

# 4 *Sexuality and Society*

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## ■ READING 10

### *Sexual Revolution(s)*

Beth Bailey

In 1957 America's favorite TV couple, the safely married Ricky and Lucy Ricardo, slept in twin beds. Having beds at all was probably progressive—as late as 1962 June and Ward Cleaver did not even have a bedroom. Elvis's pelvis was censored in each of his three appearances on the *Ed Sullivan Show* in 1956, leaving his oddly disembodied upper torso and head thrashing about on the TV screen. But the sensuality in his eyes, his lips, his lyrics was unmistakable, and his genitals were all the more important in their absence. There was, likewise no mistaking, Mick Jagger's meaning when he grimaced ostentatiously and sang "Let's spend some *time* together" on *Ed Sullivan* in 1967. Much of the audience knew that the line was really "Let's spend the night together," and the rest quickly got the idea. The viewing public could see absence and hear silence—and therein lay the seeds of the sexual revolution.

What we call the sexual revolution grew from these tensions between public and private—not only from tensions manifest in public culture, but also from tensions between private behaviors and the public rules and ideologies that were meant to govern behavior. By the 1950s the gulf between private acts and public norms was often quite wide—and the distance was crucial. People had sex outside marriage, but very, very few acknowledged that publicly. A woman who married the only man with whom she had had premarital sex still worried years later: "I was afraid someone might have learned that we had intercourse before marriage and I'd be disgraced." The consequences, however, were not just psychological. Young women (and sometimes men) discovered to be having premarital sex were routinely expelled from school or college; gay men risked all for engaging in consensual sex. There were real penalties for sexual misconduct and while many deviated from the sexual orthodoxy of the day, all but a few did so furtively, careful not to get "caught."

Few episodes demonstrate the tensions between the public and private dimensions of sexuality in midcentury America better than the furor that surrounded the publication of the studies of sexual behavior collectively referred to as the "Kinsey Reports."

Though a dry, social scientific report, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) had sold over a quarter of a million copies by 1953, when the companion volume on the human female came out. The male volume was controversial, but the female volume was, in *Look* magazine's characterization, "stronger stuff." Kinsey made it clear that he understood the social implications of his study, introducing a section on "the pre-marital coital behavior of the female sample which has been available for this study" with the following qualification: "Because of this public condemnation of pre-marital coitus, one might believe that such contacts would be rare among American females and males. But this is only the overt culture, the things that people openly confess to believe and do. Our previous report (1948) on the male has indicated how far publicly expressed attitudes may depart from the realities of behavior—the covert culture, what males actually do."

Kinsey, a biologist who had begun his career with much less controversial studies of the gall wasp, drew fire from many quarters, but throughout the criticism is evident concern about his uncomfortable juxtaposition of public and private. "What price biological science . . . to reveal intimacies of one's private sex life and to draw conclusions from inscriptions on the walls of public toilets?" said one American in a letter to the editor of *Look* magazine.

Much of the reaction to Kinsey did hinge on the distance between the "overt" and the "covert." People were shocked to learn how many men and women were doing what they were not supposed to be doing. Kinsey found that 50 percent of the women in his sample had had premarital sex (even though between 80 percent and 89 percent of his sample disapproved of premarital sex on "moral grounds"), that 61 percent of college-educated men and 84 percent of men who had completed only high school had had premarital sex, that over one-third of the married women in the sample had "engaged in petting" with more than ten different men, that approximately half of the married couples had engaged in "oral stimulation" of both male and female genitalia, and that at least 17 percent of American men had had "some homosexual experience" during their lifetimes.

By pulling the sheets back, so to speak, Kinsey had publicized the private. Many people must have been reassured by the knowledge that they were not alone, that their sexual behaviors were not individual deviant acts but part of widespread social trends. But others saw danger in what Kinsey had done. By demonstrating the distance between the overt and the covert cultures, Kinsey had further undermined what was manifestly a beleaguered set of rules. *Time* magazine warned its readers against the attitude that "there is morality in numbers," the *Chicago Tribune* called Kinsey a "menace to society," and the *Ladies' Home Journal* ran an article with the disclaimer: "The facts of behavior reported . . . are not to be interpreted as moral or social justification for individual acts."

Looking back to the century's midpoint, it is clear that the coherence of (to use Kinsey's terms) covert and overt sexual cultures was strained beyond repair. The sexual revolution of the 1960s emerged from these tensions, and to that extent it was not revolutionary, but evolutionary. As much as anything else, we see the overt coming to terms with the covert. But the revision of revolution to evolution would miss a crucial point. It is not historians who have labeled these changes "sexual revolution"—it was people at the time, those who participated and those who watched. And they called it that before much of what we would see as revolutionary really emerged—before gay liberation and the women's movement and Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex* (1972) and "promiscuity" and singles' bars. The term was in general use by 1963—earlier than one might expect.

To make any sense of the sexual revolution, we have to pay attention to the label people gave it. Revolutions, for good or ill, are moments of danger. It matters that a metaphor of revolution gave structure to the myriad changes taking place in American society. The changes in sexual mores and behaviors could as easily have been cast as evolutionary—but they were not.

Looking back, the question of whether or not the sexual revolution was revolutionary is not easy to answer; it depends partly on one's political (defined broadly) position. Part of the trouble, though, is that the sexual revolution was not one movement. It was instead a set of movements, movements that were closely linked, even intertwined, but which often made uneasy bedfellows. Here I hope to do some untangling, laying out three of the most important strands of the sexual revolution and showing their historical origins, continuities, and disruptions.

The first strand, which transcended youth, might be cast as both evolutionary and revolutionary. Throughout the twentieth century, picking up speed in the 1920s, the 1940s and the 1960s, we have seen a sexualization of America's culture. Sexual images have become more and more a part of public life, and sex—or more accurately, the representation of sex—is used to great effect in a marketplace that offers Americans fulfillment through consumption. Although the blatancy of today's sexual images would be shocking to someone transported from an earlier era, such representations developed gradually and generally did not challenge more "traditional" understandings of sex and of men's and women's respective roles in sex or in society.

The second strand was the most modest in aspect but perhaps the most revolutionary in implication. In the 1960s and early 1970s an increasing number of young people began to live together "without benefit of matrimony," as the phrase went at the time. While sex was usually a part of the relationship (and probably a more important part than most people acknowledged), few called on concepts of "free love" or "pleasure" but instead used words like "honesty," "commitment," and "family." Many of the young people who lived together could have passed for young marrieds and in that sense were pursuing fairly traditional arrangements. At the same time, self-consciously or not, they challenged the tattered remnants of a Victorian epistemological and ideological system that still, in the early 1960s, fundamentally structured the public sexual mores of the American middle class.

The third strand was more self-consciously revolutionary, as sex was *actively claimed* by young people and used not only for pleasure, but also for power in a new form of cultural politics that shook the nation. As those who threw themselves into the "youth revolution" (a label that did not stick) knew so well, the struggle for America's future would take place not in the structure of electoral politics, but on the battlefield of cultural meaning. Sex was an incendiary tool of a revolution that was more than political. But not even the cultural revolutionaries agreed on goals, or on the role and meaning of sex in the revolution.

These last two strands had to do primarily with young people, and that is significant. The changes that took place in America's sexual mores and behaviors in the sixties were *experienced* and *defined* as revolutionary in large part because they were so closely tied to youth. The nation's young, according to common wisdom and the mass media, were in revolt. Of course, the sexual revolution was not limited to youth, and sex was only one part of the revolutionary claims of youth. Still it was the intersection of sex and

youth that signaled danger. And the fact that these were often middle-class youths, the ones reared in a culture of respectability (told that a single sexual misstep could jeopardize their bright futures), made their frontal challenges to sexual mores all the more inexplicable and alarming.

Each of these strands is complex, and I make no pretense to be exhaustive. Thus, rather than attempting to provide a complete picture of changes in behaviors or ideologies, I will examine several manifestations of seemingly larger trends. The sexualization of culture (the first strand) is illustrated by the emergence of *Playboy* and *Cosmo* magazines. For the “modest revolutionaries” (the second strand), I look to the national scandal over a Barnard College junior’s “arrangement” in 1968 and the efforts of University of Kansas students to establish a coed dormitory. Finally, the cultural radicals (the third strand) are represented by the writings of a few counterculture figures.

By focusing on the 1960s, we lose much of the “sexual revolution.” In many ways, the most important decade of that revolution was the 1970s, when the “strands” of the 1960s joined with gay liberation, the women’s movement, and powerful assertions of the importance of cultural differences in America. Yet, by concentrating on the early years of the sexual revolution, we see its tangled roots—the sexual ideologies and behaviors that gave it birth. We can also understand how little had been resolved—even begun—by the end of the 1960s.

## BEFORE THE REVOLUTION: YOUTH AND SEX

Like many of the protest movements that challenged American tranquility in the sixties, the sexual revolution developed within the protected space and intensified atmosphere of the college campus. An American historian recalls returning to Harvard University in 1966 after a year of postgraduate study in England. Off balance from culture shock and travel fatigue, he entered Harvard Yard and knew with absolute certainty that he had “missed the sexual revolution.” One can imagine a single symbolic act of copulation signaling the beginning of the revolution (it has a nicely ironic echo of “the shot heard round the world”). The single act and the revolution complete in 1966 are fanciful constructions; not everything began or ended at Harvard even in those glory years. But events there and at other elite colleges and universities, if only because of the national attention they received, provide a way into the public intersections of sex, youth and cultural politics.

