

[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/14/fashion/sex-on-campus-she-can-play-that-game-too.html?pagewanted=all&r=4&utm\\_source=General+Email+list+for+Weekly+Updates&utm\\_campaign=d5453efa22-March\\_16th\\_Weekly\\_Update03\\_16\\_2011&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_778f4d28f1-d5453efa22-233038237&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/14/fashion/sex-on-campus-she-can-play-that-game-too.html?pagewanted=all&r=4&utm_source=General+Email+list+for+Weekly+Updates&utm_campaign=d5453efa22-March_16th_Weekly_Update03_16_2011&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_778f4d28f1-d5453efa22-233038237&)

July 12, 2013

Sex on Campus: She Can Play That Game, Too

By KATE TAYLOR

At 11 on a weeknight earlier this year, her work finished, a slim, pretty junior at the University of Pennsylvania did what she often does when she has a little free time. She texted her regular hookup — the guy she is sleeping with but not dating. What was he up to? He texted back: Come over. So she did. They watched a little TV, had sex and went to sleep.

Their relationship, she noted, is not about the meeting of two souls.

“We don’t really like each other in person, sober,” she said, adding that “we literally can’t sit down and have coffee.”

Ask her why she hasn’t had a relationship at Penn, and she won’t complain about the death of courtship or men who won’t commit. Instead, she’ll talk about “cost-benefit” analyses and the “low risk and low investment costs” of hooking up.

“I positioned myself in college in such a way that I can’t have a meaningful romantic relationship, because I’m always busy and the people that I am interested in are always busy, too,” she said.

“And I know everyone says, ‘Make time, make time,’ ” said the woman, who spoke on the condition of anonymity but agreed to be identified by her middle initial, which is A. “But there are so many other things going on in my life that I find so important that I just, like, can’t make time, and I don’t want to make time.”

It is by now pretty well understood that traditional dating in college has mostly gone the way of the landline, replaced by “hooking up” — an ambiguous term that can signify anything from making out to oral sex to intercourse — without the emotional entanglement of a relationship.

Until recently, those who studied the rise of hookup culture had generally assumed that it was driven by men, and that women were reluctant participants, more interested in romance than in casual sexual encounters. But there is an increasing realization that young women are propelling it, too.

Hanna Rosin, in her recent book, “The End of Men,” argues that hooking up is a functional strategy for today’s hard-charging and ambitious young women, allowing them to have enjoyable sex lives while focusing most of their energy on academic and professional goals.

But others, like Susan Patton, the Princeton alumna and mother who in March wrote a letter to The Daily Princetonian urging female undergraduates not to squander the chance to hunt for a husband on campus, say that de-emphasizing relationships in college works against women.

“For most of you, the cornerstone of your future and happiness will be inextricably linked to the man you marry, and you will never again have this concentration of men who are worthy of you,” advised Ms. Patton, who has two sons, one a Princeton graduate and the other a current student. In many places, Ms. Patton was derided for wanting to return to the days of the “Mrs. degree,” though a few female writers, noting how hard it can be for women to find mates in their 30s, suggested that she might have a point. (Ms. Patton just landed a book deal with a division of Simon & Schuster.)

As lengthy interviews over the school year with more than 60 women at Penn indicated, the discussion is playing out in the lives of a generation of women facing both broader opportunities and greater pressures than perhaps any before, both of which helped shape their views on sex and relationships in college.

Typical of elite universities today, Penn is filled with driven young women, many of whom aspire to be doctors, lawyers, politicians, bankers or corporate executives like Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg or Yahoo's Marissa Mayer. Keenly attuned to what might give them a competitive edge, especially in a time of unsure job prospects and a shaky economy, many of them approach college as a race to acquire credentials: top grades, leadership positions in student organizations, sought-after internships. Their time out of class is filled with club meetings, sports practice and community-service projects. For some, the only time they truly feel off the clock is when they are drinking at a campus bar or at one of the fraternities that line Locust Walk, the main artery of campus.

These women said they saw building their résumés, not finding boyfriends (never mind husbands), as their main job at Penn. They envisioned their 20s as a period of unencumbered striving, when they might work at a bank in Hong Kong one year, then go to business school, then move to a corporate job in New York. The idea of lugging a relationship through all those transitions was hard for many to imagine. Almost universally, the women said they did not plan to marry until their late 20s or early 30s.

