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CASUAL HOOKUPS TO FORMAL DATES:

Refining the Boundaries of the Sexual Double Standard

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“Hooking up,” a popular type of sexual behavior among college students, has become a pathway to dating relationships. Based on open-ended narratives written by 273 undergraduates, we analyze how students interpreted a vignette describing a heterosexual hookup followed by a sexless first date. In contrast to the sexual script which holds that women want relationships more than sex and men care about sex more than relationships, students generally accorded women sexual agency and desire in the hookup and validated men’s post-hookup relationship interest. However, in explaining the sexless date, students typically reasoned the woman was being chaste and withholding sex to redeem her reputation whereas they often characterized the man’s abstinence in terms of a pity date. The findings underscore the tenacity of gendered sexual scripts around heterosexual dates and hookups but also reveal fissures and contradictions that suggest some changes to the sexual double standard.

Keywords: *hooking up; dating; sexual scripts; young adulthood; sexuality*

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INTRODUCTION

Until recently, popular and academic understandings of heterosexual dates and hookups depicted these as very different forms of sexual and relational behavior, with dates considered the most common pathway to a relationship and casual sexual hookups characterized as “one-night stands.” However, hooking up has largely replaced traditional courtship rituals to become one of the primary ways heterosexual college students form committed relationships (England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007; Glenn and Marquardt 2001). The reality that dates sometimes follow hookups challenges the notion that hookups are outside the parameters of “real” relationships. Although hookups can and do sometimes lead to relationships and even though both college men and women are hooking up, research documents a pernicious sexual double standard that shapes men’s and women’s hookup behaviors and experiences (Bogle 2008; England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Hamilton and Armstrong 2009; Kreager and Staff 2009). College students report that people judge women negatively for engaging in multiple hookups, whereas men gain status (England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). Men are also more likely to initiate hookups and report getting more sexual pleasure or benefits out of hookups than women (Bradshaw, Kahn, and Saville 2010; England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007). These gendered inequities are not unique to hooking up, however. According to heterosexual dating norms, men initiate dates and thereby have a high degree of agency in the context of relationship building (Bailey 1988; England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007; Ronen 2010).

Given the prevalence of hookups over traditional dates and the changing contexts from which relationships develop for college students, our research explores heterosexual hookups within the larger picture of dates, relationships, and the sexual double standard. Some research frames hooking up as bad for women (Bogle 2008; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Regnerus and Uecker 2011); others, however, argue that hookups may offer women an outlet for sexual agency outside of time-consuming relationships (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). We contribute to this debate by examining the heterosexual hookup not as an isolated event but in terms of the issues involved when it becomes a pathway to future encounters and what this might mean for leveling (or not) the gendered sexual and relational playing fields. Our analyses challenge recent research that implies hookups are necessarily bad for women and conventional dates are a better option.

HOOKING UP AND DATING IN COLLEGE

The term “hookup” has diverse meanings and is used to indicate a variety of behaviors; however, most attention and research has focused on *sexual* hookup behavior, especially among heterosexual college students (Bogle 2008; Bradshaw, Kahn, and Saville 2010; England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007; Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). Hooking up has become more popular in college than traditional courtship activities (Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). College students report a median of five hookups compared to a median of three dates by the time they are seniors (England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007). However, hookups are not happening to the exclusion of relationships. Committed relationships remain common and desirable for many college students. Among heterosexual college seniors, 69 percent have been in a relationship lasting at least six months (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009).

In earlier decades, dates—whereby couples went out for planned social engagements—were the primary method by which young men and women got to know each other before deciding whether they wanted to progress to the next level of commitment (Bailey 1988). In the modern context of mostly coeducational higher education, formal dates have become less imperative for heterosexual men and women to have contact and get to know each other. Conventionally, relationships were presumed to follow a particular pathway that moved from casual dating to exclusive relationship to sexual interaction. Today, although all those steps may be present, the order is likely to be switched, going from casual sexual interaction to dates to exclusive relationship (England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007). Asked about their last relationship of six or more months, 67 percent of students reported having had at least one hookup and one date before it became a relationship. Furthermore, asked specifically about their last hookup partner, 47 percent of women and 35 percent of men reported having had an interest in a relationship with this person before they hooked up, which is similar to percentages indicating an interest in a relationship after the hookup (England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007). Thus, despite widely understood norms that a hookup is not supposed to lead to a relationship, clearly these norms do not mesh with college students’ actual views and practices. What are the implications of these changing norms for dominant scripts around gender, sexuality, and heterosexual relationships?

GENDERED SEXUAL AND RELATIONAL SCRIPTS

We employ a symbolic interactionist perspective, arguing that the meanings people construct around sexuality have consequences insofar as meanings

guide action and serve as a basis for how people judge others (Blumer 1969; Plummer 2003; Rose and Frieze 1989; Simon and Gagnon 1986). In making meaning, people draw from larger cultural scripts (Simon and Gagnon 1986). Cultural scripts around heterosexuality are deeply gendered (Elliott and Umberson 2008; Crawford and Popp 2003; Greene and Faulkner 2005) and buttress and reproduce gender difference and inequality (Pascoe 2007; Ronen 2010; Rubin 1975). According to dominant scripts, girls and women want heterosexual romance and relationships—what Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) term the relational imperative. Popular scripts assume boys and men, on the other hand, are more interested in sex than relationships (Bradshaw, Kahn, and Saville 2010; Crawford and Popp 2003; Regnerus and Uecker 2011; Rose and Frieze 1989), yet expect them to make the first move toward a relationship (Bailey 1988; England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007; Ronen 2010). How individuals experience and make sense of their own and others' sexual and relational behaviors incorporates and reflects these gendered scripts. For example, high school boys often boast about sex and heterosexual conquests, regardless of their actual sexual experience (Pascoe 2007), while high school girls are steeped in narratives of ideal love and romance and are more likely to describe sex as something that “just happened” (Martin 1996; Tolman 2002).

