



# **Socio-Religious Implications of Self-Sexualisation and Hookup Culture among University Students in Akwa Ibom State**

Etiemana Warri Benjamin

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies  
Akwa Ibom State University. Obio Akpa Campus  
[edymanbenshalom@yahoo.com](mailto:edymanbenshalom@yahoo.com)  
08025468069

Umoh, Dominic S. Ph.D  
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies  
Akwa Ibom State University. Obio Akpa Campus  
[labbedominic2009@yahoo.uk](mailto:labbedominic2009@yahoo.uk).  
08025468902

Asukwo Edet Oko, Ph.D  
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies  
Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus  
[asukwooko@aksu.edu.ng](mailto:asukwooko@aksu.edu.ng); [revasukwo@yahoo.com](mailto:revasukwo@yahoo.com)  
08037297842

Enang, Edenowo T. Ph.D  
Department of English and Literary Studies  
Akwa Ibom State University. Obio Akpa Campus  
08020933031

## **Abstract**

This study investigates the socio-religious implications of self-sexualisation and hookup culture among university students in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Increasing exposure to digital media and shifting youth social norms have normalised sexualised self-presentation and casual sexual encounters, creating tensions with traditional sexual expectations and Christian moral principles. Grounded in Objectification Theory and Sexual Script Theory, the study analyses how religious beliefs and social contexts shape students' participation in sexualised behaviours. A mixed-methods design was employed,



drawing on 489 valid unstructured questionnaires complemented by personal observation. Findings show that self-sexualisation and hookup practices are propelled by socio-economic pressures, peer influence, media-driven ideals, and a liberal sexual climate within university settings. Despite the appearance of casual pleasure, students often confront emotional vulnerability, unmet desires, and hidden risks. The study further reveals that although religiosity tempers some sexualised behaviours, many students experience moral ambivalence as they navigate conflicting demands of spiritual conviction and social conformity. These behaviours carry significant implications for students' health, emotional stability, academic performance, and social identity. The study concludes self-sexualisation alone may not directly push someone into hookup, but its influence is complex and mediated by other factors (e.g., financial need, opportunity, and stigma). It recommends strengthened parental engagement, targeted Christian-based youth programmes, and coordinated interventions by governmental and non-governmental organizations to address the underlying religio-cultural and social drivers of sexualised behaviour among university students in Akwa Ibom State.

**Keywords:** Hookup, religiosity, Self-sexualisation, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University.

## Introduction

This study aims to establish the interplay of self-sexualisation and hook-up culture and its socio-religious implications amongst university students in Akwa Ibom State. Evidence of a highly sexualised cultural trend is becoming increasingly apparent in several countries across the world (Choi & DeLong, 2019, p.1352) including Nigeria, with ubiquitous influence of sexualised images of girls and women littering both media and non-media spaces. Prior research on the sexualised culture has focused relatively on affluent Western society to the exclusion of non-Western society (Choi & DeLong, 2019, p.1352). But forces of globalization have facilitated this trend into Africa with local societies yielding to this culture.

In Nigeria, women are highly sexually objectified in commercial, entertainment and fashion industries. They are frequently portrayed in ways that viewers can make judgments about their physical appearance and their sex appeal (Ejem, *et al.* 2022, p.59). Sex appeal has become greatly valued and young women now actively and publicly expose their sexualities in a variety of ways. McNair (cited in Choi & DeLong, 2019) uses the term *striptease culture* to describe the democratization of sexual self-exhibition and bodily exposure, especially by the media.



Nigeria's entertainment industries regularly display women as sexual objects in movies and music videos. Hip Hop music videos is a platform for the flagrant display of women as decorative and sex symbols. They are displayed as dancers dressed partially or completely showing sensitive body parts and most of the videos are basically about girls in pants and bra shaking their booties, seductive dance steps, pole-strip dance, cage twerk dance, etc. (Ogazie & Imasagbor, 2023, p.8). The lyrics of top-selling songs in Nigeria for instance often refer to women's body parts and sexual acts using very explicit and depreciating language.

An obvious hyper-sexualised cultural trend in Akwa Ibom State today is the recent pornographic sexual expressions participated in by members of the general public. Choi & DeLong (2019) distinguishes two current hyper-sexualised cultural tendencies; one is 'the pornographic sexiness created by professionals' (e.g., actors, artists, celebrities, filmmakers) and the other is sexiness produced by the behaviour of members of the general public. Young girls emulate celebrities with cosmetically modified body and seductive postures who post sexualized images of themselves and create independent and personal sexualised content (e.g., amateur pornography videos posted as reels on Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok). The internalisation of these sexual behaviours predisposes these girls to adopt a hyper-sexualised lifestyle like hook-up culture. With self-sexualisation and hook-up becoming progressively entrenched in youth culture today, this study explores the interplay of the trends as they play out among young people in two universities in Akwa Ibom State – specifically, University of Uyo and Akwa Ibom State University.

