

**MEDIA EDUCATION**  
**FOUNDATION**  
**STUDY GUIDE**

**UNDERSTANDING HOOKUP CULTURE**  
What's Really Happening on College Campuses

Study Guide by Jason Young  
Graphs by Paula England

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**NOTE TO EDUCATORS** This study guide is designed to help you and your students engage and manage the information presented in this video. Given that it can be difficult to teach visual content – and difficult for students to recall detailed information from videos after viewing them – the intention here is to give you a tool to help your students slow down and deepen their thinking about the specific issues this video addresses. With this in mind, we’ve structured the guide to help you stay close to the video’s main line of argument as it unfolds:

**Key Points** provide a concise and comprehensive summary of the video. They are designed to make it easier for you and your students to recall the details of the video during class discussions, and as a reference point for students as they work on assignments.

**Questions for Discussion or Writing** provide a series of questions designed to help you review and clarify material for your students; to encourage students to reflect critically on this material during class discussions; and to prompt and guide their written reactions to the video before and after these discussions. These questions can therefore be used in different ways: as guideposts for class discussion, as a framework for smaller group discussion and presentations, or as self-standing, in-class writing assignments (i.e. as prompts for “free-writing” or in-class reaction papers in which students are asked to write spontaneously and informally while the video is fresh in their mind).

**Assignments** encourage students to engage the video in more depth – by conducting research, working on individual and group projects, putting together presentations, and composing formal essays. These assignments are designed to challenge students to show command of the material presented in the video, to think critically and independently about this material from a number of different perspectives, and to develop and defend their own point of view on the issues at stake.

**PROGRAM OVERVIEW** 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 hookup phenomenon represents some kind of fundamental change, or whether we’re simply seeing age-old gender patterns dressed up in new social forms.

## **PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITING**

- 1) What does it mean to “hook up”?
- 2) Is there a hookup culture on your college campus? Why or why not?
- 3) What is your precise definition of “sex”? What is the difference between what some might call “sexual stuff” and “sex”?
- 4) Is the “date” dead? What does the term “dating” mean to you?
- 5) Do you think the orgasm rate in hookups is higher for men or women? Why?
- 6) How are women who hook up with numerous male partners perceived? Are men who hook up with numerous female partners perceived differently? Why or why not?

## KEY POINTS

- Paula England is a professor of sociology at Stanford University.
- England collects *qualitative* data at Stanford University through:
  - Interviews with undergraduates by other undergraduates
  - Focus groups with undergraduates she conducts in her class on sex and love
- England collects *quantitative* data from an online survey of undergraduates from about eighteen public and private universities.
- For this study, England only considered those who reported themselves as heterosexual.
- In the online survey, students were told to “use whatever definition of ‘hookup’ you and your friends use.”
- About 40% of hookups involve vaginal intercourse, and about a quarter to a third involve making out with some touching – but nothing genital. (See Graph 1)
- When students use the term “sex,” they mean vaginal intercourse.
- Less than 15% of hookups are with strangers. (See Graph 2)
- Students often hook up with the same person. Although 50% of students who hooked up “never hooked up before,” about 20% hooked up “ten or more times.” (See Graph 3)
- Hookups often involve alcohol. On average, prior to hooking up, men have six drinks and women have four. (See Graph 4)
- When asked, “Have you contacted this person since you last hooked up?” the vast majority of students say “yes.” The percentage is slightly higher for men because it seems to be a social norm for men to be the initiator. (See Graph 5)
- The prearranged “date” is much more rare than decades ago. Today, students use the term “dating” to describe when a couple is already considered boyfriend and girlfriend.
- Today, “dates” often come after hookups and are a way for students to signal interest in a relationship.
- There’s a lot of variation between the numbers of hookups among students. The median number of hookups reported by seniors is between four and seven, whereas a quarter of the students never hook up. (See Graph 6)
- Most hookups don’t lead to a relationship, but many relationships start with a hookup.

- Relationships often become “official” or “exclusive” when students engage in a talk to define the relationship more clearly. Sometimes this is even called “the talk” or a “define-the-relationship talk,” known simply as a DTR.
- The orgasm rate in hookups is 44% for men and 19% for women.
- The orgasm rate increases for both men and women based on the number of hookups, but the rate is always higher for men:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> hookup: 31% men to 11% women
  - 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> hookup: 43% men to 16% women
  - 4<sup>th</sup>+ hookup: 64% men to 33% women
- In the event of a relationship, the orgasm rate increases to 85% for men and 68% for women.
- Hookups are often organized around giving men pleasure more than women. For example, men receive oral sex at rates wildly disproportionate to women. (See Graph 7)
- When students are asked about the reciprocity of oral sex during hookups, they often give answers like:
  - “I think a lot of the times the girl does it because it’s expected.”
  - “The female feels a lot more protective of herself. They’re not expecting nor do they really allow themselves to be that open right away.”
- There is a lot of contrast between what sexual behaviors occur in hookups versus relationships. In relationships, students are doing more of everything, and there is less oral sex asymmetry. (See Graph 8)
- England thinks that we tend to have this idea that a man who has intercourse or receives oral sex will orgasm 99% of the time, but her research does not indicate that. (See Graph 9)
- Men tend to dramatically overestimate how often their partner orgasms. England thinks that some men are lying and that others simply don’t know – but also that women are faking orgasms. (See Graph 10)
- Even though there is a big difference in orgasm rates between women and men, women are reporting about the same level of enjoyment as men. (See Graph 11)
- Some women hook up for male attention. For example, female respondents say things like:
  - “It made me feel like I was cute, boosted self-esteem.”
  - “The pleasure that girls receive from hooking up isn’t, like, physical.”
- Preceding the hookup, men typically initiate spending time together. They also initiate the sexual activity a lot more than women. (See Graph 12)

- 75% of students say it's fine for women to ask men on dates, but it's almost universally men asking women on dates. (See Graph 13)
- When students in a relationship were surveyed about how it became clear that this person was his or her boyfriend or girlfriend, overwhelmingly the most common scenario was that the guy initiated a define-the-relationship talk. (See Graph 14) However, in focus groups, both men and women say that women are much more likely to initiate a DTR.
- Women are judged by a different standard than men. Women who hook up with "too many" people or go "too far" on the first hookup are seen as "sluts" by both men and women.
- Men can sometimes be seen as a "man whore," but more importantly male peer groups encourage sexual exploits.
- Some men say that if a woman has sex with him on the first or second hookup, he sees her as less than relationship or dating material.
- 33% of men and 23% of women say that they respect their partner less for hooking up with them, and more than half of the women feel that the man respects them less after the hookup. (See Graph 15)
- Both men and women lose interest in a romantic relationship over the course of the hookups, but men are typically less interested in a romantic relationship both before and after. (See Graph 16)
- England concludes that:
  - Hooking up is a new social form where sexual activity precedes – rather than follows – dates or other expressions of relational intent.
  - The gendering of this new social form seems just as extreme as the gendering of old dating and courtship forms.
  - It is unclear whether or not this change empowers women.

**POST-VIEWING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITING**

- 1) What is “hookup culture”?
- 2) Why is it important to use both qualitative and quantitative data for a study like this?
- 3) Why do you think so many students reserve the word “sex” solely for vaginal intercourse?
- 4) What role does alcohol play in hooking up culture?
- 5) Why do you think men are frequently seen as the initiator in heterosexual relationships?
- 6) How have dating rituals changed over the past few decades? How have they stayed the same? Why do you think the culture has shifted?
- 7) Why do you think the orgasm rate in hookups is higher for men than for women? Why do you think the orgasm rate increases over the span of multiple hookups? And why do you think this rate increases even further among men and women in a relationship?
- 8) Why do you think women feel expected to perform oral sex? In your view, why don’t men feel this same expectation?
- 9) England thinks that most people have the false impression that men who have intercourse or receive oral sex will orgasm 99% of the time. Prior to watching her lecture, did you share this common misperception? Examine why you may or may not have thought this.
- 10) Why do you think women fake orgasms?
- 11) Even though there is a big gap in orgasm rates among men and women, why do you think both men and women report equal levels of enjoyment of sexual activity?
- 12) What other reasons – besides physical pleasure – might make a woman want to hook up with a man?
- 13) Do you think it’s okay for women to ask men out on dates? Why or why not? And why don’t you think women typically ask men out on dates?
- 14) Why do you think men initiate define-the-relationship talks more often than women? And why do you think the perception among both men and women is that women do – and not men?
- 15) How are men and women judged differently in hookup culture? Why do you think this is?
- 16) In your opinion, how does hookup culture affect levels of respect between men and women who hook up?
- 17) Why do you think men are less interested in a romantic relationship both before and after a hookup?
- 18) In your view, does the shift from dating and courtship culture to hookup culture empower or disempower women? Does it do both? How?