A burgeoning literature describes some of the ways these scripts play out among heterosexual college students today. Bogle (2008) claims that in the college hookup scene, women seek relationships whereas men seek sex, and the result is women lose out. She notes that women put up with hookups in hopes of a relationship, but the decision to transition to a relationship is primarily left to men. England, Schafer, and Fogarty (2007) also find that women are more likely to indicate interest in a relationship with their last hookup partner than are men. However, Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) show that, contrary to popular belief, many heterosexual college women—especially those from privileged, middle-class backgrounds—are not constantly pursuing relationships and may in fact try to avoid them in order to carve out a period of independence and self-development. However, these college women are also held to a different sexual standard than their male peers (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). Thus, while hookups can offer women sexual pleasure without the demands of relationships, they occur within the gendered context of an ongoing sexual double standard.

THE SEXUAL DOUBLE STANDARD

The stereotype that men chase sex and are driven by lust but that women chase relationships and are driven by love is related to the sexual double

standard. Generally, the sexual double standard encompasses the idea that women are allowed to have sex within committed relationships while men are free to pursue sex either within or outside of a relationship (Crawford and Popp 2003; Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). The sexual double standard preserves the gender order whereby men's desires and needs take precedence over women's and thus has implications for gender inequality that transcend intimate relationships.

The sexual script that bolsters the double standard for women is "be desirable but not desiring." Popular scripts designate women as naturally less sexual than men and as the sexual gatekeepers within heterosexual couples. However, some women are scripted as imbued with sexuality and sexually "loose"—as the "bad" girls in the good girl–bad girl dichotomy. This dichotomy polices girls' and women's sexuality, influencing their sense of self as sexually agentic and empowered and shapes the extent to which they may experience sex as fulfilling and chosen (Carpenter 2002; Martin 1996; Ronen 2010; Tolman 2002). In contrast, sexual scripts deem men to be sexually driven—what some feminist scholars refer to as the male sex drive discourse (Gavey, McPhillips, and Doherty 2001)—and link the achievement of normative masculinity to heterosexual prowess (Martin 1996; Pascoe 2007). Although these scripts grant men more sexual agency, they can also negatively influence men's sexual experiences, encouraging some men, for example, to feel shame around lack of sexual experience (Carpenter 2002). While the sexual double standard has become less strict over time, it nevertheless still exists. For example, high school girls' popularity decreases with more sexual partners—regardless of whether the sex occurs within a relationship or not—but boys' popularity increases with more sexual partners (Kreager and Staff 2009). Some women college students report hooking up less and/or modifying their hookup behavior (e.g., refraining from sexual intercourse) to avoid being labeled "sluts" (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). By contrast, young men who engage in many hookups may gain status as "studs" or "players" (Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Kreager and Staff 2009). College women more often than men also report feelings of guilt and loneliness about hooking up, and they are frequently characterized as victims and losers within the hookup culture (Bogle 2008; Bradshaw, Kahn, and Saville 2010; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Regnerus and Uecker 2011). However, past research often indicts hooking up itself as bad for women rather than questioning the sexual double standard that shapes how girls and women experience hooking up.

This article explores how college students interpreted men's and women's behavior in relation to a vignette describing a casual heterosexual hookup followed by a formal, sexless first date. Diverging from a dichotomy

whereby sexually active women are sluts and men are studs, we find acceptability among college students for women's sexual agency and empowerment in the context of a hookup, albeit with some important caveats. Moreover, in contrast to the cultural script that men are relationship averse, students validated men's post-hookup relationship interest. However, highly gendered sexual scripts and double standards came into play when students explained men's and women's behavior on a date following a hookup, highlighting the importance of context in the deployment of the sexual double standard. Our analyses underscore the tenacity of gendered sexual scripts around heterosexual dates and hookups but also reveal fissures and contradictions that suggest changes to the sexual double standard.

METHOD

We conducted a content analysis of short narratives written by college students for a classroom exercise designed to generate discussion about gender and sexuality. For the exercise, students were presented with one of two versions of a vignette describing a man and a woman who meet at a party and have a sexual encounter and then later go on a dinner date. The versions were exactly the same except that in scenario A, the target character was a woman; in scenario B, the target character was a man. The students then wrote their responses regarding the target in narrative form. The two versions of the vignette were as follows:

Scenario A (woman target):

A woman and a man meet at a party and hit it off. At the end of evening, she takes him to her house and they have a night of wild sex, which they both enjoy. The following weekend, the man asks the woman out and they go to dinner on a date. The date ends with just a kiss, nothing else.

What do you think happened in this situation in terms of the woman's point of view? That is, why did she do what she did the first time they met, and why did she do what she did the second time? (Try to give your gut reaction rather than an intellectually thought-out rationale.)