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and observational procedures. Pilot study revealed open-ended questions allow respondents to provide in-depth answers rather than constrain them to predefined answer choices. This flexibility was necessary to gain a deeper understanding of respondents' thoughts, feelings, personal experiences, unexpected insights and perspectives not known to the researcher. The researcher's instrument "Socio-Religious Implications of Self-sexualisation and Hookup Culture Amongst University Students Questionnaire (SRISHCAUSQ)" was used for data collection. Questions were designed to ascertain the prevalence or not of self-sexualisation and hookup culture, the nexus, causes, and socio-religious effects. A total



of 500 copies of questionnaire were distributed to 500 undergraduates of University of Uyo and Akwa Ibom State University. Only 489 responses were validated for content and thematic analysis and using simple percentage to represent data. Casual interactions with students in the two institutions (who pleaded anonymity) also yielded additional information germane to the study.

### **Research Questions**

What forms of sexualisation and hookup culture are prevalent among university students in Akwa Ibom State?

What social factors motivate the trends?

How does the trend relate to students moral attitude and behaviour

How does self-sexualisation and hookup culture interfere with academic performance?

What is the relationship between religiosity and participation in the trend?

### **Hypotheses**

H<sub>1</sub> There is a significant level of participation in self-sexualisation and hookup culture among university students in Akwa Ibom State

H<sub>2</sub> Some factors like economic misery, peer pressure and media exposure significantly predict engagement in self-sexualisation and hookup culture

H<sub>3</sub> Religious teachings influence student's perceptions of the moral consequences of self-sexualisation and hookup culture

H<sub>4</sub> Engagement in self-sexualisation and hookup affect academic performance

H<sub>5</sub> Students with high religious commitment are less likely to engage in self-sexualisation and hookup culture

H<sub>6</sub> Engagement in self-sexualisation and hookup culture may lead to moral fatigue and spiritual dryness



## Conceptual Definition

### Sexualisation

The term developed as a portmanteau of the words ‘sexual socialization’, coined by Spanier in 1975 (Duschinsky, 2013, np). The earliest usage described sexual socialisation, as ‘having three major components: development of a gender identity; acquisition of sexual skills, knowledge, and values; and development of sexual attitudes.’ However, sexual socialisation grew to a point where it was seen as a mal-socialisation, a social problem particularly in the USA and Britain (Duschinsky, 2013). The most popular and current usage of the term is provided by the American Psychological Association (APA) taskforce report on sexualisation of girls. The APA position (cited in Papageorgiou *et al.* 2023, p.1) states that sexualisation as occurs when:

A person’s value comes only from his or her sex appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics; a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy; a person is sexually objectified – that is, made into a thing for others’ sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or sexuality being inappropriately imposed upon a person.

APA’s explanation shows that sexualisation is not the same as sexuality or having sex; rather, it is a form of sexism, a distorted sexuality based on materialistic attitude. It is a narrow frame of people’s worth and value in which they are seen only as objects or as sexual body parts for others’ pleasure. Absence of mutuality in sexualisation accentuates the fact of instrumentality. One person is in reality “using” the other for his or her own gratification, without regard for the other’s needs, interests, or desires (Ward, 2016). Motivations for sexualisation come from the society - like cultural norms, gender expectations, and values that are communicated in various ways, including through the media; interpersonal dynamics — where girls can be treated as, and encouraged to be sexual objects by boy/girlfriends, family, peers and others; contribution by **self** (self-sexualisation) where girls/boys may treat and experience themselves as sexual objects.



The APA task force report (cited in Choi & DeLong, 2019, p.1357) describes *self-sexualisation* as treating and experiencing oneself as a sexual object. It is any action taken by an individual, which intentionally highlights his or her sexualised features; any behaviour designed to draw sexualised attention to oneself e.g., pole dancing and flashing one's breasts (Erchull & Liss, 2014,p.774). It occurs when women apply the assumptions/beliefs of sexualization to themselves, and it involves the internalization of a belief system where women come to value themselves mainly for their sexual appeal or sexual appearance, to the exclusion of other characteristics (Ward *et al.* 2016:1). In one way, the concept of self-objectification is broader than self-sexualisation, for it includes general appearance, while self-sexualisation has a focus limited to sexuality.

The definition of sexualisation contains the notion of objectification of the self—where one prefers to seeing oneself as an *object* from an observer's perspective (i.e., self-objectification), while the other refers to treating of oneself as a *sexual object* to be used by others. Sexual objectification goes beyond the cloths, dance, to include other sexual suggestive gestures like licking of the lips, fingers, self-touching, projection of the tongue or even undressing; the smacking of parts of the body, which often is accompanied by an inspection or an assessment of the body. Undoubtedly, these actions bombard the social media platforms daily, not only by some unidentified porn-stars, but by the familiar *Imaobongs* and *Okons*. While self-sexualisation can occur for both men and women regardless of one's sexual identity, this study focuses on self-sexualisation of girls/women because the current phenomenon seems to revolve around them. It appears that, as girls create and upload personal sexualised pictures and videos, men sample these *commodities* and go for the most sexually appealing and affordable as well. These dynamics drive the hook-up culture

