University of Connecticut campus, students rarely mingle with one another. Although bars in the Downtown Hartford area are sometimes visited by Trinity students as well as University of Hartford students, the majority of Trinity students prefer to and are content with staying on campus and experience nightlife via specifically the fraternities in Greek life. In part this is due to the discourse that Hartford is an unsafe city, especially the neighborhood in which Trinity is located. The surrounding neighborhood is largely Brown and Black, is low-income and although is not associated with heavy crime, students are fearful of the residents, often referring to them as "locals" when discussing a community incident.

On campus, there are limitations as to who can host parties, the central venue of hooking up on college campuses (Allison and Risman, 2014). Trinity is no different, and often referred to as the Party School of the NESCAC there are ample parties that provide opportunities and structure hooking up for college students. However, rules dictate that only Fraternities are allowed to host parties over the weekends.

While sororities are crucial for women to secure cultural and social capital to participate in Greek life by means of being allowed into fraternities, sororities themselves host no major parties of their own during the school year apart from mixers with other fraternities that tend to be "invite only". Access to Greek life is entirely dependent on who you know, therefore your social and

cultural capital if you are not directly involved in it. For women, joining a sorority guarantees access to the fraternities. Athletes also often are guaranteed entry into fraternities. Additionally, fraternities like Kappa Sigma are often referred to as the “rowing frat” or Crowe, the “football frat”. There is a large overlap in student athletes who are also members of Greek life. Beyond that, students have to rely on their social and cultural capital in order to be recognized as someone worthy of being permitted into the dingy basement of a fraternity house.

Fraternities serve as a hunting ground for college men then in the sense that the institution not only gives them the power to host the kinds of events that facilitate hookups but they additionally get to determine who is physically allowed to enter the space and partake in both partying and hooking up.

When the larger point of the party scene is to mingle with peers outside your dominant friend group (who you usually pregame with), it is hard to find spaces of your own to host parties in as dormitories are small. Men and women are then forced to align themselves with attending Greek life parties. Fraternities maintain a sense of exclusivity by denying entrance to people, whether it be for arbitrary reasons, whether they deem someone attractive or unattractive or racially or other hatefully motivated reasons. For women, the pressure to appear approachable, fun and sexy is at an all-time high. For men and women alike, their social circles and connections determine if they make it past the door, regardless of how good they might look. There is also a sense of entitlement towards women in fraternity parties; the implication of being allowed into the space is that the men are allowed to sexualize and objectify you, for the potential of sexual pleasure after the party is over as a hookup. The women who are permitted to enter fraternities are then marked as the recipients of sexual attentions, the ones who are considered attractive enough to have sexual

relations with. While the intention in going out to party might not be to hook up for everyone, the possibility of a drunken spontaneous sexual encounters is definitely incentive to partake.

This was evident from the responses from most of the participants; party spaces were a place to socialize and it had the added bonus of potentially leaving with someone. Liquorice said,

“I don't really go to hook up with people. I just kind of like, go to the spaces just to like, be in that space and interact with people. And then like, if, yeah, you know, I meet someone, and then we end up doing whatever together like, at the end of the night or whatever, you know, so be it.”

While this might be Liquorice's view on partying, Virgo understood through her experiences in partying with two different sets of friend how people decide which fraternity or kind of party to attend,

“Also, I think without trying, people are just subconsciously, or like with their friend groups, determining what spaces allow hookups to happen between which people.” This is indicative that the sexual script at Trinity doesn't just emphasize spontaneity, but there is an overlap in the sexual and social spheres of life. Peers in their social network and party spaces were simultaneously considered prospective hookups.

Virgo's point is indicative that the potential for having a hookup factors into determining where one parties, aligning the social experience of partying with hooking up. While she did not have a preference, the deeper point she was making was emphasized by Diana, especially when it came to Greek life and who really considered Greek Life parties as a space to hookup. Both Diana and Virgo were referring to the racial exclusivity of fraternities at Trinity that they gauged from noticing who was allowed to enter the fraternity along the lines of race.

“I would say like, first they will let you in? So like so first off there's just like, that issue of like, who's getting in? Who doesn't get in?”

Without getting in, neither are you allowed to party for social life's sake, it is also an indicator that you are not considered desirable by the people in attendance, which is a majority White crowd. Every participant said that as freshmen, they had assumed that the social space of a fraternity party was a way to find someone to hook up with. It is indicative of the party space as the social venue for hookups to occur within the cultural script for hooking up, often presented explicitly in TV, films and social media.

However, the free for all orgy that students expect from TV is distorted when they attend PWI's like Trinity that foster a student body that hold power over the marginalized students in various areas, including social life. In this case, parties are designated within the college structure to hold potential for sexual encounters and by designating power to wealthy, white men who determine the "who" of the sexual script to their benefit.

While some continue to participate in Greek Life as juniors and seniors, others realized over time for various reasons that the exclusivity of the space prohibited them from engaging in party hookup culture like their white peers. For example, in Diana's case, she pointed out that getting into fraternities was an issue for people, especially people of color. She even said that sometimes when she was permitted to enter, her immediate reasoning was that it was because they thought she was "one of the more beautiful black women". Others also made it clear that attractiveness was a cover charge to enter fraternities, but that standards were higher for women of color. In some cases, depending on who the participant was with, gave them access to the space. Kate's friend group with whom she attended fraternities consisted of White women. She said, "When we're going to the frats with like, my, um, my girlfriends that are like white. Like, it's just simple things. Like when you're standing in lines for the frats. They go up in front, because it's just like, I don't know, I'm like, it's just so it's like, not on the forefront of my mind. It's so subconscious,

like, these are just things that I naturally do.” Although she had a hard time putting it in words, Kate was referring to negotiating entry into fraternities by means of her White friends who were granted entry more easily. Her proximity to them therefore granted her entry. However, she recounted an experience in which it is indicative that even though in some cases you are permitted to enter, you are not treated like the White women are.

“I remember, like, we were waiting in line to get beer at one of the frat houses and my friend tapped this guy on the shoulder. And he was like, really nice about it. And then like, 15 minutes went by, and I did the same thing. And he was like ‘Don't touch me!’”

Some participants expressed that since their freshman year, they were hyper-aware of the racial exclusivity of fraternities, which deterred them from entering certain fraternities that were known to be dismissive of people of color at the doors. Rani said,

“Like, there's obviously like, frat houses that we know that are only meant for white people. And like, obviously, let in POC just for, I don't know, whatever. But I would never, like go there. Like for me, it was more like I'm gonna go where I feel comfortable and like, obviously, like go on, like a group of friends.”