Scenario B (man target)

A man and a woman meet at a party and hit it off. At the end of evening, he takes her to his house and they have a night of wild sex, which they both enjoy. The following weekend, the woman asks the man out and they go to dinner on a date. The date ends with just a kiss, nothing else.

What do you think happened in this situation in terms of the man's point of view? That is, why did he do what he did the first time they met, and why did he do what he did the second time? (Try to give your gut reaction rather than an intellectually thought-out rationale.)

We purposely wrote the vignettes to level the playing field in terms of both actors' participation in the encounters and to convey that the sex was consensual and enjoyable. Neither scenario made one character completely active or passive: in scenario A, the woman initiated the sex but the man initiated the date, and the reverse in scenario B. Students were not told prior to writing their narratives that there were multiple versions of the vignette. They were asked to complete the exercise in class anonymously and thus were not graded or given extra credit. We distributed the vignette prior to specifically teaching the topic of gender and had not previously discussed or assigned readings on gender, hooking up, or dating. Afterwards, we fully apprised students of the two scenarios and presented them with statistical summaries of their responses for discussion.

The methods and data have strengths and limitations. By using two versions of the vignette, we were able to compare students' responses depending on whether they were explaining *his* behavior or *hers*. By describing the hookup as mutually enjoyable and between two people who had just met, we could gauge whether and how students differently evaluated men's and women's active sexual agency and behavior. However, the specificity of the vignette precluded the full range and variety of hookup and dating behavior such as a hookup between two people who already knew each other, a repeat hookup with the same person, a one-time-only encounter, an extended dating relationship, or a same-sex hookup and date. The vignette's phrasing also likely shaped the types of explanations students gave. For example, mentioning that the sex was wild and mutually enjoyable may have led more students to impute desire to *both* the targets. However, students made a wide range of assumptions in their explanations that extended beyond the written text of the vignette, providing further insight into their understandings of hookups and dates and the cultural scripts that inform them. For example, students characterized *her* desire differently than *his*, despite the universalistic way the vignette implied desire. Students also assumed alcohol was present at the party but not on the date, even though alcohol was never mentioned in the vignette. Moreover, they assumed the targets entered the hookup without expectation for a future encounter even though the vignette plainly revealed the couple would end up on a date.

Sample

Our sample consisted of 273 undergraduate students enrolled in four different sections of a lower-division introductory sociology course taught during two semesters at a large public university located in the southern United States. This course fulfilled a general education requirement of the university and thus drew on a large cross section of the university population. Because this was an introductory course, first- and second-year students were more likely to be enrolled. The median student age was 19 years, with 42 percent under 19. Women were overrepresented in the sample at 61 percent while men comprised the remaining 39 percent. This partially reflected the majority women university population, especially for the university's first year class (55 percent women and 45 percent men). It may have also reflected a generally higher rate of class attendance by college women (Sax 2008). In terms of race/ethnicity of those who reported this information, 50 percent were white, 22 percent were Latino, 16 percent were Asian, 7 percent were African American, and 5 percent were other race/ethnicity. These demographics paralleled the university's first year population within 2 percent for all racial/ethnic categories. The university is located in an urban setting but draws students from across the state. The vast majority of undergraduate students at the university enroll in college on completion of high school, attend full-time, and live either on or near campus. When quoting a student, we provide his or her sex and age in parentheses, for example we identify a 19-year-old woman student as (WS19).

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Based on the instructions given in the vignette, students offered explanations for two situations: (1) the behavior at the party and (2) the behavior on the date. Students generally gave between one and two explanations for each situation. We did not limit students in the number of explanations they could offer and considered all explanations mentioned by each student in the analysis. We did an initial open coding of all the narratives to identify broad themes in students' explanations for the party and the date situations. We then refined these explanation types into a set of coding categories for each of the two situations based on common themes, overlapping rationales, and theoretical concerns. We identified nine categories that broadly captured students' explanations for the hookup and 10 categories for the sexless date. We did not code explanations based on gender in the first

TABLE 1. Percentage Of Students Who Mentioned An Explanation By Target's Sex

	<i>Scenario A: Woman Target</i>	<i>Scenario B: Man Target</i>	<i>Both Targets Combined</i>
	<i>n = 168</i>	<i>n = 105</i>	<i>n = 273</i>
Most common explanations for the target's hookup behavior at party			
Desire/pleasure ^a	49	61	54
Alcohol consumption ^a	42	31	38
Most common explanations for the target's sexless behavior on date			
Relationship interest	45	41	43
Impression management ("redemptive chastity") ^a	47	12	34
Interest in sex only ("pity date") ^a	8	41	21

Note: The most common explanations, which are listed above, all occurred with a frequency of 40% or more for at least one version of the scenario. No other explanations were mentioned by more than 22% of the respondents for either version of the scenario. a. Difference between men and women targets is statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$).

stage; for example, the explanations of trying to showcase oneself as "a lady" or "a gentleman" were both coded in terms of the common theme of impression management rather than the gendered aspect of what it means to be a lady or a gentleman. After identifying these categories, we independently recoded all of the narratives, discussing any discrepancies in our coding in order to achieve a consensus on every narrative.

