

Hookup Culture Hysteria: How Ambivalent Sexism Has Fuelled a Moral Panic

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*I understand that MLA 7 was not an ideal citation format for this paper, however, my scholarly writing class encouraged us to use the format we use in our majors. For the integrity of my submission, I did not want to change the product.

Pop superstar Katy Perry's hit song, "Last Friday Night" salutes to the weekend, celebrating teenagers "streaking in the park" and "skinny dipping in the dark" during a night of threesomes and too many shots (Gottwald, Martin, Mckee, n.p.). Her album *Teenage Dream* markets the track as an adolescent anthem, and the music video depicts the glamorous singer as a nerdy high schooler discovering the glory of sexual recklessness. Perry's lustful sentiments are not unique: pop culture is crazed with explicit narratives about wild youth. However, sexual freedom in the media is not always carefree. For instance, a 2011 movie titled *What's Your Number?* chronicles Ally, a woman who panics that she has not found a long term partner, only 19 hookups leading to nowhere. According to the mass media, Ally and Katy are products of a rampant hookup culture.

Although it is practically ubiquitous in popular discourse, hookup culture is an ambiguous term because hookups entail a variety of sexual behaviors ranging from kissing to oral sex and penetrative intercourse (Garcia, Reiber, Massey, Merriwether). Despite its vague definition, the phrase is used to describe increasingly normative casual sex behaviors that are blamed for the decline of dating (Garcia, et al). In fact, in the book *Unhooked: How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love, and Lose at Both*, journalist Laura Sessions Stepp asserts that romantic relationships are virtually disintegrating among young people. Based on the claim that hookup culture is a catastrophic social disease, Stepp urges women to "admit it, the bar scene is a guy thing" and embrace baking, since "guys will do anything for homemade baked goods" (88).

Augmenting *Unhooked's* argument, UCLA psychiatrist Miriam Grossman contends in her pamphlet "Sense & Sexuality" that hookup culture endangers women's

physical health in addition to their emotional well-being. Listing HPV, AIDS, and throat cancer as frightening consequences to casual sex, Grossman believes that sexual encounters cannot be untangled from unwanted emotional attachment and physical disease. Her best solution is to abstain from all uncommitted sex and avoid anal intercourse at all costs, since the “rectum is an exit, not an entrance” (Grossman, 13). In response to hypersexuality in media outlets like “Last Friday Night,” “Grey’s Anatomy,” and “Sex and the City,” Grossman maintains that “in real life, Meredith and Carrie would have warts or herpes. They’d likely be on Prozac or Zoloft” (17). Her alarm is not uncommon; in fact, there is some scholarly basis for these claims.

In “Sexual Hookup Culture: A Review,” psychologists from the Kinsey Institute and Binghamton University acknowledge hookup culture as an burgeoning social shift. Citing evolutionary theory and the rise of sexual media as causes, the article compiles extensive research suggesting that most emerging adults have had uncommitted sexual encounters (e.g. 60-80% of college students have had at least one hookup experience) (Garcia, et. al, 163). Additionally, the review elaborates on the various manifestations of hookup culture (e.g. “friends-with-benefits,” one-night-stands, and intoxicated encounters) and situates them primarily in a college context. Qualifying the claim that hookup culture is popular, the article suggests that hookup-regret is common, especially among females, as their pleasure is often neglected during casual sex. Contrary to Stepp and Grossman’s claims, “Sexual Hookup Culture: A Review” is hesitant to label hookups as inherently damaging, insisting instead that relationships are still very much alive and preferred by young people.

While “Sexual Hookup Culture: A Review” elaborates on valid research, it fails to situate the reality of modern sexuality in contrast to the media’s flagrantly

inaccurate construction of hookup culture. The review, like *Unhooked* and “Sense and Sexuality,” ignores how widespread sexism distorts perceptions of mainstream sexual behavior in an attempt to police women’s sexual freedom. In this article, I will refute Grossman and Stepp’s claim that hookup culture is destroying modern sexual attitudes. Despite the mass media’s dramatic depictions of heterosexual hookup culture, rates of casual sex are not skyrocketing or replacing dating relationships. Rather, the mainstream hysteria surrounding millennial's sexual behavior is a moral panic fuelled by resistance to changing gender norms. Rooted in ambivalent sexism and fear of female sexual expression, this notion that conventional dating scripts are threatened is amplified and illuminated by burgeoning social media and technology.