### **Hook-up Culture**

Hookups occurs when two people who are not involved in a committed relationship with each other engage in a brief sexual encounter, whether it just the foreplay like kissing, sexual touching, or actual sex act. To underscore the sex part, Sevi (2018) uses *casual sex* as a synonym for hookup. Sometimes these *hookers* barely even know each other to warrant the designation 'friend'. Ambroise (2023, np) defines hookup culture as 'a set of beliefs, values and practices that promote casual sex often without



expectation of a committed relationship and it is widely seen among college students and young adults, though other younger and older people also explore it'. Iorkosu et al. (2025) confirms that in Nigeria, commercial sex has become a lucrative sector, especially for young people with a huge percentage of sex workers as students in Nigerian public institutions. The present focus on university students is apt, because as Wade (2017) believes posits 'when students arrive on campus, they do not just encounter the opportunity to hook up; they are also immersed in a culture that endorses and facilitates hookups. Ceding to or resisting that culture becomes part of their everyday lives'. Wade's observation confirms the pervasive nature of hookup culture in tertiary institutions.

Hookup has become culturally normative amongst young people. Dating for marriage/family purposes has decreased and sexual behaviour outside of traditional committed romantic pair-bonds has become increasingly usual and socially acceptable. Garcia *et al.* (2012, p.1) confirms that hooking up has taken root within the sociocultural milieu of adolescents, emerging adults, and men and women throughout the Western world. However, these encounters are becoming increasingly normative among adolescents and young adults...representing a marked shift in openness and acceptance of uncommitted sex.

This culture is 'immanently defensible' and as Wade (2017) explains,

Students believe that their peers believe that virginity is passé and monogamy is prudish; that college is a time to go wild and have fun; that separating sex from emotions is sexually liberating; and that they are too young and career-focused for commitment. All these ideas are widely circulated on campus and all make reasonable sense – validating the choice to engage in casual sex while invalidating both monogamous relationships and the choice to have no sex at all.

Students' behavioural intention to participate in the culture depends on their attitude about the behaviour as well as perceived expected outcomes. It is therefore a reasoned and informed decision to internalise and reproduce patterns of sexual behaviour. Through observation, imitation and reward mechanism, students can defend their involvement in hookup culture. The waves of Sexual revolutions and scientific breakthroughs in medical and information technologies have blown into traditional



societies in Africa, shaking conservative sexual framework and promoting sexual liberalism and personal rights to sexual gratifications outside the traditional confines of marriage

### **Nexus between Sexualisation and Hookup Culture**

As stated earlier, in self-sexualisation, an individual adopts an attitude and lifestyle that treats and flaunts the body primarily as a sexual object for other's gratification. The self-sexualiser emphasizes and prioritises physical appearance and sexiness to gain attention and endorsement. This sexualised behaviour is like exhibiting sexually suggestive aspects of their bodies as visual objects - as wares in a showcase for public evaluation and desire. Beauty and physical attractiveness have traditionally reckoned among the most valuable social resources for women, making it easier to understand why women go extra miles to flaunt and invest in their beauty and sexiness. Images depicting girls and women as sexually available and accessible are ubiquitous and normalized on social media platforms. By modern standard and beauty ideal, sexy pictures are defined as self-taken images where girls are scarcely dressed, have a sexy gaze or are posing in a sexually suggestive but not explicit way, though some can really be explicit.

As girls post their sexy-selfies and amateur videos, men take evaluative analyses of the displayed bodies and initiate communication with girls who suit their sexual preferences. Communication may include sexting or cybersex, depending on the sexual attitude of the self-sexualiser. In this process, the media plays an important role in displaying self-sexualised images and facilitates the connection between the viewer and the viewed. This increase in sexual exposure 'has been argued to be a possible reason for the endorsement and participation in the hookup culture' (Sevi, 2018, p.2). Participation in hookup culture can reinforce and normalize self-sexualisation since sexual worth and attractiveness become valued currency in hookup culture. Like other consumables, sexual products and services (like hookup) are constantly advertised; the body becomes a kind of social showcase (in self-sexualised pics and videos) in most online platforms (TikTok, Tinder, Facebook, and dating apps) to reach the highest number of potential consumers.

Scholars agree that self-sexualisation and hookup culture are mutually reinforcing constructs within contemporary sexual discourse, wherein the internalization of sexual objectification fosters



engagement in causal sexual behaviours. This in turn regularize the presentation of the self as a sexual object within sociocultural frameworks that equate attractiveness with empowerment and social validation (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, Aubrey, 2006; Liss et al., 2011; Garcia et al, 2013, Ward et al.,2017).