Next, we analyzed the data using SPSS to calculate the frequency of each explanation and to examine whether students' explanations differed significantly depending on whether they were explaining *his* or *her* behavior and if men and women students provided different explanations.¹ We then turned our attention to the most frequent explanations students offered for the party hookup and the sexless date (presented in Table 1).

Suggesting the strength of gendered scripts around heterosexual hookups and dates in college, chi-square analysis indicated several statistically significant differences between the most popular explanations for the man and woman targets' behaviors. Regarding the motivation for the hookup, students' responses differed significantly based on whether the target was a man or woman for *desire/pleasure* ($\chi^2 = 3.83$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.05$) and

alcohol ($\chi^2 = 3.82$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.05$). Related to the motivation for the sexless date, student responses differed significantly between the man and woman target for *impression management* ($\chi^2 = 34.71$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$) and *interest in sex only* ($\chi^2 = 41.62$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). Responses of *relationship interest* did not differ significantly ($\chi^2 = 0.359$, $df = 1$, $p > 0.05$). There was only one significant difference (discussed later) based on the sex of the student respondents. After examining the data quantitatively, we conducted a qualitative analysis to explore nuanced themes within the most popular explanation categories in terms of gender variations and similarities in how students described the woman and man targets' behavior.

FINDINGS

Explaining the Party Hookup: Desire and Alcohol

When asked to explain why a woman and a man had sex after meeting at a party, students had no difficulty: They were acting on sexual desire. This was the most common explanation both men and women students offered to explain the party hookup for either target, although they mentioned desire more frequently to explain the man's behavior than the woman's. Students clearly saw the woman, like the man, as a sexual being with physical wants that promoted her hookup behavior. One student wrote that the hookup happened "because she was really aroused and wanted to get some" (WS19). Another explained, "She's attracted to the party type and she likes sex" (MS19). The fact that hookups are popular for both college women and men was reflected in students' responses that recognized and celebrated the normalcy of women's sexual desire, in direct contradiction of the sexual script that women are less motivated by desire to have sex than men. A few narratives directly acknowledged this discrepancy: "She probably just wanted to get 'some' (yes, girls think like that as well!)" (WS18). To be sure, we wrote the vignette to convey a sense that the sexual encounter was mutually enjoyable and to negate any assumption that the sex might have been coercive, perhaps influencing students to indicate desire as an explanation for the hookup. However, the frequency of this account, and men and women students' matter-of-fact explanations for the hookup, suggest that students were comfortable with the idea of women (and men) enacting sexual desire and agency. In addition, students who explained the hookup based on the bad character or low morals of the woman (or the man) were extremely rare. This is all the more notable given that we thought the phrasing of the vignette (i.e., she took him to

her house for “wild sex, which they both enjoy”) might have prompted students to disparage the woman for the casual hookup, particularly considering that our sample was drawn from a college campus in a conservative state. Thus, it is not simply that students said the woman, like the man, is a desiring subject, they also did not negatively characterize the woman for her agentic expression of desire.

However, our qualitative analyses reveal that students considered women’s desire to be more transitory, spontaneous, impulsive, or emergent in the situation compared to men’s desire, which students viewed as a more stable character trait. Students consistently described the woman’s desire in terms of being “in the mood,” “turned on,” experiencing a sexual “tension . . . build up,” and acting “in the heat of the moment.” One student stated, “It was a spur of the moment type of thing and she figured why not because there were no strings attached” (WS19). Another observed: “Her actions after their first meeting were impulsive and irrational yet satisfying at the time” (MS18). Certain life circumstances could also drive a woman’s desire: “I think the woman had sex with the man because she needed it. Maybe she came out of a bad relationship, and had so much sexual tension, that when combined with the effects of alcohol, she just slept with someone, anyone who would satiate her hunger” (WS19). As we discuss in more detail later, the impulse to act on one’s desire could be accentuated by students’ understanding that hookups themselves are ephemeral and without implication of future commitment: “There was probably a very strong physical attraction and she felt like just going for it, hell she may never see him again” (WS18). Similarly, “the woman most likely just wanted to have a good time with someone she probably wouldn’t have to deal with again” (MS18).

In contrast, students more often described the man’s sexual behavior as natural, permanent, and in line with his basic character. Common responses included: he had “guy instinct” (MS19); his “first impulse is just to have sex with her because that is what men like to do” (WS20); and “he saw [an] opportunity to get laid and he went for it, like most men I know would when at a party” (WS18). Related to the notion of having masculine steadfast sexual desire (as opposed to a feminine transitory one), students routinely assumed the man went to the party with a premeditated objective to have sex:

The guy is obviously a pimp player and knows how to work it with the ladies. It is always a guy’s objective to score with a chick whenever he has the opportunity. When a guy arrives at a party, he only has one goal in mind and that goal involves hooking up with a chick. (MS21)

Another student wrote, “Well, they say that ‘men only have their mind set on one thing when it comes to women,’ so therefore, it might have just been on his mind to have sex with an attractive lady” (WS20). By contrast, students infrequently described the woman as having had an agenda to hookup prior to arriving at the party. Thus, students deemed both the man and woman to be active, sexual beings in the hookup, but portrayed the woman as acting more spontaneously while the man was acting in expected fashion based on an innate, invariable sex drive. Students were also much more likely to describe the man’s objective to have sex at the party in terms of a “challenge” or “goal” he either set for himself or had thrust upon him by peer pressure. As one student put it: “He did what he did the first time probably to show or prove he could” (MS18). Hence, although students often discussed masculine sexuality in terms of an inner drive (Gavey, McPhillips, and Doherty 2001), they also recognized the social motivations behind men’s supposedly “natural” desire.