## ASSIGNMENTS

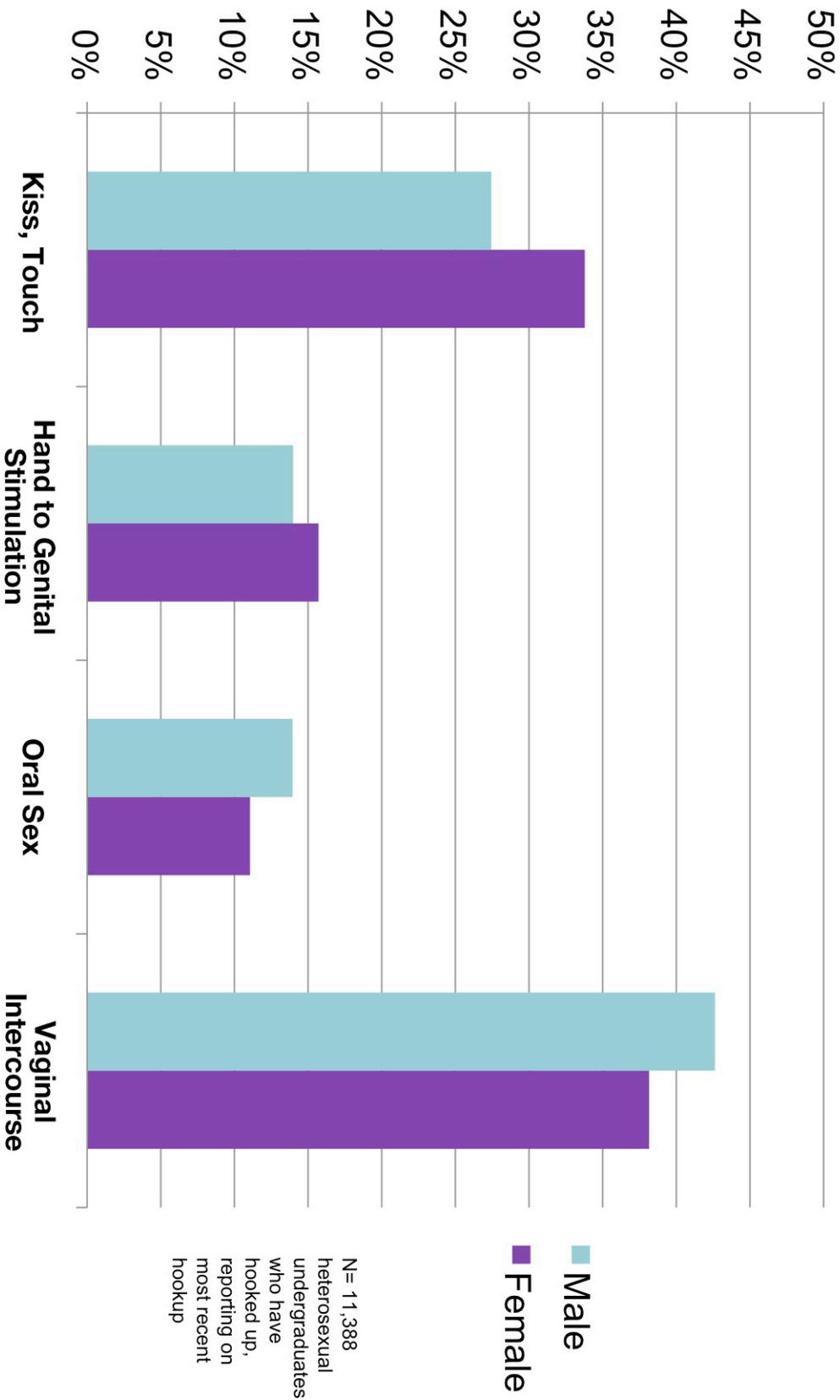
- 1) Design your own study of hookup culture. What do you want to examine? How would you go about collecting both qualitative and quantitative data? If your study calls for a survey, write up a sample survey. If it calls for a focus group, write about how you would lead the discussion.
- 2) Find examples of hookup culture in the media. Look at TV, movies, the Internet, even print media like magazines and books. How do these messages shape and reflect hookup culture? How are the messages geared toward men different from those geared toward women? How are they the same? What might a man learn from receiving a message geared toward a woman? And vice versa? For example, what might a man learn from reading *Cosmopolitan* or watching *Sex and the City*, and what might a woman learn from reading *Maxim* or watching professional wrestling?
- 3) Research the history of gender roles in the United States. How have the expected roles of men and women changed since the dating and courtship culture of past decades? How have they stayed the same? In what ways do you think these changes may have influenced hookup culture?
- 4) Write a script of a define-the-relationship (DTR) talk. Cast both the male and female character, and present your scene to the class.
- 5) In the lecture, Paula England references two academic papers: “Is Hooking Up Bad for Young Women?” by Elizabeth A. Armstrong, Laura Hamilton and Paula England; and “Waiting to be Asked” by Sharon Sassler and Amanda Miller. Read one of these papers, and write a response connecting the material from the paper to England’s overall argument and analysis in this lecture.

These two academic papers can be downloaded at the following links:

<http://www.mediaed.org/Handouts/IsHookingUpBadForYoungWomen.pdf>

<http://www.mediaed.org/Handouts/WaitingToBeAsked.pdf>

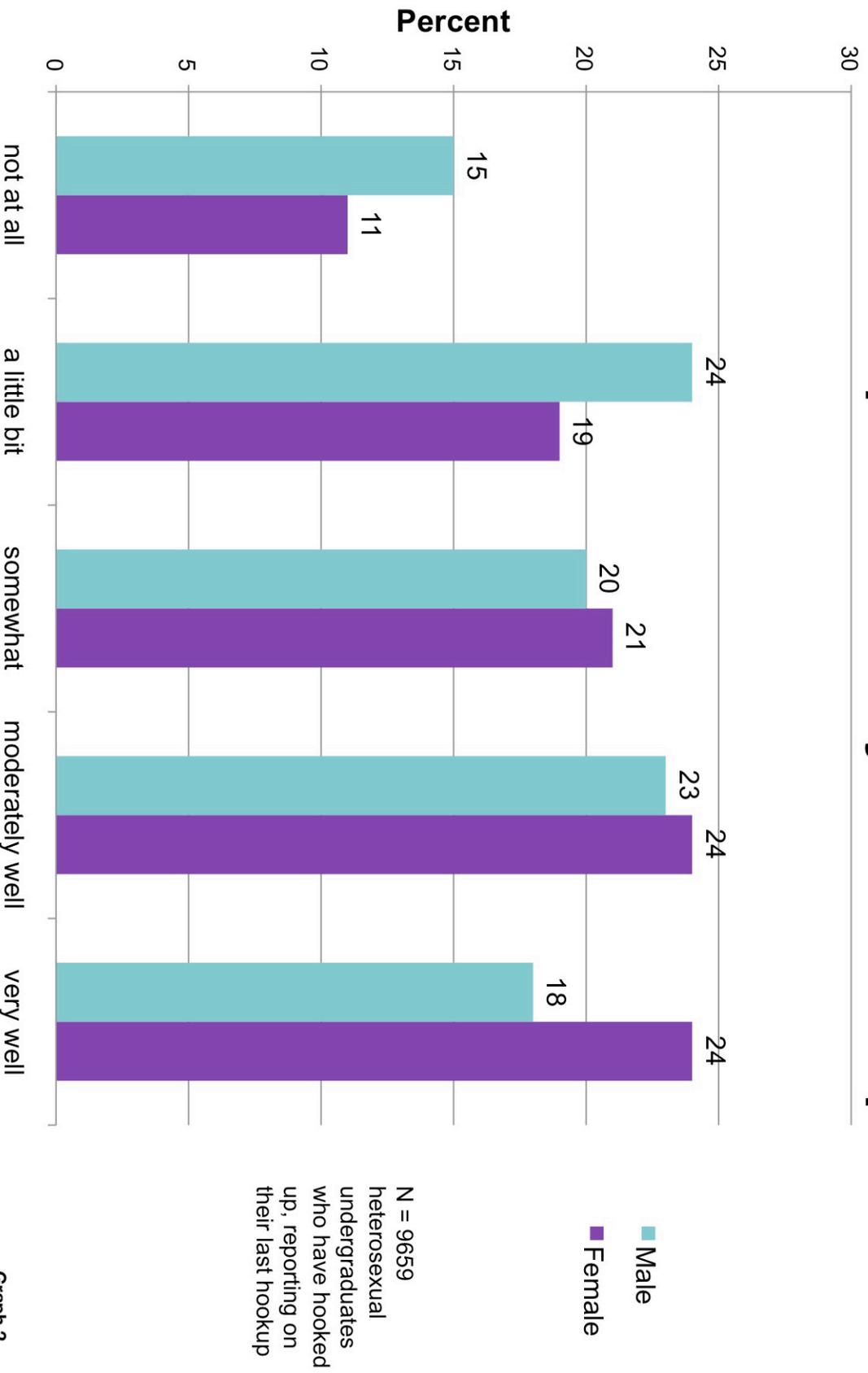
# Sexual Activity on Most Recent Hookup



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

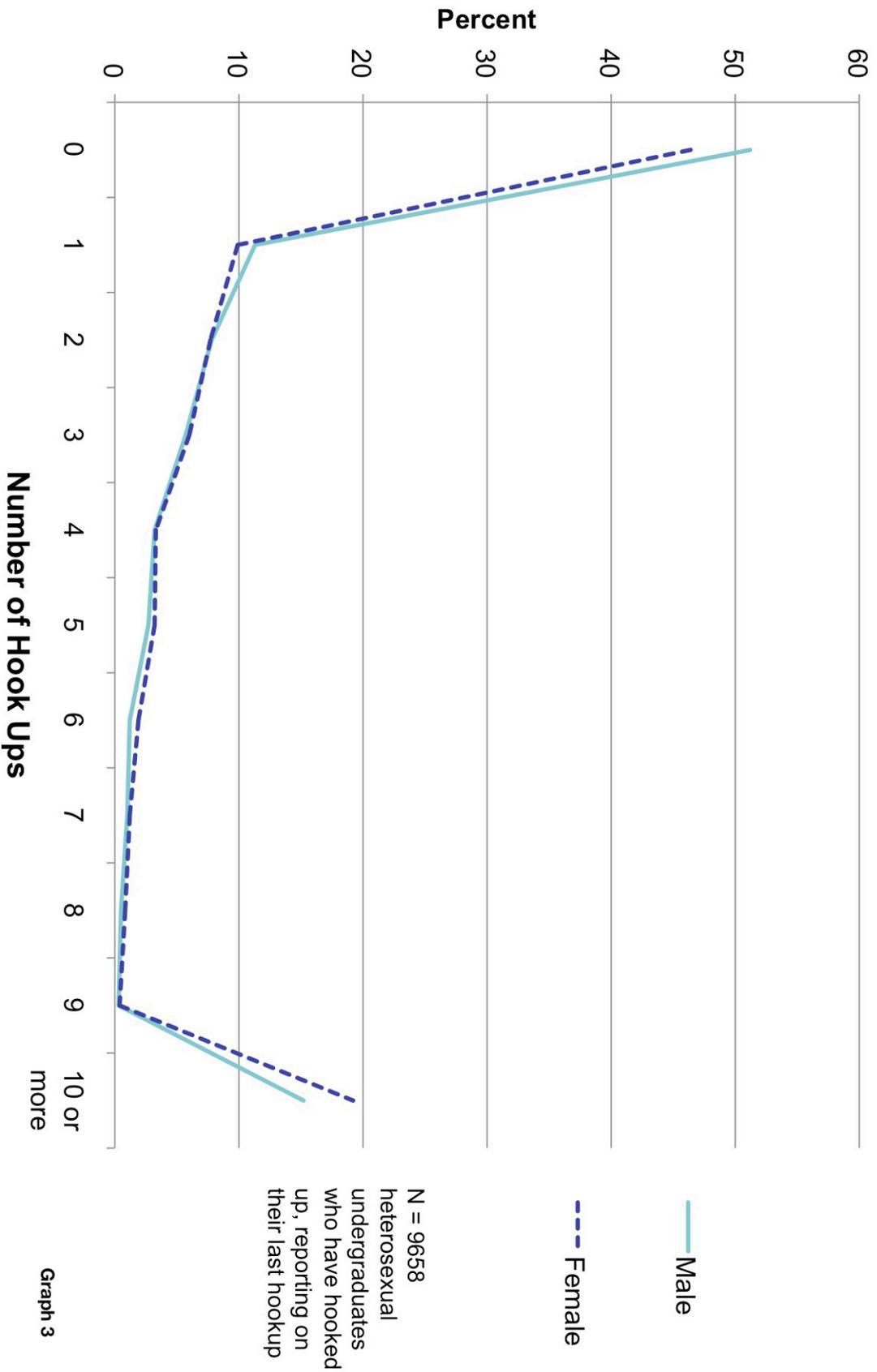
Graph 1