### **Self-sexualisation and Hookup Culture in Akwa Ibom State**

Sexualisation is founded on an ideology that sees the body as an object that can be evaluated by others for value judgements, and as commodity that can be put up for merchandize. Amongst the Ibibio and Annang groups, patriarchal hegemony seems to encourage sexism and commodification of sex. Amongst the Annang, there is a saying that, “*Agwo-nnwaan ama unyim efùd, nyim anye inwang. Jak aben efùd amo aloong akpakpa, aloong uboong!*” (If a woman deprives you of sex, deprive her of farmlands. Let her use her private part to cultivate corn and pumpkin). In traditional Ibibio society, this saying was used to refer to the relationship between married couples, where husbands had control over all means of production and their wives entirely depended on them for survival. Women needed farmlands to survive especially in polygamous systems, but she must satisfy with the *cravings* of her lord – the patriarchal husband. This is highly suggestive of trade and barter system, women’s vulnerability and subservience. Her success depended on maintaining a disposition that favoured the man because it is his world. In modern Ibibio, the transactional theme shows up in a local saying/song, ‘...*tad ukot mfo dia mkpo, bop ukot mfo kpa obiong* (spread your legs, you have what to eat, close your legs, you die of hunger). This transactional ideology is no longer limited to married couples, as most relationships today are built on some form of exchanges – sex for jobs, sex for food, sex for grades, sex for money, sex for role, etc. Both boys and girls are socialised into this system and they grow to internalise it. Self-sexualisation then becomes an outward expression of a sexist belief system whereby girls accept the status quo and present are objects of male desire. The body and sexual appeal becomes important asset that earns favours in men’s world. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) in Objectification Theory confirms that in cultures where women are regularly sexualized and treated as objects for other’s pleasure, they begin to internalize this external gaze leading to body surveillance, shame and anxiety. So the idea of hookup has a link with the culture’s view of the commodification of sex.



Hookups, as uncommitted sexual encounters, are becoming progressively more engrained in popular culture (Garcia et al, 2013, p.1). While professional sex workers have specific physical locations for pickups in most cities in Nigeria, hookers depend on dating applications and sometimes social clubs. This makes hookers ubiquitous. Quality20 in (Nairaland, May, 2023) observes that all over the cities and towns in Nigeria, prostitution and hookup culture is very much on the rise especially among teenage girls and up to 25. However, cities and states covered by Sharia Law and less influence of western education seem to have minor cases of youth hook up. This submission seems to indirectly indict both western education and non-Islamic system as facilitators of hookup culture in Nigeria.

Empirical studies conducted in Nigeria show that about 31% of hookers are students in public institutions who seek new experiences and exploit a sense of freedom. With the Android phones, hookup is arranged and confidentiality is maintained (Iorkosu et al, 2025, p.3). Adediran & Olusanya (2023,p.1) sees hookup culture as a 'rebranded form of prostitution prevalent among female undergraduate students in tertiary institutions' and motivated by poverty, fallen moral and ethical values, greed, pursuit of materialism, foreign influences, glorification of sex on Social Media, negligence of moral responsibilities by the family, church, etc. The unanimous position of these studies affirms that there are causes, curses and cures for hookup culture especially amongst tertiary school students.

The socio-economic atmosphere of Akwa Ibom State makes it a rewarding destination for visitors and settlers. With a number of federal and state tertiary institutions spread across the state, there is a remarkable presence of young people in metropolitan centres like Eket, Mkapt Enin, Ikot Abasi, Abak, Ikot Ekpene and Uyo. In terms of hookup, the city of Uyo has been listed as one of the cities with a rise in hookup culture in Nigeria (Fanen & Fortune, 2025:4) and studies like Ekott (2023), Ekong & Udoh, (2025) have established hookup culture among students in some tertiary institutions in Akwa Ibom State. The presence of sexually-objectifying environments that promote social hangouts and nightlife, makes hookup culture a flourishing enterprise for students. Apart from physical environments that support hookup culture in Akwa Ibom State, there are virtual platforms that promote undercover online dating and hookup commerce. Some of the most used sites are Mingle2.com, Swing Towns,



Porn WhatsApp Groups, NaijaPlanet, Uyo Hookup, Akwa Ibom Singles Connect, Akwa Ibom Hookup, Mamba.ru, etc.

### **Objectification Theory and Sexual Script Theory**

Objectification Theory as a psychosocial and feminist framework by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argues that in cultures where women are regularly sexualized and treated as objects for other's pleasure, they begin to internalize this external gaze leading to body surveillance, shame and anxiety. The key issues are that women are treated as body or parts and internalization leads to consequences like (depression, eating disorder, diminished cognitive performance, and appearance anxiety). This theory helps to explain links between culture and sexualization, gender inequality, sexualization in media, workplaces, etc. On the Other hand, Sexual Script Theory formulated by Gagnon and Simon in 1973 provides a psychosocial framework for understanding how human sexual behaviour is socially constructed. Through culturally embedded script learned through socialisation individuals perceive and interpret and even enact sexual desires and behaviour. Media representation of sexuality, digital platforms and sexual liberalism of the present society shape new forms of sexual expressions and identity. The two theories complement each other and remain central to understanding of self-sexualisation and hookup as socially constructed behaviours where individuals internalize societal and media-driven sexual scripts that normalise sexual self-presentation sexual objects, thereby performing and negotiating sexual encounters in ways that align with culturally approved narratives of desirability and sexual liberalism.

### **Results of Study**

<b>Variables (sex)</b>	<b>No of respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	184	37.6
Female	305	62.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>100</b>

More girls than boys participated in the exercise with age range between 17 -34.

H<sub>1</sub> There is a significant level of participation in self-sexualisation and hookup culture among university students in Akwa Ibom state.



