

Obesity and Nonrelationship Sex: Are Obese Young Adults Hooking Up?

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Background

- A recent change that is occurring among young adults is the rise of the "hook up" culture (Armstrong 2010).
- It is estimated that 56% of young adults report ever hooking up in their lifetime (Lyons et al. 2010).
- The prevalence rate of obesity has also increased dramatically over the past thirty years among young adults.
- Current estimates reveal that 30.75% of young adults aged 20 to 39 years old are obese (Flegal et al. 2010).
- Although obesity is increasingly common in young adulthood, obese individuals are still stigmatized and targets of discrimination (Puhl and Brownell 2001; Brownell et al. 2005).
- The stigma and discrimination that obese individuals experience, in turn, can have negative implications for union formation and sexual activity.

Prior Research

- Research has demonstrated that obese individuals are less likely to form romantic relationships than their thinner peers, but the association between obesity and sexual activity is less clear.
- Few studies that have addressed whether obesity is associated with the frequency of sex have found mixed findings.
- Halpern et al. (2005) found obesity is associated with decreased odds of engaging in sex within a romantic relationship only. Other studies, however, suggest obesity does not significantly affect engaging in sex (Cawley et al. 2006).

The Present Study

- This study examines the association between obesity and the frequency of hooking up.
- It extends previous research on the association between obesity and sexual activity by considering hooking up behavior. The current study also plays particular attention to gender and race differences between the association of obesity and hooking up.
- Competing Hypotheses
- First, obese individuals may be less likely to engage in sexual activity than their thinner peers, regardless of relationship context because the bias in attitudes of attractiveness and desirability (Regan 1996).
- Second, obese individuals may be more likely than their thinner counterparts to engage in nonrelationship sexual activity given obese individuals are less likely to form romantic relationships than their thinner counterparts (Mukhopadhyay 2008; Cai 2006; Cawley et al. 2006; Sobal 2005).