Harvard had set a precedent in student freedom in 1952, when girls (the contemporary term) were allowed to visit in Harvard men’s rooms. The freedom offered was not supposed to be sexual—or at least not flagrantly so. But by 1963 Dean Jon Monro complained that he was “badly shaken up by some severe violations,” for a once “pleasant privilege” had come to be “considered a license to use the college rooms for wild parties or sexual intercourse.” The controversy went public with the aid of *Time* magazine, which fanned the flames by quoting a senior’s statement that “morality is a relative concept projecting certain mythologies associated with magico-religious beliefs.” The Parietals Committee of the Harvard Council for Undergraduate Affairs, according to the *Boston Herald*, concluded that “if these deep emotional commitments and ties occasionally lead to sexual intercourse, surely even that is more healthy than the situation a generation ago

when ‘nice girls’ were dated under largely artificial circumstances and sexual needs were gratified at a brothel.” Both justifications seemed fundamentally troubling in different ways, but at least the controversy focused on men. The sexual double standard was strong. When the spotlight turned on women, the stakes seemed even higher.

The media had a field day when the president of Vassar College, Sarah Blanding, said unequivocally that if a student wished to engage in premarital sex she must withdraw from the college. The oft-quoted student reply to her dictum chilled the hearts of middle-class parents throughout the country: “If Vassar is to become the Poughkeepsie Victorian Seminary for young Virgins, then the change of policy had better be made explicit in admissions catalogs.”

Such challenges to authority and to conventional morality were reported to eager audiences around the nation. None of this, of course, was new. National audiences had been scandalized by the panty raid epidemic of the early 1950s, the antics and petting parties of college youth had provided sensational fodder for hungry journalists in the 1920s. The parents—and grandparents—of these young people had chipped away at the system of sexual controls themselves. But they had not directly and publicly denied the very foundations of sexual morality. With few exceptions, they had evaded the controls and circumvented the rules, climbing into dorm rooms through open windows, signing out to the library and going to motels, carefully maintaining virginity in the technical sense while engaging in every caress known to married couples. The evasions often succeeded, but that does not mean that the controls had no effect. On the contrary, they had a great impact on the ways people experienced sex.

There were, in fact, two major systems of sexual control, one structural and one ideological. These systems worked to reinforce one another, but they affected the lives of those they touched differently.

The structural system was the more practical of the two but probably the less successful. It worked by limiting opportunities for the unmarried to have intercourse. Parents of teenagers set curfews and promoted double dating, hoping that by preventing privacy they would limit sexual exploration. Colleges, acting in loco parentis, used several tactics: visitation hours, parietals, security patrols, and restrictions on students’ use of cars. When Oberlin students mounted a protest against the college’s policy on cars in 1963, one male student observed that the issue was not transportation but privacy: “We wouldn’t care if the cars had no wheels, just so long as they had doors.”

The rules governing hours applied only to women and, to some extent, were meant to guarantee women’s safety by keeping track of their comings and goings. But the larger rationale clearly had to do with sexual conduct. Men were not allowed in women’s rooms but were received in lounges or “date rooms,” where privacy was never assured. By setting curfew hours and requiring women to sign out from their dormitories, indicating who they were with and where they were going, college authorities meant to limit possibilities for privacy. Rules for men were not deemed necessary—because of a sexual double standard, because men’s safety and well-being seemed less threatened in general, and because the colleges and universities were primarily concerned with controlling their own populations. If women were supervised or chaperoned and in by 11:00 P.M., the men would not have partners—at least, not partners drawn from the population that mattered.

Throughout the 1950s, the structural controls became increasingly complex; by the early 1960s they were so elaborate as to be ludicrous. At the University of Michigan in

1962, the student handbook devoted nine of its fifteen pages to rules for women. Curfews varied by the night of the week, by the student's year in college, and even, in some places, by her grade point average. Students could claim Automatic Late Permissions (ALPs) but only under certain conditions. Penalties at Michigan (an institutional version of "grounding") began when a student had eleven "late minutes"—but the late minutes could be acquired one at a time throughout the semester. At the University of Kansas in the late 1950s, one sorority asked the new dean of women to discipline two women who had flagrantly disregarded curfew. The dean, investigating, discovered that the women in question had been between one and three minutes late signing in on three occasions.

The myriad of rules, as anyone who lived through this period well knows, did not prevent sexual relations between students so much as they structured the times and places and ways that students could have sexual contact. Students said good-nights on the porches of houses, they petted in dormitory lounges while struggling to keep three feet on the floor and clothing in some semblance of order, and they had intercourse in cars, keeping an eye out for police patrols. What could be done after eleven could be done before eleven, and sex need not occur behind a closed door and in a bed—but this set of rules had a profound impact on the *ways* college students and many young people, living in their parents' homes *experienced sex*.

The overelaboration of rules, in itself, offers evidence that the controls were beleaguered. Nonetheless, the rules were rarely challenged frontally and thus they offered some illusion of control. This system of rules, in all its inconsistency, arbitrariness, and blindness, helped to preserve the distinction between public and private, the coexistence of overt and covert, that defines midcentury American sexuality.

The ideological system of controls was more pervasive than the structured system and probably more effective. This system centered on ideas of difference: men and women were fundamentally different creatures, with different roles and interests in sex. Whether one adopted a psychoanalytic or an essentialist approach, whether one looked to scholarly or popular analysis, the final conclusion pointed to *difference*. In sex (as in life), women were the limit setters and men the aggressors.

The proper limits naturally depended on one's marital status, but even within marriage sex was to be structured along lines of difference rather than of commonality. Marital advice books since the 1920s had the importance of female orgasm, insisting that men must satisfy their wives, but even these calls for orgasm equality posited male and female pleasure as competing interests. The language of difference in postwar America, which was often quite extreme, can be seen as a defensive reaction to changing gender roles in American society.

One influential psychoanalytic study, provocatively titled *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, condemned women who tried to be men and argued the natural difference between men and women by comparing their roles in sexual intercourse. The woman's role is "passive," the authors asserted. "[Sex] is not as easy as rolling off a log for her. It is easier. It is as easy as being the log itself. She cannot fail to deliver a masterly performance, by doing nothing whatever except being duly appreciative and allowing nature to take its course." For the man, in contrast, sexuality is "overt, apparent and urgent, outward and ever-present," fostered by psychological and physiological pressures toward orgasm. Men might experiment sexually with few or no consequences and no diminution of pleasure. Women, on the other hand, could not: "The strong desire for children or lack of it in a woman has a

crucial bearing on how much enjoyment she derives from the sexual act. . . . Women cannot make . . . pleasure an end in itself without inducing a decline in the pleasure.”

These experts argued from a psychoanalytic framework, but much less theoretical work also insisted on the fundamental difference between men and women, and on their fundamentally different interests in sex. Texts used in marriage courses in American high schools and college typically included chapters on the difference between men and women—and these difference were not limited to their reproductive systems.

Women did in fact have a different and more imperative interest in controlling sex than men, for women could become pregnant. Few doctors would fit an unmarried woman with a diaphragm, though one might get by in the anonymity of a city with a cheap “gold” ring from a drugstore or by pretending to be preparing for an impending honeymoon. Relying on the ubiquitous condom in the wallet was risky and douching (Coca-Cola had a short-lived popularity) even more so. Abortion was illegal, and though many abortions took place, they were dangerous, expensive, and usually frightening and degrading experiences. Dependable and *available* birth control might have made a difference (many could later attribute “the sexual revolution” to the “pill”), but sexual behaviors and sexual mores were not based simply on the threat of illegitimate pregnancy. Kinsey found that only 44 percent of the women in his sample said that they restricted their premarital coitus “because of fear of pregnancy,” whereas 80 percent cited “moral reasons.” Interestingly, 44 percent of the sample also noted their “fear of public opinion.”

Women who were too “free” with sexual favors could lose value and even threaten their marriageability. In this society, a woman’s future socioeconomic status depended primarily on her husband’s occupation and earning power. While a girl was expected to “pet to be popular,” girls and women who went “too far” risked their futures. Advice books and columns from the 1940s and 1950s linked girls’ and women’s “value” to their “virtue,” arguing in explicitly economic terms that “free” kisses destroyed a woman’s value in the dating system: “The boys find her easy to afford. She doesn’t put a high value on herself.” The exchange was even clearer in the marriage market. In chilling language, a teen adviser asked: “Who wants second hand goods?”

It was not only the advisers and experts who equated virtue and value. Fifty percent of the male respondents in Kinsey’s study wanted to marry a virgin. Even though a relatively high percentage of women had intercourse before marriage, and a greater number engaged in “petting,” most of these women at least *expected* to marry the man, and many did. Still, there might be consequences. Elaine Tyler May, who analyzed responses to a large, ongoing psychological study of married couples in the postwar era, found that many couples struggled with the psychological burdens of premarital intimacy for much of their married lives. In the context of a social/cultural system that insisted that “nice girls don’t,” many reported a legacy of guilt or mistrust. One woman wrote of her husband: “I think he felt that because we had been intimate before marriage that I could be as easily interested in any man that came along.”

Of course, sexual mores and behaviors were highly conditioned by the sexual double standard. Lip service was paid to the ideal of male premarital chastity, but that ideal was usually obviated by the notion, strong in peer culture and implicitly acknowledged in the larger culture, that sexual intercourse was a male rite of passage. Middle-class boys pushed at the limits set by middle-class girls but they generally looked elsewhere for “experience.” A man who went to high school in the early 1960s (and did not lose his

virginity until his first year of college) recalls the system with a kind of horror: “You slept with one kind of woman, and dated another kind, and the women you slept with, you didn’t have much respect for, generally.”