To develop my argument, I will first explore how the media’s hyperbolic hookup culture is not reflective of the sexual behaviors of today’s youth. Although I have already situated my argument in scholarly discourse and provided primary examples of hookup culture in the media, I will further investigate how hookup culture is discussed in mainstream culture. Even though I deny that there is a cultural shift to casual sex mania, I will examine how today’s sexual climate is actually changing and why that contributes to perceptions of hookup culture. Then, I will classify the misrepresentation of hookup culture as a moral panic, using past moral panics as reference points. Finally, I will analyze hookup culture discourse from a feminist lens, ultimately revealing how ambivalent sexism underlies the mainstream hysteria.

Before I investigate hookup culture as a moral panic, I must first identify how it is fallaciously constructed in mainstream society. Hookup culture is largely exaggerated, as the mass media portrays modern sexual culture as hedonistic, extreme, and sometimes dangerous. In some respects, this reality is rather obvious: as

a young college woman, I have not met many people who frequently have nights where they skinny dip and engage in ménages à trois like Katy Perry glorifies. Still, dating experts like Erica Gordon worry that hookup culture is extinguishing real connections between men and women. In her *EliteDaily* article, “How Accepting The Hook-Up Culture Is Getting 20-Somethings Nowhere,” she calls today’s age a “post-dating world,” where authentic (traditional) relationships are dwindling in exchange for empty sex (par. 6). Gordon insists that women only engage in hookup culture with the hope that men will love them eventually, and that this false hope will leave them heartbroken and alone. She notes that the pervasiveness of texting has eroded effective communication, contributing to a “whoever cares less wins” mentality (Gordon, par. 3).

Similarly, the *Vanity Fair* article, “Tinder and the Dawn of the Dating Apocalypse” laments how technology has caused dating to take a nosedive. Journalist Nancy Jo Sales describes her interviews with various twenty-somethings, providing vivid descriptions of their eyes glued to phone screens as they search for unbelievably easy sex at the swipe of a finger. One interview, with a bassist for an indie rock band, summarizes Sales’ argument nicely. Even though his rockstar persona makes it easy for him to find women, the musician still uses dating apps, explaining that he gets sexual with women “99 percent of the time before [he’s] even met them,” which is “fucking weird” (qtd. in Sales, n.p.).

Clearly, hookup culture is both portrayed and discussed in the media. It is easy to interpret Sales and Gordon’s sources as mirror images of society, especially when they include relatable anecdotal evidence. However, mass media must be analyzed critically and skeptically. Appearing in *The Journal of Sex Research* in 2002, Media and

Journalism professor Jane Brown's article "Mass Media Influences on Sexuality" argues that the media frames public perception by selectively keeping sexuality salient and relevant (42). Using Agenda Setting/Framing Theory as a critical framework, the article contends that media exposure can entrench gender roles and sexual scripts by enhancing society's awareness about sexuality (Brown, 44).

In the case of hookup culture, the media does inform perceptions of reality, rather than the other way around. Even though writers like Stepp and Sales detail a sexual free-for-all, young people are not engaging in sexual behavior at higher rates than previous generations. According to the General Social Survey, American young adults (18-25) do not have more partners total, more frequent sex, or more partners in the past year than samples from 1988-1996 (Monto, n.p.). Granted, Garcia's research is accurate that most millennials have hooked up; however, they don't get frisky often: about 80% of college students hookup one time or less per semester (Armstrong, England, & Hamilton, n.p.). Additionally, when today's young people are having sex, they are not engaging in risky behaviors at high rates. Rather than opting for unprotected intercourse, students generally select lighter encounters (e.g. oral sex, kissing, and manual stimulation of the genitals) (Armstrong, et al.). Young people also reduce risk by choosing to have casual sex with friends or exes more often than with strangers, making the musician in Sales' article a minority (Ford & England, n.p.).