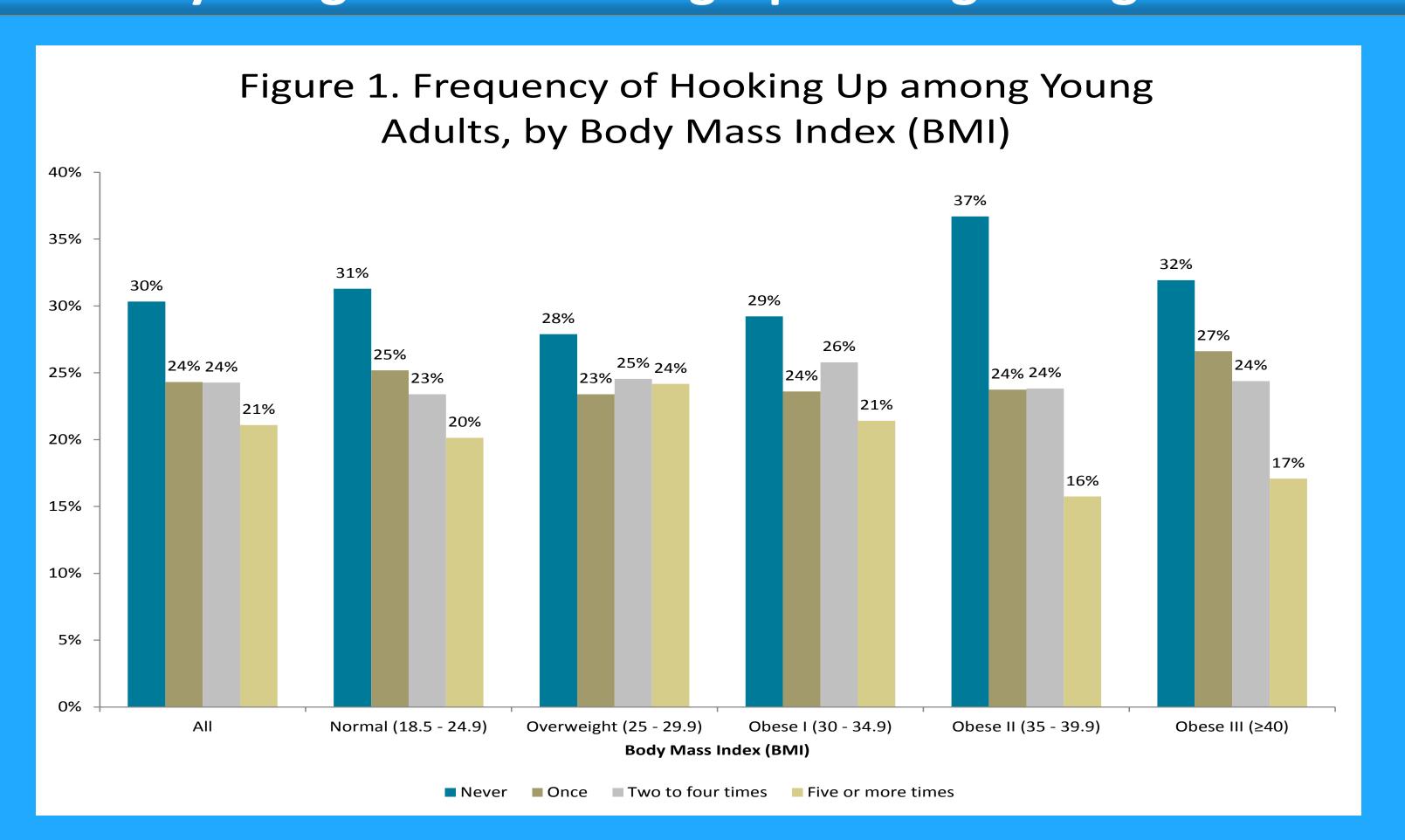
Data and Sample

- Data come from:
- National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health)
- Wave IV In-home core sample
- Analytic sample is restricted to respondents who reported valid responses on the dependent variable, not underweight, between the ages of 24 and 32, not pregnant, and valid sampling weights (N=13,912).