In this context, some women, like A., seized the opportunity to have sex without relationships, preferring "hookup buddies" (regular sexual partners with little emotional commitment) to boyfriends. Others longed for boyfriends and deeper attachment. Some women described a dangerous edge to the hookup culture, of sexual assaults and degrading encounters enabled by drinking and distinguished by a lack of emotional connection.

The women interviewed came from all corners of Penn's population. They belonged to sororities (or would never dream of it), reported for the school newspaper, sang or danced in performance groups, played sports. Some spent almost every weekend night at a "downtown" (a fraternity party at a nightclub, where men paid for bottle service) or at a campus bar. Others preferred holing up in the library or hanging out with the theater crowd. They came from all over the country, and as far away as China and Africa. Some had gone to elite private high schools; others were on full scholarship. They came from diverse racial backgrounds, and several were first-generation immigrants. They were found in a wide variety of ways, from chance encounters in coffee shops to introductions from friends.

Because they believed that talking publicly about sex could come back to haunt them — by damaging their reputations at Penn, their families' opinions of them or their professional future — the women spoke on the condition that their full names would not be revealed. Most are identified by their first or middle names or by a middle initial. They spoke over the course of the academic year, often repeatedly and at length.

#### An Economic Calculation

For A., college is an endless series of competitions: to get into student clubs, some of which demand multiple rounds of interviews; to be selected for special research projects and the choicest internships; and, in the end, to land the most elite job offers.

As A. explained her schedule, "If I'm sober, I'm working."

In such an overburdened college life, she said, it was rare for her and her friends to find a relationship worth investing time in, and many people avoided commitment because they assumed that someone better would always come along.

"We are very aware of cost-benefit issues and trading up and trading down, so no one wants to be too tied to someone that, you know, may not be the person they want to be with in a couple of months," she said.

Instead, she enjoyed casual sex on her terms — often late at night, after a few drinks, and never at her place, she noted, because then she would have to wash the sheets.

Nationally, women now outnumber men in college enrollment by 4 to 3 and outperform them in graduation rates and advanced degrees. Some researchers have argued that the gender imbalance fosters a culture of hooking up because men, as the minority, hold more power in the sexual marketplace, and they prefer casual sex to long-term relationships.

But Elizabeth A. Armstrong, a sociologist at the University of Michigan who studies young women's sexuality, said that women at elite universities were choosing hookups because they saw relationships as too demanding and potentially too distracting from their goals.

In interviews, "Some of them actually said things like, 'A relationship is like taking a four-credit class,' or 'I could get in a relationship, or I could finish my film,'" Dr. Armstrong said.

Increasingly, she said, many privileged young people see college as a unique life stage in which they don't — and shouldn't — have obligations other than their own self-development.

Women say, "I need to take this time for myself — I'm going to have plenty of time to focus on my husband and kids later," Dr. Armstrong said. "I need to invest in my career, I need to learn how to be independent, I need to travel." People use this reference to this life stage to claim a lot of space for a lot of different kinds of things."

Some women also want to wait to see how men turn out as they advance through their 20s.

A., for example, said that she did not want to settle down until she could choose a partner knowing that his goals and values were fixed.

"I've always heard this phrase, 'Oh, marriage is great, or relationships are great — you get to go on this journey of change together,'" she said. "That sounds terrible.

"I don't want to go through those changes with you. I want you to have changed and become enough of your own person so that when you meet me, we can have a stable life and be very happy."

In the meantime, from A.'s perspective, she was in charge of her own sexuality.

"I definitely wouldn't say I've regretted any of my one-night stands," she said.

"I'm a true feminist," she added. "I'm a strong woman. I know what I want."

At the same time, she didn't want the number of people she had slept with printed, and she said it was important to her to keep her sexual life separate from her image as a leader at Penn.

"Ten years from now, no one will remember — I will not remember — who I have slept with," A. said. "But I will remember, like, my transcript, because it's still there. I will remember what I did. I will remember my accomplishments and places my name is hung on campus."

## **Independent Women**

Susan Patton says women like A. are making a mistake.

Ms. Patton, who graduated from Princeton in 1977 and is now a human resources consultant in New York, said in an interview that she wrote her letter after attending a conference on Princeton's campus, where she took part in a discussion about careers with a group of female students. At one point, she asked the young women if any of them wanted to marry and have children. They at first appeared shocked by the question, then looked at one another for reassurance before, she said, "sheepishly" raising their hands.