Sex	Agreed		Disagreed	
Male	110	22.5%	39	8%
Female	290	59.3%	50	10.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>81.8%</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>18.2</b>

As shown above, about 81% (400) of the total respondents confirmed self-sexualisation and hookup culture is prevalent in the university community, with some seeing it as ‘reasonable hustling, better than stealing’. The fact that some female students still deny involvement, for fear of moral judgment and labelling, shows some persons still have reservations about hookup culture in Akwa Ibom state. There is high level of self-sexualization amongst female students in dressing, amateur sexy videos posted on social media platforms, exchange of nude pictures and personal sex clips. However, not all sexualised videos are intended for hookup and not all hookers engage in public self-sexualization. Some amateur videos are just for the fun of garnering likes and reputation on media platforms. Some ladies are too discrete with their physical appearance and demeanour, that they cannot be suspected of engaging in hookup business.

In social media platforms, male shoppers take evaluative gazes at sexually-appealing girls, and send direct message if what they see meets their personal preferences. Further interaction would tell if the transactional relationship can be consummated. In most cases, men would request for or exchange of sexually-explicit pictures and videos as prelude for the *actual* meeting. With artificialities in appearance, most men request for body survey videos or a pictures to ascertain the sexual and instrumental value of the prospective hookup girl(s). The assessment through nudes may be an expression of male control of girls’ sexual behaviour; girls must respond if they need male acceptance and patronage. Beyond the evaluative scrutiny of appearance/endowments, there are questions like; how long can you last? What crazy things can you do? What is your best style? What makes you high? What is your charge? Given answers decide if the hookup process should be terminated or expedited through an advance payment.

Nude pictures (breasts and vagina) can be exchanged for as low as N3,000, while nude videos can go for N5,000. If the male client needs a video with facial identity and body touching activities (like



caressing the breast or autoeroticism), the price is negotiated and trust has to be ascertained first. However, these depend on individual's policies regarding exposure and exchange of nudity on social media space. There are grades and levels in hookup. These grades show up in the kind of men, places, financial target, degree of involvement and purpose. While men evaluate girls for sexual appeal, girls also assess men for financial appeal. Thus, some girls of class accept solicitations only from affluent clients, some go for older men (less sexual stress in most cases), and some for young and masculine (for optimum satisfaction), etc. Young men display their masculine bodies and wads of cash as a hookup strategy, and girls also know there are fakes too.

Again, almost all female respondents rejected hookup partners within the school and town. Apart from the joy of changing environment, most girls prefer 'away match' to protect their personality from familiar people. In terms of involvement, there are amateurs, professionals and *arrangers* in hookup culture in the two universities studied. Arrangers are hot, rich and connected girls who scout, coordinate and supply girls on campus to male clients based on desired specifications. Whereas some girls operate as individuals, some operate as a group of five or more. They exist not just to share stuffs but to watch out for one another.

Besides the social media arrangements, there are environments that are sexually objectifying and serve as hubs for hookup lifestyle. Bars, night clubs, gyms, school environments and offices, hotel spots, hook up websites, etc., provide environment where ladies flaunt their natural wares and guys display money. Six packs can increase a man's sexiness and charm, but in hookup, the pocket is more alluring than muscularity and beards.

### Causes of Self-sexualisation and Hookup

H<sub>2</sub> Some factors like economic misery, peer pressure and media exposure significantly motivate engagement in self-sexualisation and hookup culture

Sex	Agreed		Disagreed	
Male	91	18.6%	48	9.8%
Female	300	61.3%	50	10.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>20%</b>



About 80% of respondents believe that hookup culture on campuses is driven largely by need for economic survival, followed by peer pressure and sexual liberalism of the university environment. Students have needs some of their parents cannot meet. These students find themselves immersed in a culture and milieu that offers variety of money-making ways. Often, hookup is the quickest and less engaging. Multiple sex partners yield multiple streams of income. Committed relationship does not permit this multiplicity and that is a limitation in income generation. Ugocee's song on hookup sheds light on how social issues like poverty (condition) drive many Nigerian women into hookup culture. The lyrics read:

Onoeme dey do hookup o  
She come tell me say omo na because of condition  
Without hookup some girls go suffer  
Whether na for road or for Lekki garden, she must hammer

Everybody want to be oga (boss)  
Fast fast money  
All of una wan dey touch  
Nobody come get time to be patient  
Patience n'emezi hookup (tr. Patience is now doing hookup)  
Money give am tight

(Boom Play Music, 2025)

Ugocee's line that without hookup girls will suffer seems to portray hookup culture not just as lucrative but also as life-saving. In hookup culture, patience as a virtue in making legitimate money is disregarded. Platforms like Telegram, WhatsApp, Bingo, etc., serve a hotspot for young Nigerians seeking financial gain through intimate encounters. A recent trend on Facebook is the proliferation of local content creators using indigenous languages (Ibibio, Annang) and Pidgin English to vend overt sexual themes to viewers and garnering followers and likes. There is that tendency based on their self-objectifying and sexualisation media contents that they are open to transactional relationship. In a study conducted by Chen (2016), those who perceived themselves as more object-like, felt more positive toward transactional sex than did those less prone to objectify the self and others.