Along with ascribing sexual desire to both men and women to explain their hookup behavior, students also attributed hooking up to alcohol, an association other scholars note (Ven and Beck 2009). Alcohol consumption or being drunk, which was assumed to be a norm for a party, was the second most common explanation for the hookup. Often mentioned in conjunction with sexual desire, students explained that alcohol—which they presumed would be present in a party setting—releases inhibitions and hinders clear thinking. For example, a student wrote, “There may have been more alcohol, a more sexually charged atmosphere, which would make it more acceptable to have sex after first meeting” (WS21). In this way, alcohol allowed both the woman and the man to act on their individual desires rather than being held back by societal rules. However, students mentioned alcohol more often as a factor in the woman’s decision to have sex than in the man’s—but many did so by blending a cocktail of alcohol and desire. As one student put it: “She was probably drunk and horny that night” (MS20). In line with responses indicating acceptance for women’s sexual desire, students explained that sometimes women are very sexually attracted to men and that alcohol (or other mood-enhancing environmental factors) merely releases their inhibition and allows them to act on their real desires. Alcohol accentuated the no-holds-barred party atmosphere whereupon the woman, finding herself “in the mood,” “aroused,” and “attracted” to a good-looking man, got caught up in the moment. For example, students offered, “she was probably drunk. She saw a good looking guy and an opportunity for sex” (WS19) and “she was in the heat of the moment (maybe intoxicated) and was doing what felt right and what she wanted to do” (MS20). In contrast, students rarely indicated that

the man felt compelled to have sex based on his particular attraction to the woman at the party—his motivation for sex typically preceded the meeting—and in explaining the man’s hookup behavior in relation to alcohol, students routinely stated that they were *both* drunk rather than singling out the man for alcohol consumption. Moreover, students mentioned being sober significantly more often as a reason why the woman did not have sex on the date. This implies that women need more of an excuse to unleash their sexual desire and engage in casual sex. Thus, although the students described the woman’s decision to hook up in terms of desire, her desire was not always of her own making—it was spontaneous, not fully thought out, and often fueled by alcohol—suggesting students did not view the woman as a complete author of her own sexual desire (Martin 1996; Ronen 2010; Tolman 2002).

Explaining the Sexless Date: From Hookups to Relationships

The vignette described a heterosexual hookup followed by a date ending in a kiss, no sex. Students interpreted the date that followed the hookup as highly indicative of mutual interest in a relationship. In fact, the most common reason students attributed to *both* the woman (45 percent) and man (41 percent) for not having sex on the date was the presumption of interest in a relationship. According to men and women students’ narratives, relationships entail more than just sex and require some type of deeper intellectual and/or emotional connection between the couple, involving getting to know the real person and forming a bond beyond the sexual attraction (established by the hookup): “the man wants a relationship and starts slowing down; taking the opportunity to get to know this woman” (MS18). Refraining from sex on the date thus put the couple’s emphasis on other aspects of rapport building, creating a foundation for a relationship. This finding suggests that previous research asserting that women and men have oppositional objectives when it comes to sex and relationships may be either outdated or oversimplified. As Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) find, college women are not necessarily interested in pursuing relationships. It may also be the case that popular understandings have overly portrayed men as relationship averse (see also Giordano, Longmore, and Manning 2006).

Because students believed a date indicated potential interest in a relationship, this strongly shaped their explanations for the sexless date. In many cases, it also led students to clarify their previous explanations of the hookup as motivated largely by sexual desire (often fueled by alcohol). Once a date was attached to the hookup, many students made it clear that

the context changed along with the implications of the hookup behavior. In particular, they indicated that a date post-hookup can be a double-edged sword for women: Women may feel positive about the potential relationship, but simultaneously, this possibility now requires them to deal with the traditional gendered scripts and ideals that have long been a part of the institution of dating (Bailey 1988). Although first dates may come with particularly strong norms of proper behavior, students frequently described dates in general as “formal” and having more behavioral restrictions than hookups. As one student explained, “Once the man calls and asks for a date . . . the situation enters traditional roles they have to go through” (MS19). Another observed, “Parties are looser about social rules . . . which would make it more acceptable to have sex after first meeting. On the second date, she’s into a social courting ritual where rules are stricter concerning appropriate behavior” (WS21). Thus, while students gave the woman greater latitude to pursue sex in an anonymous hookup, the sexual double standard lingered in the background and became more evident in the context of a formal date and in the face of a potential relationship.

Redemptive chastity. Revealing the power of the sexual double standard in the traditional dating situation, the students’ most popular explanation for the woman target not having sex with her hookup partner on the subsequent date was that she was actively engaging in impression management to moderate either the man’s potentially negative perception of her or to improve her own self-image in light of their earlier hookup. Students mentioned impression management for the woman target at almost four times the frequency as they did for the man target. In line with gendered sexual scripts, both men and women students asserted a woman, much more so than a man, on meeting her hookup partner again, must engage in face-saving behavior because of post-hookup feelings of “shame,” “embarrassment,” “remorse,” and “guilt.” More specifically, she performed impression management—in the form of avoiding sex—out of concern about being perceived as “easy,” “loose,” “dirty,” “a woman of no morals,” “a slut,” or “a whore.”