Contrary to Gordon's fear that dating is dying, hooking up is not replacing relationships. By senior year, 69% of heterosexual college students had been in at least one monogamous relationship lasting at least six months (Armstrong, et al.). It makes sense that hookups aren't threatening relationships, considering that casual sex is not a new phenomenon. Even though the term "hooking up" is relatively recent,

uncommitted encounters have been occurring probably as long as sex has been happening. In fact, the most sexually active generation was the Baby Boomers, since the Sexual Revolution involved changes such as second-wave feminism and the widespread availability of birth control (Armstrong, et al.). While some millennials may be all for “free love,” about one third of partners hooking up do so in hopes that the sex will lead to a more traditional relationship (Manning, Giordano, & Longmore). Because uncommitted sexual encounters can be emotionally intimate, it is fallacious to assume that flings and relationships are mutually exclusive components of society. Ironically, young adults may feel some romantic spark hooking up, but they are not as likely to have sexual chemistry: college students orgasm more in relationships (Ford, et al.). This is especially significant for women, since men flagrantly overestimate how often their partners climax during casual sex (Ford, et al.).

Even though hookup culture is a false representation of today’s sexual climate, mainstream sexuality is changing in some ways. With the rise of third-wave feminism, men and women alike are increasingly exhibiting egalitarian attitudes about dating, despite the prevalence of traditional dating scripts (McCarty & Kelly, 237). In fact, when 217 Midwestern undergraduates responded to gender-stereotypic, gender-counter stereotypic, and egalitarian heterosexual dating vignettes, the gender-stereotypic and egalitarian scenarios were reviewed most favorably (McCarty & Kelly, 237). This rise of egalitarian attitudes has encouraged women to delay (or completely avoid) marriage in order to pursue careers and higher education. In the book *All the Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of the Independent Nation*, feminist Rebecca Traister celebrates that “abstention from or delay of marriage may have been a conscious

choice for some women in the 1970's and 1980's, but now it has simply become a mass behavior" (29).

Millennial blogger Tracy Moore substantiates Traister's claim in her article "Pearl-Clutching Alert: Ambitious College Sluts Taking Over Campuses." The blog post argues that female students who decide to keep sex casual often do so because they decided "college [is] 'me-time;'" they will "work on relationships later when [they] are ready" (Moore, n.p.). Although Moore's point about the burgeoning narrative of the independent woman is female-specific, young men are also increasingly encouraged to delay adult commitments as higher education gains even more importance in the workplace (Armstrong, et al.). This individualistic, future-oriented ideology relates to the notion of limited liability hedonism. Sociology professors Elizabeth Armstrong, Paula England, and Laura Hamilton contend that emerging adults modify aspects of the Sexual Revolution in ways that maximize fun while also curbing physical and emotional risks. Instead of recklessly engaging in unchecked sexual indulgence, many young people explore their sexuality in ways that do not jeopardize their futures (i.e. limited liability hedonism). This calculated caution explains why millennials increasingly engage in protected sex and tend to favor lighter, less risky encounters (oral sex, kissing, etc.) (Armstrong, et al.).

Echoing Armstrong, England, and Hamilton's theory, Kara Brown, who penned the blog post "Adults Think Millennials Don't Know How to Love" elaborates on how older generations tend to misinterpret limited liability hedonism. Her article, written for the feminist forum *Jezebel*, vehemently asks that parents refrain from judging their children's dating lives. Brown explains, "Baby boomers seem to assume that just because millennials won't put an official title on a relationship, it somehow means that

they value it less” (n.p). Instead, she suggests that kids are doing relationships differently because they want to be completely comfortable with commitment, especially when adults place so much significance around marriage.

Adult’s confusion about millennial’s hookup behavior is exacerbated by the technological revolution. For emerging adults, the private and public spheres converge more than ever before: the online world gives visibility to the social, political, and personal in a remarkably global way. As Jane Brown points out in “Mass Media Influences on Sexuality,” sexuality is expressed and discussed everywhere online; in fact, the word *sex* is the most prevalent search term on the internet (44). With apps like Tinder and websites like Match.com, romantic prospects are increasingly available, and relationships are thought of in unprecedented, nonspatial terms. In “How Technology Has Changed Romance,” millennial Bree Hare states “in the digital age, technology isn't killing courtship. But for many young couples, it's redefining what romance looks like” (n.p.). Indeed, the world of texting, Facebook, SnapChat, and eHarmony facilitates transparent, unfiltered discourse about sex and dating.