# "How well did you know the person you hooked up with before you hooked up?"



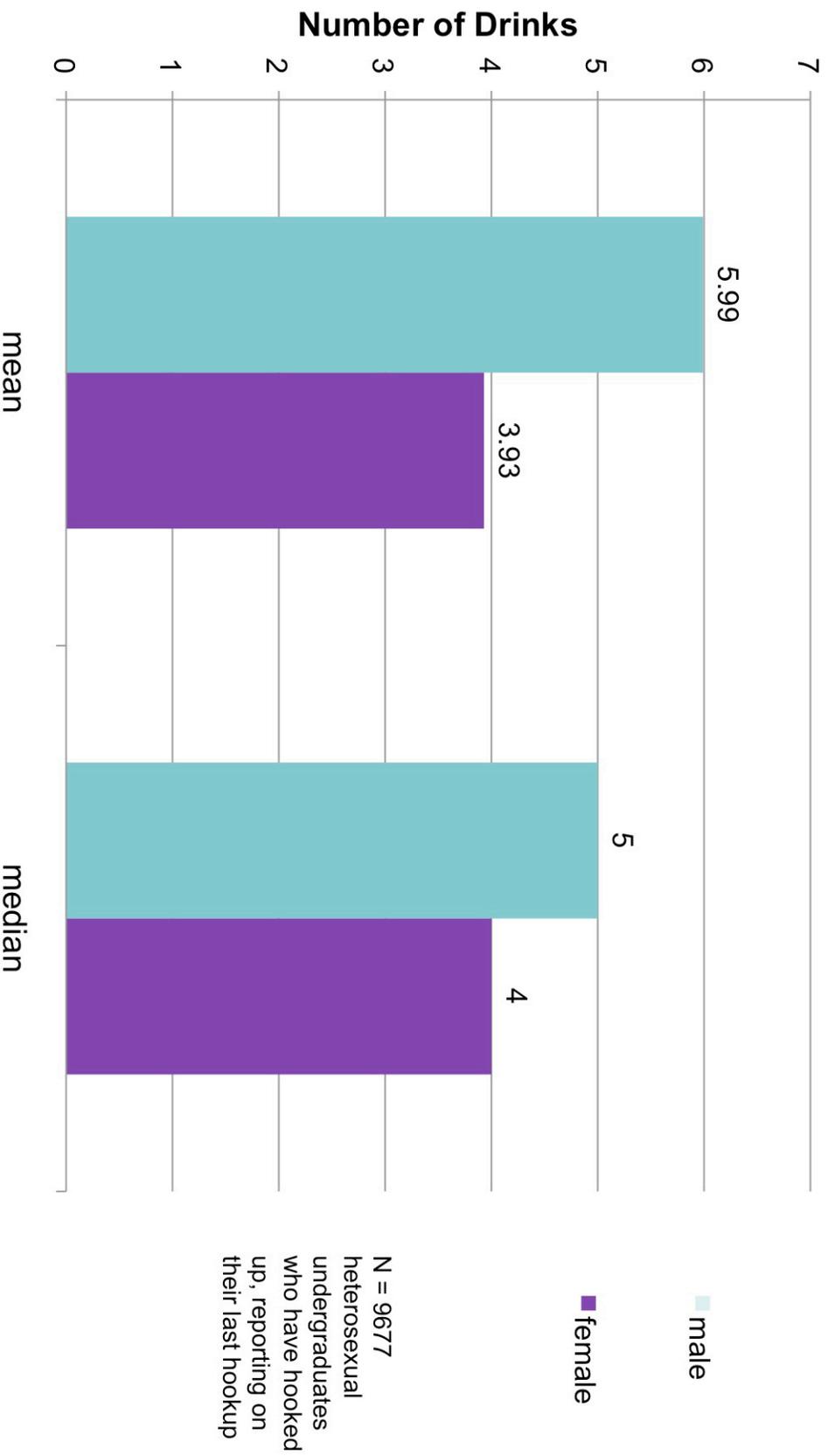
Graph 2

# "How many times had you previously hooked up with this person before this hook up?"



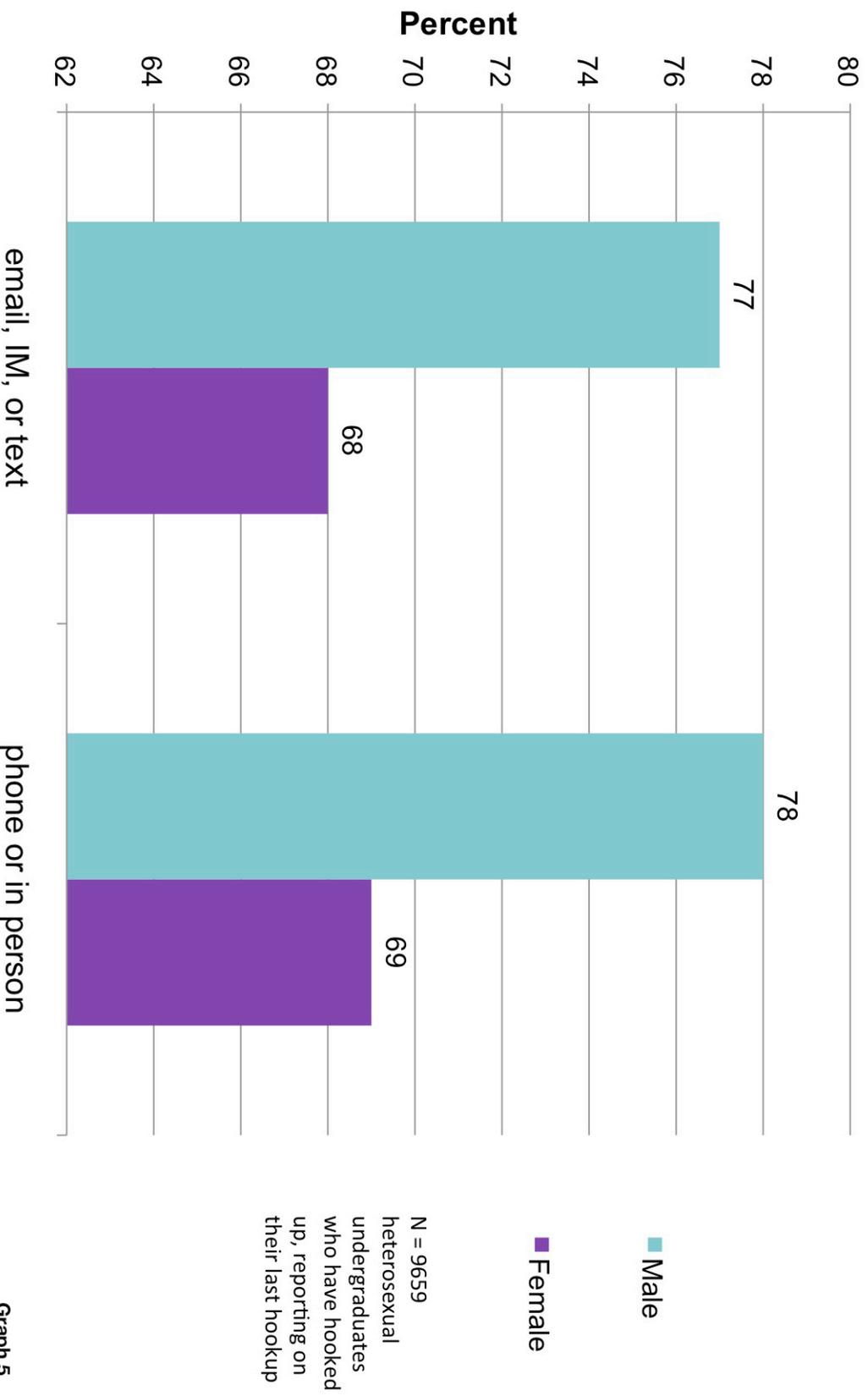
Graph 3

## How Drunk Were They? Alcohol Consumption on Most Recent Hook Up



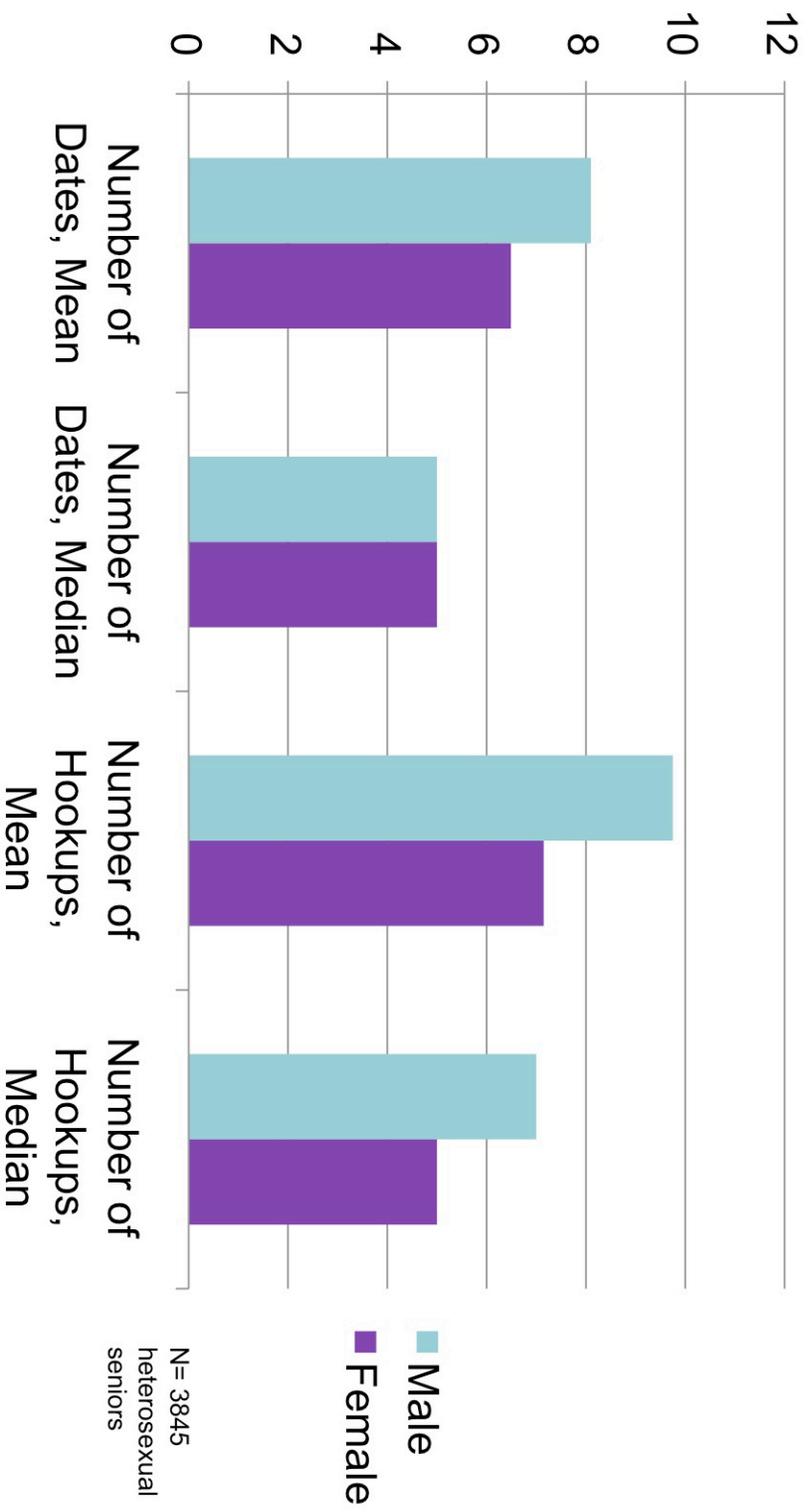
Graph 4