The entertainment industry is another factor driving hookup culture. The social media is not just filled with self-sexualised contents; it is also replete with celebrities flaunting hot and sexy bodies in bikinis, music videos, movies, and Reality TV shows like Big Brother Naija, that feature themes about uncommitted sexual encounters with random people – often for fun or money. Tiwa Savage’s *Get low*; Burna Boy’s *Pull Up* and *Call Me Everyday* seem to normalise the culture of hookup. This has become a strong motivation especially to the younger generation.

Greed for material things and personal sexual lifestyle drives hookup culture on campus. There are girls who desire to live above their means; they want to maintain a hot and sexy look on campus by all means. Most often, hookup is the source that funds that project. The cycle begins with internalized objectification to more materialistic values to acceptance of transactional sex then to potentially greater involvement in self-objectification and transactional relationships. Respondents also mentioned collapsed moral and ethical values in society, sexual explorations as a sign of freedom and youthfulness, extreme/unusual sexual desire/sexual experimentation (orgies, threesome, foursome), foreign/celebrity influences, gross negligence of moral responsibilities by the family, church, society and other institutions and the glorification and permissiveness regarding sexuality on social and dating sites. All these overlapping factors contribute to self-objectification and commodification of sex in hookup.

### **Social Implications**

Judging from participants’ reasons for engagement in hookup culture captured in H<sub>2</sub>, there are rewards such as;

**Economic Benefits:** Hookup is a transactional relationship. It is a commercial engagement that provides multiple sources of income to hookers to meet variety of needs. Proceeds from one encounter can meet needs on campus and at home as well. Hookup occurs in bars and clubs, not just on social media. It boosts the revenue of bars, clubs, eateries and hotels. Even contacts who meet on dating apps may still sit-out before proceeding to other intimate spaces.



**Social Benefits:** Respondents agree that hookup culture affords opportunities to meet new individuals and expand their circle of friends. Hookup culture does not fancy committed relationship, but a casual client today may be of help in tomorrow. Hookup may serve as a form of education for those who have to travel out to new places, use modern amenities, eat new cuisines, learn new expressions of sexuality etc. while it appears to favour girls more than men, men directly benefit from the sexual services rendered, and a good *treat* for their money.

However, there are numerous Negative social implications

H<sub>3</sub> Religious teachings influence student’s consciousness of the consequences of self-sexualisation and hookup culture

Sex	Agreed		Disagreed	
Male	200	40.9 %	20	4%
Female	269	55%	5	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>464</b>	<b>95.9%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>4.1%</b>

A significant percentage of respondents (95.9%) agreed that their religious background provides the consciousness of the social and moral consequences of self-sexualisation and immoral relationships. Students who participate in these trends are therefore aware of the morality of such trends. However, participation reveals more of;

**Moral Breakdown and Social tolerance:** Traditional and moral control system in Akwa Ibom society appears battered by western liberalisation of sex and sexuality. Society is becoming more of a silent moral gatekeeper, more accommodating and more empathetic. Young people are exposed to so many sexual influences and some of these were considered deviant in the past. The more permissive a society becomes in sexual matters, the greater the likelihood to become sexual destination for sexual tourist. With sexual stereotypes that portray *Calabar girls* as sex vendors, emerging hookup culture may just confirm the false narrative.

**Psychological Distresses:** Sexting, cybersex and self-sexualised presentation play a major role in hookup spaces. Respondents reported cases of cyberbullying and attempts to leak nude contents by their ex boyfriends/hookers. Sometimes they chose to reach unhealthy compromises to avoid the social



scandal. Sometimes these nudes appear on social media platforms by accident or as revenge porn or for monetary exploitation. Victims would have to live with this social stigma and psychological trauma.

**Self-objectification and commodification of the body:** In self-sexualisation and hookup, girls/women intentionally objectify and commodify themselves as object of gaze and sex vendors and are treated as such. This conscious and compulsive complicity perpetuates negative attitude towards girls and women in spite of the real and perceived benefits accruable from it. Hookup leads to emotional detachment – because there is no love from both sides but inclination to exploit service and maximise profit respectively. A respondent confirmed that in hookup engagement, the man needs sexual satisfaction and the woman needs the money, so no room for sympathy, it is strictly business. This apparent loss of humanity in the sex act may lead to a number of abuses.

**Exploitation of Persons:** This manifests in unprotected sexual encounters in cases where male clients insist on that. However, men who desire ‘raw’ sex must pay additional fee for after-sex-drugs. There are also cases of use and abuse of substances (drugs) by both parties. Men use substances to last long enough and girls use substances to be *high* enough do or survive anything. This poses negative impact on mental health as hookup increases depression based on non-performance or traumatic encounters. There are reported cases physical assaults (like Bondage, discipline, dominance, sadism and masochism BDSM), blowjob and semen ingestion, debut anal sex, trendy sex styles which leave them with injuries. The worst narrated experience was that of having a recorded sexual orgy with extra two men (called threesome).