This enhanced visibility suggests that technology merely shines light on the prevalence of casual sex, since research substantiates that young adult sexual behaviors have not drastically changed in decades. Contrary to Sales’ claim in “Tinder and the Dawn of the Dating Apocalypse,” social media has not turned romantic beings into sex-crazed zombies. Undoubtedly, it has revealed the inherent sex-crazed zombie in some people, but for others others, technology has kindled incredible bonds. Hare cites one interview in which a woman in a long-distance relationship says “for me and Josh, being romantic is having one night a week where [we're] eating together on

Skype” (n.p.). Rather than feeding a monstrous hookup culture, social media, texting, and the internet liberate romantic and sexual behaviors formerly shrouded in privacy.

However benign these social shifts may be, they are distorted and misconstrued by the media, signifying a moral panic. In his seminal work, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, Stanley Cohen defines moral panic as a widespread reaction that occurs when an idea, person, or group emerges as a threat to society’s values and sense of security. Moral panics can revolve around legitimate crises or completely false hazards; they are uniquely new phenomena, but also “old camouflaged versions of traditional and well-known evils” (Cohen, viii). Scholars Eric Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda operationalize the concept with five criteria: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility (158). In other words, moral panics embody the sudden eruption of social anxiety that provokes hostility toward threatening groups. This reaction is disproportionately hysterical to the actual risk present.

More specifically, sexual panics are a subset of moral panics that ignite when the collective consciousness becomes inundated with apprehension about some sort of sexual behavior that could corrupt future generations (Herdt, 6). Often shaped and staged by the media, sexual panics campaign to strip the “sexual other” (who is often painted as oversexed or undersexed) of his/her rights by juxtaposing the righteous majority with the denounced scapegoat (Herdt, 5).

To defend my claim that hookup culture is a moral/sexual panic, I will first examine past moral panics and their social contexts. Perhaps the quintessential moral panic is the Salem Witch Trials, a notorious series of executions that was driven by religious fanaticism, paranoia, and lapses in due process. Almost 300 years later,

satanic panics revived in the form of unfounded hysteria about ritual abuse promoted by conservative Christians, conspiracy theorists, law enforcement, and psychologists. The 1980's also birthed the infamous War on Drugs, an era when citizens widely believed that drug use was sweeping the nation when it was, in fact, declining. While some of these panics bleed into today, more recent societal alarm revolves around violent video games, vaccination dangers, xenophobia, religious intolerance, and even witchcraft in the *Harry Potter* novels.

A particularly notable moral panic involved the hysteria and misinformation surrounding the AIDS epidemic. On the surface, the mainstream fear of AIDS resulted from the lack of knowledge about the nature of the disease and its transmission. Obviously, the virus was greatly misunderstood; however, this ignorance intensified preexisting homophobic notions about the evil of same-sex intercourse and the inherent cleanliness of heteronormative behaviors. Sociologist Gary Dowsett verifies that the media stigmatized AIDS as "The Gay Plague" by circulating ample reports of homosexual scandal validated by pseudo-scientific accounts, one of which detailed AIDS transmission through a shared bottle with a gay man (130). Even though the initial known incidences of AIDS were among Haitians, heroin users, and hemophiliacs, homosexuality was positioned at the center of popular discourse. In fact, heterosexual basketball star Magic Johnson consistently fended off assertions that he was gay, since his 1991 diagnosis aroused public suspicion of perceived sexual deviance (Dowsett, 135). Although AIDS is a real and tragic crisis, its construction in the media qualifies as a sexual panic because it wrongfully demonized gays as "sexual others" to blame for the spread of the disease. Beneath this episodic cultural fear lies

America's persistent anxiety provoked by tension between sexual progressivism and tradition.

Similarly, alarm about pornography has provoked a sexual panic, particularly among the religious right. Granted, there are legitimate problems with the porn industry and its treatment and depiction of women. Parents should certainly discuss with their children how porn misrepresents real sexual encounters and the emotional intimacy they often entail. However, traditional purity movements dramatize porn as a social evil that contrasts their conservative agendas. For instance, the Christian activist group Concerned Women for America (CWA) compares pornography to crack cocaine and blames it for divorce, impotency, shrinking brain size, and even child-on-child rape ("Sexual Exploitation" & "10 Harms of Pornography.") Instead of advocating for the rights of sex workers harmed or sexistly depicted in pornography, CWA and other purity movements use scare-tactics to inflate the detriment of porn and scapegoat porn users as dangerous to themselves and society, when in fact there is sparse research on porn, since many people lie or are unwilling to discuss their viewing habits. In fact, in his book *His Porn, Her Pain: Confronting America's Porn Panic with Honest Talk about Sex*, therapist Marty Klein explains that porn manifests sexual fantasies that have very little predictive value regarding actual sexual behavior. As demonstrated by the massive failure of abstinence only sex education, anti-porn hysteria focuses more on policing sexuality than facilitating progress. If women's rights were really at the heart of the issue, CWA would be boycotting romance novels for their unrealistic depictions of women as well.