The so-called “battle of the sexes” perspective presents the hookup—casual sex without further obligation—as a masculine imperative that is at odds with feminine objectives. In contrast, students assumed the party hookup would be anonymous without the expectation of a relationship and indicated that this relative anonymity allowed the woman to escape the consequences of the sexual double standard and act on her sexual desire:

The first time they met, she probably assumed *she would never really see him again so she didn't care what he thought of her*. However, after he asks her out, she probably doesn't want him to assume she is a slut or easy so she decides to merely end the date with a kiss. (WS20, emphasis added)

Another wrote, "She doesn't mind having a one night stand with *someone she will never meet again*, but when it's someone she might date she doesn't want to give too much I guess" (MS18, emphasis added). As both these students pointed out, the woman did not feel she had to moderate her sexuality *until* the potential of a relationship forced her to think about how others might morally judge her and to self-assess her behavior similarly. Even when the woman had regrets immediately after the hookup, it was because she thought the behavior had affected her future relationship opportunities with her partner:

[Although she was having second thoughts about what she was doing at the party] . . . she figured she had already gone this far and *she will probably never hear from the guy again, so what the hell*. She was probably regretting it in the morning and was certain the guy would never call because he thought she was "too easy." So she was surprised when he called and asked her out. She didn't want to screw it up this time, so she decided they would take it slow and that's why it ended with a kiss. (WS18, emphasis added)

All of these narratives juxtaposed a woman's hope that anonymity might allow her to get away with simply enjoying herself sexually, setting aside moral and guilt implications, with the way the date disrupted this plan and triggered her impression management. Bogle (2008) describes how stories about college women's sexual activities can quickly spread on campus, making them vulnerable to the sexual double standard. However, as one critique of Bogle's thesis has pointed out, it is not clear if the consequences of gossip are as great a threat at all universities, particularly larger ones (Kalish 2009). The students in our study—who attended a university with a very large student population—suggested that in some environments, hookups can remain a private affair if the parties involved so choose.

Students thus interpreted the woman's chaste behavior on the date as a way to solidify her reputation or correct a "wrong impression," and show that she was "respectable," "a lady," and "not that kind of girl" and therefore dating material. The concept of redemption for past actions through alternative new behaviors was very common. As one student wrote, "I think she tried to appear like a lady and redeem herself after what she did. She might have felt embarrassed and wanted to clean her act up on the

second meeting” (WS21). Other explanations employed different phrasing but conveyed the same point:

The second date, she was probably embarrassed with her action because some would say that they are not socially acceptable, and wanted [to] wait a while for another sexual encounter. (MS20)

She was trying to “fix” what happened before. She doesn’t want to be seen as a slut or easy. She wants the man to take her serious and not think she has sex with any man she meets at a party. (WS19)

While most descriptions of the woman’s impression management alluded to embarrassment and remorse, some students simply stated that it involved showing a more well-rounded or complete portrayal of herself rather than the one-sided sexual image presumably conveyed by the hookup:

The date was the woman’s opportunity to show that *she is more than just sex*. She probably doesn’t want the man to think she is promiscuous and might have told him she usually doesn’t do that on the first date and wanted to prove she was more than sex. (WS19, emphasis added)

Similarly, it is important to note that not all students who described the woman’s behavior in terms of impression management thought that her previous behavior was improper or would be viewed as such by her date. A few asserted that a woman’s sexually liberated behavior was not a source of shame in itself but was a problem if it was the only type of behavior she knew how to exhibit. The woman’s decision to refrain from sex was thus not necessarily meant to revoke past actions but to build on them and construct a more complex portrait of herself. As one student put it, “If she is truly interested she wants the guy to like her for all her traits, not just her sexuality. She’s obviously not totally regretful of her decision to have sex, she’s just defining the relationship differently” (WS21). Another volunteered, “You don’t want to ruin the one time a guy calls you back the next day by being too pushy for sex” (MS18). Although these responses imply a more sexually liberated script for women, they also suggest the ongoing presence of a double standard in which women’s sexual behavior remains highly scrutinized.

In contrast, far fewer students indicated there was anything embarrassing or reputation-damaging to the man as a result of the hookup. However, students did not view the man as completely oblivious to concerns of impression management on the date. According to some students, the man

engaged in impression management because he was interested in the woman and wanted her to know he was really a “gentleman” rather than someone who was only on the prowl for sex or trying to take advantage of her: “The man is trying to come off as a gentleman the second time around and maybe he really likes her and he doesn’t want to be associated with the common understanding that guys are just out to ‘get some’” (WS19). Similarly, a student offered, “Since they are officially dating now, he probably decided to take it easy, and not seem like a perv[ert]” (MS18). Thus, students viewed both the woman’s and the man’s impression management as attempts to demonstrate their worthiness as a relationship partner, but their merit as a partner rested on very gendered grounds. Because the woman’s entire character was in jeopardy, she had to prove that she was not a “bad” girl in the context of the date. However, the man simply needed to establish that his intentions toward the woman were trustworthy. He was not “redeeming” himself as much as simply saying he was genuine in his intentions towards her.