The fraternities clearly have distinct reputations regarding the people who attend and the people who delineate who can attend, and even though in instances they might accommodate a few people of color, there was a sense of underlying comfortability in having to stand out in a space that had that reputation; a feeling of alienation. The prospect of being one of the few people of color was an underlying issue for multiple participants. Virgo said, “Especially depending on who I'm with, like, if I'm at specific, like white dominated like frats and women with like, two or three other like, women of color, like we stand out in the room, like, it's obvious that like, you don't fit in.” Virgo was also clear that women of color get a far different treatment in fraternities. “For myself, personally, like I know, if I'm gonna end up at Psi U with my team that night, I'm not gonna get hit on like, I have a conversation with somebody, but it's always oh, like, who's your

friend?” In this instance even though they were not dismissive of her, it was in their favor to approach her and casually interact only in order to ask about someone else they considered a potential hook up, clearly marking her as someone who can participate in the social scene but, but by nature of the sexual script and Trinity’s culture, is not included in the potential hook up pool.

Another reason participants often cited in their deterrence of going to fraternity parties to find someone to hook up with had to do with the lack of Black men attending fraternities. In the last 2 years, 3 new additions to Greek life were made that were multicultural: Lambda Tau Omega Sorority, Latino America Unida (Lambda Alpha Upsilon Fraternity), and Lambda Pi Upsilon, Latinas Poderosas Unidas Sorority. However, none of these organizations have a physical space on campus on Vernon Street, which is where fraternities host their parties. Fraternities and sororities are largely white, which can be attributed to either a lack of applicants or less frequent acceptance of people of color. As a result, the potential pool of men of color who attend fraternity parties are limited to members of the fraternity. In the off chance they are not in fraternities, they are likely athletes. The fraternity Alpha Chi Rho, colloquially referred to as Crowe, is likely the most diverse in terms of members and attendance because they are closely linked to the football team, which is also arguably the most diverse athletic team on campus. Groups of men getting entry into fraternities is a known no-go, since it is believed that the “ratio” of men to women in parties should weigh in favor of women rather than men. Without the cultural or social capital of knowing the right people or being on a team, all men face the issue of getting entry into a fraternity. However, going back to the 2 distinctive social spheres that exist on campus, men of color who are also uninvolved in Greek life or athletics are faced with the additional issue of being excluded based on their race.

With regards to the men of color who are part of the fraternities, participants said that although they would be their first pick, these men tend to prefer white women. Juliet, who is from New York City tuned into the difference between the Black men she meets on campus in social settings and the ones she meets in social settings in New York and their preferences

“And even on this campus, there's a difference with like the black men that I talked to here versus the black men that I talked to in New York, because I just feel like there's just a different dynamic, like, especially the black men here, they just tend to like, go towards white women more than they do black women.”

Sandy also referred to this phenomenon, making it clear that even though she considered them attractive, or dateable, and even though they might be good people, they “have a pedestal for white women.” Here is where we again see how the culture of Trinity and therefore the sexual script that denotes white women as most desirable effectively eliminates women of color from being considered potential partners, therefore excluding them from participating in hookup culture.

Emma was one participant who said they continue to participate hooking up within Greek life because of their membership in it. Emma was aware that her involvement and comfortability navigating predominantly white spaces at Trinity was because she attended a predominantly white private high school. As a freshman, she found it easy to get into fraternities initially and was able to socialize with people having had the cultural and social capital to navigate it. Once she rushed, she was exposed to more people within Greek life through mixers, and other events that were exclusive to members rather than the larger Trinity student body.

### **We're Still Going to Party, Just Not With Them**

Greek life parties can only be marked as the norm if there are parties' spaces marked as "alternative". When I began to ask participants about parties and the potential for hookups, their discussion of "alternative" parties reveal that there are parties that are inherently considered the norm and those were fraternity parties.

Some of these "alternative" party spaces are Umoja, The Mill, and interestingly enough, Cleo. Cleo (Cleo Society of AX) is considered a Greek life organization, one of the two co-ed Greek Organizations on Trinity's campus. While they have that in common, they are very different spaces in almost every regard. Although Greek, Cleo is widely acknowledged as an "alternative" space on campus because in many ways they are subversive of Greek stereotypes.

A big factor in this is because out of all the fraternities, it is a more inclusive space. Members of the organization are diverse, representing people from different races, nationalities, sexualities, etc. It is arguably the queer-friendly party space on campus. They often allow different cultural organization to host party events in their space, allowing students to participate in nightlife on campus along the Greek Row with their peers.

Umoja, a cultural house on Vernon Street, albeit further down the street than the majority party crowd care to venture to, often hosts parties in their basement. Without saying that Umoja or Cleo cater their parties towards people of color and the broader marginalized community, participants referenced them as different from parties that the majority tended to go to, and ones that they never doubted their access to. Before the pandemic, parties were often hosted in the Washington Room, which were open to the larger Hartford community. Given that the neighborhood around campus is predominantly Black and Brown, often the attendees were college

aged Hartford residents and predominantly were of color. The parties being thrown were often a celebration of hip hop, rap and musical Black culture, often featuring DJs from the community and showcasing talent. Music plays a big role in determining who parties where as participants voiced preference to parties that played “Black” music, referring to hip-hop and dance music in comparison to the pop and house music genre that played at fraternities. With going to parties to dance, women voiced being far more comfortable twerking without being sexualized since in fraternity spaces it was viewed as sexual rather than a dance form. Participants had other reasons to not attend fraternity parties, which impacted how they chose who to hook up with.

Juliet said, “I don't really go to frats because I'm afraid of frats. Just like a lot of the stories that I've heard with frats and I don't really want to involve myself in that.” Juliet later specified that the fear was in part due to stories of sexual assault that took place at these parties as well as the fear of being singled out for her race. Juliet instead preferred to and often looked for potential partners in these alternative party spaces. Other participants did mention the issues with Title IX and sexual assault on campus, however with the lack of party spaces, students felt that they didn't have a choice to entirely avoid parties, rather stayed away from specific ones that had a reputation for frequently having members who had assaulted women.

Juliet instead enjoyed parties hosted in Crescent townhouses. With parties being confined to smaller residential spaces, those attending Crescent parties often have to be invited by a resident of the house; as a result, attendees of Crescent parties are more or less acquainted with one another by nature of their mutual connection to the friend group of residents that invited them. Again, racialized friend groups means that often the people attending the party are also from the community of people of color. Crescent parties often begin more laidback as people start to come in, making it a good setting to engage in conversation whilst having a good time. Unlike

fraternities, there is often seating space which allows people to choose between participating in the dancing and group fun or conversing and meeting new people.