The distinction was often based on class—middle-class boys and men had sex with girls and women of the lower classes, or even with prostitutes. They did not really expect to have intercourse with a woman of their own class unless they were to be married. Samuel Hynes, in his memoir of coming of age as a navy flier during World War II, describes that certain knowledge: “There were nice girls in our lives, too. Being middle-class is more than a social station, it’s kind of destiny. A middle-class boy from Minneapolis will seek out nice middle-class girls, in Memphis or anywhere else, will take them out on middle-class dates and try to put their hand inside their middle-class underpants. And he will fail. It was all a story that had already been written.”

Dating, for middle-class youth, was a process of sexual negotiation. “Good girls” had to keep their virginity yet still contend with their own sexual desires or with boys who expected at least some petting as a “return” on the cost of the date. Petting was virtually universal in the world of heterosexual dating. A 1959 *Atlantic* article, “Sex and the College Girl,” described the ideal as having “done every possible kind of petting without actually having intercourse.”

For most middle-class youth in the postwar era, sex involved a series of skirmishes that centered around lines and boundaries: kissing, necking, petting above the waist, petting below the waist, petting through clothes, petting under clothes, mild petting, heavy petting. The progression of sexual intimacy had emerged as a highly ordered system. Each act constituted a stage, ordered in a strict hierarchy (first base, second base, and so forth), with vaginal penetration as the ultimate step. But in their attempts to preserve technical virginity, many young people engaged in sexual behaviors that, in the sexual hierarchy of the larger culture, should have been more forbidden than vaginal intercourse. One woman remembers: “We went pretty far, very far; everything but intercourse. But it was very frustrating. . . . Sex was out of the question. I had it in mind that I was going to be a virgin. So I came up with oral sex. . . . I thought I invented it.”

Many young men and women acted in defiance of the rules, but that does not make the rules irrelevant. The same physical act can have very different meanings depending on its emotional and social/cultural contexts. For America’s large middle class and for all those who aspired to “respectability” in the pre-revolutionary twentieth century, sex was overwhelmingly secret or furtive. Sex was a set of acts with high stakes and possibly serious consequences, acts that emphasized and reinforced the different roles of men and women in American society. We do not know how each person felt about his or her private acts, but we do know that few were willing or able to publicly reject the system of sexual controls.

The members of the generation that would be labeled “the sixties” were revolutionary in that they called fundamental principles of sexual morality and control into question. The system of controls they had been inherited and lived within was based on a set of presumptions rooted in the previous century. In an evolving set of arguments and actions (which never became thoroughly coherent or unified), they rejected a system of sexual controls organized around concepts of difference and hierarchy.

Both systems of control—the structural and the ideological—were firmly rooted in a Victorian epistemology that had, in most areas of life, broken down by the early twentieth



century. This system was based on a belief in absolute truth and a passion for order and control. Victorian thought, as Joseph Singal has argued persuasively, insisted on “preserving absolute standards based on a radical dichotomy between that which was deemed ‘human’ and that regarded as ‘animal.’” On the “human” side were all forces of civilization; on the “animal,” all instincts, passions, and desires that threatened order and self-control. Sex clearly fell into the latter category. But the Victorian romance was not restricted to human versus animal, civilized versus savage. The moral dichotomy “fostered a tendency to see the world in polar terms.” Thus we find rigid dichotomous pairs not only of good and evil, but of men and women, body and soul, home and world, public and private.

Victorian epistemology, with its remarkably comfortable and comforting certainties and its stifling absolutes, was shaken by the rise of a new science that looked to “dynamic process” and “relativism” instead of the rigid dichotomies of Victorian thought. It was challenged from within by those children of Victorianism who “yearned to smash the glass and breathe freely,” as Jackson Lears argued in his study of antimodernism. And most fundamentally, it was undermined by the realities of an urban industrial society. American Victorian culture was, as much as anything, a strategy of the emerging middle classes. Overwhelmed by the chaos of the social order that had produced them and that they sought to manage, the middling classes had attempted to separate themselves from disorder and corruption. This separation, finally, was untenable.

The Victorian order was overthrown and replaced by a self-consciously “modern culture.” One place we point to demonstrate the decline of Victorianism is the change in sexual “manners and mores” in the early twentieth century. Nonetheless, sex may be the place that Victorian thought least relinquished its hold. This is not to say that prudishness reigned—the continuity is more subtle and more fundamental. Skirts rose above the knee, couples dated and petted, sexologists and psychologists acknowledged that women were not naturally “passionless,” and the good judge Ben Lindsey called for the “companionate marriage.” But the systems of control that regulated and structured sex were Victorian at their core, with science replacing religion to authorize absolute truth, and with inflexible bipolar constructions somewhat reformulated but intact. The system of public controls over premarital sex was based on rigid dichotomous pairings: men and women, public and private. This distinction would be rejected—or at least recast—in the cultural and sexual struggles of the sixties.

## REVOLUTIONARIES

All those who rejected the sexual mores of the postwar era did not reject the fundamental premises that gave them shape. *Playboy* magazine played an enormously important (if symbolic) role in the sexual revolution, or at least in preparing the ground for the sexual revolution. *Playboy* was a men’s magazine in the tradition of *Esquire* (for which its founder had worked briefly) but laid claim to a revolutionary stance partly by replacing *Esquire*’s airbrushed drawings with airbrushed flesh.

Begun by Hugh Hefner in 1953 with an initial print run of 70,000, *Playboy* passed the one million circulation mark in three years. By the mid-1960s Hefner had amassed a fortune of \$100 million, including a lasciviously appointed forty-eight-room mansion staffed by thirty *Playboy* “bunnies” (“fuck like bunnies” is a phrase we have largely left

behind, but most people at the time caught the allusion). Playboy clubs, also staffed by large-breasted and long-legged women in bunny ears and cottontails, flourished throughout the country. Though *Playboy* offered quality writing and advice for those aspiring to sophistication, the greatest selling point of the magazine was undoubtedly its illustrations.

*Playboy*, however, offered more than masturbatory opportunities. Between the pages of coyly arranged female bodies—more, inscribed in the coyly arranged female bodies—flourished a strong and relatively coherent ideology. Hefner called it a philosophy and wrote quite a few articles expounding it (a philosophy professor in North Carolina took it seriously enough to describe his course as “philosophy from Socrates to Hefner”).

Hefner saw his naked women as “a symbol of disobedience, a triumph of sexuality, an end of Puritanism.” He saw his magazines as an attack on “our ferocious anti-sexuality, our dark antieroticism.” But his thrust toward pleasure and light was not to be undertaken in partnership. The Playboy philosophy according to Hefner, had less to do with sex and more to do with sex roles. American society increasingly “blurred distinctions between the sexes . . . not only in business, but in such diverse realms as household chores, leisure activities, smoking and drinking habits, clothing styles, upswinging homosexuality and the sex-obliterating aspects of togetherness,” concluded the “Playboy Panel” in June 1962. In Part 19 of his extended essay on the Playboy philosophy, Hefner wrote: “PLAYBOY stresses a strongly heterosexual concept of society—in which the separate roles of men and women are clearly defined and compatible.”

Read without context, Hefner’s call does not necessarily preclude sex as a common interest between men and women. He is certainly advocating heterosexual sex. But the models of sex offered are not partnerships. Ever innovative in marketing and design, *Playboy* offered in one issue a special “coloring book” section. A page featuring three excessively voluptuous women was captioned “Make one of the girls a blonde. Make one of the girls a brunette. Make one of the girls a redhead. It does not matter which is which. The girls’ haircolors are interchangeable. So are the girls.”

Sex, in the Playboy mode, was a contest—not of wills, in the model of the male seducer and the virtuous female, but of exploitative intent, as in the playboy and the would-be wife. In *Playboy*’s world, women were out to ensnare men, to entangle them in a web of responsibility and obligation (not the least of which was financial). Barbara Ehrenreich has convincingly argued that *Playboy* was an integral part of a male-initiated revolution in sex roles, for it advocated that men reject burdensome responsibility (mainly in the shape of wives) for lives of pleasure through consumption. Sex, of course, was part of this pleasurable universe. In *Playboy*, sex was located in the realm of consumption, and women were interchangeable objects, mute, making no demands, each airbrushed beauty supplanted by the next month’s model.

It was not only to men that sexual freedom was sold through exploitative visions. When Helen Gurley Brown revitalized the traditional women’s magazine that was *Cosmopolitan* in 1965, she compared her magazine to *Playboy*—and *Cosmo* did celebrate the pleasures of single womanhood and “sexual and material consumerism.” But before Brown ran *Cosmo*, she had made her contribution to the sexual revolution with *Sex and the Single Girl*, published in May 1962. By April 1963, 150,000 hard-cover copies had been sold, garnering Brown much media attention and a syndicated newspaper column, “Woman Alone.”

The claim of *Sex and the Single Girl* was, quite simply, “nice, single girls *do*.” Brown’s radical message to a society in which twenty-three-year-olds were called old maids was that singleness is good. Marriage, she insisted, should not be an immediate goal. The Single Girl sounds like the Playboy’s dream, but she was more likely a nightmare revisited. Marriage, Brown advised, is “insurance for the worst years of your life. During the best years you don’t need a husband.” But she quickly amended that statement: “You do need a man every step of the way, and they are often cheaper emotionally and more fun by the dozen.” That fun explicitly included sex, and on the woman’s terms. But Brown’s celebration of the joys of single life still posed men and women as adversaries. “She need never be bored with one man per lifetime,” she enthused. “Her choice of partners is endless and they seek *her* . . . Her married friends refer to her pursuers as wolves, but actually many of them turn out to be lambs—to be shorn and worn by her.”