With these historical episodes as reference points, it is easy to see that hookup culture is a moral panic: society reacts disproportionately to the threat of uncommitted

copulation, even though millennial practices are not truly shaking society's sexual foundation. However, it is less clear why this sexual hysteria erupted in the first place if it is unwarranted by factual evidence. In the case of the aforementioned panics, a deeper cultural fear underlies society's widespread concern (e.g. homophobia powered the AIDS panic, while religious fundamentalism incited concern about pornography.) According to Stanley Cohen, the root causes of moral panics are "rather predictable" (viii). Unsurprisingly, opponents of the perceived hookup culture are disturbed by age-old topics of contention: sex and female freedom.

The discrepancy between the reality of what is changing and the way that hookup culture is portrayed in the media reflects society's internalized and outright ambivalent sexism. According to Megan McCarty and Janice Kelly's study "Perceptions of Dating Behavior," Ambivalent Sexism Theory posits that gender inequality endures because of hostile and benevolent attitudes toward women that secure the status quo. Reflecting stereotypical notions of misogyny, hostile sexism punishes women who deviate from gendered expectations. Often, this prejudiced mindset entails the belief that women, the "dirtier sex," are contaminated by sexual encounters outside of wedlock. More subtly, benevolent sexism restricts female liberation by celebrating women who remain traditional. Because of its positive facade, benevolent attitudes are frequently internalized by men and women alike. The perception that women are caregivers who must settle into the domestic sphere under a husband's protection is a prominent example of benevolent sexism.

Currently, ambivalent sexism and egalitarian ideologies compete as widely held outlooks in society, generating mixed messages about the appropriateness of uncommitted sexual relationships. McCarty and Kelly's aforementioned study,

“Perceptions of Dating Behavior” notes that even as college-aged students endorse egalitarian attitudes, gendered dating scripts still prevail. When a sample of Midwestern undergraduates judged the warmth, appropriateness, and competence of men and women in various dating scenarios, the gender stereotypic narratives were evaluated most favorably, suggesting that millennials still prefer that men assume active dating roles and that females embody demure, sexually reserved personas. Predictably, counter-stereotypic gender roles were mostly reviewed negatively, implying that college-students widely believe that it is inappropriate for women to take initiative and assume male behaviors, such as paying for a date. This traditionalism is in tension with the current tide of egalitarianism; feminist author Jessica Valenti points out that the mixed societal messages give women conflicting options: “live up to the ideal of purity” or choose the sexualized alternative promoted by songs like “Last Friday Night” (10).

Because ambivalent sexism is entrenched in today’s collective consciousness, benign changes to millennial dating culture are viewed as threats to traditional gender structures, provoking a moral panic. To the media, hookup culture represents unchecked female autonomy. In a world where casual sex is acceptable, women are free to pursue pleasure outside the confines of the gendered scripts ambivalent sexism reinforces. Even though casual sex is nothing new, the open sexual dialogue that technology facilitates erodes religious dating tradition and sentimental, romantic notions of sex. Jessica Valenti explains this phenomenon in her book “The Purity Myth” by connecting female sexual behavior to society’s conceptions of morality. Valenti argues that, in society’s eyes, a woman’s moral compass resides between her legs; “her worth lies in her ability—or her refusal—to be sexual,” which is mitigated—but not

erased--by rising egalitarian attitudes (10). Ultimately, this virgin/whore dichotomy ensures that women are distrusted and judged regardless of whether or not they are pure or sexualized, so it is left to men to decide what's best for them. As the narrative of the independent, unmarried, and professional woman blooms, this once-fixed patriarchal hold must desperately cling to power.

