

A MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION PRODUCTION



Understanding Hookup Culture

What's Really Happening on College Campuses

a lecture by Paula England

FILM SYNOPSIS

When it comes to intimacy and sex, young people today are apparently doing away with the old rules of romance and cutting straight to the chase. If recent reports are to be believed, the rise of hookup culture on college campuses is in the process of killing off dating and courtship, radically altering some of our most basic assumptions about heterosexual sex and gender. But for all the speculation, there's been little beyond anecdotal evidence to back any of these claims up. This lecture by Stanford University's Paula England, a leading researcher in the sociology of gender, aims to clarify what's actually going on. England mobilizes a wealth of data to begin to chart whether the phenomenon of hooking up represents some kind of fundamental change, or whether we're simply seeing age-old gender patterns dressed up in new social forms.

ABOUT PAULA ENGLAND

Paula England is Professor of Sociology and an affiliate of the Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University. Her research focuses on gender inequality in labor markets, and on how changes in family life are affected by the gender and class systems. She is a former editor of the *American Sociological Review*.

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NOTABLE QUOTES FROM PAULA ENGLAND IN *UNDERSTANDING HOOKUP CULTURE*

“I want to talk about what’s happening in sexuality in college among heterosexuals. I want to give a descriptive portrait of what’s happening these days in what I call the ‘hooking up culture’, and also what’s happening with relationships, and show how patterns are still gendered.”

“What do they mean by hookup’? That is, what is sexually happening on what students call ‘hookups’? ... Does hookup always imply they had sexual intercourse? ...Are people hooking up with strangers?”

“Some people have argued, and in fact students will themselves often say this, that, well now there’s all of this hooking up and that people don’t date anymore. I started this whole research project... because when I was teaching at Northwestern, a student came to my office and said, ‘Students don’t date.’”

“I actually think that today if you get asked on a date, it is more indicative of a serious relational interest than it was, say, when I was going to college. . . .So the date isn’t dead, but hookups are more common than dates.”

“Most hookups don’t lead to a relationship, but many relationships come from a hookup. That would have been true about the date forty years ago, right? Most dates didn’t lead to marriage, but most marriages started with a date.”

“How do we know when we’re in a relationship? Students talk about ‘the talk’, sometimes they even call it a DTR – the define-the-relationship talk. And relationships become official, this is their term.”

“I want to talk about ways in which this whole scene that I’ve been describing is gendered...and the first one is physical pleasure. So I asked people about this most recent hookup, did you have an orgasm, do you think your partner had one?... Forty-four percent of men and nineteen percent of women had an orgasm. Folks this is worse than the sex gap in pay... It does seem like that a lot of the hookup is organized around giving men pleasure more than women, and that’s one way in which this whole thing is really gendered.”

“What are women getting out of this, if it’s often not orgasm in the hookups? So I think sometimes its male attention. This woman says, ‘[It] made me feel like I was cute,’ – boosted self esteem. This woman says, ‘The pleasure that girls receive from hooking up isn’t, like, physical.’ She’s not exactly telling you what it is, but there’s something there.”

“Another way that the culture of hooking up is gendered is the double standard. So when I talk in focus groups, students say women who hook up with too many people are seen as sluts ... Men can be seen as man-whore and sometimes that’s pejorative, but also male peer groups encourage and sort of give high-fives for action. So, it’s really clear that reputationally, women are being judged by a different standard [than] men.”

“We have this new social form, or relatively new. I don’t know exactly when it started. In that something sexual precedes, rather than follows, dates or other expression of relational intent. But the gendering of this; it’s new, but this new social form – the gendering of it seems quite as extreme as the gendering of the old dating and courtship forms.”

FACTS & STATISTICS FROM *UNDERSTANDING HOOKUP CULTURE*

- About 30-40 percent of hookups involve intercourse, while 25-33 percent involve making out and some touching, but nothing genital.
- Are people hooking up with strangers? Less than 15 percent said they did not know the person at all.
- Twenty percent of hookups occur between people who have hooked up ten times or more, while 50 percent occur between people who have never hooked up before.
- Hookups involving alcohol – the mean for women is 4 drinks and for men is 6.
- Over 65 percent of women have contacted the last person they hooked up with.
- The average number of hookups a senior in college has is between 4 and 7.
- Regarding all hookups – 44 percent of men and 19 percent of women had an orgasm.
- For first time hookups with a particular partner – 31 percent of men and 11 percent of women had an orgasm. If it is a 2nd or 3rd time with this partner – 43 percent of men and 16 percent of women had an orgasm. If it is the 4th time or more with a partner – 64 percent of men and 33 percent of women had an orgasm. If it is a relationship of at least 6 months – 85 percent of men and 68 percent of women had an orgasm.
- Twenty-two percent of women in relationships receive oral sex, while 57 percent of men do.
- Seven percent of women in relationships practice anal sex, while only 1 percent of women not in relationships do.
- If men receive oral sex, they orgasm 50 percent of the time, while women do only 30 percent of the time (for all hookups).
- For intercourse without oral sex; men orgasm 65 percent of the time, while women orgasm a little more than 30 percent of the time.
- When asked if it is all right for a woman to ask a man on a date, 75 percent of men and women say 'yes'.
- Thirty-three percent of men respected a hookup partner less because they hooked up, while 23 percent of women did.
- More than half of women felt respected less after hooking up with a partner, while only 20 percent of men felt the same.

For more graphs and statistics, please refer to the [study guide](#).

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

SUT JHALLY | Producer and Director

Sut Jhally is Professor of Communication at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and founder and executive director of The Media Education Foundation (MEF). He first gained national recognition for his film *Dreamworlds: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video* when MTV threatened him with a lawsuit over copyright infringement. The resulting press storm led to numerous requests for the video, and provided the rationale for MEF's founding in 1991. In the time since, Jhally has been the executive producer and/or director of more than 25 films produced and distributed by the Media Education Foundation, including the critically acclaimed *Peace, Propaganda & The Promised Land* and *Hijacking Catastrophe*. He is the author of *The Codes of Advertising* and *The Spectacle of Accumulation: Essays in Cultural Politics*, co-author of *Social Communication in Advertising* and *Enlightened Racism*, and the co-editor of *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*. A renowned lecturer, he is the recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Award at UMass, and is regarded as one of the world's leading cultural studies scholars in the area of advertising, media, and consumption.

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