Juliet enjoyed Crescent parties in part because she felt more comfortable in the space with regards to her comfortability with power dynamics of race at fraternities as well as the opportunity to meet more men of color. However, Juliet recalls a time that she was invited to a party hosted by the men's basketball team that lived together. She had attended the party with her friends who were a mix of women of color and white women.

“Some of them are light skinned, some of them are dark skinned. And I'm noticing, like, I'm trying to talk to them. They're not really interested in talking to me, but they're talking to my friends who are lighter skinned or who are lighter than me. And I'm just sitting back and I'm observing. And I'm just like, wow.”

I asked Juliet if this happened often and after she agreed that it did, I asked if her intention at parties was to inevitably find someone to hook-up with. She said that it wasn't and that initially she was on dating apps to find hookups but found that especially at Umoja or Washington parties she would inevitably hookup with someone given that she had multiple Black men to consider. Other students also discussed their preference for Crescent parties. Rani knew coming into college that she wanted to only hookup with people at parties, wanting to “exhaust” her options on campus. This indicates that parties are considered the most appropriate venue to find a hookup. However, Juliet's story indicates that even though some party spaces offer the potential to facilitate a hookup for students who feel alienated from the fraternities, the pervasiveness of Whiteness as attractive can extend beyond the basement walls of a fraternity.

Participants who referenced alternative parties at Cleo and Umoja also indicated that their first intentions with partying was having a good time with friends rather than being incentivized by the possibilities of hookups. Participants brought up similar issues with hooking up with people attending those parties as they were still all from the same community of color and had to

weigh in the moment whether it would be a good or bad idea for them to hook-up with someone that potentially knew one of their friends or peers. However, they appreciated that they had a space in which they could follow the dominant script of finding someone at a party, especially Washington parties, since they could mingle with people from outside the student body.

## **Love me Tinder**

I knew before going into my interviews that I should ask participants about hooking up through dating apps. Although dating sites have been around since the dawn of the internet, Tinder and Grindr revolutionized the dating game by utilizing real-time geolocation technologies. In the app format, Tinder can be used in both public and private places alike, and its geolocation technology permits users to view potential partners within proximity to their physical location. There are alternatives to Tinder, since it has been marked as a hookup app by both my Internet discourse and the predominantly young users. According to the Tinder website, 50%+ of its users are aged 18-25, which are typically college student ages. Since not all students necessarily adhere to hookup culture, alternatives like Hinge or Bumble advertise as more authentic and intended for people who are looking to date or for long-term relationships. Tinder's main selling point, and their claim to fame, is the "swiping" format of the app. This format is designed to visually stimulate; the main screen only shows users the first picture uploaded to the profile, and the person's age, sometimes their place of work or school if they even choose to have that feature on. You can tap through to view the multiple pictures a participant uploaded. Even though there are options to add a brief description about yourself, it requires the added step of tapping on the "extend profile" option to view the entirety of what a person has to say about themselves, their interests or what they are looking for. Rather than using an algorithm that cues in on compatibility, Tinder's format allows users to swipe based solely on looks, essentially diminishing others and being diminished themselves, to their physical attractiveness. It requires users on both ends to "swipe right" in order to match only then allowing them to engage in messaging. Unless you pay for a premium version of the app, you cannot see who swiped right on you. Bumble and Hinge are different in their layout since you

have to scroll through a profile to see all the pictures, which are interspersed by answers to prompts that allow a user to share their interest. That being said, Bumble's mainscreen still opens to the first picture you upload, and users can "Like" or "Unlike " someone without scrolling through their whole profile if they think someone is unattractive. They also do not notify or offer an option to see who has "Liked" them. Bumble also requires users to "Match" before they can message one another; on Bumble however, women are required to start the conversation.

Incidentally, the founder of Bumble was a co-founder of Tinder who left the company after suing them for sexual harassment. She designed Bumble to be a more empowering dating app for women, arguing that women should be empowered to pursue men rather than waiting around to be pursued. Hinge markets itself as an app designed to be deleted (inviting users who are looking for long-term relationships). Although they also have Like and Unlike options, and the main screen similarly opens first to a picture, Hinge has a different system setting regarding getting matches. Not only can you "Like" a user, you can respond via text to a prompt or picture on their profile. Likes and responses to a user's profile moves the profile card of the user on the other end to a Likes tab rather than keeping them on the Discover tab. The messaging feature allows users to show interest less superficially than a "Like", and the separation of tabs allow the user on the other end to view someone's profile after knowing they indicated interest in them.

Tinder is arguably the most popular app on college campuses, having been around for longer than the others, as well as preference for the features like the swiping format of the app, the minimal information requirement that goes into building a profile and the convenience of the geolocation technology. Additionally, Tinder makes dating and meeting new people more accessible by creating a digital space in which people can meet, thereby easing the pressures of social anxiety that being in public may induce.

Tinder added a feature called “Tinder U” in 2018, and according to their website was intended to “... make it easier to connect with other students around you - putting their profiles first as you swipe.” The feature also requires that the user must be geolocated on a college campus. While this is fraught with implications of elitism, it is indicative that college students use Tinder to view profiles or meet with other college students.

While there is constantly a debate over whether Tinder is strictly a dating or hookup app, for the purposes of this research paper, it would be more useful to understand how Trinity students conceive of and use the app. It is evident on Trinity’s campus that the app is intended to be used to meet potential hookups, rather than a way to date and find long-term relationships. That said, infrequently people do end up meeting someone that they might continue to see repetitively and go on to make things more serious. All 10 of my participants indicated that they viewed Tinder as a hookup app. When I asked why they came to that conclusion, they said that they were aware that the men who go to Trinity and who use dating apps like Tinder are not looking for anything serious. Their conceptualization of the app’s intent was therefore derived from how the campus culture determined where Tinder fit within the sexual script; one designed for casual hookups over relationships. There were further nuances in patterns and reasonings for why and who they used dating apps to find. Tinder plays an interesting hybrid role in the sexual script. Parties have long been written into college sexual scripts whereas Tinder has only been around for the last 10 years and is written into the sexual script as a tool that students use to negotiate their participation in hookup culture.

It was clear that Tinder was used as a tool to negotiate participation in hookup culture in the ways that participants talked about how their usage of Tinder changed over their years.