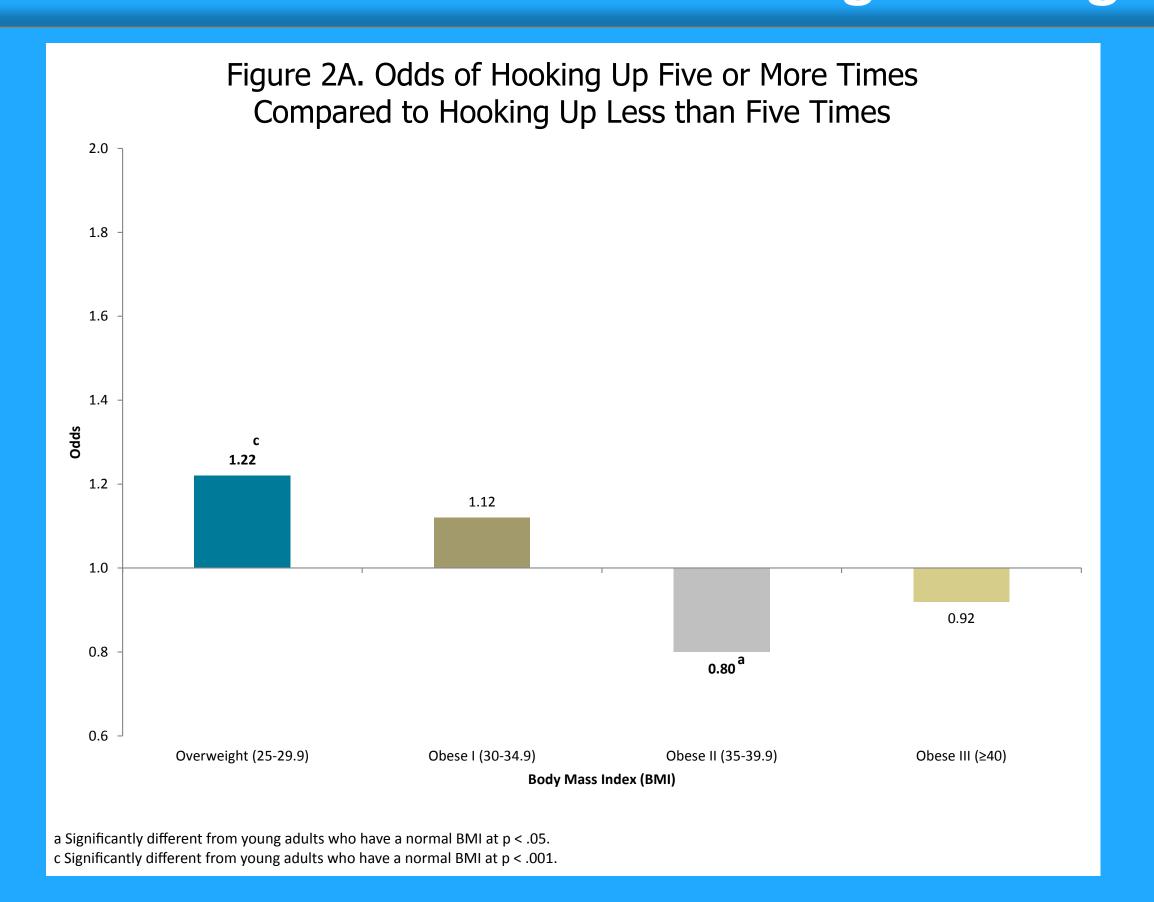
Measures

- Dependent variable
- One variable is used to measure hooking up. Respondents are asked, "Considering all types of sexual activity, with how many partners, male or female, have you ever had sex on one and only one occasion?"
- Independent variables
- Focal variable:
- Body mass index (BMI) is calculated as weight (in kilograms) divided by height (in meters).
 Continuous BMI scores were recoded into five weight categories using cutpoints defined by the guidelines set by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (1998).
- Risk and Protective Factors:
- religiosity; depressive symptoms; alcohol and drug use
- Controls:
- sex; age; union status; race/ethnicity; education; current student; income; current employment; and self-rated physical health

Body Weight and Hooking Up among Young Adults



Predicting Hooking Up among Young Adults



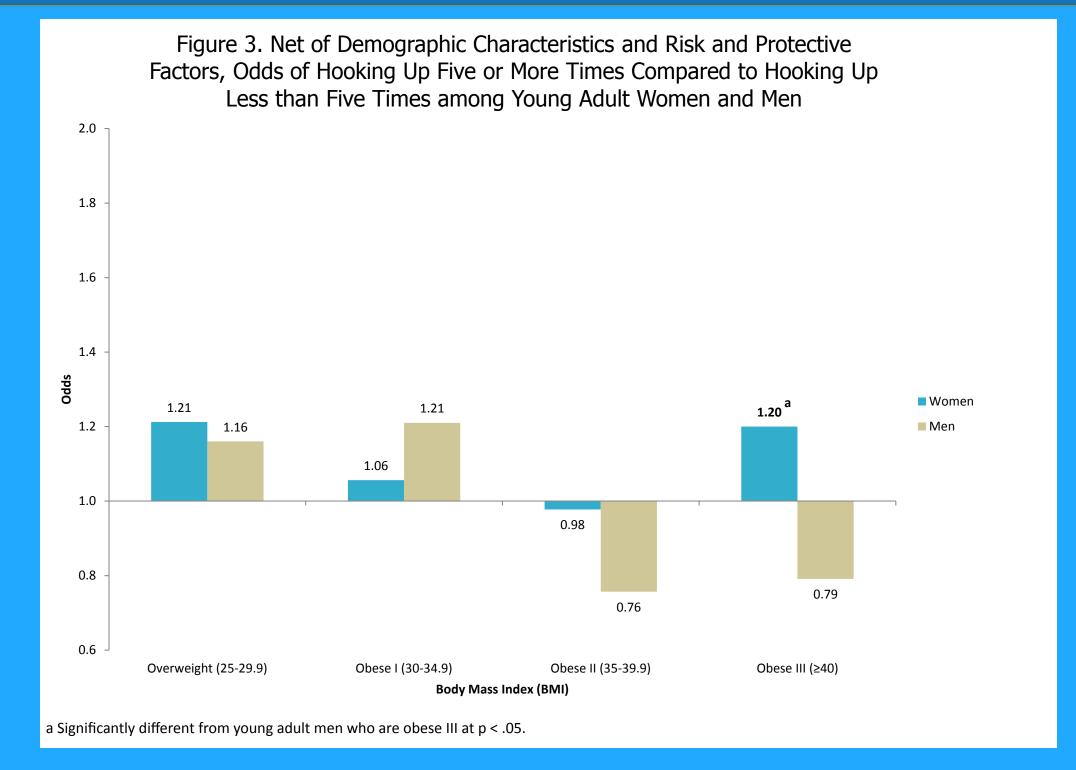
1.6 - 1.4 - 1.19 1.14 1.10 1.02 1.02 1.02 1.03 Obese II (25-29.9) Obese II (30-34.9) Obese II (35-39.9) Obese III (240) Body Mass Index (BMI)