# Have you contacted your hook up partner since you hooked up?



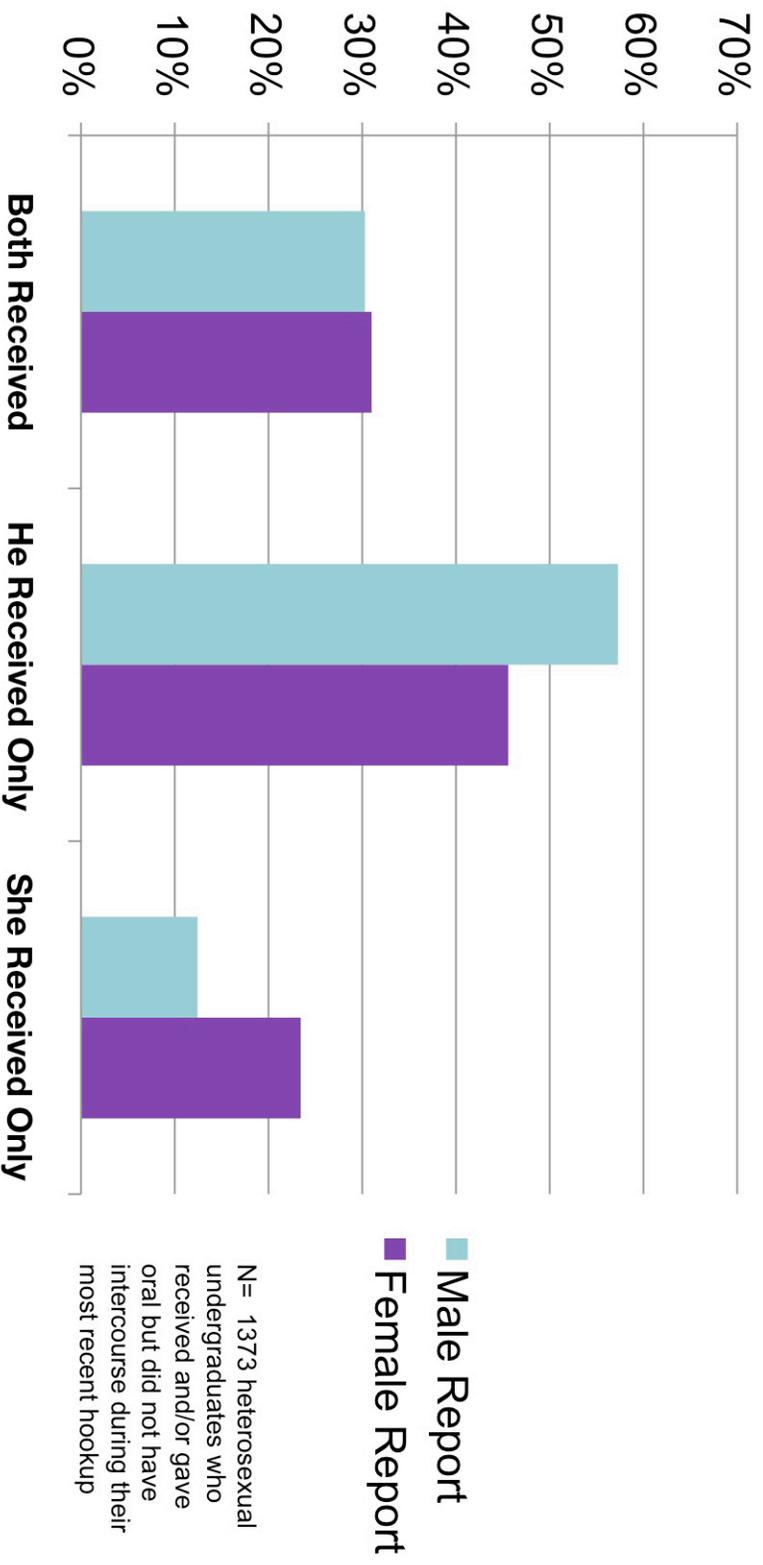
Graph 5

# Number of Dates and Hookups Reported by Seniors



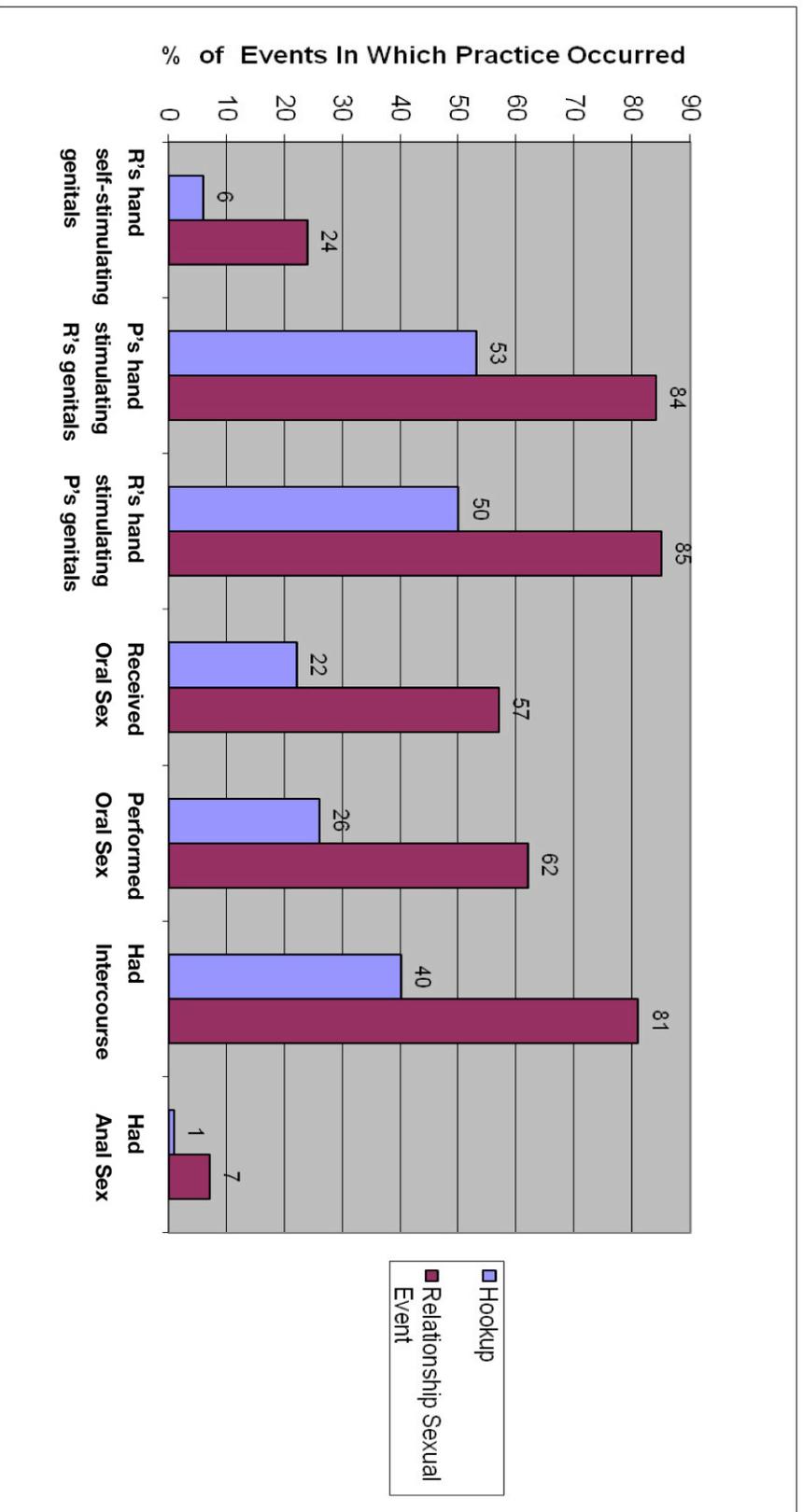
Graph 6

## Who Received Oral Sex In Hookups When Oral Sex Occurred, But Intercourse Did Not



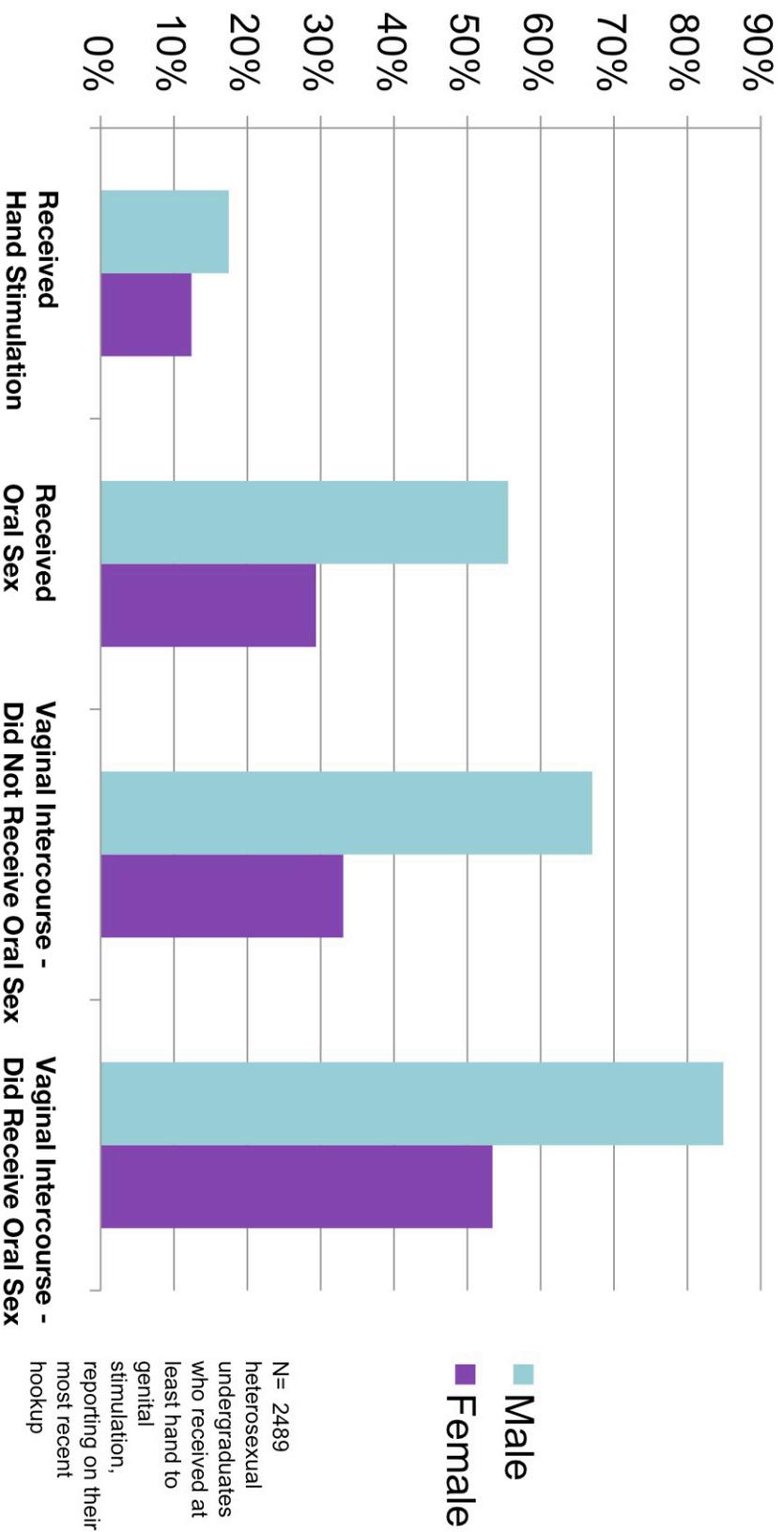