The pity date. Aside from interest in a relationship, students were equally likely to reason that the man did not have sex on the date because of his *lack* of interest in a relationship. Preference for hookup sex with no strings attached was mentioned five times more often to explain the man’s chaste behavior on the date than the woman’s. In this explanation category, which we labeled *sex only*, the target actor’s decision *not* to have sex on the date, ironically, meant that he or she (but most commonly he) was only interested in the partner for sex. Some narratives were quite succinct: “[The kiss] was her way of saying, ‘Sorry dude. Last week was fun, but it’s back to life now’” (MS18) and “He got what he wanted and realized he didn’t want it anymore. He hit it and quit it, used her, felt pleasure, got over the infatuation and moved on” (WS18). Since relatively few students assumed an interest in sex only for the woman, we focus below on students’ explanations for the man’s behavior.

Students frequently characterized the sexless date for the man as fundamentally a pity date: A date he went on not because he had an interest in the woman but rather because he felt sorry for her. According to the student narratives, thinking it was just sex, the man found himself in an awkward situation when asked for a date. Although one solution would be simply to refuse the date, students said it would be unkind to be so direct. Sometimes the man’s date behavior was motivated by guilt for exploiting the woman for his own sexual purposes, as illustrated in the following:

The guy was being a jerk. He wants the thrilling experience without the commitment of a relationship. He was too much of a wimp the second time to be consistent and he probably feels embarrassed about exploiting the woman like he did. He felt that he should owe it to her by going on a second date as some sort of quasi-apology. He probably had another hot date waiting for him after the second one! (WS18)

However, students depicted a man who used a woman for his own desire very negatively in only a few cases; more often students portrayed him as somewhat noble or honorable. Rather than being a complete cad, he was recognized for at least trying to “let her down easy,” he had a “conscience,” or he felt “obligated” to give her a date despite his lack of interest in a relationship:

The girl hoped for some kind of relationship. On the second date the guy tried to start getting away from the girl in a gradual way. (MS18)

The second time, we notice that the woman asked him out and he felt obligated to go out with her, but his expectations were not the same as hers—that’s why it ended with just a kiss. He was sending a signal about what he thought of their relationship. Some men would be openly rude and refuse to see the girl the next time around but he was actually considerate to go out with her. (WS20)

This explanation itself was quite gendered, insinuating the woman was delicate and fragile and the man had to act with care not to hurt her. Thus, within the context of a traditional ritual—heterosexual dating—are embedded strong gendered beliefs about proper behavior for men and women that support male dominance and female subordination.

While it might seem that a person who was supposedly interested in sex only would strive to have sex again on the date, when we considered the narratives utilizing the sex-only explanation as a whole, a pattern emerged: Since the man did not want to be in a relationship, having sex again—particularly within the context of a relationship-signifying date—might have given “encouragement” or false hope to the partner and made it harder to extract himself later. By agreeing to go on the date but ending it with a kiss, the man was thus politely nipping the relationship in the bud. Justifying their interpretations in explaining the man’s sexless behavior, students often brought attention to the fact that it was the *woman* who asked for the date, indicating that if the man were interested in her, *he* would have requested the date himself. In explaining the woman’s sexless behavior, students did not use the same logic. In fact, when *he* requested the date, the students

assumed a mutual interest in a relationship. Even when students did not explicitly attribute the woman's date behavior to relationship interest, they often implied this by, for example, describing the woman as pleasantly surprised by the man's invitation and eager to make a good impression. England, Schafer, and Fogarty (2007) find that students overwhelmingly profess support for women initiating dates, but this is in sharp contrast to their actual practices. Based on the students' confusion about a woman asking a man on a date, women's date requests are clearly not the norm, and when they happen, students view them through a different lens. This difference in interpretation is further evidence of persistent unequal gender scripts around dating. In expectation and in practice, men initiate dates among college students and as such, take the lead in determining if there is a relationship possibility (Bogle 2008; Bradshaw, Kahn, and Saville 2010; England, Schafer, and Fogarty 2007; Rose and Frieze 1989). Thus, whereas dates and relationships are stereotyped as what women want, in line with previous studies, students' narratives suggested that it is men who largely control if and when this will happen.

Although students infrequently attributed the woman's date behavior to her interest in sex only (eight percent); of those students who did, men students were more likely to provide this explanation than women students (15 percent compared to 5 percent). This was the only explanation analyzed here in which men and women students' responses differed significantly ($\chi^2 = 5.23$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). Despite the relatively small percentage of students who gave this explanation, this difference suggests an interesting area for future research. Perhaps men view women as more sexually agentic and less restricted by gendered sexual scripts than do women. However, it may be that, because of their standpoint, women have more insight than men into the constraints on women's sexual and relational behavior.

CONCLUSION

Previous research often characterizes hookups as normless and thus bad for women, while positing traditional dates, with their established rules, rituals, and scripts, as better for women (Bogle 2008; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Regnerus and Uecker 2011). In contrast, by analyzing how undergraduate college students interpreted a woman and man's behavior in relation to a heterosexual hookup followed by a date, we find support for women's sexual agency in the context of a hookup but that the norms around dates may disadvantage women. Overall, both men and women

students' narratives reveal that when a hookup leads to a date, men are freer from potential negative judgment for the hookup, *and* they may actually be viewed positively for being considerate toward their partner by going on the date. These assumptions are based on and ultimately reproduce unequal gender and heterosexual power dynamics. Students' tendency to assume that a woman would welcome a man's initiation of a relationship, but a man would just as likely spurn as welcome a woman's initiation, reveals another way that men are privileged in the context of relationship building. Student narratives are in line with cultural scripts that men make the first move toward a relationship yet are less invested in relationships than women. Thus, heterosexual relationships may start off with a more gender-unequal pattern firmly established. Women are allowed to have fun at parties, but once it becomes a serious matter, traditional gender norms, which affirm men's prerogatives, take precedence.