"I thought, 'My gosh, what have we come to that these brilliant young women are afraid to say that marriage and children are significant parts of what they view as their lifelong happiness?'" Ms. Patton said.

"They have gotten such strong, vitriolic messages from the extreme feminists saying, 'Go it alone — you don't need a man,'" she added.

But, in fact, many of the Penn women said that warnings not to become overly involved in a relationship came not from feminists, but from their parents, who urged them to be independent.

“That’s one thing that my mom has always instilled in me: ‘Make decisions for yourself, not for a guy,’ ” one senior at Penn said.

A friend of hers, who attended a nearby college and did have a serious boyfriend, said that she felt as if she were breaking a social taboo. “Am I allowed to find the person that I want to spend the rest of my life with when I’m 19?” she said. “I don’t really know. It feels like I’m not.”

Even if they did meet someone they were interested in, some women said the logistics of a relationship were just too hard. Some described extracurricular commitments — running debate tournaments for local high school students, or organizing Model United Nations conferences — that took up 30 to 40 hours a week, and came on top of going to class, doing homework and, in the case of less-wealthy students, work-study jobs. Some relationships ended, or never got off the ground, simply because schedules didn’t align.

Moreover, by senior year, the looming prospect of graduation and job applications made many students leery of dating.

“There’s this hypothetical, ‘I would like to be in a relationship, because it’s like comforting and stable and supportive,’ ” a senior, Pallavi, said of her friends’ attitudes. “But then, the conversations that I’ve had, it’s always like, ‘Well, then what do I do when we get to May, because we’re graduating, and so where do we go from there?’ That uncertainty is a huge sort of stop sign.”

She had dated a few men in college but said that she wasn’t sure if she wanted to get married. With the economy changing, and people less likely to have straight career tracks, she thought that the uncertainty and the need to be mobile might discourage people from marrying.

For herself, she was planning to stay in Philadelphia for two years to pursue a master’s degree part time while working for the university, then possibly get a Ph.D. and a law degree somewhere else. That pretty much precluded a serious relationship, she said.

“Hypothetically, if I were to enter into a serious relationship with someone right now,” she said, “would I honestly say to them: ‘We’re going to spend two years in Philadelphia, and then with some kind of crazy luck I’m going to spend eight years somewhere else? And God knows what you would have been doing for the two years that we were still in Philadelphia — you either would have to up and leave with me, or we’d have to do a long-distance.’ That’s just too much to even ask anyone to commit to.”

### **Adapt, Have Fun**

Some women went to college wanting a relationship, but when that seemed unlikely, they embraced hooking up as the best alternative. M., an athletic freshman with long legs and a button nose, arrived at college a virgin and planned to wait to have sex until she had her first boyfriend, something she expected to happen in college. But over the course of the fall, as she saw very few students forming relationships, she began to lose hope about finding a boyfriend and to see her virginity as a hindrance.

“I could be here for four years and not date anyone,” she said she realized. “Sometimes you are out, and there’s a guy you really are attracted to, and you kind of want to go back home with him, but you kind of have that underlying, ‘I can’t, because I can’t just lose my V-card to some random guy.’ ”

At a party in the spring semester, she was taking a break from dancing when she ran into a guy she had had a class with in the fall. They started talking, then danced until the party was over. M. went back to his room, where they talked some more and then started making out.

By this time, she said, “I wasn’t very drunk — I was close to sober,” which made her believe she could make a considered decision.

“I’m like, ‘O.K., I could do this now,’ ” she recalled thinking. “ ‘He’s superhot, I like him, he’s nice. But I’m not going to expect anything out of it, either.’ ”

The alternative, she said, was that “I could take the chance that one night I get really drunk and sleep with someone that I don’t want to sleep with, which probably is what would have ended up happening.”

So she had sex with him. In the morning, he walked her home.

“Honestly, all of my friends, they’re super envious, because I came back with the biggest smile on my face,” M. said. As she had expected, she and the guy remained friendly but nothing more. Yet she was still happy with her decision.

“All of my friends are jealous, because I had such a great first experience,” she added. Over spring break, she slept with someone else.

In general, she said, she thought that guys at Penn controlled the hookup culture. But women played a role as well.

“It’s kind of like a spiral,” she said. “The girls adapt a little bit, because they stop expecting that they’re going to get a boyfriend — because if that’s all you’re trying to do, you’re going to be miserable. But at the same time, they want to, like, have contact with guys.” So they hook up and “try not to get attached.”