Rani, who had used dating apps in high school, was one participant whose choices clearly indicate that the sexual scripts direct students to use the party space to find potential partners.

“So freshman year I came in, and I was strictly just like parties because everyone's new as a freshman, so like, I had experienced on dating apps when I was in high school stuff, but I came to college like, oh, no, everyone here, like, let me exhaust all my options here. So it's a freshman, like most of sophomore year, I really wasn't on dating apps. It was pretty much just like parties and stuff, like, friend of a friend. Like, you know, you go to parties, you can meet people, I would say that was where I met everyone that I hooked up with then. After that, after I got a sense of what type of guys I'm comfortable with and I want to see maybe a little bit more seriously I was like, there's no one on this campus that meets what I want to do. So then I went to dating apps.”

Rani's thought process reveals multiple layers of the sexual script. As a freshman, she was looking to participate in hookup culture at Trinity, implying that her potential pool comprised of Trinity students, which highlights the guideline that hooking up at college is something that takes place between students and peer networks. Her conscious choice to attend parties as means of finding to hookup with someone similarly highlights parties as the designated space for potential hookups. Additionally, by saying she stayed away from dating apps to find “exhaust all her options”, she reveals: 1) That the sexual script marks party spaces as the first and most appropriate space to find a potential partner or engage in a hookup and 2) That using a dating app was inherently linked to expanding someone's potential pool to outside of Trinity's student body.

Conversely, Sandy as a freshman used dating apps specifically Tinder and Bumble, but did not use the app itself to find a potential partner. Instead she says,

“I think [I used Tinder] solely on my freshman year, sophomore years. But more like, who could I find on campus who was like - I was gonna be mad, nosy - I was curious, like, who's on the market? Like, you know, who's single.”

Like Rani, Sandy was also interested in finding potential partners on campus. Unlike Rani who considered dating apps as a way for her to find people from outside of Trinity's campus, Sandy used the app to just find out who was single or available; their presence on Tinder implying

that they were looking for a casual relation. Instead of using the app to engage with a potential partner or initiate a hookup, she had attempted to use it to simply find out who on campus was currently available. In terms of initiating or engaging in a hook up, Sandy preferred the party space. She continued that she did not necessarily only approach people she had seen on a dating app if they happened to be in the same party space; she considered anyone attending the party a potential partner. Her decision to approach someone, or as she said “make a move”, were largely spontaneous; she said if someone happened to catch her eye at a party, she would be inclined to approach them in that space itself.

Like Sandy, Emma also described using Tinder as a tool to explore her choices at Trinity, however, she equally initiated hookups from both party spaces and through the app.

“My freshman year, I was on Tinder, in the beginning a lot just because, you know, you're just trying to find your way around campus. And I think I just want to like see, like the type guys. And then, I just like, wanted to stop hooking up with guys from Tinder because it just was, like, pointless to me.”

Emma later clarified that all the men from Tinder that she hooked up with were not Trinity students. However, she did use the app like Sandy did to explore her options on campus, without actually initiating anything through the app itself. When she did actively use the app, it was to initiate hookups from off campus, and her narrative mirrors Rani’s perception of Tinder’s role in the sexual script as secondary to the predominant party narrative. In both their perceptions, Tinder was to be actively used only to initiate hookups with people who were located off Trinity’s campus. Curious about why students did not engage with Trinity students on the app, Esther revealed the answer when I talked to her about using Tinder for students or non-Trinity individuals. Esther , like the others, approached Tinder with the intention to use the app to initiate and engage in hookups. She explained that she was not a party person for a large part of her freshman and sophomore year. However, she was eager to participate in hookup culture and gain sexual

experience and thought Tinder would make the most sense because in her script, it was meant to be for casual sex. She said

“So like, when people would like have those type of experiences at parties, that wasn't something that I really was experiencing. And when I was becoming more comfortable with being sexual, and things like that, I just found it easier to go straight to like use the apps, mostly because I really wasn't looking for anything super serious. And if I saw someone at a frat then I could see them around campus. And again, because like at those frats, not many students of color go to them. So I knew that would probably just be a bunch of drunk white boys.”

Esther's explanation for her preference for dating apps reveals how and why she used them as a tool to negotiate Trinity's sexual script because it didn't work for her. First, because she was not a party goer, she was forced to negotiate the sexual script that dictates party settings as a way to find potential hookups. Tinder however allowed her to negotiate the importance of the physical party space in the sexual script because it gave her an alternative and digital space through which she could find a potential partner. She was also comfortable using Tinder because she was clear she was not looking for anything serious, revealing again that Tinder is conceptualized in the sexual script as an hookup app more than a dating app. She later said that although she does attend more parties now, she continues to exclude them from her sexual script albeit for different reasons. Fraternities in particular were excluded from her sexual script because the people attending the parties were not people she would consider potential partners; “drunk white boys”. She also excluded them from her sexual script as she was uncomfortable with the prospect of having to see someone on campus after hooking up with them.

She said when it came to who on Tinder she would consider a potential partner she said she sometimes actively swiped against people who went to Trinity. She said even though she would consider swiping on someone who currently attends Trinity, most Trinity students that showed up on Tinder were wealthier, white men. While she didn't have a racial preference, she didn't consider

them potential partners because she felt they would be incompatible due to a lack of relatability between their socio-economic backgrounds. She hooked up predominantly with men from off campus, from various ethnicities, emphasizing that she was comfortable with men from a middle class background like hers.

However, she acknowledged the role that Tinder played within the campus community, as earlier described by Emma and Sandy, wherein the app allowed students to find out who was “on the market” which was knowledge that they could use at their discretion.

However, Esther was wary of using the app in this way.

“A thing that about I think about that a lot is that like if I do swipe on someone from Trinity, regardless of their race is like, Okay, what if you saw me? Would you even actually come up to me, and that has happened a lot like you swipe with people, like you find people on these apps from Trinity and you match with them. And then you might meet up with them in person, and you might not, but it's still like the thing of like, okay, if we go to the same school, if you've seen me around campus, like, would you actually come up to me? And I've definitely have seen that where like, I swipe with someone and I see them out and about and like, no. Nothing.”

Esther here points out the complexity that Tinder has introduced to the dominant sexual script at Trinity. As a digital platform to connect people for hookups, Tinder offers an alternative to the public social setting in which people, especially college students, tend to find hookups. Given that anonymity becomes an issue for people when it comes to hooking up in a public setting, Tinder allows people to initiate a hookup without outside perception. Outside the app, there might be confusion on both ends whether the other person would be comfortable with being approached publicly.

