

It's a Man's World: University women's experiences with undesired consensual hookups

by

Sarah Barbara Cahill

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women's beliefs regarding UC hookups could have implications for sexual education and consent are discussed.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Critical psychologists Muehlenhard and Peterson (2005) contend that sexual coercion research has conflated unwanted sex with coerced and non-consensual sex. This conflation was evident in past research that defined rape as sexual intercourse the woman did not *want* (Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski 1987; Muehlenhard and Linton 1987). For example, Koss et al.'s (1987) *Sexual Experience Survey* asked about unwanted sex when trying to identify the prevalence of sexual assault on campus. This research has been vitally important in identifying the prevalence, context, precursors, and prevention of unwanted non-consensual sex and has been used to advocate for sexual assault to be seen as a serious social problem (DeKeseredy and Kelly 1993; Flack et al. 2008; Kimble et al. 2008; Larimer et al. 1999; Newton-Taylor, DeWit, and Gliksman 1998; Senn et al. 2014, 2015). Nevertheless, the conflation of non-consensual/unwanted sex ignores experiences that fall outside consensual/wanted and non-consensual/unwanted sex binaries.

Several researchers have theorized and empirically examined experiences outside the traditional consensual/wanted and non-consensual/unwanted sex binaries (Morgan, Johnson, and Sigler 2006; Muehlenhard and Peterson 2005). In particular, Muehlenhard and Peterson (2005: 17-18) were the first to deconstruct the binary between consensual/wanted sex (not rape) and non-consensual/unwanted sex (rape), proposing a framework for understanding the complexities of consent. They suggested researchers examining young women's sexual experiences needed to appreciate the

In addition, the chapter reviews the survey instrument employed for the quantitative portion of the study.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide details about the method of analysis and the sample for the qualitative analysis. In both chapters a thematic analysis was used to present themes found in the 33 interviews. Chapter 5 uses a standpoint feminist approach to present women's perspectives regarding the pressures experienced during UC hookups. In this chapter, the women's explanations and reasons for engaging in the undesired/unwanted consensual hook up are the focus. Chapter 6 further uses women's experiences to explore the implicit, often hidden gendered power dynamics of undesired consensual hookups. This chapter helps explain why the women experience social pressures and why the pressures are so powerful during undesired/unwanted consensual hookups. Chapter conclusions take up these themes in relation to previous literature and theorizing.

Chapter 7 tests the generalizability of the qualitative themes using heterosexual women's survey data. The survey data is used to explore which social pressures are more likely to influence women who have previously engaged in UC hookups compared to women who have only previously engaged in desired consensual (DC) hookups. While connecting to the prior literature, chapter 7 closes with a discussion about the strengths and limitations of the quantitative findings. Finally, chapter 8 summarizes key findings, implications, and limitations of the study and identifies areas of future research.

2006) the media (Kim et al. 2007; Kim and Ward 2004; Tolman 2002, 2006) and conversations about consent (Fischel 2019; Gilbert 2018; Traister 2015).

Tolman (2002) argues that by avoiding women's sexual subjectivity (i.e. their ability to see themselves as "sexual beings who feel entitled to pleasure and sexual safety") and sexual agency, we prevent them from being able to make sexual decisions for themselves. Tolman (2002:3) theorizes about women's sexual acquiescence as instances where sex "just happened" and women did not feel empowered to act on their own sexual desire. She describes how women were portrayed as sexualized objects and not taught about their sexual feelings and needs (Tolman 2002). Further, Wade (2017:183) found that women are often taught to be "sexy" but not "sexual". When women are not cognizant of their sexual desires it puts them "at risk", adding, "when a girl does not know what her feelings are, when she disconnects the apprehending psychic part of herself from what is happening in her own body, she then becomes especially vulnerable to the power of other's feelings, as well as to what others say she does and does not want or feel" (Tolman 2002:21). Ultimately, not educating women about their own sexual desire and subjectivity is unsafe and unhealthy because it puts women in a situation where they can be used for someone else's needs rather than their own. Indeed, women's lack of education regarding desire, pleasure, and sexual agency may be part of the reason they consent to UC hookups.