**Interference with Academics**

H<sub>4</sub> Active Participation in self-sexualisation and Hookup Culture among University students in Akwa Ibom state affects academic performance

Sex	Agreed		Disagreed	
Male	100	20.4 %	38	7.8%
Female	341	69.7%	10	2.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>90.2%</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>9.8%</b>



While 9.8% of respondents believe hookup may not affect the academic growth of intelligent students, 90.2% agreed active participation does have negative consequences on academic performance. Hookup is a time and attention consuming course, especially for inter-state and compulsive hookers. Girls' preoccupation with hookup beauty ideals potentially impacts their self-esteem and body image. Focus shifts from monitoring academic progress to constant body surveillance. The watchword seems to be 'Do not be caught unsexy'. Students more time with their phones, even in lecture halls, as they traverse dating for new/better customers. 'A thoughtful hooker should have a line-up and back up list. For instance, After A, who next? What if B disappoints, who next? Social effects show that in hookup culture, the casual bond is based on the principles of objectification, commodification and instrumentality (a tool to be employed for one's purposes).

Men treat girls as sexual service providers. In every transactional relationship, those involved use each other as means to an end. Objectification shows as, *instrumentality* (a tool to be employed for one's purposes); *denial of autonomy* (lacking self-determination, or autonomy probably once you are paid, the payer determines use); *inertness* (lacking in agency or activity); *fungibility* (interchangeable with others of the same type); *violability* (with boundaries lacking integrity and permissible to break into); *ownership* (possible to own or trade); *denial of subjectivity* - the person's feelings or experiences are seen as something that does not need to be considered (Nussbaum cited in Santoniccolo *et al.*, 2023, p.2) This nature of relationship denies bodily integrity and dignity of human persons. Unfortunately, these negative experiences do not deter girls from trying out other partners. Not all encounters are the same, and as long as the pay is good, the business can run. Perhaps the worst experience is when hookup girls are killed by their male clients for whatever purposes. But even at that, it is common to hear other girls say, 'That is their own'; My case is different'. The kind of 'faith' or perhaps self-assurance to engage in hookup culture in spite of glaring fatal repercussions is an instance of religious conviction and social conformity.



### **Religious Implications**

Hypothesis 3 established that religious teachings influence student's consciousness of the consequences of self-sexualisation and hookup culture. It implies;

### **Hookup culture runs counter to Biblical teaching on the Sanctity of the Body and Marriage**

The body is not a composition of functional body parts, for Christians; it is the Temple of the Living God. The theme of mankind in the image of God also strengthens the dignity of persons. Hookup culture is a conglomeration of misbehaviours and impacts not just the sacredness of sex but also the foundation of marriage and family. The normalization erodes communal moral standard the church. From this perspective, the culture conflicts with biblical ethic of chastity, holiness, and self-control.

### **Level of Religiosity affects Involvement in Hookup Culture**

H<sub>5</sub> Students with high religious commitment are less likely to engage in self-sexualisation and hookup culture

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Agreed</b>		<b>Disagreed</b>	
Male	200	40.9 %	0	0%
Female	271	55.4%	18	3.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>96.3%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>3.7%</b>

About 96.3% of total respondents accepted that level of religiosity affects participation in self-sexualisation and hookup culture, while 3.7% believe some religious people pretend and cover their tracks well.

Christianity is the dominant religion in Akwa Ibom State. In theory, Christianity is intolerant of indecent communication, immodest dressing, sales of sex, and sexual objectification of the body. Results from data revealed that religiosity significantly predicts students' disposition to engage in self-sexualisation and hookup in public universities in Akwa Ibom State. This is true because students who are highly committed to religious teachings, beliefs and values are less prone to engage in this culture. This finding agrees with the position of Vasilenko et al. (2013) that the more religious individuals are,



the more they are less likely to engage in sexual behaviour, largely because they internalise sexual norms rather than just being externally controlled via religiosity. But a twist of religiosity shows up as some respondents admit God understands the circumstances better than human judges, and his mercies can offer protection and forgiveness.

**Non-conformity to Moral Instructions:** The prevalence of hookup culture is a clear case of non-conformity to moral instructions and loss of religious authority to discipline erring members. Respondents report non-conformist attitude to moral teachings in their churches. Some students in reality live double lives and can easily switch from faith to fun. The conflict between Christian sexual norms and media trends seems to favour popular media more than the church. This loss of grip is also a loss of relevance and the church should be concerned.

**Moral fatigue, spiritual alienation and dryness:**

**H<sub>6</sub>** Engagement in self-sexualisation and hookup culture may lead to moral fatigue and spiritual dryness

Sex	Agreed		Disagreed	
Male	100	20.4 %	38	7.8%
Female	331	68.1 %	20	4.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>88.6%</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>11.9</b>

88.6% of total respondents agreed for there is moral weakness to confront the trends and most participants who are still committed to religious duties do experience some form of spiritual disconnect. Religious quietness on hookup culture leaves many students in a moral impasse, without faith-based guidance. There is moral fatigue when the church appears exhausted, lacks clear moral, theological or institutional response to the upsurge of sexualised culture. This indifference or cultural accommodation challenges the theology and dignity of the church. Whether the church feels inadequate in her out-of-date sexual framework, or does not want to appear judgmental in an age of sexual liberalism, there is presently a loss of prophetic voice and presence. When church people join or patronize hookup culture and sexualising behaviours, the moral witness of the church is compromised.