Other students also voiced how the convenience of Tinder as interest being indicated through a “Like” complicated how they viewed themselves as sexual interests of different men.

Juliet talked about her excitement when she first began using Tinder and was surprised to see the how many White Trinity students indicated interest.

“I really want to like explore, I really want to get some experience. So I did start I started on Tinder. And on Tinder, the white boys, they are more bold than in person, because obviously it's through the phone so they can say whatever they want. So that was like really new for me, because I was swiping on these white men, and they were swiping back. So I was like, oh, like, okay, like white men like me.”

Michonne, like Esther expressed confusion at receiving likes from white men saying that,

“I mean, like majority of the time that they do swipe, and I feel like I don't know, like, they never interact with me otherwise, so why would they swipe?”

Like Esther, Michonne indicates that students have opportunity in spaces to interact with them by approaching them at parties or other spaces so to be liked on Tinder rather than approached was confusing. I later discuss the idea of anonymity and privacy involved with approaching in public versus private, which relates to Tinder usage.

However, their confusion at being approached on Tinder and not in person indicates that they intend for the app to be a way to find off campus people, especially since they found it harder to find on campus partners, yet their likes indicate that they are being signaled as sexual interests.

Participants also discussed Tinder users being more “bold” or risky with their opening Tinder messages, often opening up with a sexualizing comment or suggestion as to what they “should do”. Juliet compared the men from Tinder that she matched with to the men at Crescent parties who did not approach her, saying that the difference was that there was a screen between them and knowing that they were interested in her gave her the chance to do the approaching in a party venue.

Students also mentioned moving away from dating apps like Tinder to ones like Bumble and Hinge over the years, since they grew out of finding meaningless hookups through an app like Tinder that they felt reduced them to their physical features.

For example, for Rani, who had a preference for South Asian men, talked about an app Dil Mil, that allowed her to connect with South Asian men, none of whom went to Trinity college.

## Hooked On Race

### **White women don't get complimented for being white**

Since attraction and therefore physical attractiveness are considered important in partners for a hookup, I asked my participants to talk about the ways in which their attractiveness had been perceived and general experiences regarding hookups and physical appearance.

Today, with the global reach of social media, the internet has greatly participated in contributing to the shift in a Eurocentric beauty standard to a more racially ambiguous one. Superficially sound in logic, the concept is riddled with power issues. Who actually benefits from the evolved beauty standard when it is inherently rooted in Antiracism? The incorporation of predominantly racialized features into mainstream media as the ideal to be attained after a history of racial inequality that rested on scientific and anatomical racism is a signifier of Blackness as exploitable. Black femininity was marked by (and historically devalued for) fuller lips and bigger behinds, whilst today the most iconic sex symbols emulate those bodily and facial features, and even go as far as appropriating more cultural features like braids.

The pervasiveness of this cultural definition of attraction is evident on Trinity's campus. Virgo was particularly vocal about the way in which Black bodies and features are explicitly referred to during an encounter or during the initiation of an encounter. For her, and all other participants who identified as Black often had braids and other black hairstyles, stated that their hair was always the first feature they were complimented for by. Additionally, Liquorice and Michonne expressed that often men would touch or stroke their hair be it open and natural or in braids without asking, especially when they were intoxicated and in a party setting. Diana elaborated that there was a complexity within Black hair styles too, mentioning that people

received her differently if she presented with natural hair or if she presented with a protective or braided hairstyle.

“It's like a visceral reaction. Because when you go to a frat party, they come up to you if your hair is a certain way. If it's not, it's just.... it's so much deeper”

Diana felt that when she presented with her natural hair, she was received well, prompting compliments that often bordered on being condescending and priding her for being confident in her natural hair. She mentioned that on social media, men only ever complimented posts in which she had her natural hairstyle, and made it a point to mention her hair. She further elaborated that it was usually white male students that complimented her on her natural hair; black men especially only complimented it when it was braided. This is evident of a kind of internalized racism wherein natural hair and its attractiveness are contested. Michonne, Diana and Emma further discussed how not just men, but White women as well tended to focus on their hair out of all physical features, complimenting their hairstyles came with unwarranted touching. Interestingly, Michonne and Liquorice added that although sometimes it was evident that they received compliments that were outright fetishizing, they knew that more often than not, white students were simply curious about hair and although it wasn't their intention it did result in them feeling fetishized.

Although not all participants were dark-skinned, all women recall receiving a compliment for their skin. Emma recalled being confused the first time a white man told her she had nice skin. She said, “Ok, I can get ‘I like your braids.’ But ‘I like your skin’? It's just it feels like, I don't know, like, it feels weird because like, why are you complimenting me on my skin?”

I asked her to elaborate on what she perceived from that compliment and she continued to say that if it was another woman, she would assume it meant something about having clear or healthy skin, but since it was from a white man in a frat, she felt that he was referring to the

color. The fetishism of having darker skin or at least tanned skin is relatively new thanks to the boom of the self-tanning and fake-tanning industry. Black participants were especially vocal about being complimented by white men for their skin, expressing it made them feel like a fetish; that the individual was attracted to the color of their skin rather than their entire physical or mental being. Other features explicitly referred to as racialized and sexualized ones were lips and buttocks.

Interestingly, the two South Asian participants noted that rather than white men, it was men of color who often complimented them for their skin and made other comments about their physicality while tying it into their race. This is potentially linked to the racial ambiguity unintentionally granted to South Asians as a result 1) the distinct Black/White binary that exists within the United States and 2) the essentialization of East Asian features to the Asian racial category.

While there was discomfort expressed with receiving compliments for their hair or lips, participants expressed more anger about the more sexual, yet racial compliments they received specifically about their lips or their buttocks. Participants who received compliments of that nature expressed anger specifically with regards to first time interactions. Diana recounted multiple experiences in which men, who she had no prior interactions with, approached her in fraternities and usually opened up a dialogue by telling her they liked her body, specifically her buttocks. She used language like “slim thick” and other slang that describes a certain body type and arguably the current and idealized body type. “Slim thick” refers to the way in which body standards evolved from slim to slim with curves in the right place (breasts, hips and buttocks).

These features, as well as lips, are not just inherently sexualized body parts, but on black women, have layers of socio-historical meanings of race and scientific racism attached to them.

Diana further talked about the entertainment value that was associated with black women and their bodies, especially in party spaces.