Brown’s celebration of the single “girl” actually began with a success story—her own. “I married for the first time at thirty-seven. I got the man I wanted,” begins *Sex and the Single Girl*. Brown’s description of that union is instructive: “David is a motion picture producer, forty-four, brainy, charming and sexy. He was sought after by many a Hollywood starlet as well as some less flamboyant but more deadly types. And I got him! We have two Mercedes-Benzes, one hundred acres of virgin forest near San Francisco, a Mediterranean house overlooking the Pacific, a full-time maid and a good life.”

While Brown believes “her body wants to” is a sufficient reason for a man to have an “affair,” she is not positing identical interests of men and women in sex. Instead, she asserts the validity of women’s interests—interests that include Mercedes-Benzes, full-time maids, lunch (“Anyone can take you to lunch. How bored can you be for an hour?”), vacations, and vicuna coats. But by offering a female version of the Playboy ethic, she greatly strengthened its message.

Unlike the youths who called for honesty, who sought to blur the boundaries between male and female, *Playboy* and *Cosmo* offered a vision of sexual freedom based on difference and deceit, but within a shared universe of an intensely competitive market economy. They were revolutionary in their claiming of sex as a legitimate pleasure and in the directness they brought to portraying sex as an arena for struggle and exploitation that could be enjoyed by men and women alike (though in different ways and to different ends). Without this strand, the sexual revolution would have looked very different. In many ways *Playboy* was a necessary condition for “revolution,” for it linked sex to the emerging culture of consumption and the rites of the marketplace. As it fed into the sexual reconfigurations of the sixties, *Playboy* helped make sex more—or less—than a rite of youth.

In the revolutionary spring of 1968, *Life* magazine looked from the student protests at Columbia across the street to Barnard College: “A sexual anthropologist of some future century, analyzing the pill, the drive-in, the works of Harold Robbins, the Tween-Bra and all the other artifacts of the American Sexual Revolution, may consider the case of Linda LeClair and her boyfriend, Peter Behr, as a moment in which the morality of an era changed.”

The LeClair affair, as it was heralded in newspaper headlines and syndicated columns around the country, was indeed such a moment. Linda LeClair and Peter Behr were accidental revolutionaries, but as *Life* not so kindly noted “history will often have its little joke. And so it was this spring when it found as its symbol of the revolution a

champion as staunch, as bold and as unalluring as Linda LeClair.” The significance of the moment is not to be found in the actions of LeClair and Behr, who certainly lacked revolutionary glamour despite all the headlines about “Free Love,” but in the contest over the meaning of those actions.

The facts of the case were simple. On 4 March 1968 the *New York Times* ran an article called “An Arrangement: Living Together for Convenience, Security, Sex.” (The piece ran full-page width; below it appeared articles on “How to Duck the Hemline Issue” and “A Cook’s Guide to the Shallot.”) An “arrangement,” the author informs us, was one of the current euphemisms for what was otherwise known as “shacking up” or, more innocuously, “living together.” The article, which offers a fairly sympathetic portrait of several unmarried student couples who lived together in New York City, features an interview with Barnard sophomore, “Susan,” who lived with her boyfriend “Peter” in an off campus apartment. Though Barnard had strict housing regulations and parietals (the curfew was midnight on weekends and ten o’clock on weeknights, and students were meant to live either at home or in Barnard housing), Susan had received permission to live off campus by accepting a job listed through Barnard’s employment office as a “live-in maid.” The job had, in fact, been listed by a young married woman who was a good friend of “Susan’s.”

Not surprisingly, the feature article caught the attention of Barnard administrators, who had little trouble identifying “Susan” as Linda LeClair. LeClair was brought before the Judiciary Council—not for her sexual conduct, but for lying to Barnard about her housing arrangements. Her choice of roommate was certainly an issue; if she had been found to be living alone or, as one Barnard student confessed to the *Times*, with a female cat, she would not have been headline-worthy.

Linda, however, was versed in campus politics, and she and Peter owned a mimeograph machine. She played it both ways, appearing for her hearings in a demure, knee-length pastel dress and churning out pamphlets on what she and Peter called “A Victorian Drama.” She and Peter distributed a survey on campus, garnering three hundred replies, most of which admitted to some violation of Barnard’s parietals or housing regulations. Sixty women were willing to go public and signed forms that read: “I am a student of Barnard College and I have violated the Barnard Housing Regulations. . . . In the interest of fairness I request that an investigation be made of my disobedience.”

Linda LeClair had not done anything especially unusual, as several letters from alumnae to Barnard’s president, Martha Peterson, testified. But her case was a symbol of change, and it tells us much about how people understood the incident. The president’s office received over two hundred telephone calls (most demanding LeClair’s expulsion) and over one hundred letters; editorials ran in newspapers, large and small, throughout the country. Some of the letters were vehement in their condemnation of LeClair and of the college. Francis Beamen of Needham, Massachusetts, suggested that Barnard should be renamed “BARNYARD”; Charles Orsinger wrote (on good quality letterhead), “If you let Linda stay in college, I can finally prove to my wife with a front page news story about that bunch of glorified whores going to eastern colleges.” An unsigned letter began: “SUBJECT: Barnard College—and the kow-tow to female students who practice prostitution, PUBLICLY!”

Though the term “alley cat” cropped up more than once, a majority of the letters were thoughtful attempts to come to terms with the changing morality of America’s

youth. Many were from parents who understood the symbolic import of the case. Overwhelmingly, those who did not simply rant about “whoredom” structured their comments around concepts of public and private. The word *flaunt* appeared over and over in the letters to President Peterson. Linda was “flaunting her sneering attitude”; Linda and Peter were “openly flaunting their disregard of moral codes”; they were “openly flaunting rules of civilized society.” Mrs. Bruce Bromley, Jr., wrote her first such letter on a public issue to recommend, “Do not let Miss LeClair attend Barnard as long as she flaunts immorality in your face.” David Abrahamson, M.D., identifying himself as a former Columbia faculty member, offered “any help in this difficult case.” He advised President Peterson, “Undoubtedly the girl’s behavior must be regarded as exhibitionism, as her tendency is to be in the limelight which clearly indicates some emotional disturbance or upset.”

The public-private question *was* the issue in this case—the letter writers were correct. Most were willing to acknowledge that “mistakes” can happen; many were willing to allow for some “discreet” sex among the unmarried young. But Linda LeClair *claimed* the right to determine her own “private” life; she rejected the private—public dichotomy *as it was framed around sex*, casting her case as an issue of individual right versus institutional authority.

But public response to the case is interesting in another way. When a woman wrote President Peterson that “it is time for these young people to put sex back in its proper place, instead of something to be flaunted” and William F. Buckley condemned the “delinquency of this pathetic little girl, so gluttonous for sex and publicity,” they were not listening. Sex was not what Linda and Peter talked about. Sex was not mentioned. Secularity was, and “family.” “Peter is my family,” said Linda. “It’s a very united married type of relationship—it’s the most important one in each of our lives. And our lives are very much intertwined.”

Of course they had sex. They were young and in love, and their peer culture accepted sex within such relationships. But what they claimed was partnership—a partnership that obviated the larger culture’s insistence on the difference between men and women. The letters suggesting that young women would “welcome a strong rule against living with men to protect them against doing that” made no sense in LeClair’s universe. When she claimed that Barnard’s rules were discriminatory because Columbia men had no such rules, that “Barnard College was founded on the principle of equality between women and men,” and asked, “If women are able, intelligent people, why must we be supervised and curfewed?” she was denying that men and women had different interests and needs. Just as the private-public dichotomy was a cornerstone of sexual control in the postwar era, the much-touted differences between men and women were a crucial part of the system.

Many people in the 1960s and 1970s struggled with questions of equality and difference in sophisticated and hard-thought ways. Neither Peter Behr nor Linda LeClair was especially gifted in that respect. What they argued was commonplace to them—a natural language and set of assumptions that nonetheless had revolutionary implications. It is when a set of assumptions becomes natural and unself-conscious, when a language appears in the private comments of a wide variety of people that it is worth taking seriously. The unity of interests that Behr and LeClair called upon as they obviated the male-female dichotomy was not restricted to students in the progressive institutions on either coast.

In 1969 the administration at the University of Kansas (KU), a state institution dependent on a conservative, though populist, legislature for its funding, attempted

to establish a coed dormitory for some of its scholarship students. KU had tried coed living as an experiment in the 1964 summer session and found students well satisfied, though some complained that it was awkward to go downstairs to the candy machines with one's hair in curlers. Curlers were out of fashion by 1969, and the administration moved forward with caution.

A survey on attitudes toward coed housing was given to those who lived in the scholarship halls, and the answers of the men survive. The results of the survey go against conventional wisdom about the provinces. Only one man (of the 124 responses recorded) said his parents objected to the arrangement ("Pending further discussion," he noted). But what is most striking is the language in which the men supported and opposed the plan. "As a stereotypical answer," one man wrote, "I already am able to do all the role-playing socially I need, and see communication now as an ultimate goal." A sophomore who listed his classification as both "soph." and "4-F I hope" responded: "I believe that the segregation of the sexes is unnatural. I would like to associate with women on a basis other than dating roles. This tradition of segregation is discriminatory and promotes inequality of mankind." One man thought coed living would make the hall "more homey." Another said it would be "more humane." Many used the word "natural." The most eloquent of the sophomores wrote: "[It would] allow them to meet and interact with one another in a situation relatively free of sexual overtones; that is, the participating individuals would be free to encounter one another as human beings, rather than having to play the traditional stereotyped male and female roles. I feel that coed living is the only feasible way to allow people to escape this stereotypical role behavior."