The topic of women's desire is complicated by the sexualization of young women and girls, particularly in the media (Egan 2013; Gill 2012). While discussions about women's desire and sexual feelings continue to be sidelined, the sexualization of young

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter describes the overarching feminist theoretical, epistemological, and methodological approaches used in the current study. A feminist conceptual framework is key in conducting this research since most disciplines, including sociology have been focused on the concerns, knowledge, and beliefs of (white, middle-class) men (Witz and Marshall 2004). The experiences of women have been largely misrepresented or excluded from sociology's history (Smith 1987; Sprague and Zimmerman 2004). Feminist methodological and theoretical approaches emerged to understand and recognize the unique lives of women, to reduce gender bias in science and social sciences, and to advance research aimed at improving gender inequalities in the social, political, and economic spheres (Intemann 2010; Tong 2009). This dissertation relies on two such approaches, feminist empiricism and standpoint feminism, to uncover and acknowledge young women's experiences with UC hookups.

Feminist empiricism and standpoint feminism frameworks can be viewed as being in epistemological conflict with one another. Feminist empiricism values objectivity and "Facts" (Harding 1986), while standpoint feminism postulates facts are grounded in women's unique subjective experiences, and researchers are often encouraged to highlight their subjective experiences to strengthen the research (Collins 1986, 1990). I will argue that these two feminist frameworks, despite their differences in epistemological assumptions, can complement each other to strengthen the study's findings. In addition, both approaches were developed to add women's experiences into the mainstream and remained focused on uncovering instances of injustice for women.

women. Feminist empirical frameworks are important to get a sense of how many women could be affected by a particular issue and what patterns may exist, but the results from this study will not be used to identify a homogenous experience or solution for all women.

3.2 Standpoint Feminism

Standpoint feminists believe women's perspectives and experiences are the ultimate source of knowledge and truth (Collins 1990; Harding 1986; Smith 1987). They reject the objective and universal facts of positivism and instead believe that our individual social locations shape our knowledge about the social world (McLaughlin 2003). Standpoint feminism is based on Hegel's theory of the relationship between the master and the slave and also on Marx and Engel's concept of historical materialism (Harding 1986; Hartstock 1998; Smith 1987).¹³ Like the proletariat, women are seen as occupying a place of epistemic privilege, which makes feminists more capable of theorizing about socially and politically marginalized women and better positioned to study their oppressors (Hartstock 1988, 2003). According to Harding (1986), standpoint

¹³ Hegel believes that the "oppressed have a dual perspective: their personal perspective developed through experiences and their perspective of their oppressors" (Hesse-Biber et al. 2004: 15). The difference in the master and the slave's social locations creates a situation whereby slaves and masters have different perspectives and beliefs. In *The German Ideology Part 1* (1932), Marx and Engels identify historical materialism as a political framework that is based in the material conditions of social life. Historical materialism was used to critique many German theorists at the time, whose theorizing existed primarily in the ivory tower removed from material life (McLaughlin 2003). Using Hegel's master/slave relationship, Marx argued that the proletariat provided a superior standpoint for understanding the social world than the bourgeoisie (McLaughlin 2003).

6.3.1 Fitting in: A burdensome task

Status can be defined as “an individual’s prominence, respect, and influence in the eyes of others” (Anderson and Kilduff 2009: 295). Further, status theorists Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch (1972), claimed that one’s status in face-to-face groups is based on the extent to which an individual has certain characteristics and engages in actions that are respected by the group. In fact, for many of the interviewed women, being sexual and hooking up with an attractive male was viewed as important to fit in and receive group admiration. While many participants described hooking up to obtain elevated social status, they also described the negative outcomes that were avoided by engaging in hookups. Their discussions made visible the underlying burden of engaging in UC hookups to avoid negative status implications.

“Ummm . . . not being called a prude, or cold or frigid. There are so many words . . . Tease. Yeah, there are a few situations where they actually gain things. I don’t know how often that happens, but women sleeping to get a position [achieve a certain status], I think a lot of times it's to avoid the negative rather than getting the positive.” – Pam

Further, locating the “sweet spot” concerning friends' validation is also a burden, and the women were careful to cultivate sexual experiences that brought social benefits, not scorn. For example, Kara explains how women struggled to avoid being made fun of for not engaging in sexual activity by a certain age. Her answer also exposes her lack of certainty around locating what “number” of sexual hookup partners is acceptable for the “middle ground”.

actually slutty? But I feel like that's just bad to say. Also, the other side of the spectrum is what they *haven't* done. I watch a *YouTube* channel where they do interviews and one of the questions they ask is, 'How many sexual partners have you had?' And when they say the number—some people say 2 or 25 or even 100 people—the comments are always like, 'I would never stick my dick in her if I knew this was her number.' So that's really bad, but you will also see comments where they say, 'Oh, I've only had sex with one person,' and the comments will say, 'Oh, she's too much of a virgin for me.' I feel like you can't have the happy medium." – Allison