“Last time I went to one of the frats, no one was looking at me. But then when a certain type of music comes on, when they all turn around while it's ass shaking music. Now they all have their attention on you because *Oh, like, you know what to do, like, do your thing!* Oh! There was one time this boy tapped me and I was like *Excuse me? What is that?* Because it was during that ass shaking song and then one of the black girls I know started dancing. So she started bringing a crowd to her. So it's like you dancing from afar, then finding you cute from afar because you're dancing sexually, and then they stare, compared to them coming up to you”

In this statement, Diana doubles down on the kind of bodily fetishization as well as the notion of performance and entertainment. Others talked about entertainment and performance by discussing how they dressed. Some participants discussed having to change how they dressed to match how the white students did for a night out in order to be allowed into the fraternities which confirms the idea that women have to sexualize themselves and perform femininity in exchange for participation in social events especially parties. However, the women in my sample contested that dressing up was still complicated by race, and that they felt they tried harder to look good and put more effort than white women did into their looks as a result of their perceived distance from the beauty standard.

“I feel like you won't see someone complimenting a white woman for being white. But like, it's a point of talking about being beautiful, is oh! You have nice skin or like, you look like you know how to move or like, you can shake that ass like you like, it's that. I feel it's another conversational point to bring up the race.”

Hook discusses this “commodification of the Otherness” in *Eating The Other: Desire and Resistance*, elaborating that within commodity culture, the forces of Antiracism and the centrality of Whiteness render race/ethnicity as exciting twists to the mainstream white culture. She says “Displacing the notion of Otherness from race, ethnicity, skin-color, the body emerges

as a site of contestation where sexuality is the metaphoric Other that threatens to take over, consume, transform via the experience of pleasure..... It was this black body that was most “desired” for its labor in slavery, and it is this body that is most represented in contemporary popular culture as the body to be watched, imitated, desired, possessed.”

### **Hidden and Quit It**

In my attempt to understand how women of color fit into the sexual scripts, I asked participants about their perceptions of their sexual encounters. What came as a surprise was that my findings seem to suggest that rather than women of color fitting into the sexual script at college as an appropriate partner to engage in a hookup with, they are actually located outside of the prevailing script; instead there is an alternative script to hooking up with a woman of color, especially in interracial hookups. This alternative script essential positions hookups with women of color as racialized sexual “experiences” to have. In contextualizing Hook’s the ideas of Otherness and commodity culture to sexual scripts, women of color are the sexual “Others” to white women who the sexual script of college hookup culture is intended to include. As Hook says, “Commodity culture in the United States exploits conventional thinking about race, gender, and sexual desire by “working” both the idea that racial difference marks one as Other and the assumption that sexual agency expressed within the context of racialized sexual encounter is a conversion experience that alters one’s place and participation in contemporary cultural politics.”

In many conversations, participants explicitly indicated having felt like they were an “experience”. Liquorice, who has not engaged in a hookup with a white male student at college said,

“It's definitely rooted in like. I feel like if I were to hook up with a white person, in the back of my head, I would just feel fetishized, especially here. Because the white people here, especially the men, they never make a move. And I think it's partially because they feel intimidated, but also, it's just like, most of these people have never actually been with people of color. And so it's like, I don't know, I just feel I would feel kind of weird being with a white person. Yeah, I would just feel fetishized, I would feel kind of like an experiment.”

Although other participants indicated being aware that women of color are fetishized, or that they might have been the first partner of color someone had, Liquorice was the only participant who indicated it was the reason she chose to opt out of hooking up with white men. Additionally, she references being considered intimidating; a nod to a pervasive stereotype that defines women of color as unapproachable.

Liquorice continued that she and her peers knew they were just an experiment to someone if they knew about the other people they had dated or hooked up with. She said

So when I was dating this person, and they never said this to me, but like people that knew him were like, *Oh, they only like white people! Like, it's so crazy to see them with you or whatever.* And I laughed it off. But like now that I'm like, kind of thinking back to that and of course that's kind of weird! For you to say that. And it's crazy because like, right after me like they just went back to like dating white people.

Other participants recollected similar instances in which the dating or hooking up history and future of a partner helped them place themselves either in or out of the dating script.

Virgo also discussed the complexity of wondering whether she was an experiment and did so by reflecting on her ex-partners' past and post hookups. Both Virgo and Liquorice implicitly made sense of these individuals' interpersonal script and who fit their criteria for a hookup, and inferring they were different from the others, understand themselves as a nonnormative sexual experience for those men.

“I know for like, at least probably like three people out of the five people I've hooked up with here.... I was either at that point, the only or probably still am only the first woman of color that they've hooked up with. So I don't know if that was like a big thing for them or like different or if they was just like, *Oh no, I fucked with you like as your personality and like, you. Just your*

*being as a person.” So I'd be interested to kind of pick their brain about that and see if that's like anything that they thought about. I will say one time, my first hookup experience. There was a joke made for a while about how he liked chocolate milk. Let me tell you, it was one of the most uncomfortable jokes to ever circulate for a hot sec. But it was a conversational point. Because at that time, I was the only woman of color yet ever hooked up with I still think that's true. But like it's funny. It's funny, I will give him that. But it becomes like a *Oh, she's she's a black woman. And I haven't done that before. So let me just throw that one out there when I can.”**

Sandy discussed having once been told by a friend that a person she hooked up with considered her an experiment.

“And he was like, Oh, I just want to experiment her, like verbatim. Like, I just want to experiment with her to see how black women work. And so ever since then, that's like stuck in the back of my head. Because I always feel as if whenever I go with people, like I didn't see that I like as experiment.”

Unlike Liquorice, this did not deter Sandy from hooking up with white men. Sandy elaborated that although she was uncomfortable feeling like a fetish, she was someone who enjoyed casual sex and that drove her to participate knowing she might be made to feel uncomfortable.

Kate said that her instance of being labeled an experience came from a South Asian man from a different ethnic group,

“So I actually had this interaction with someone who was ironically also Brown. And he asked where I was from. And I was like, oh, I'm from the US. And he's like, No, where are you *from from?* So I told him I was Indian. He responded by asking if I was Punjabi and when I said *yeah, I am Punjabi*, he straight up he was like *I've never hooked up with a Punjabi girl before*, like clearly indicating that he like wanted to like just check that region off”

For South Asian women, the vast ethnicities in the diaspora contribute to the racial ambiguity associated with Indian women. While Rani described racial ambiguity as something she experienced with white and black men, South Asian women tended to know her ethnic and cultural background. She later discussed how South Asian men perceived her based on her ethnicity, and likewise, Kate also nods towards the notion that South Asians might recognize interethnic differences that white students would not.