Now, she said, she and her best friend had changed their romantic goals, from finding boyfriends to finding “hookup buddies,” which she described as “a guy that we don’t actually really like his personality, but we think is really attractive and hot and good in bed.”

### **The Default Is Yes**

For many Penn students, their initiation into the sexual culture takes place at fraternity parties during New Student Orientation, a five-day period before classes start in the fall, which, along with Spring Fling in April, is known as the biggest partying time of the year.

“You go in, and they take you down to a dark basement,” Haley, a blond, pink-cheeked senior, recalled of her first frat parties in freshman year. “There’s girls dancing in the middle, and there’s guys lurking on the sides and then coming and basically pressing their genitals up against you and trying to dance.”

Dancing like that felt good but dirty, and like a number of girls, Haley said she had to be drunk in order to enjoy it. Women said universally that hookups could not exist without alcohol, because they were for the most part too uncomfortable to pair off with men they did not know well without being drunk. One girl, explaining why her encounters freshman and sophomore year often ended with fellatio, said that usually by the time she got back to a guy’s room, she was starting to sober up and didn’t want to be there anymore, and giving the guy oral sex was an easy way to wrap things up and leave.

In November of Haley’s freshman year, a couple of months after her first tentative “Difmos,” or dance-floor makeouts, she went to a party with a boy from her floor. She had too much to drink, and she remembered telling him that she wanted to go home.

Instead, she said, he took her to his room and had sex with her while she drifted in and out of consciousness. She woke up with her head spinning. The next day, not sure what to think about what had happened, she described the night to her friends as though it were a funny story: I was so drunk, I fell asleep while I was having sex! She played up the moment in the middle of the night when the guy’s roommate poked his head in the room and asked, “Yo, did you score?”

Only later did Haley begin to think of what had happened as rape — a disturbingly common part of many women’s college experience. In a 2007 survey funded by the Justice Department of 6,800 undergraduates at two big public universities, nearly 14 percent of women said they had been victims of at least one completed sexual assault at college; more than half of the victims said they were incapacitated from drugs or alcohol at the time.

The close relationship between hooking up and drinking leads to confusion and disagreement about the line between a “bad hookup” and assault. In 2009, 2010 and 2011, 10 to 16 forcible sex offenses were reported annually to campus security as taking place on Penn’s campus or in the immediate neighborhood.

In January, Penn announced that it was forming a commission, led by a faculty member, to study the impact of alcohol and drug use on campus, with a particular focus on sexual violence.

When drinking is involved, Haley said, “Guys assume that the default answer is always yes.”

“I think a lot of guys get the idea: ‘O.K., this girl’s coming to this party, and she’s drinking. That means her goal of the night is to hook up with somebody,’ ” she said. “They’re like, ‘O.K., she came out, and if she dressed like that, it must mean that she wanted to hook up.’ ”

A friend of hers, Kristy, shared a story about a different kind of coercion. She had been making out with a guy at his house, not sure how far she wanted to go, when he stood up and told her, “Get down on your knees.”

At first she froze. “I was really taken aback, because I was like, no one has ever said that to me before,” she said. Then he said something like, “ ‘I think that’s fair,’ ” she recalled. When she still hesitated, he pushed her down.

“It was at that point that I was like, ‘I’ll just do it,’ ” she said. “I was like, ‘ “It will be over soon enough.’ ”

Paula England, a sociologist at New York University, who led an online survey of 24,000 students at 21 universities called the Online College Social Life Survey, said that women tended to fare much better sexually in relationships than in hookups.

“Guys don’t seem to care as much about women’s pleasure in the hookup, whereas they do seem to care quite a bit in the relationships,” Dr. England said. By contrast, women “seem to have this idea they’re supposed to be pleasing in both contexts.” In hookups, women were much more likely to give men oral sex than to receive it.

Part of the reason men aren’t as focused on pleasing women in hookups, Dr. England said, is the lingering sexual double standard, which sometimes causes men to disrespect women precisely for hooking up with them.

There is judgment from other women, too — two women said they had been rejected from sororities because of their sexual reputations. And technology has made it easier to spread gossip. One woman recalled a guy showing her an e-mail he had received on his fraternity Listserv, in which another guy described having sex with a girl in the bathroom at a club.