Allison highlights the mixed feelings most of the women felt navigating peer group norms and sexual experiences, constantly aware that lacking "enough" hookup experience meant they were viewed negatively while having "too much" was negative as well. The line was highly ambiguous and the women were unable to suggest a "sweet spot" where they could avoid stigma and still reap the social benefits. Moreover, elevating social status in one group often meant you could be perceived worse in another, making fitting in a burden the women had to face while trying to meet the impossible "middle" ground. While the women were happy about the "benefit" certain hookups provided them with their friends, the struggle for social acceptance emerged from their stories as another burden they faced when deciding when, how often, and with whom to engage in UC hookups.

7 COMPARING SOCIAL PRESSURES IN UNDESIREDCONSENSUAL HOOKUPS VERSUS DESIRED CONSENSUAL HOOKUPS

The purpose of the final results chapter is to discover which, if any, of the qualitative findings from chapter 5 can be generalized to a larger sample of young women. Since few studies have examined the social pressures of UC hookups, it is important to identify if patterns found in the qualitative analysis are relevant in a larger sample. In this chapter, I used logistic regression analyses to identify which social pressures help predict women's engagement in UC hookups compared to women who have only experienced desired/wanted hookups.¹⁸

7.1 Analytic Strategy

A logistic regression was employed to answer this chapter's research question: *What social pressures predict women's engagement in at least one UC hookup compared to women who have never engaged in an UC hookup?* To answer this question the logistic regression analysis compared women with at least one UC hookup to those without the experience. Logistic regression is an appropriate analytic strategy when the dependent variable is dichotomous (Menard 2002). The sample used in the logistic regression included all respondents with at least one hookup experience since

¹⁸ The survey did not inquire about nonconsensual hookup experiences. It is likely that some women who experienced undesired/unwanted consensual (UC) hookups and desired/wanted consensual (DC) hookups also experienced one or more nonconsensual hookups. The relationship between nonconsensual hookups and UC or DC hookups was not explored.

7.3 Hypotheses

To determine the generalizability of the qualitative themes (Chapter 5), quantitative hypotheses were created:

1. Women with a stronger belief in the traditional sexual double standard will be more likely to engage in an UC hookup compared to women who engaged in DC hookups.
2. Women who feel flattered when a male is interested in hooking up with them will be more likely to engage in an UC hookup compared to women who engaged in DC hookups.
3. Women who have previously hooked up before they were ready in order to increase the possibility of dating their male hookup partner will be more likely to engage in an UC hookup compared to women who engaged in DC hookups.
4. Women who believe university students are expected to hookup will be more likely to engage in an UC hookup compared to women who engaged in DC hookups.
5. Women who believe the media encourages them to be sexually active will be more likely to engage in an UC hookup compared to women who engaged in DC hookups.
6. Women with a large percentage (over 75%) of friends who are hooking up will more likely engage in an UC hookup compared to women who engaged in DC hookups.

7. Women who identify as a feminist will be more likely to engage in an UC hookup compared to women who engaged in DC hookups.

7.4 Bivariate Results

Table 8-3 displays the results from the bivariate analysis, highlighting the differences between women who have engaged in desired consensual (DC) hookups with women who have engaged in at least one UC hookup. As shown in table 8-3, five independent variables were correlated to the dependent variable. Specifically, 54% of women who had at least one UC hookup (compared to 33% of women with DC hookups) stated they hooked up before they were ready for a chance of dating their partner. Women who had an UC hookup were significantly more likely to say hooking up is expected in university and that popular media encourages them to have sex. Sixty percent of women experiencing DC hookups stated that over 75% of their friends were hooking up, compared to 67% of women who experienced UC hookups. Last, women who engaged in at least one UC hookup were more likely to identify as a feminist (81%) compared to women who never engaged in an UC hookup (73%).

Regarding the control variables, women who experienced an UC hookup had a significantly lower average on the sexual communication scale, meaning they felt it was more difficult to communicate about their needs during hookups. In addition, women with UC hookup experience had significantly more male partners since age 18.