Diana and Michonne also referenced feeling like people perceived them as intimidating; so Diana negotiated participation by growing the confidence to approach men herself.

“I usually have to do the approaching or like, I usually have to be the one to go up to them and like say something before that, then they start feeling comfortable and talking to me. And I've definitely had like a lot of men approached me and say, like, the first time they saw me, they were intimidated to speak to me, because like, I'm a black woman. But like, I think it's a good difference. Because it is like pushing me out of my comfort zone. I feel like if none of that had happened, I would still be talking to just black men. But now I know that I can pull white men.”

However, Diana only included white men who attended Crescent or other alternative parties; she mentioned earlier she did not attend frat parties due to prevailing incidences of sexual assault associated with them as well as to avoid feeling stigmatized or alienated by being rejected at the door. Therefore for Diana, her pool was arguably more complex than a racial preference rather than her association of the fraternities as spaces which foster an environment and group of people that alienate her. So while she considers white men in her potential pool, she limits the pool to the men that attend the spaces she does as she views them as distinct from ones that attend fraternity parties. I argue that the intimidation is inherently linked to “othering” women of color from the mainstream, i.e., women of color are stereotyped as intimidating but white women are considered submissive by mainstream gender stereotypes.

Converse to Black women, South Asian women felt that they were viewed as more innocent, therefore approachable. Kate said,

“I have heard a lot that like, the whole cute innocent sweetheart. I actually have heard that. Like, a lot of like, men have said *you seem so innocent*. Like you're like this and that. And it's not the worst, I guess. But it's also like, just to be treated so fragile, *oh, she's so pure* is weird to me.”

Another way in which they felt “othered” and inferred themselves as an experience was mentioned by Sandy and Emma who are members of Greek Life. Both of them discussed the idea of invisibility and being hidden away. Although hookup culture is associated with anonymity and

people prefer to have their partners remain unknown, in colleges there are certain party spaces where being seen in public with a potential or prior partner is considered acceptable. Sandy discussed college formals, each hosted by a fraternity, sorority or athletic teams, where students belonging to the organization are allowed to invite a certain number of friends, as well as a date. These often take place off campus, or within Greek life housing, and are exclusive to those invited. Majority of the attendees of fraternity and sorority formals are other Greek life students, who are largely white. Sandy and Emma both discussed their hypervisibility as Black women within those spaces, but the invisibility when it came to being “claimed” by means of being asked to a formal.

“I feel like they view certain girls differently. You know, a girl to wife up, a girl that you see but not touch and you know, a girl that they could see, maybe touch you but behind you know, behind closed doors. It makes me think of the Madonna-Whore complex. And that's literally how I view going out. Every time I see people interact, because no matter what, for the white woman here, especially in social spaces, they are bound to be seen by men as *Alright, that girl's wifeable! Let me see if I can mess around with her for a little bit and then decide to see.* And it's like they see black women and it's *All right. Touch, don't see, or it's like touch and see but behind closed doors.* And it's not the same level of respect, as you know, we would get as if they were going to view us the way they do white women. Like it really feels I'm a dog on campus. I'm just there and like, they view me and only want to use me for things like my subject features or whatever. And it's like, boom, that's it. And I'm never going to be viewed as someone that's like, you know, like, there for a long time, I know this is only viewed as temporary.”

Emma said,

“When my white friends get with guys, there's more excitement in terms of potential, like, long term or like, even if it's not super long term, but there being something more. Whereas when I hook up with someone or other girls who are similar to me hook up with someone, it's just like, is it gonna happen again? Or even if you know what's gonna happen again, is it going to be consistent, or, you know, are they gonna, hook up with someone else in between, which is fine honestly because that's the way Trinity culture is, but it's just, then they'll, like, invite that girl that they hooked up with to the formal or to something as a date, instead of like, well, me or like a, or like a black girl that they've been hooking up with. I guess it's usually just like, they're preference is to bring, I don't know, it's hard because like, it's like trying to get inside like their head.”

Thinking back to Hook's essay *Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance*, when race and ethnicity become commodified for pleasure, including their bodies, become a sexual or alternative

playground where members from the dominant group can assert and affirm their power in an intimate setting. She also says, “Unlike racist white men who historically violated the bodies of black women/women of color to assert their position as colonizer/ conqueror, these young men see themselves as non-racists, who choose to transgress racial boundaries within the sexual realm not to dominate the Other, but rather so that they can be acted upon, so that they can be changed utterly. Not at all attuned Eating the Other to those aspects of their sexual fantasies that irrevocably link them to collective white racist domination, they believe their desire for contact represents a progressive change in white attitudes towards non-whites. They do not see themselves as perpetuating racism. To them the most potent indication of that change is the frank expression of longing, the open declaration of desire, the need to be intimate with dark Others. The point is to be changed by this convergence of pleasure and Otherness.”

### **Sexpectation**

“They would assume that I would like it rough. And black woman are seen as strong and very just like, you know, like beating up the bed type shit. And that is not us. Whatever you see from porn, its not what I do and like that's what I get the sense of from past lookups. This one guy just kept pulling my hair. And it didn't feel like he wanted to have sex. It was just more so that he had this girl and it seemed like a power thing.”

Sandy recounted more than this one experience in which she felt that sex was more an act of domination or a fulfillment of a pornographic fantasy for white men, given the way in which she was treated. She talked to me about knowing that porn involving women of oclor were often racially charged fantasies and for men who grow up in predominantly white communities and neighborhoods, porn fulfills a fantasy of seduction and sex with Black women, an “Other”. She further emphasized that often it was conflated with the idea of an experience in which they could unleash a kind of sexual aggression that porn had deemed not just acceptable but actually normalizes women of color as wanting or like rougher sex. Sandy also mentioned that she knew

that their fantasies came from porn given that she had been referred to as “Ebony” several times, which is often used in categorizing porn involving Black women.

Emma also contested that the fantasy was born out of the way in which porn reinforced sexual stereotypes about Black women,

“I’ve really maybe had two experiences where it was just like, I don’t want to do that. I don’t know why you think I want to do that. And I feel like the only reason you think I want to do that is because like, I don’t know, you think I’m like exotic or something? Or like, you want to do something that you seen in a porno or some shit?”

While Emma and Sandy did not necessarily give into fulfilling the fantasy, Juliet addressed performance in bed by comparing how she felt about being an active sexual participant vs white women.