The double-edged sword that oversexualizes women in the media but punishes them for having sexual autonomy is anchored in ambivalent sexism. Hookup culture is blown out of proportion by people who harbor hostile sexist attitudes because they generally judge promiscuity. This misogyny is especially evident in rhetoric that labels women as "dirty" or "clean" based on their sexual behavior. Somehow, men remain uncontaminated (even exalted) after sex, yet women who "sleep around" become filthy sluts, whores, or--as a classmate of mine once said-- "cumdumpsters." This dialogue is especially sinister in abstinence movements. At the Eighth Annual Abstinence Clearinghouse Conference, preacher Darren Washington related the female body to a wrapped lollipop. He affirmed that, "when [a woman has] sex with a man, he unwraps your lollipop and sucks on it. It may feel great at the time, but, unfortunately, when he's done with you, all you have left for your next partner is a poorly wrapped, saliva-fouled sucker" (qtd. In Valenti, 41). In addition to promoting the fallacious notion that the female body wilts after a premarital encounter, Washington also frames his message to imply that a woman must behave for a man she has not even met yet. Ironically, "Perceptions of Dating Behavior" notes that men who hold hostile sexist attitudes like this are more likely to take advantage of women sexually (239).

Meanwhile, casual sex threatens benevolent sexists because they see women as "weak beings who ought to be protected and provided for by men" (Gaunt, 3). In fact,

benevolent sexism has even pervaded the feminist movement, with women like Miriam Grossman (“Sense and Sexuality”) and Laura Sessions Stepp (*Unhooked*) pleading for women to either seek refuge in relationships or not engage with men at all. Ironically, hookup culture is often labeled as inherently sexist; bloggers like Erica Gordon (“How Accepting The Hook-Up Culture Is Getting 20-Somethings Nowhere”) insist that casual sex invites men to use women and trample all over their feelings. As flawed as it is, this viewpoint is understandable: American culture is laden with victim-blaming rhetoric that teaches women that if they are raped or abused, it is their fault. It makes sense that Gordon would heed fellow women to seek close and safe romantic relations, but in a world where men are not effectively reproached for sexual and domestic violence, Gordon’s attitude extends victim-blaming attitudes.

While it is valid that hookups can leave women vulnerable, relationships are not always paragons of safety either. “Is Hooking Up Bad for Young Women?” examines the dark side of commitment, referencing interviews with college students chronicling manipulation, physical and emotional abuse, and interference with friendships and personal goals. According to the most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control, over 10 million women and men in the United States experience intimate partner violence each year, and over 1 in 5 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced some form of relationship violence in their lifetime (“Intimate Partner Violence Surveillance, 1). Even though hookups and relationships each carry risks, to anti-hookup activists, the latter secures gendered scripts, whereas the former expands female freedom. Even if relationships guaranteed safety, stigmatizing and exaggerating hookup culture still polices female sexuality and shames female choice. The target of this disgrace is certainly women, since hookup culture discourse starkly avoids covering how casual

sex hurts men. In fact, throughout my extensive research process, I never once encountered a source concerned with why men should avoid the bar take up baking.

Ultimately, the number of double standards like this is countless. The fact is, hookup culture alarm is not an isolated incident; it is symptomatic of the long-lasting battle for female freedom. Whether it be through technological forums, career paths, marriage decisions, or sexual choices, reclaiming the female voice is dangerous. Even though outright hostile sexism is diminishing, benevolent sexism remains entrenched in modern consciousnesses, complicating the rise of egalitarian attitudes that offer women the right to decide an identity uninfluenced by the male gaze. Founded in the belief that a woman's worth is inseparable from her sexuality, the media has spearheaded a moral panic claiming that casual sex is a rampant, glamorous, destructive social illness infecting today's young women. Reality, on the other hand, tells a different story: casual sex is not massively undermining relationships or promoting recklessness. For some women, hooking-up minimizes risk when in the midst of pursuing a career or degree.

Unfortunately, this narrative of the achieving, balanced woman makes for a dull headline in contemporary America, especially if this woman deviates from the "strict father morality" dictating that men know best (Valenti, 221). By dichotomizing "good girls" in line with male expectations and "bad girls" whose sluttiness warrants whatever consequence comes their way, the media manufactures a world concerned with imagined notions of casual sex rather than severely dangerous threats like rape culture. Fundamentally, the hysteria surrounding hookup culture is a destructive distraction. By sensationalizing hookup culture, the media neglects real problems real women are facing: prejudice, violence, poverty, single parenthood, violence, and

sexual harassment (to name a few). To combat these issues, women and men alike must generate media, education, community initiatives, and dialogue that facilitates awareness and change, rather than panic.

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