The student-generated proposal that went forward in December 1970 stressed these (as they defined them) "philosophical" justifications. The system would NOT be an arrangement for increased boy-meets-girl contact or for "convenience in finding dates," the committee insisted. Instead, coed living would "contribute to the development of each resident as a full human being." Through "interpersonal relationships based on friendship and cooperative efforts rather than on the male/female roles we usually play in dating situations" students would try to develop "a human concern that transcends membership in one or the other sex."

While the students disavowed "boy-meets-girl" contact as motivation, no one seriously believed that sex was going to disappear. The most cogently stated argument against the plan came from a young man who insisted: "[You] can't ignore the sexual overtones involved in coed living, after all, sex is the basic motivation for your plan. (I didn't say lust, I said sex)." Yet the language in which they framed their proposal was significant: they called for relationships (including sexual) based on a common humanity.

Like Peter Behr and Linda LeClair, these students at the University of Kansas were attempting to redefine both sex and sex roles. Sex should not be negotiated through the dichotomous pairings of male and female, public and private. Instead, they attempted to formulate and articulate a new standard that looked to a model of "togetherness" undreamed of and likely undesired by their parents. The *Life* magazine issue with which this essay began characterized the "sexual revolution" as "dull." "Love still makes the world go square," the author concluded, for the revolutionaries he interviewed subscribed to a philosophy "less indebted to *Playboy* than Peanuts, in which sex is not so much a pleasure as a warm puppy." To his amusement, one "California girl" told him: "Besides being my

lover, Bob is my best friend in all the world,” and a young man insisted, “We are not sleeping together, we are living together.”

For those to whom *Playboy* promised revolution, this attitude was undoubtedly tame. And in the context of the cultural revolution taking place among America’s youth, and documented in titillating detail by magazines such as *Life*, these were modest revolutionaries indeed, seeming almost already out of step with their generation. But the issue, to these “dull” revolutionaries, as to their more flamboyant brothers and sisters, was larger than sex. They understood that the line between public and private had utility; that the personal was political.

### *In 1967, The Summer of Love*

It was a “holy pilgrimage,” according to the Council for a Summer of Love. In the streets of Haight-Ashbury, thousands and thousands of “pilgrims” acted out a street theater of costumed fantasy, drugs and music and sex that was unimaginable in the neat suburban streets of their earlier youth. Visionaries and revolutionaries had preceded the deluge; few of them drowned. Others did. But the tide flowed in the vague countercultural yearnings, drawn by the pop hit “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)” and its promise of a “love-in,” by the pictures in *Life* magazine or in *Look* magazine or in *Time* magazine, by the proclamations of the underground press that San Francisco would be “the love-guerilla training school for drop-outs from mainstream America . . . where the new world, a human world of the 21st century is being constructed.” Here sexual freedom would be explored; not cohabitation, not “arrangements,” not “living together” in ways that looked a lot like marriage except for the lack of a piece of paper that symbolized the sanction of the state. Sex in the Haight was revolutionary.

In neat suburban houses on neat suburban streets, people came to imagine this new world, helped by television and by the color pictures in glossy-paper magazines (a joke in the Haight told of “bead-wearing *Look* reporters interviewing bead-wearing *Life* reporters”). Everyone knew that these pilgrims represented a tiny fraction of America’s young, but the images reverberated. America felt itself in revolution.

Todd Gitlin, in his soul-searching memoir of the sixties, argues the cultural significance of the few:

Youth culture seemed a counterculture. There were many more weekend dope-smokers than hard-core “heads”; many more readers of the *Oracle* than writers for it; many more co-habitors than orgiasts; many more turners-on than droppers-out. Thanks to the sheer number and concentration of youth, the torrent of drugs, the sexual revolution, the traumatic war, the general stampede away from authority, and the trend-spotting media, it was easy to assume that all the styles of revolt and disaffection were spilling together tributaries into a common torrent of youth and euphoria, life against death, joy over sacrifice, now over later, remaking the whole bleeding world.

Youth culture and counterculture, as Gitlin argues so well, were not synonymous, and for many the culture itself was more a matter of lifestyle than revolutionary intent. But the strands flowed together in the chaos of the age, and the few and the marginal provided archetypes that were read into the youth culture by an American public that

did not see the lines of division. “Hippies, yippies, flippies,” said Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago. “Free Love,” screamed the headlines about Barnard’s Linda LeClair.

But even the truly revolutionary youths were not unified, no more on the subject of sex than on anything else. Members of the New Left, revolutionary but rarely countercultural, had sex but did not talk about it all the time. They consigned sex to a relatively “private” sphere. Denizens of Haight-Ashbury lived a Dionysian sexuality, most looking nowhere but to immediate pleasure. Some political-cultural revolutionaries, however, claimed sex and used it for the revolution. They capitalized on the sexual chaos and fears of the nation, attempting to use sex to politicize youth and to challenge “Amerika.”

In March 1968 the *Sun*, a Detroit people’s paper put out by a “community of artists and lovers” (most notably John Sinclair of the rock group MC5), declared a “Total Assault on the Culture.” Sinclair, in his “editorial statement,” disavowed any prescriptive intent but informed his readers: “We *have* found that there are three essential human activities of the greatest importance to all persons, and that people are well and healthy in proportion to their involvement in these activities: rock and roll, dope, and fucking in the streets. . . . We suggest the three in combination, all the time.”

He meant it. He meant it partly because it was outrageous, but there was more to it. “Fucking” helps you “escape the hangups that are drilled into us in this weirdo country”—it negates “private lives,” “feels good,” and so destroys an economy of pain and scarcity. Lapsing into inappropriately programmatic language, Sinclair argued:

Our position is that all people must be free to fuck freely, whenever and wherever they want to, or not to fuck if they don’t wanna—in bed, on the floor, in the chair, on the streets, in the parks and fields, “back seat boogie for the high school kids” sing the Fugs who brought it all out in the open on stage and on records, fuck whoever wants to fuck you and everybody else do the same. America’s silly sexual “mores” are the end-product of thousands of years of deprivation and sickness, of marriage and companionship based on the ridiculous misconception that one person can “belong” to another person, that “love” is something that has to do with being “hurt,” sacrificing, holding out, “teardrops on your pillow,” and all that shit.

Sinclair was not alone in his paean to copulation. Other countercultural seekers believed that they had to remake love and reclaim sex to create community. These few struggled, with varying degrees of honesty and sincerity, over the significance of sex in the beloved community.

For others, sex was less a philosophy than a weapon. In the spring of 1968, the revolutionary potential of sex also suffused the claims of the Yippies as they struggled to stage a “Festival of Life” to counter the “Death Convention” in Chicago. “How can you separate politics and sex?” Jerry Rubin asked with indignation after the fact. Yippies lived by that creed. Sex was a double-edged sword, to be played two ways. Sex was a lure to youth; it was part of their attempt to tap the youth market, to “sell a revolutionary consciousness.” It was also a challenge, “flaunted in the face” (as it were) of America.

The first Yippie manifesto, released in January 1968, summoned the tribes of Chicago. It played well in the underground press, with its promise of “50,000 of us dancing in the streets, throbbing with amplifiers and harmony . . . making love in the parks.” Sex was a politics of pleasure, a politics of abundance that made sense to young middle-class whites who had been raised in the world without limits that was postwar America.



Sex was also incendiary, and the Yippies knew that well. It guaranteed attention. Thus the “top secret” plans for the convention that Abbie Hoffman mimeographed and distributed to the press promised a barbecue and lovemaking by the lake, followed by “Pin the Tail on the Donkey,” “Pin the Rubber on the Pope,” and “other normal and healthy games.” Grandstanding before a crowd of Chicago reporters, the Yippies presented a city official with an official document wrapped in a *Playboy* centerfold inscribed, “To Dick with love, the Yippies.” The *Playboy* centerfold in the Yippies’ hands was an awkward nexus between the old and the new sexuality. As a symbolic act, it did not proffer freedom so much as challenge authority. It was a sign of disrespect—to Mayor Richard Daley and to straight America.

While America was full of young people sporting long hair and beads, the committed revolutionaries (of cultural stripe) were few in number and marginal at best. It is telling that the LeClair affair could still be a scandal in a nation that had weathered the Summer of Love. But the lines were blurred in sixties America. One might ask with Todd Gitlin, “What was marginal anymore, where was the mainstream anyway?” when the Beatles were singing, “Why Don’t We Do It in the Road?”

## CONCLUSION

The battles of the sexual revolution were hard fought, its victories ambiguous, its outcome still unclear. What we call the sexual revolution was an amalgam of movements that flowed together in an unsettled era. They were often at odds with one another, rarely well thought out, and usually without a clear agenda.

The sexual revolution was built on equal measures of hypocrisy and honesty, equality and exploitation. Indeed, the individual strands contain mixed motivations and ideological charges. Even the most heartfelt or best intentions did not always work out for the good when put into practice by mere humans with physical and psychological frailties. As we struggle over the meaning of the “revolution” and ask ourselves who, in fact, *won*, it helps to untangle the threads and reject the conflation of radically different impulses into a singular revolution.