“For white woman, like, all you have to do is like, be there for sex. But when it comes to women of color, I think you have to perform. When I’m having sex with black men, I’m not really expecting myself to perform too much. Like, obviously, like, I’m gonna, I’m gonna perform but like, not at not to the extent like if I’m having sex with a white man, because I feel like, well, especially a lot of these white men, they’ve only had sex with white women. So like, being a black woman having sex with a white man, it just feels like I kind of have to, like, outdo myself. And if I’m doing it with black men, because I don’t know, I don’t know, I just feel like I kind of want to do better than the white woman that you’ve been sleeping with. And I feel like, maybe it’s a power thing. Or maybe it’s like a validation thing. But like, I want to be the best that you’ve had as a black woman.”

Juliet understood that there were sexual expectations when it came to being a woman of color. Simultaneously, she was aware of the dynamics within which women exist within the sexual framework as that experience and negotiates her participation in the culture by accepting that she had to perform in order to secure participation. She also discusses the way in which women of color are made to feel secondary to white women as potential partners and in order to ascend the hierarchy, they had to secure their position by proving their sexual capability. For white women, who are stereotyped as feminine and submissive, they are the the idealized sexual partner for white men in asserting their masculinity by having sex with them. Conversely, the historical

categorization of Black women as not just masculine, but sexually deviant, giving in to the sexual expectations set by the culture secures their place within being a potential partner or recurring sexual partner by allowing their partner to fulfill their sexual fantasies about them.

My South Asian participants felt that their expectations were complicated given racial ambiguity within their context. Rani said,

“The way that I experienced it, and ever heard people talk about it, they always think we’re shorter, or smaller, have long hair. And it translates into this image of innocence or along the lines of assuming we don’t have much experience or that we’re sheltered. That comes from knowledge of culture, and just like the fact that we look very small compared to other people. And I think that a lot of guys who I have been with whether they were brown or not, their biggest thing is dominance, because I’m really small. I would say society in general sees brown girls who are ladies on the streets, but freaks in the sheets. They like to see us as calm people but then its like, when she’s in bed, she’s freaky.”

From the perspective that Asian representations are largely East Asian, South Asian women are similarly categorized as submissive due to emphasized femininity. However, the sexual deviance associated with skin tone, especially for darker skinned South Asians who have virtually no representation in popular media, results in a culturally submissive and docile image (“lady in the streets”) but sexually deviant and “othered” in the sexual realm (“freak in the sheets”).

Esther talked about how she had often overheard students at college talk about both men and women of color; not only is there a beauty standard of big breast and buttocks and long hair, but she mentioned “olive skin” indicating that colorism is rife in the beauty standard, where only lighter skinned Latinx individuals are considered attractive. She went on to talk about how she knew that there were expectations when it came to interracial hookups for both Latinx men and women because of sexual stereotypes. She described pervasive stereotypes, saying that women are considered feisty and promiscuous, and are willing to “take sexual risks”.

When I asked her to talk about her own interactions she said,

“They really just tend to assume that I'll be more willing to do rougher things. And I kind of am, but because that's what I like. But also like, just like more slutty shit. Like, they'll always call me a slut or they'll say *Call me Papi*. That's the biggest one actually, *papi* is the biggest thing about that now. Even white boys will be like, *you want to call me papi?* And I'm like, *no, I don't even like that*. That's a very distinct thing that I feel like men will do. Another is that they try to get women to be more slutty. At least for me I feel like they'll push you around differently. Like hust the way they want sex to do, I don't know I feel like men think it's easy for them to get me to be more slutty for them because I'm Latina.”

According to Hurtado and Gurin (2004) the racialized narratives of Latinx sexuality were historically shaped by values of purity, modesty and chastity reserved for women who had lighter-skin or upper-class/higher-status women. Esther mentioned these values when she went on to talk about how growing up, her family constantly reminded her to keep her virginity as they subscribed to purity culture that is directly related to negotiations of power between lighter skinned Latinas and darker skinned Latinas and sexual stereotypes that evolved in opposition to one another. For Esther, part of her reason for exploring her sexuality through hooking up in college was to rid herself of her family's internalized expectations for herself.

## **Conclusions**

My study looks at how women of color are situated at a complicated intersection of power dimensions of race and gender within sexual scripts of hooking up. While common notions of a post-racial society that is America is invoked through media and institutions, through their promotion of diversity or representation, even within the sphere of sexuality, women of color simultaneously experience violence and oppression at the hands of race and gender.

With hookups replacing the form of sexual activity between students and increasing emphasis on colleges as diverse environments careful attention has to be paid to the culture within

which the practices take place and institutional arrangements that designate power to certain social groups. Hookup culture is often critiqued by feminist scholars, usually asking whether hookup culture is empowering for women, as it is positioned by the media, or if it upholds patriarchal power structures in which men hold sexual power. Adding a dimension of race and class in discussion hookup culture is necessary when understanding how culture of colleges, especially historically white and wealthy institutions like Trinity, whose students voice experiences of marginalization across various college spheres, experience and are expected to participate in hookup culture that is not intended to serve them.

While interracial hookups might be indicative of progress compared to previous generations, arguably more research needs to include how historical representations of women of color as the sexual other construct sexualities in contemporary times and the consequences for women of color. As long as race or ethnicity serve as motivation for engaging in a hookup, women of color will not be permitted full participation in a culture that seeks to commodify their bodies for sexual pleasure.

I attempt to contribute to existing literature by adding to knowledge from the perspective of the women who experience it, at a highly complex social environment. Trinity College has historical wealth rooted in the slave trade industry as well as maintained the elite class by designing itself as an institution that sent children from elite classes to network and marry within one another to reproduce eliteness. Today, the sons and daughters of high-ranking finance sector families attend not just elite institutions like Trinity, but a select number of private boarding schools that inculcate them into the same pattern of reproducing elite classes.

Although hookups are intended as meaningless events, if the social context within which they occur are rife with power inequality, then social contexts of race, gender and wealth must be addressed to create equitable solutions.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

My sample consisted of 6 women who identified as Black, 1 who identified as Afro-Latinx, 1 who identified as Latina and 2 who identified as South Asian. My sample did not include East Asian participants who would have helped me understand the differences in the ways South Asian and East Asian women are sexualized. However, there is potential for a future study in which a comparative study of the racialization of East and South Asian women takes place in both the American and college context.

I intentionally looked for participants who had engaged in heterosexual hookup experiences, however, there is a distinct queer culture and community on campus. However, in order to limit the frameworks I used for this research, I chose to avoid investigating the structures of heteronormativity in hookup culture.

Future directions for a queer analysis of hookup culture should also include the racialized and gendered lens to understand how the compounded effects of marginalization impact participation and experience.

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