Graph 7

## Sexual Behaviors Women Reported in Most Recent Hookups and Relationship Sexual Events



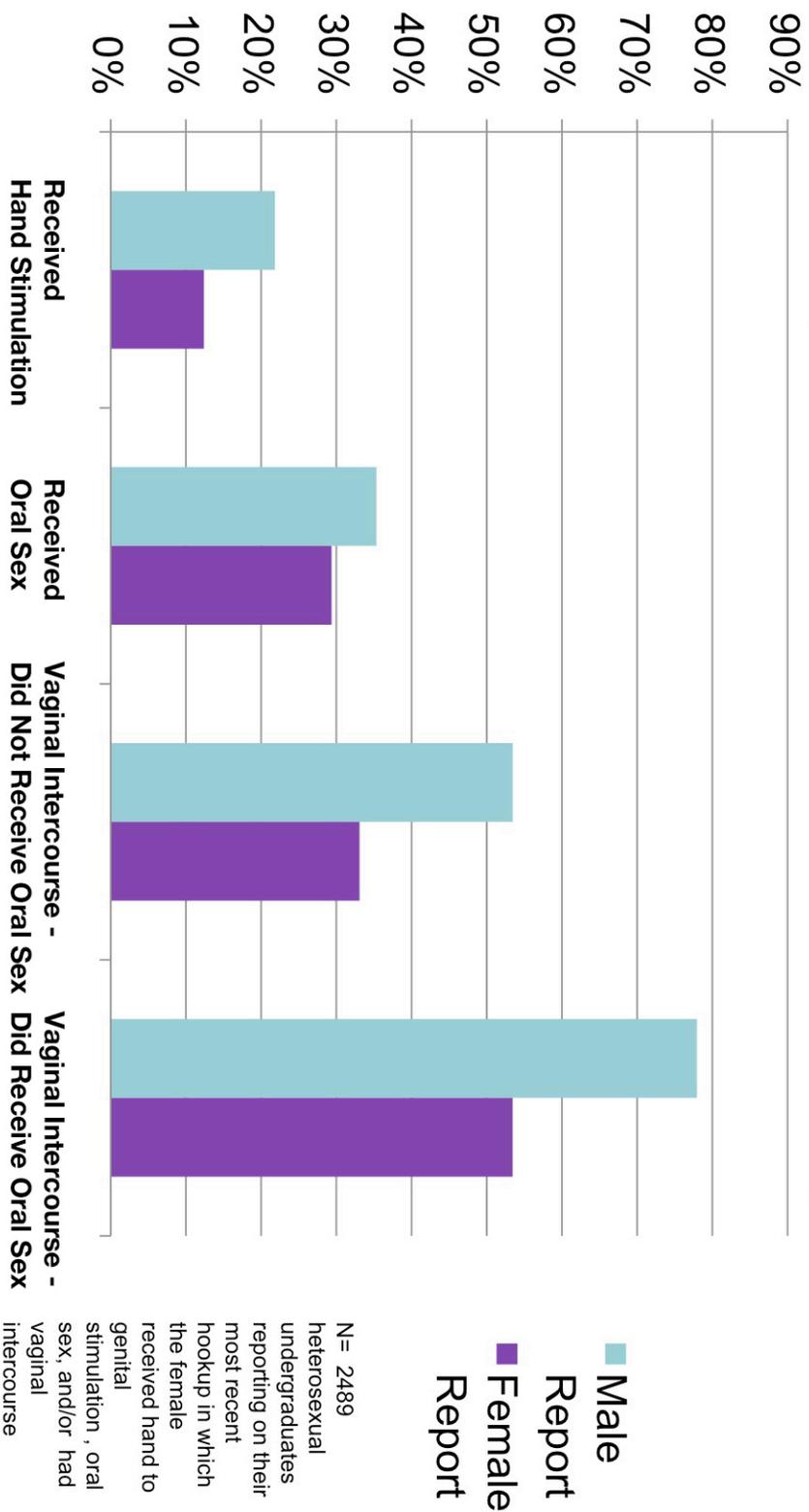
Graph 8

## Women's and Men's Report of Own Orgasm on Most Recent Hookup, by What Occurred



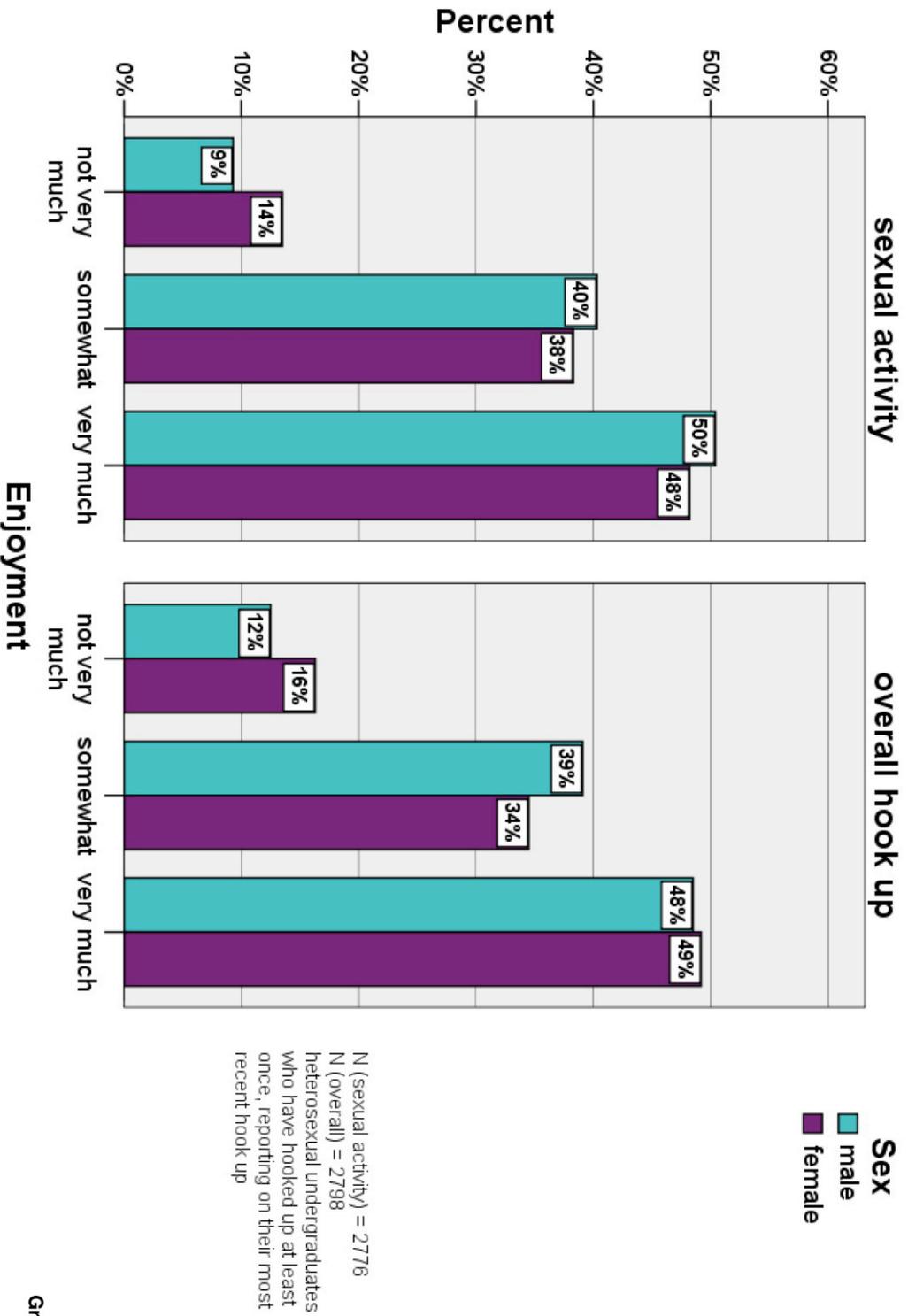
Graph 9

# Male and Female Reports of Female Orgasm on Most Recent Hookup



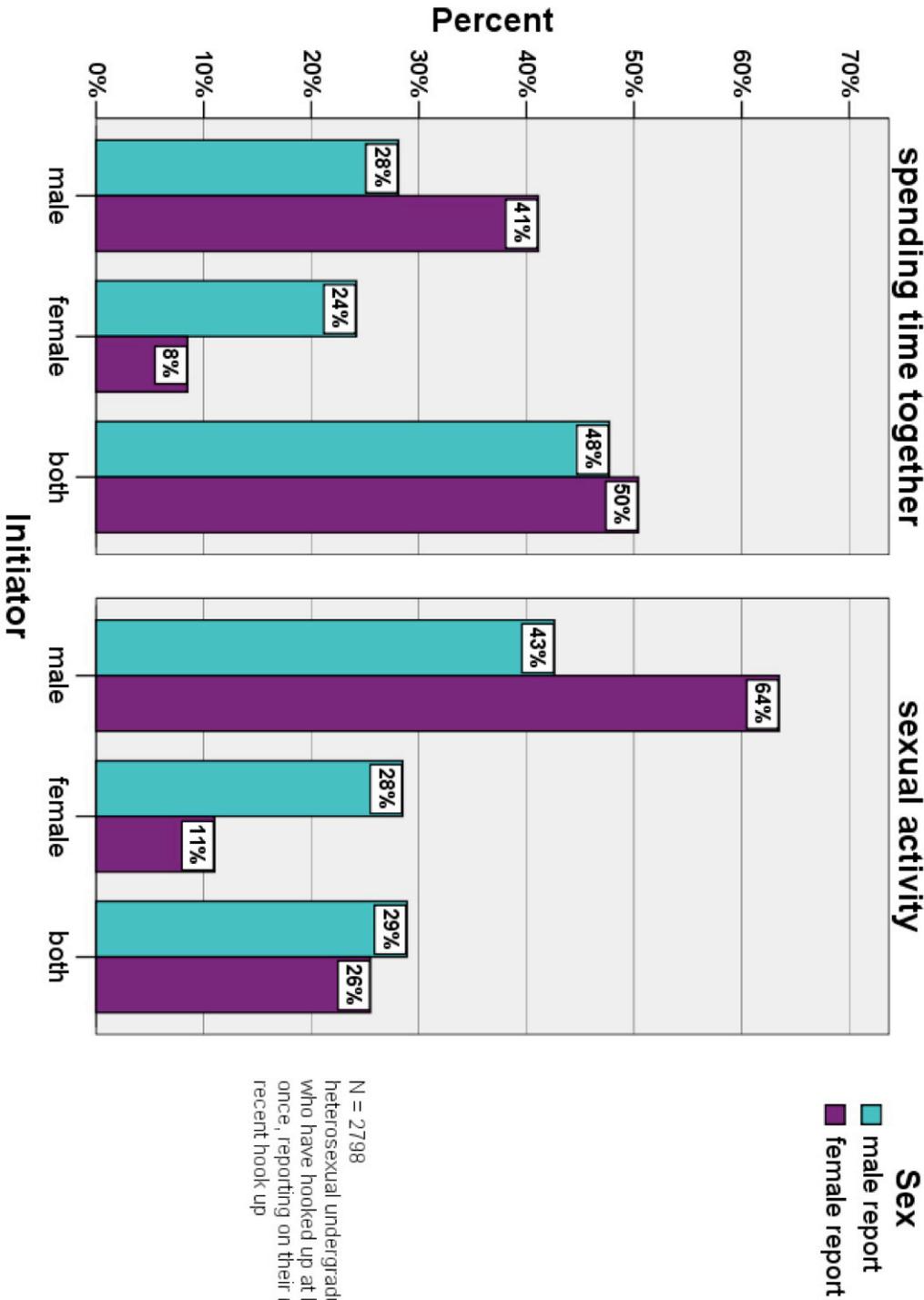