## ■ READING 11

### *The Decline of the Date and the Rise of the College Hook Up*

Paula England and Reuben J. Thomas

In 2002, an undergraduate student came to the first author’s (England’s) office and said that he wanted to do a research paper on why students on campus didn’t date much anymore. She said, amazed, “They don’t?” A query in a large class that afternoon confirmed

that dates aren't very common. Students said that people mostly hang out with friends or hook up. Being over 50, England had never heard of a "hook up"! The students said they believed that dating was still common on *other* campuses, but thought something unique made it rare on their campus. A graduate student, recently graduated from a small liberal arts college, supplied the information that students at her alma mater also thought that their school was unique in how dead the old-fashioned date was. A colleague at a large state university said the same thing was going on there. It seemed a national trend, but we could find few studies on the phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

Intrigued by this social change, in 2005, the two of us, England (a professor of sociology) and Thomas (a doctoral student working as her research assistant), set out to study the college hook up scene. We used the medium-sized private university where we work as a case study.

We had over 615 students answer an on-line survey with closed-ended questions amenable to statistical analysis. We had a team of students do in-depth qualitative interviews with 270 fellow undergraduate students. In this article, we present the first report of findings from this study.<sup>2</sup> Here we only describe the undergraduate, heterosexual scene; we hope in future studies to also explore what is happening with gay, lesbian, and bisexual students and with graduate students. Based on talking to students and faculty on many campuses—large state universities, private universities, and small colleges—we believe that the demise of the date and the rise of the hook up is a national trend, probably starting in the 1980s, and that something similar to what we describe in this article is happening on many campuses.

## IS THE TRADITIONAL DATE DYING?

The traditional date started with a man asking a woman at least several days in advance if she wanted to go to a movie, dinner, a concert, a dance, a party, or some other event. Dating isn't ancient, however; it was an "invention" of the 1920s and was helped along by the invention of the automobile and commercial spots, like movie theatres, where youth could go.<sup>3</sup> Before that, young men often had to "court" women in their homes under the supervision of parents. At first the practice of dating outraged the older generation, who had grown up in the Victorian era with the previous courtship pattern. After the advent of dating as a social form, dates were the pathway into romantic relationships, but not every date involved serious romantic interest on either side. Sometimes he just wanted someone to take to the dance, or she thought it would be fun to go to the party. Dates were a way to get to know each other, although the gender norms of the 1950s and 1960s worked against male and female college students having as much in common as

1. Glenn and Marquant, 2001; Paul et al., 2000; Armstrong, 2005.

2. While we will provide statistics, the reader should remember that this was not a probability sample, so we cannot say that it is representative of the University's population. And, while we know similar trends are apparent on other campuses, they may be somewhat different in the patterns described here. We especially suspect that patterns are different when college students live with their parents.

3. Bailey, 1998.

they do today. If you wanted sex, except for the unusual “pick up” or “one night stand” situation, dates were pretty much the only way to move in that direction. In the 1950s and before, the social norm was that sexual intercourse was to be reserved for marriage. Of course, the norm was sometimes violated, but usually not until the couple planned to get married. If the woman got unexpectedly pregnant (birth control was harder to obtain then, especially for single people), a “shot gun marriage” might ensue. Thus, dates were sometimes casual, sometimes led to serious relationships and even marriage. Sometimes they involved something physical—making out or more, but not always.

Today, on college campuses, the students in our study told us, the traditional date is nearly dead. Either male or female students sometimes invite a date to a fraternity, sorority, athletic team, or dorm event. Those are dates, but somehow they aren’t seen as “real dates” in the traditional sense. In fact, students tend to use the term “dating” to refer to the activities of couples who have already decided that they are in an exclusive romantic relationship.

In our survey, we asked students how many dates they had been on since they came to college with someone they weren’t already in a relationship with, excluding dorm or Greek events. Although the average student in the survey had been in college two years already, over half of both the men and women had been on fewer than five dates. Twenty-one percent of the men and 32% of the women hadn’t been on any dates. Only 7% had been on more than 10. But when we asked how many dates they had been on since coming to college with someone they were in an exclusive relationship with, the numbers were much higher. About 30% of each sex had been on none, but 45% had been on more than 10, showing that dating is much more common after than before exclusive relationships are formed. As one male student told us, “So there’s no such thing as causally going out to . . . gauge the other person. . . . I mean you can hang out. . . . But we’re only dating once we’ve decided we like each other . . . and want to be in a relationship.”

## THE HOOK UP

What is a “hook up”? Two people are hanging out in the dorm or see each other at a party, start talking or dancing, and, sometime during the evening, go somewhere private (often a dorm room or apartment), and something sexual happens. Often they have been drinking. Hooking up with someone doesn’t necessarily imply an interest in a relationship, although sometimes it leads to relationships; in this way the hook up is similar to the old-fashioned date.

We asked students in the survey how many hook ups they had been on. A little more than 20% had never been on one. A quarter had hooked up at least once but no more than 4 times. About 20% had had 5–10 hookups, and over a third had hooked up more than 10 times.

We asked questions to get an in-depth portrait of each respondent’s most recent hook up. About half (47%) started at a party. Fraternities often host such parties, but dorm or house parties are also common. About a quarter (23%) started when two people were hanging out in the dorm. Others started at bars or miscellaneous settings.

Students make jokes about “random hook ups,” where the two had never met before that night, but these are unusual on our campus. Only 14% said they didn’t know the

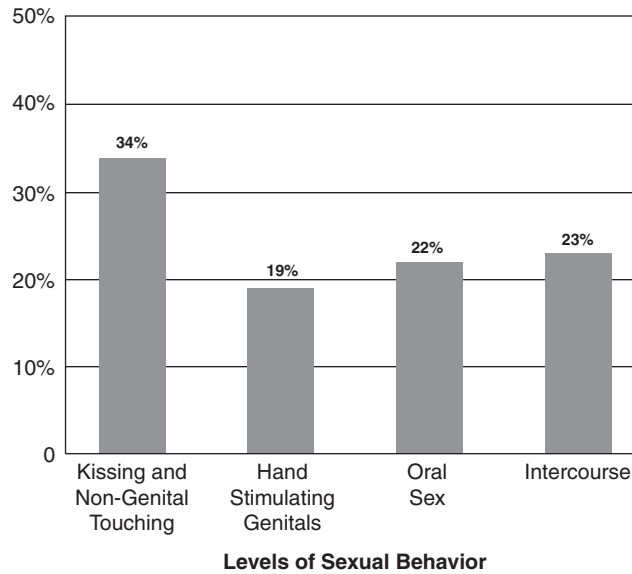
person they hooked up with before that night, at least a little. Over half said they knew the person moderately or very well. In fact, slightly over half of those reporting on a recent hook up said they had hooked up with this same person before.<sup>4</sup> Interviews revealed that sometimes a sequence of multiple hook ups ultimately leads to an exclusive relationship. Other times, people become what some call “friends with benefits”—two people who regularly have sex together but do not define themselves as boyfriend and girlfriend.

Hook ups often follow lots of drinking. We asked respondents how many drinks (beers, glasses of wine, shots, mixed drinks, or malt liquors) they had had the night of the hook up. Men averaged 5 and women 3 drinks. Because we had asked them their weight, we were able to apply a formula used by the U.S. Department of Transportation to estimate blood alcohol content. Almost half (46%) reported drinking little enough that they were not significantly impaired. Thirteen percent were impaired but under the legal limit. Another 13% were over the legal limit with a blood alcohol content between .08 and .12. Finally, 28% were extremely drunk, with a blood alcohol content estimated at .12 or over. In the qualitative interviews, students talked about the role of alcohol two ways. Sometimes they said being drunk caused them to do things they wish they hadn’t afterwards—going farther sexually than is consistent with their values, or just getting so drunk that they got sick and were miserable. Other times they admitted that they liked being under the influence because it took away inhibitions and helped them do things they wanted to but were too self-conscious to do sober.

As students use the term, a hook up implies that something sexual happened, but not necessarily that you “had sex,” by which students mean sexual intercourse. Oral sex is not seen as “having sex,” something that surprises many over-50 adults. We gave students a checklist and asked them to check any of the specific sexual behaviors they had engaged in on their most recent hook up since they came to college, whether with a person from their school or not. We categorized all hook ups according to how far things went sexually. About a third (34%) of hook ups involved no more than kissing and some touching that didn’t involve genitals. Nineteen percent involved hand stimulation of one or both person’s genitals, but nothing more (we considered oral sex or vaginal or anal intercourse to be “more”). Twenty-two percent involved oral sex, but not intercourse. About the same number, 23%, involved sexual intercourse.<sup>5</sup> (See Figure 11.1.) In the cases where things stopped with oral sex, 49% of the time it was mutual, but where it was not, it was much more often the young men than women receiving oral sex (37% versus 14% of the oral sex cases).

4. This was coded from the qualitative interviews where we asked the story about how the hook up with this person came about. The question wasn’t asked in the survey.

5. Hook ups are classified by assuming a hierarchy where kissing and nongenital touching is first, hand stimulation of genitals next, oral sex next, and intercourse going “farthest.” (Vaginal and anal intercourse are classified together, although there were only two cases of anal sex reported among heterosexual hook ups.) A hook up is classified according to the highest point on this hierarchy that occurred. For example, if a couple kissed, one stimulated the other’s genitals by hand, and they had oral sex, it would be classified in the “oral sex” category. Considering oral sex as “going farther” than hand stimulation of genitals is somewhat arbitrary. We made this decision because often mouth-genital contact is considered more intimate than hand-genital contact, and because our data show that oral sex more often leads to orgasm and hand stimulation is rarely conducted to the point of orgasm (see Figure 11.2). Hook ups were classified into oral and hand stimulation categories irrespective of which partner was performing or receiving the stimulation.