The height of ethical muddle is when the Holy God is made to appear as a silent witness and an *empathetic father* who offers forgiveness and protection to moral culprits.

Respondents indicated feelings of shame, guilt and disconnect after hookup encounters. While some quickly recover from these negative feelings and still offer their religious services, others believe they are unworthy to offer any meaningful service to God. This feeling of self-condemnation may lead to withdrawal or temporary deferral of religious involvement. This confirms that most young people are aware of the moral standard and expectations of their churches but choose to act contrarily.

### **Conclusion**

The study demonstrates the pervasiveness of self-sexualisation and hookup culture among university students in Akwa Ibom State with implications for society and church. The findings confirmed all the stated hypotheses, demonstrating significant socio-religious implications of the trend for students and general society. While there *are* evidence that self-sexualisation is associated with transactional sex, the relationship is not straightforward in some cases. This is because not everyone who self-sexualizes engages in transactional sex. Other structural factors (poverty, gender norms, trends) play a huge role. Today's society cannot deny the barrage of sexual content on media platforms today from both corporate entities and individuals. While some contents are popular sexual trends to garner 'likes' and 'shares' from netizens, some contents are intentionally targeted towards sexual commodification. This study contributes to understanding of transactional sex, which temporarily satisfies individuals' psychosocial and material needs yet with devastating consequences in multiple life domains. The negative consequences of hookups far outweigh whatever positive benefits one may enjoy. This apparent demystification, commodification of sex, as well as implicit accommodation of hookup culture in tertiary institutions (UNIUYO & AKSU) in Akwa Ibom society have deep implications for academics, marriage, family life and society at large. Religious values emphasizing purity, restraint, dignity of persons and sacredness of the body are replaced with consumeristic ideas of pleasure and immoral exhibition. The body of Christ and society cannot remain silent spectators as erosion of traditional and religious values deepens.



## **Recommendations**

- I. Churches in Akwa Ibom State should deliberately reenact their authority as moral watchdog for Akwa Ibom society. This can be done through intentional teaching, counter social media contents, pastoral therapy for victims, public disapproval of pornification of the media and popular culture.
- II. Parents/Guardians must intentionally provide for and nurture children who can make healthy sexual decisions outside the home, and be concerned about their social engagements. As much as possible, their wards should not be predisposed to conditions that make them vulnerable to unhealthy social involvements.
- III. Academic institutions (UNIUYO, AKSU) should organize periodic workshops to deliberate on current themes in human sexuality, encourage research on sexualisation and hookup culture, establish financial support schemes for indigent students and systems to monitor indecent behaviour and appearance on campus.
- IV. The government of Akwa Ibom State through Agencies/Commissions like EARCOM (Ethical and attitudinal Reorientation Commissions) should sincerely denounce the prevailing inappropriate exhibition and commodification of the body. It should sue for an attitudinal and behavioural change, especially among youths using available offline and online media platforms.
- V. Nongovernmental organizations like the Beauty with Brains Project can collaborate with the Church and government of Akwa Ibom state to launch public awareness campaigns to promote body respect, healthy relationships among youths, sometimes using rehabilitated victims of hookup culture as resource persons.



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## Appendix 1

### Socio-Religious Implications of Self-sexualisation and Hookup Culture amongst University Students Questionnaire (SRISHCAUSQ)

#### Instructions:

Please indicate whether you *Agree* or *Disagree* with each of the following statements.

1. I am aware of hookup culture within my school/community.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
2. There is a clear difference between prostitution (transactional sex) and hookup culture.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
3. I or people I know share sexually suggestive pictures/videos online and engage in hookup culture.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
4. I (or people I know) have participated in hookup outings or casual sexual encounters.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
5. I have felt pressure to conform to certain standards of beauty or sexual behavior.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
6. People engage in hookup culture for reasons such as pleasure, social status, peer pressure, financial benefit, or emotional needs.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
7. Some people experience benefits (e.g., confidence, pleasure, social connection, financial gain) from self-sexualization or hookup culture.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
8. I or people I know have exchanged nude pictures for money, gifts, favors, or other benefits.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
9. It is possible to maintain a committed relationship while being familiar with or previously involved in hookup culture.  
 Agree  
 Disagree



- 10. I or people I know have had negative experiences during hookup encounters (e.g., regret, emotional distress, coercion, academic distraction).  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 11. Hookup culture can negatively affect academic performance or focus on campus.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 12. There would be problems if family or church members knew about involvement in hookup culture.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 13. My religion or belief system condemns sexualized self-presentation and transactional sex.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 14. My faith community provides adequate support and guidance on issues related to sex and relationships.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 15. After hookup encounters, I (or a religious person) may experience emotional or spiritual conflict.  
 Agree  
 Disagree
- 16. I have additional information to share -----  
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