Graph 10

# Enjoyment of Sexual Activity and Overall Hook Up



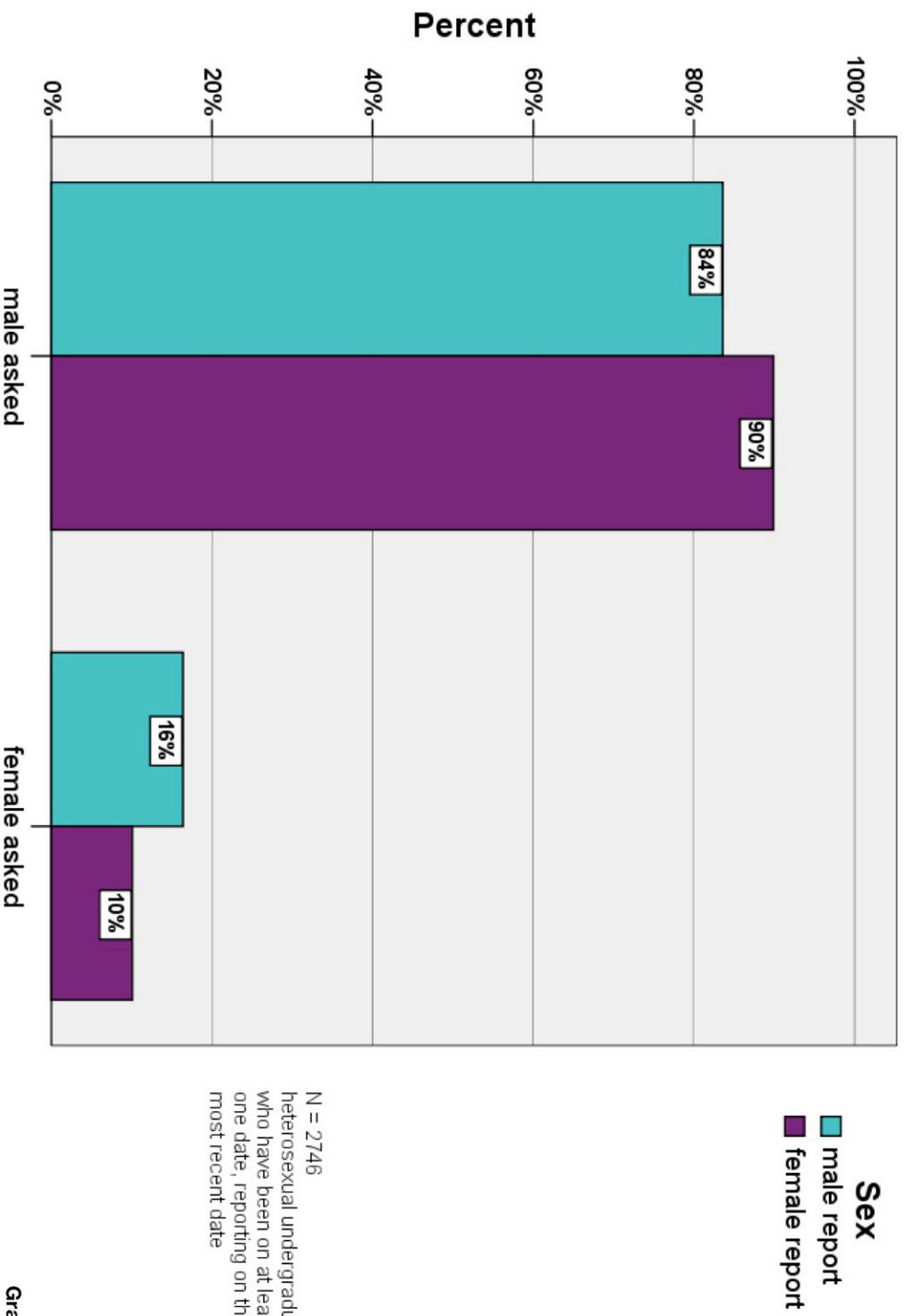
Graph 11

# Initiation of Spending Time Together Preceding the Hook Up and Initiation of Sexual Activity



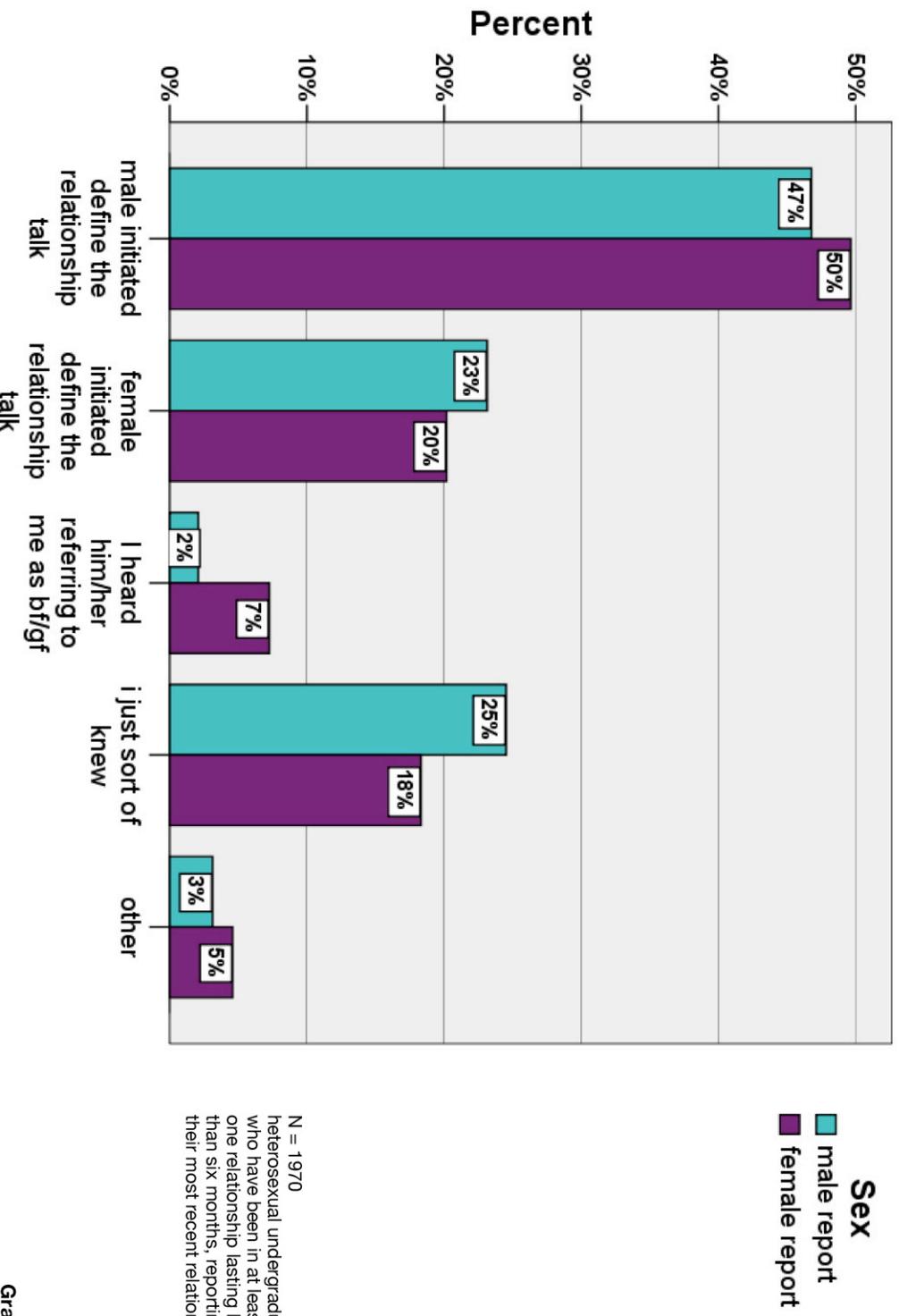
Graph 12