Further, although students indicated that the date generally signified positive advance toward a relationship, they also suggested that this relationship may start off with a woman monitoring and modifying her behavior in an effort to win a man's approval. These power dynamics in turn have the potential to set the tone for the relationship as a whole. Our analyses also suggest that the consequences of a hookup for a woman's reputation are primarily activated in the context of a subsequent date. Student narratives strongly indicated that a hookup can remain a semianonymous, casual, and mutually pleasurable affair that carries few long-term consequences. However, when the potential for a relationship arises, a woman, but not a man, may feel compelled to engage in impression management to encourage her partner to see her as potential dating material. That is, the power of the sexual double standard, which somewhat dissipated in the party setting, came to the forefront in the date setting where, students suggested, the woman must essentially rescript herself as a "good" girl who does not "put out" on the first date.

The findings thus reveal the importance of context in the deployment of the sexual double standard. Because of the norms around parties and hookups, students asserted women can, and indeed, should act on their desire in this context. However, this more liberalized sexual script does not fully embrace women's sexual agency and may present particular quandaries for women around sexuality. It implies that women are sexual beings, but also suggests women need more of an excuse to act on their sexual desires, such as the consumption of alcohol and the expectation of anonymity. This new script instructs women to "be desirable but not *too* desiring" (a shift from "be desirable but not desiring"). Similarly, Kreager

and Staff (2009) find that high school girls who have had a couple of sexual partners—but not too many more than that—are the most popular among their peers (see also Ronen 2010). The gendered sexual scripts women encounter are thus contradictory. On the one hand, they afford women some level of freedom to express sexual desire if done parsimoniously, anonymously, or outside of intentions for a relationship. But on the other hand, they sanction women for pursuing their desires once the possibility of a relationship arises. In contrast, students characterized the man's hookup behavior in terms of his ever-present sexual desire and competitive spirit, which led him to enter the party with the goal of hooking up. His hookup was more premeditated and more often based on the assumption that his friends would find out and he would have bragging rights as opposed to hooking up based on the assumption of anonymity.

While we highlight salient gender differences, we also importantly acknowledge the similarity of students' explanations for both women's and men's hookup and date behaviors. Students attributed sexual desire to women and men in the context of a hookup and relationship interest to both in the context of a formal date following a hookup. Moreover, with one noted exception, men and women students did not differ in their explanations, indicating the strength of sexual scripts. While gender and sexual differences often make for more sensationalized reporting of findings, such emphases can contribute to a dichotomized portrayal of heterosexual and relational behaviors while failing to account for nuances in the commonalities and differences in women's and men's experiences (Giordano, Longmore, and Manning 2006). Hookups and dates on college campuses occur within the larger milieu of gender inequality, and our research indicates the ongoing presence of a sexual double standard that continues to disadvantage women with few repercussions for men. Yet this article also reveals that within the context of a hookup, students accorded women a sexual freedom not previously highlighted in the literature. Further, it is within the commonly accepted practice of a date that students held women to stricter standards of gendered behavior. Despite changes, gender and sexual scripts still disadvantage women, yet these inequities may not necessarily be present in the expected contexts.

Although our analyses shed light on the persistence of traditional gendered scripts and the emergence of new scripts, we do not know how students' attitudes and the scripts they use in interpreting others' behaviors may or may not reflect their own behaviors. Nor do we know how many of the student respondents have participated in a hookup or a formal date themselves, although clearly hookups and dates are common practices on

college campuses (England, Schafer, and Fogarty 2007). In addition, the vignette only described a heterosexual hookup and date, thereby marginalizing the experiences of gay and lesbian students in our sample. However, regardless of students' own sexual identities and experiences, all students have contact with dominant scripts concerning gender and sexuality through various socialization agents including family, peers, and media, and it is these scripts and how students use them to create meaning that interest us here.

Despite gendered inequalities associated with hooking up (Bogle 2008; England, Schafer, and Fogarty 2007), some types of hookups—particularly those that allow anonymity with “no strings attached”—may offer women a reprieve from the consequences of the sexual double standard. We are not suggesting that hooking up is a bastion of heterosexual equality, but rather that hookups may be one way women negotiate societal constraints and double standards. Furthermore, we argue that to gain a more nuanced and contextual perspective on heterosexual hookups on college campuses, scholars should assess the meaning of hooking up for students relative to other forms of intimate partnering such as formal dates and relationships. It is also imperative to attend to the gendered inequities embedded in the social structure rather than simply judge hookups and dates based on whether students experience these activities as positive or negative because it is the meanings, scripts, and power dynamics surrounding hooking up and dating that shape individuals' sexual and relational behaviors, experiences, and interpretations.

NOTE

1. We did not examine differences in explanations based on race/ethnicity because of sample limitations. Data on social class for our sample as well as for the university population were unavailable.

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