Figure 2B. Net of Demographic Characteristics and Risk and

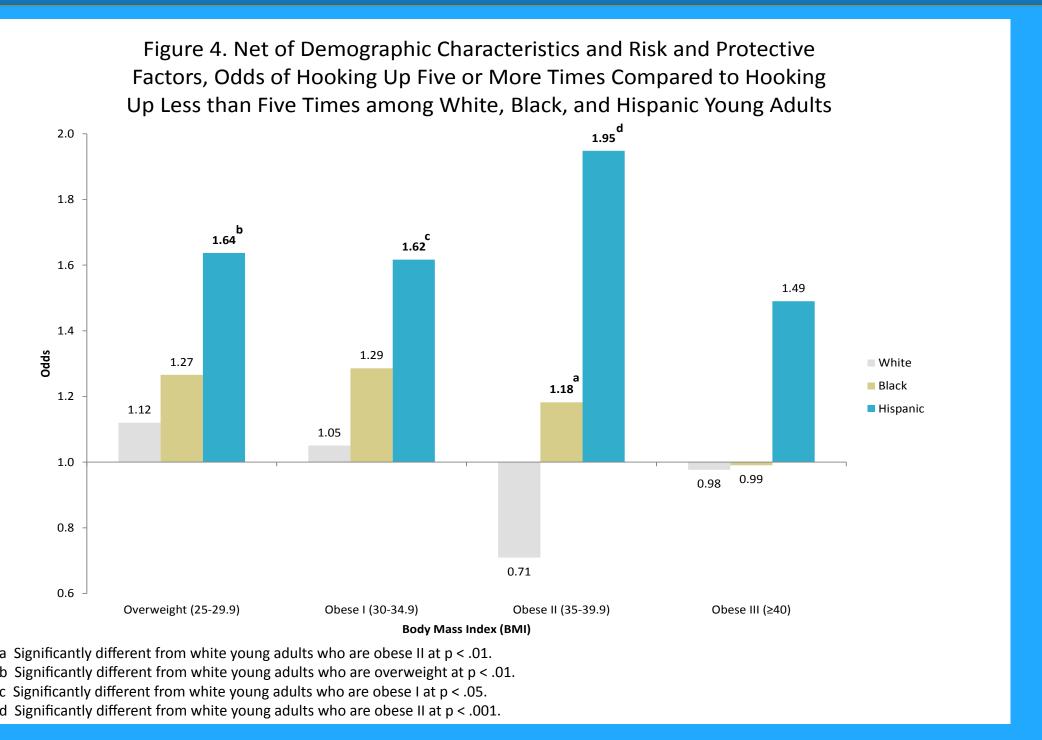
Protective Factors, Odds of Hooking Up Five or More Times

Compared to Hooking Up Less than Five Times

Predicting Hooking Up among Young Adults, by Gender



Predicting Hooking Up among Young Adults, by Race



Conclusions

- Consistent with the stigma of obesity argument, the odds of hooking up five or more times compared to hooking up less than five times for young adults who are obese II (35-39.9) are 20% lower relative to young adults who have a normal BMI (18.5-24.9).
- Contrary to the stigma of obesity argument, the odds of hooking up five or more times compared to hooking up less than five times for young adults who are overweight (25-29.9) and obese I (30-34.9) are 19% and 14% greater compared to odds for young adults with a normal BMI (18.5-24.9).
- For young adult women who are obese III, the odds of hooking up five or more times compared to hooking up less than five times are 52% greater than the odds for young adult men who are obese III.
- For Black young adults who are obese II, the odds of hooking up five or more times compared to hooking up less than five times are 66% greater compared to the odds for White young adults who are obese II.
- For Hispanic young adults who are overweight (25-29.9), obese I (30-34.9), and obese II (35-39.9) the odds of hooking up five or more times compared to hooking up less than five times are 46%, 54%, and 175%, respectively, greater than the odds for their relative White counterparts for each BMI cutpoint.

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