“They’re not afraid to use names,” she said of the men, adding, “I’m sure there’s been a story about me on a Listserv. It happens to everyone.”

### **Opting Out**

For all the focus on hookups, campuses are not sexual free-for-alls, at Penn or elsewhere. At colleges nationally, by senior year, 4 in 10 students are either virgins or have had intercourse with only one person, according to the Online College Social Life Survey. Nearly 3 in 10 said that they had never had a hookup in college. Meanwhile, 20 percent of women and a quarter of men said they had hooked up with 10 or more people.

Mercedes, a junior at Penn who is on financial aid, said that at her mostly Latino public high school in California, it was the troubled and unmotivated students who drank and hooked up, while the honors students who wanted to go to college kept away from those things.

When she went to Penn, she was surprised to see her elite classmates drinking, but even more surprised by the casual making out. She would go along with her friends to fraternity parties, but she refused to dance with strangers or to kiss anyone.

“Sharing that side of myself with a stranger just seems very strange to me,” she said in September. “I mean, if you break it down, it’s a very strange thing to do.”

Her unease was common among students from relatively modest backgrounds, said Dr. Armstrong, the University of Michigan sociologist. In one study, conducted with Laura Hamilton, now a professor at the University of California, Merced, Dr. Armstrong followed roughly 50 women from their freshman year at Indiana University in 2004 until the end of their college careers. They found that the women from wealthier backgrounds were much more likely to hook up, more interested in postponing adult responsibilities and warier of serious romantic commitment than their less-affluent classmates.

The women from less-privileged backgrounds looked at their classmates who got drunk and hooked up as immature.

At Penn, Mercedes said: “Everyone else seemed to live life, not really care about what they were doing. Like, ‘You’re only young once,’ they had that sort of mentality. And I didn’t understand why I couldn’t be, like, free-spirited, and not really care about the consequences of my actions.”

She added, “Nothing is stopping me from rebelling. I just didn’t rebel.”

By the start of her junior year, Mercedes had still never kissed anyone. Then in the fall, she found herself often getting into late-night conversations with a boy in her dorm. They talked about their studies, their families, politics. One weekend he invited her to a poetry slam off campus. The next night, they shyly confessed that they liked each other and had their first kiss.

Interviewed again in the spring, she said things were proceeding slowly but steadily. The two never had to hook up. They were just dating, getting to know each other in the old-fashioned way.

Physically, they had not gone further than making out, Mercedes said, and she thought she might want to wait to have sex until marriage. “It’s not like I’m doing it because of my reputation,” she said. “It’s not because a religion tells me to wait. I think of it more as, this is the way I want to emotionally connect to someone, and I think that only a person who deserves me to be emotionally attached to them should have that opportunity to see me in that way.”

## **Romantics**

Catherine, a Penn senior, had found hooking up in college to be a continual source of heartbreak. She had repeatedly made the mistake of thinking that because she was sleeping with someone, they were in a relationship, only to be disabused when the guy broke things off abruptly. The only glimmer of light had been a friendship with a guy she had met while studying abroad in Ireland, which blossomed into a romance just before she had to leave. Although, because of the distance, they ended up not pursuing a relationship, the experience had given her hope for the future.

In Catherine’s view, her classmates tried very hard to separate sex from emotion, because they believed that getting too attached to someone would interfere with their work. They saw a woman’s marrying young as either proof of a lack of ambition or a tragic mistake that would stunt her career.

But Catherine noted that a handful of young women are starting to question that idea. In an article on Slate titled “Marry Young,” the writer Julia Shaw, who married at 23, said her generation was missing out on the support that young couples could provide each other as they faced the challenges of early adulthood.

“Marriage wasn’t something we did after we’d grown up, it was how we have grown up and grown together,” she wrote of herself and her husband.

As a teenager, Catherine had thought she would wait to get married until her late 20s or early 30s. But her college experiences had made her think that she would rather marry young than throw away a good relationship because it wasn’t the right time.

That might mean having to pass up certain career opportunities, for geographic reasons. But Catherine thought that her peers underestimated how hard it was to find the right person to be with — as hard, perhaps, as finding the right job.

“People kind of discount” how “difficult it is to find someone that you even remotely like, let alone really fall for,” she said. “And losing that can be just as impractical and harmful to yourself, if not more so, than missing out on a job or something like that. What else do you really have at the end of your life?”