Model 3. This model was comprised of the independent variables and control variables with only the variable “university students are expected to hook up” included. After controlling for sexual communication, number of sexual partners, age, and religion, three independent variables were statistically significant ($p < .05$ level). In model 2, respondents who hooked up before they were ready because they wanted to date their partner ($p < .001$), respondents who identified as a feminist ($p < .01$), and respondents who believed university students were expected to hookup ($p < .05$), were more likely to engage in an UC hookup compared to women who have engaged in DC hookups. This model helps explain that when “media encourages sex” is removed, the measure “expected in university” becomes statistically significant (at $p < .05$).²⁶ Given the variables “university students are expected to hook up” and “popular and social media encourage me to be sexually active” were not highly correlated with one another (i.e. no signs of multicollinearity), the loss of statistical significance in the full model (Model 1) may be a result of the two variables measuring the same qualitative pressure (“everyone else was doing it”). Other reasons for the lack of significance will be explored in the summary section.

7.6 Summary

The results presented in this chapter support the generalizability of half of the qualitative findings. First, consistent with the qualitative findings, it appears women may

²⁶ In other words, the odds a woman engaged in a UC hookup compared to a DC hookup was 1.3 times greater if they had believed hooking up was expected in university.

hookups is a benefit of this study and the identification and classification of UC hookup experiences improves women's ability to advocate for themselves in situations they do not desire. More broadly, the research findings from this study can help position UC hookups as a distinct phenomenon needing further research.

The generalizability of UC hookup findings to all women

Given the lack of research on UC hookups, this research focused on the phenomenon of UC hookups only and did not also explore instances of social coercion in DC hookups. Thus, it is likely that some of the pressures identified in the qualitative findings are not unique to UC hookups but could be social pressures experienced in all types of consensual hookups (desired and undesired). In fact, research on hookups similarly found that the hookup culture (Lambert et al. 2003), peer pressure (Garcia and Reiber 2008; Regan and Dreyer 1999), emotional gratification/validation (Garcia and Reiber 2008), improved social status (Regan and Dreyer 1999), commitment to gender norms (Bogle 2008), and romantic relationship attainment (Bogle 2008; England et al. 2008) helped predict young adults involvement in hookups. While the quantitative analysis showed preliminary evidence that some social pressures were unique to UC hookups (i.e. feminist identity, desire to date, and pressure from the media), half of the social pressures identified in the qualitative portion were not statistically significant. This lack of significance means that some social pressures identified may be experienced by all women participating in consensual hookups. Future research should attempt to qualitatively compare the social coercion experienced by women who have had UC hookups to women who have only experienced DC hookups. This additional research

feminists are more likely to have undesired sex. The interviews provided an important contextual lens into UC hookups. While the women felt encouraged to engage in hookups because they believed, similar to Millett (2016), that sexual freedom equates to female empowerment and gender equality, many of the women, upon reflection, felt that their experience was not empowering. One reason for this lack of empowerment is likely due to the social and political climate around them prioritizing men's sexual needs over their own. It is also possible that individuals who identify as feminists were more likely to identify their hookup as UC vs. DC because they may be more aware of the complexities of their own sexuality and grey areas of consent. These findings underline the importance of utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data to understand social contexts.

Changing the contexts and conversations about consent

One of the most noteworthy findings from this work was how the women's sexual agency and assertiveness disappeared in situations when their male partner was not violent, rude, or coercive. When the male was relatively nice, the women did not feel that saying "no" was an option, even when the sex was undesired or painful. In their minds, their lack of desire was not a good enough reason to say "no". Given these results, consent conversations may want to start with female sexuality, desire, and pleasure, while acknowledging that these elements look vastly different for every woman. By framing consent on what the women's body needs and wants instead of on 'typical' examples of what healthy and unhealthy sexual situations look like, women will have a better sense of what looks and feels healthy to them. Understanding their own

patriarchal world plagued by heterosexual norms, which encourage male dominance in sexual situations. I felt it was important to study women's unique experiences separately from their heterosexual counterparts to fully understand their unique needs and stories. Many of the young women discussed feeling worried about their male partner's feelings and it is important to get a better sense of how men feel during hookup situations. Their perception may help debunk some of the taken-for-granted assumptions women are making in undesired hookup experiences.

Another limitation is that the results can only apply to UC hookup situations for women in university. A future qualitative study should investigate if women at diverse ages feel similar or different social pressures during desired and wanted hookup experiences. These findings could help clarify the lack of significance of some of the key variables in the quantitative results chapter. A final limitation is the use of retrospective self-reported reflections and experiences as a source of data. The use of retrospective data has been shown to skew some results since the reflections can be biased by one's memory and what is socially desirable.