**FIGURE 11.1** *Percent of Hook Ups Involving Levels of Sexual Behavior*

Higher categories may have also included behaviors lower on the list but not vice versa.

## WHERE DO RELATIONSHIPS COME FROM?

If hook ups don't imply interest in a relationship, where do relationships come from on campus today? In the era of the date, while most dates didn't lead to exclusive relationships, nonetheless, most exclusive relationships came through dates. Now that the date is on the wane, are there no relationships? To the contrary, we found that many students form exclusive relationships. We asked on the survey if students had ever been in a relationship that lasted at least six months that started since they came to college. Over a third (36% of men and 40% of women) said yes. If we included relationships with a fellow high school student that lasted into their college years, the percent was even higher.

How do relationships get started? In the qualitative interviews, we asked students the story of how their relationships started and then coded the data for whether a date or a hook up (if either) came first. About a third started with a traditional date. But 44% had one or more hook ups first; sometimes this was followed by some dating before things were really defined as "exclusive" or "official." As one woman said,

In . . . the college hook up culture, it tends to start with . . . a crush already there. . . . Then . . . alcohol or the party setting . . . helps bring it together and people tend to . . . hook up, and if they're really into each other . . . that first hook up tends to lead straight into . . . more intense dating which can qualify as relationships. . . .

One male respondent reflected on this sequence: "A lot of my guy friends aren't looking for relationships . . . but when they meet those girls, it's often been within the group

of friends. . . . And then . . . you try to hook up with them. And then you can start dating. . . .” Another guy said, “For a time it was more like a regular hook up and then we . . . started getting attracted to each other and our relationship actually ended up happening.”

The remainder of the pathways into relationships were varied—including cases where students went almost seamlessly from meeting or being friends to falling for each other and being an exclusive couple without anything in between that they defined as a hook up. As one woman said, “We met my sophomore year through a friend, and then he’d just come up and talk to me . . . And we were . . . friends for, like, almost a year before we started dating.” A man said: “We had to hang out because we were in the show, and so we became really good friends, and then there was just a point where we realized we were dating. . . .”

Relationships were often made “official” or exclusive via “the talk”—where one of the two people sought to define the relationship more clearly. Some students call this a “DTR” or “define the relationship” talk. Others just call it “the talk.” Students told us these talks are often initiated after several hook ups by the woman who wants to know where she stands with the guy. Guys then can agree that they are in a relationship or say that they really don’t want to go beyond hooking up—we heard quite a few reports of the latter happening. One woman talked about wanting to find out where she stood, but hesitating: “I feel like it’s . . . the stereotypical girl thing to do, like . . . the guy feels like the girl is boxing him into a relationship, and I don’t want to be . . . that girl. . . . If we continue to see each other . . . I probably will bring it up eventually . . .”

But sometimes the beginning of a “relationship” is more ambiguous. One woman said, “We had been hooking up for a year and a half before finally he said that he loved me. And so then I was like ‘Well I guess that means that we’re going out, right?’ And he said ‘Yeah.’ We never . . . had . . . the relationship defining talk.”

Relationships include doing things together, “dating,” and usually having sex. Just over three-quarters of our respondents said that they had had intercourse when describing a current or most recent relationship that lasted at least 6 months. Nonetheless, it is notable that a quarter had been in a relationship for 6 months and had not had intercourse. Obviously, some groups of students, for reasons either of religious belief or just wanting to take it slow, do not consider relationships to imply sex.

## GENDER AND THE HOOK UP

When norms about what is permissive sexually liberalize, is this a form of women’s liberation or not? Feminists still debate this question. On first glance it seems obvious—if it is accepted (at least in some groups) for women to do more sexually, but they retain the choice to say no, it must be an expansion of their freedom and a victory from a feminist point of view. In one sense this is true. Consider a young woman who hooked up and had oral sex with two or more guys in a year, ended up in a relationship with one of them, had sex with him, broke up with him, and had sex with another partner before marrying him. In 1960 she would have been strongly stigmatized in most social circles. Today, while some groups (often those taking a conservative interpretation of Christian, Jewish, Islamic, or other religions) are very much against sex before marriage, in many

social circles, this young woman's behavior would be unremarkable. Cultural changes have given women the option of more sexual behavior than in the past. Options have thereby increased for men too; when "good girls" wouldn't even think of performing oral sex on the first date (and the hook up didn't exist), men were much less likely to have easily accessible sexual satisfaction.

### *Equal Opportunity Orgasms?*

We asked respondents whether they had an orgasm on their most recent hook up, and whether they thought their partner did. Whether we use women's or men's report, about 40% say the man had an orgasm. But a much lower percent of women had an orgasm, even by men's report, but it also appears that men often think the woman has an orgasm when she doesn't! Men reported that their female partners had an orgasm in 30% of the most recent hook ups, but only 14% of the women reported an orgasm.

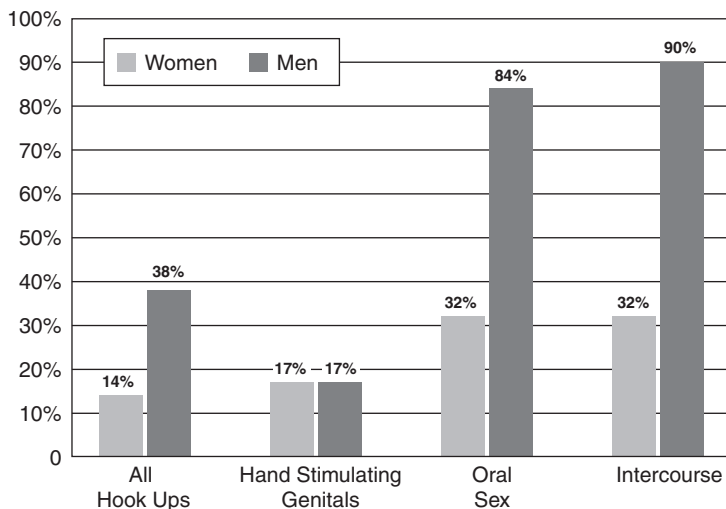
If we believe each gender's report of their own orgasm, hook ups involve orgasm for men twice as often as for women. The orgasm disparity is much worse than [the] sex gap in pay in the labor market; women have less than half the orgasms of men on hook ups, but women earn more than three-quarters as much as men!<sup>6</sup> Why does this gap exist? One reason is probably that women are receiving less genital stimulation conducive to orgasm than men in hook ups. For example, in hook ups involving oral sex but no intercourse, men had over two and a half times the probability of receiving unreciprocated oral sex than women did. (As mentioned above, where couples stopped with oral sex, 49% of the time it was mutual, 37% only the man received it, and only 14% of the time only the women received it.)

Sometimes the disparity is because women are uncomfortable receiving oral sex outside a relationship. One male respondent described it this way: "I think that girls don't go into a situation expecting that the first time, [that] the guy is gonna go down . . . they feel that's a bigger deal. . . . The female feels a little more protective of herself. . . . Whereas, the guy . . . —there's no shame in . . . having the girl have her hand down your pants. . . ."

Other times, the problem is that men are unwilling or unskilled at performing cunnilingus. One female respondent complained: "He did that thing where . . . they put their hand on the top of your head . . . and I hate that! . . . Especially 'cause there was not an effort made to, like, return that favor." One woman complained about the inequity in emphasis on female pleasure, saying, "Most usually guys don't give me head. Usually I give them head. . . . And that sucks." Another said:

He wanted me to go down on him . . . which you know I had no problem, I actually rather enjoyed. . . . And then we finish . . . I don't want to say 'my turn,' but. . . . Next morning . . . he turns over and . . . wants to start making out again. . . . So I'm gonna assert my wants this time. . . . I'm taking his hand and trying to move it down there and he goes for maybe for thirty seconds and then stops . . . and he expects me to repeat the night before. . . . I was, like, 'I'm sorry.'

6. Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2005. In 2004, among U.S. full-time, year-round workers, women's median annual earnings was \$31,223, 76.5% of men's median, which was \$40,798. These figures include only full-time, year-round workers, but are not adjusted for differences in years of experience or occupation.



**FIGURE 11.2** *Percent of Men and Women Reporting Having an Orgasm in Hook Ups Involving Various Sexual Behaviors*

Statistics include only men's report of men's orgasm and women's report of women's orgasm. Women's orgasm for hook ups involving oral sex include only those where she received oral sex, whether he did or not, and exclude those involving intercourse. Men's orgasm for hook ups involving oral sex include only those where he received oral sex, whether she did or not, and exclude those involving intercourse. Analogously, hook ups involving hand stimulation of her genitals may or may not involve her hand stimulation of his genitals, and vice versa, but both exclude any involving intercourse or oral sex.