# Male and Female Reports of "Who asked whom out on the date?"



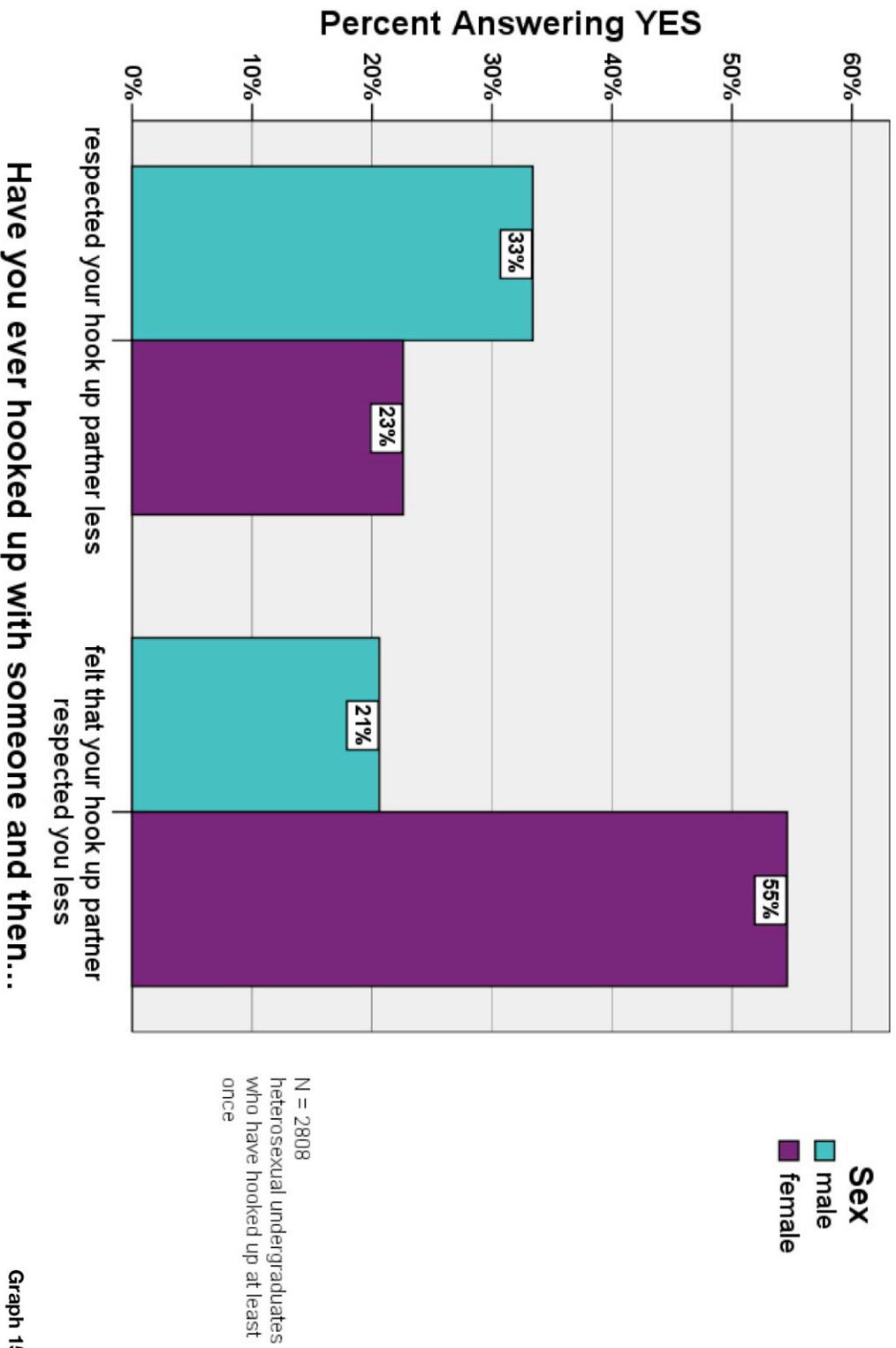
Graph 13

# "How did it become clear that this person was your boyfriend or girlfriend?"



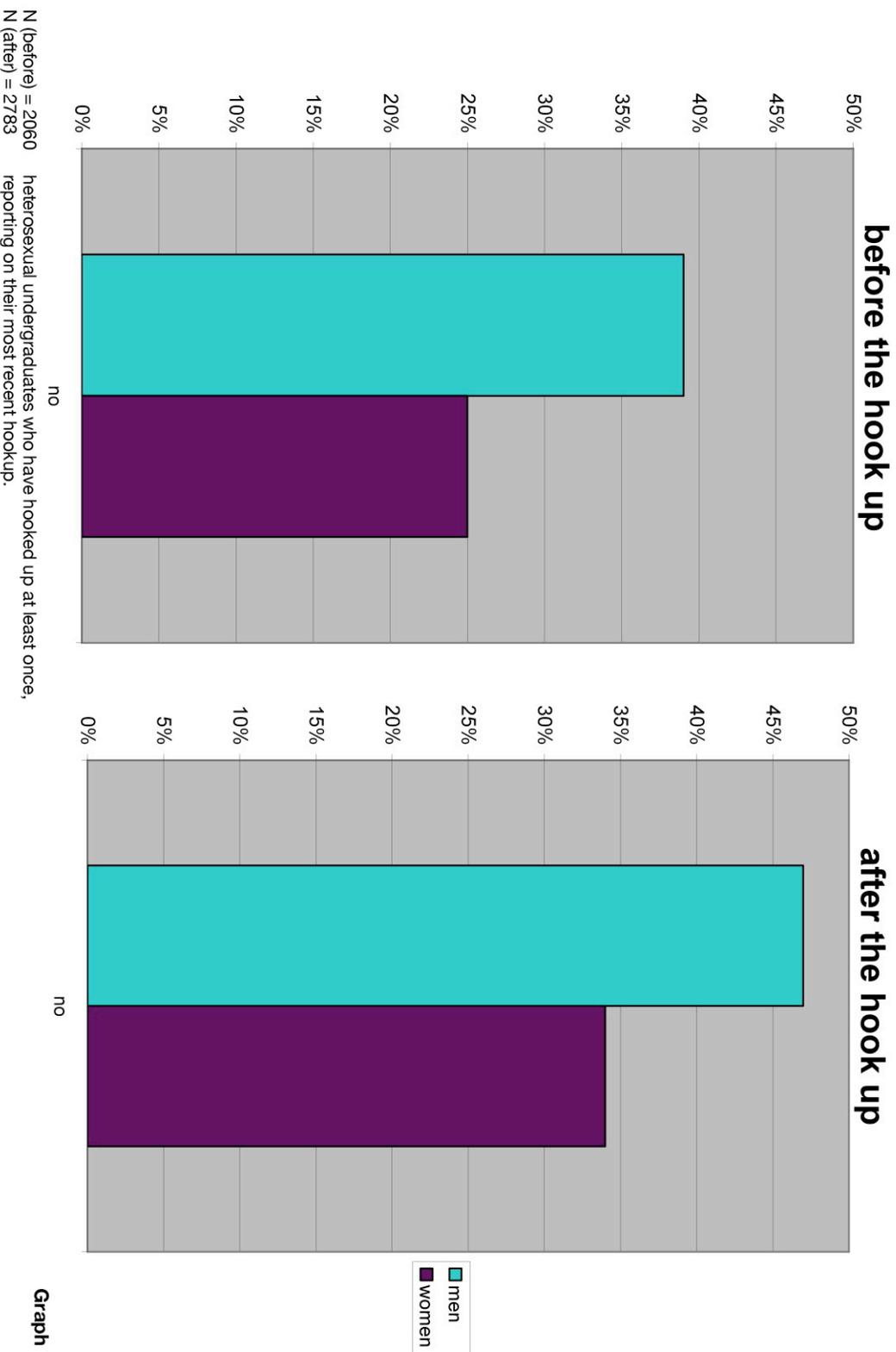
Graph 14

# Respect and Hook Ups



Graph 15

# % of Men and Women NOT Interested in a Romantic Relationship with Last Hook Up Partner



Graph 16