8.2 Concluding Thoughts

The goal of this research was to understand why women would consent to an undesired or unwanted hookup. These unique experiences help expand our notion of consent and help to uncover the social pressure felt by women. Given the interest in the topic and the significant number of self-reported experiences with UC hookups, this research suggests UC hookups are a relatively common phenomenon experienced by

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Prescreen Questionnaire

1. In order to participate in this study you must meet the following criteria:

- I am heterosexual
- I am a woman
- I am a University of ***** student
- I am between 18 and 25 years of age.

Please select 'yes' if **all** of the above statements are true. Select 'no' if one or more of the statements are false.

- ◇ Yes
- ◇ No
- ◇ Withdraw from Prescreen Questionnaire

If the participants select 'yes', they will be directed to question 2.

If participants select 'no' or 'Withdraw from Prescreen Questionnaire', they will be directed to the following message:

Thank you for your interest in this study. Unfortunately, you do not meet the requirements for participation. Please contact the primary researcher, Sarah Cahill, if you have any questions or concerns. To support us in keeping your identity confidential, I would encourage you to go into your browser history and delete your browser history for this questionnaire.

[INSERT list of on campus and after-hour resources]

Information for Question 2:

Definition of a Hookup:

A hookup can be defined as consensually engaging in, *initiating, giving, or receiving* sexual acts (manual stimulation, and/or, oral, anal, or vaginal sex) with someone with whom you are *not* in a committed relationship.

2. According to the definition above, have you engaged in at least one hookup with a male in the past year?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Withdraw from Prescreen Questionnaire

If they answer yes, they continue on to question 3.

If participants select 'no' or 'Withdraw from Prescreen Questionnaire', they will be directed to the following message:

Thank you for your interest in this study. Unfortunately, you do not meet the requirements for participation. Please contact the primary researcher, Sarah Cahill, if you have any questions or concerns. To support us in keeping your identity confidential,

Approximately what percentage of your close friends have hooked up at least once since turning 18?

- 0% of them
- 1-25% of them
- 26-50% of them
- 51-75% of them
- 76-99% of them
- 100% of them

On average, how often do your closest girl friends hookup?

- Never
- Once a year
- A couple of times per year
- Once a month
- Once a week
- More than once per week

Which statement best represents how your parent(s) or guardian(s) feel about hookups?

- Hooking up is bad or wrong -- sexual activity should only exist in committed romantic relationships or during marriage.
- There are some problems with hooking up (e.g. pregnancy, loss of respect, emotional difficulties)
- Hooking up is okay
- Hooking up is pleasurable or fun
- I don't know
- My parent(s)/guardian(s) have expressed differing opinions about hookups (e.g. my mother feels hooking up is bad or wrong, but my father thinks hooking up is okay).

Please rate the following statements about popular media and social media. Popular media and social media....

- a. ...portray ideal sexual relationships and people would be lucky to have such relationships
- b. ...inform some of my personal decision making in sexual relationships.
- c. ...encourage me to be sexually active.
- d. ...have taught me that it's normal for women to engage in undesired sexual activity for the sake of male pleasure.
 - Strongly disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Strongly agree

Please rate the following statements.

- a. It's worse for a woman to sleep around than it is for a man.
- b. It's best for a guy to lose his virginity before he's out of his teens (before 19).

of 12%-alcohol table wine, a 12-oz. bottle or can of wine cooler, or a 1.25-oz. shot of 80-proof liquor either straight or in a mixed drink.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more

Please continue answering this question recalling your most recent undesired but consensual hookup. Did you consume drugs prior to the hookup?

- Yes
- No

Please continue answering these questions recalling most recent undesired but consensual hookup. During this undesired but consensual hookup, did you experience an orgasm?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

During this undesired but consensual hookup, do you believe your male partner climaxed?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Please continue answering this question recalling your most recent undesired but consensual hookup. Which of the following sexual behaviours did you engage in during the undesired but consensual hookup? Select all that apply.

- You stimulated your partner's genitals with your hand
- You had your genitals stimulated by your partner's hand
- You performed oral sex on your partner
- Your partner performed oral sex on you
- You had vaginal sex
- You had anal sex
- You stimulated your own genitals
- Your partner stimulated his genitals
- Other: _____

Please continue answering this question recalling your most recent undesired but consensual hookup. Were there positive aspects of the undesired but consensual hookup? Please check all that apply to your experience.

- I experienced physical pleasure
- I experienced an orgasm
- My male partner was kind and respectful
- I felt desired and validated by my male partner
- My friends were excited I hooked up
- It was a good story to tell my friends
- I got revenge on a past male partner