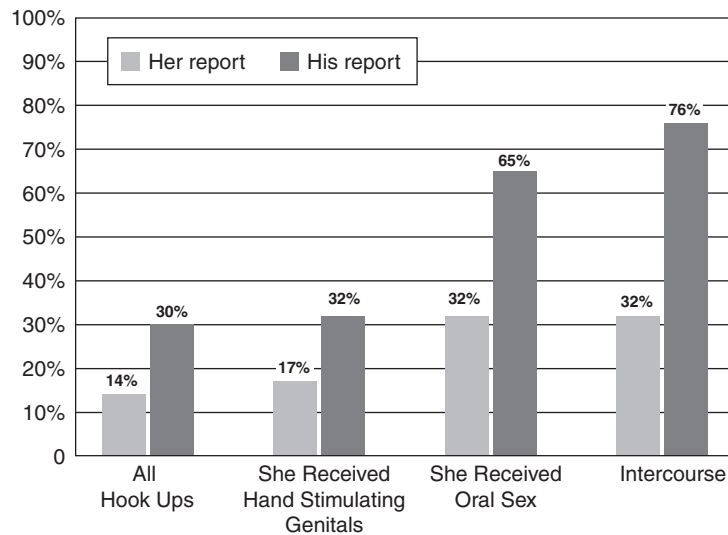
We see the orgasm gap as well when we look at reports of orgasm within specific types of hook ups. For example, in the fifth of hook ups involving intercourse, women and men agree that men have an orgasm more than 80% of the time, but, by women's report these hook ups lead to her orgasm only a third of the time. (Men, however, report that their female intercourse partner orgasmed 70% of the time.) In hook ups where he received oral sex, men and women agree that he has an orgasm about 80% of the time, but in hook ups where he performs oral sex on her, only 30% of the women who had such hook ups said they had orgasm (men estimate women had orgasms in 61% of these). Thus, by anyone's report, women have substantially fewer orgasms than men. (See Figure 11.2, which uses respondents' reports of their own orgasms.)

If we believe women's reports of their own orgasms, men are vastly overestimating the frequency of their partners' orgasms (see Figure 11.3). Why might this be? A number of women talked about faking orgasms to shore up the guy's ego. So, in some cases, men may be receiving misleading information. One man, in the dark about whether a woman he's had sex with several times has an orgasm says, "I'm just not really sure. But she makes a lot of noises . . . so I think I'm doing the right thing. . . ."

### ***Reputations and the Double Standard***

In qualitative interviews, students often talked about how women get a bad reputation—among men and women—if they hook up too much, or with too many men who know





**FIGURE 11.3** *Men's and Women's Perceptions of the Woman's Orgasm in Hook Ups Involving Various Sexual Behaviors*

Statistics for hook ups involving oral sex for her may or may not include oral sex for him, and vice versa, but both exclude those including intercourse. Analogously, hook ups involving hand stimulation of her genitals may or may not involve her hand stimulation of his genitals, and vice versa, but both exclude any involving intercourse or oral sex. Numbers are percent of hook ups in which women reported to have orgasms.

each other, or have sex too easily. Men who do the same thing sometimes get a bad reputation among women, but it doesn't last as long, they said. Meanwhile, men gain status from talking to other men about their exploits. It would seem more consistent with "equal opportunity feminism" if *both* men and women both got an equally bad (or elevated) reputation for the same behavior, or if *neither* got a bad reputation at all. The double standard is an area where cultural changes have not liberated women much at all.

One male respondent reflected on the double standard, saying, "I definitely see some girls out there just wanting to hook up." The interviewer asked "And . . . those girls, . . . are they treated differently?" He reflected, "Sometimes they're called 'slutty.' . . . I guess it's . . . less stigmatic for a guy to go out and be, like, 'I'm gonna get some ass' than for a girl. . . . I mean not myself. . . . Women are sexual creatures too; they can do what they want. But . . . there's still that . . . 'preserve the women' attitude, or denounce them. . . ." He continues: "There's a lot of times where they . . . see this girl and go . . . there's no way I can date her, but . . . she's hot for a hook up." One woman talked about the stigma of being seen coming home from a hook up, saying, "Then I take the ultimate walk of shame home at 10:00 in the morning. . . . As people are going to class, I'm walking in heels and a dress, completely hung-over, makeup smeared."

The double standard came out in survey responses as well. Asked whether they had ever hooked up with someone and then respected the person less because of hooking up

with the respondent, 37% of the men said yes (compared to only 27% of the women). Asked if they ever thought someone they hooked up with had respected them less after the hook up, 51% of the women said yes (but only 25% of men).

### ***Relational versus Recreational Sex***

A national study of adults a decade ago found that most respondents of both sexes think sex should be limited to relationships, but more men than women thought casual sex is okay.<sup>7</sup> In our study, women showed more interest in turning hook ups into relationships than men, and more women wanted to limit sexual intercourse to relationships. For example, asked to agree or disagree with the statement that they would not have sex with someone unless they were in love with the person, 62% of the women agreed or strongly agreed, but only 36% of the men. This may reflect that women have internalized different values than men. Or it may be because women are subjected to more judgment—the double standard discussed above—if they are sexual too easily. One woman reflected: “That’s not something that I’d ever thought that a decent person should do. . . . I wanted to think that we had a relationship . . . but, it really wasn’t . . . because we didn’t actually see each other except when we were hooking up.”

Gender differences in relational orientation may also reflect differences [in] how much women have been socialized to have skills at intimate relationships. Whatever the source, if women want relationships more than men, it puts men in a stronger bargaining position about starting relationships.<sup>8</sup> One female respondent described hanging out in a fraternity and hearing guys tease brothers who were too into their relationships, saying “There are two girls in that relationship.” The implication seemed to be that “real men” are not supposed to care about relationships. Of course there were cases of women just wanting casual hook ups too. But the sentiments of the woman below were expressed by many more women than men. Asked how she felt after a hook up, she said:

Fricken sweet! I was so happy . . . with the new prospect. . . . I don’t . . . know where this relationship will go . . . , how serious it would be. But . . . I heard from his friend that he usually doesn’t pursue people . . . so . . . the fact that he’s called me up a bunch . . . bodes well.

Another woman said, “He calls me like everyday. . . . Hopefully it’s something more than a hook up.” One man described a mismatch in relational interest: “I’m still interested in pursuing her in the purely physical manner but definitely nothing emotional or romantic, where she might be interested in something emotional or romantic.”

7. Michael et al., 1995.

8. One might think that an analogous thing would be true about sex. If men want sex before there is really a relationship, and women don’t, women are in a sense empowered in the area of sex because they can get what they want. There is some truth to this, but the cost of having sex early—or of just hooking up too much absent intercourse—is greater for women than for men. This is not only because of the risk of pregnancy, but also because of the double standard that means women get a bad reputation more than men for the same behavior.

## WHAT HAS CHANGED?<sup>9</sup>

The 1960s and 1970s are known for both the sexual revolution and changes in gender inequality. Both of these affected the path of change in romantic and sexual behavior. The advent and legalization of the birth control pill in the 1960s, and the legalization of abortion with a Supreme Court decision in 1973 made it possible to have sex without fear of having an unwanted birth. Ideas that women should be free to choose careers—even in traditionally male fields—may have spilled over into the idea that women as well as men had a right to sexual freedom. Whereas the norm had been that sex was reserved for marriage, and some groups still uphold this view, the dominant view came to be that sex was okay in an exclusive romantic relationship, whether or not it led to marriage. That view was popular among the cohorts in college in the 1970s. Indeed, there was some movement toward acceptance of sex in even casual relationships. But, then the pendulum swung back, and the government began promoting abstinence-only sex education programs in public schools. (By contrast, in Europe students are taught about and offered contraceptives.) The AIDS epidemic increased fear about casual sex.

Whether because of conservative backlash, fear of AIDS, or because the culture was simply not going to accept casual “sex” as mainstream, a curious thing happened. Oral sex, which used to be less common, and practiced largely by couples who were already having intercourse, came to be seen as much less serious or intimate. Oral sex then became accepted in the younger generation in relatively casual relationships, such as hook ups, while intercourse was retained as something many save for relationships. As one male respondent put it, “There are all these little lines . . . gradations, then there’s a BIG . . . line between oral sex and intercourse.”

People are marrying later, and this, too, probably contributed to the rise of the hook up. Average age at first marriage in the U.S. at the turn of the 21st century was just over 25 for women and 27 for men, up about 4 years from 1960.<sup>10</sup> In our sample, most said they wanted to marry and said they thought it would be at ages even older than these current national averages. With fewer marrying right after college, there is less rush to settle into a relationship. Of course, the increased acceptance of cohabitation and easier availability of sex outside marriage may have contributed to putting marriage off longer. In the 1950s and 1960s, one thing pushing young people into marriage earlier was that it was controversial to have sex or live together before marriage.

In sum, among college students traditional dating is on the wane. The hook up is more common. With hand–genital stimulation and oral sex fairly easily available through hook ups, and friendship easily available in coed dorms, many men see little reason to ask women on formal dates, to the lament of some women. One might have thought that the gender revolution would lead to women asking men out on dates. Instead, the

9. The data from our study deal only with the present, not how we got here over the past several decades. In this section, we use our knowledge of the history of recent decades to speculate on how the changes leading to the present situation happened.

10. Caplow et al., 2000, Chapter 4.

date has almost died. The term “dating” has come to refer more to couples already in an exclusive relationship.

Hook up culture disadvantages women who want relationships before any sexual contact, because the hook up, defined by some sexual activity, is the main pathway into relationships today. Hook up culture hasn’t gotten rid of relationships, which remain quite common. Some relationships start with an old-fashioned traditional date. But more common is relationships that start with a series of hook ups, sometimes preceded by friendship and “hanging out.”

One might have thought the gender revolution would lead to equality in concern for male and female sexual pleasure, or to equal treatment of men’s and women’s sexual experiences in forming reputations. But it did not. The sexual double standard and practices that prioritize men’s over women’s sexual pleasure have not changed much. In the past, men could have sex outside marriage with less loss to reputation than women experienced. Today, in most social circles, neither men nor women are expected to be virgins at marriage. But women get a bad reputation more readily than men from having sex with or hooking up with too many people. Hook up sex does not seem to be “equal opportunity” when it comes to orgasm; women have orgasms less frequently than men. It appears that equal opportunity for women has gone farther in the educational and career world than in the college sexual scene.

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