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College Students' Expectations for Hook-Ups

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Abstract

This study was designed to examine college students' expectations for engaging in sexual "hook-ups" (i.e., brief sexual encounters between two people who have not had a previous sexual relationship). In particular, expectations before and after a hook-up were considered, and a comparison was made between the expectations of college males versus college females. Sixty-six college students (66.7% female) completed a questionnaire (including both open-ended and closed-ended questions) on their own hook-up history (e.g., "Approximately, how many hook-ups have you been involved in since beginning college?"); their hook-up expectations (e.g., "What do you expect to get from an ideal hook-up?"); and their expectations after the hook-up (e.g., "In what ways have your expectations ever changed after a hook-up?"). Through this study, stereotypes and generalizations about hook-ups were disconfirmed. It was found that males did not report having significantly more hook-ups than females. Also, men did not expect a pleasurable experience from a hook-up significantly more often than females. Lastly, females did not engage in a hook-up expecting a romantic relationship significantly more than males. This study may provide some insights that will be helpful in facilitating college students' reflections on their sexual behavior.

College Students' Expectations for Hook-Ups

It appears that college students' are hooking up now more than ever. Two-thirds of college students have reported engaging in a hook-up (Paul, 2006). A number of researchers have studied the attitudes and beliefs about those who engaged in such behaviors and about how often hook-ups were actually occurring (Lambert, Kahn & Apple, 2003; Paul, 2000; Regan & Dreyer, 1999). The purpose of this study is to look at the expectations that students have about going into a hook-up situation and more importantly the changes in expectations that arise after a hook-up. The goal is to gain a better insight about why people engage in these behaviors and what behaviors are to be expected afterwards. This may help to explain the positive and negative consequences of hooking up during college.

For this study the following definition of a hook-up will be used: A hook-up is a brief sexual encounter between two people who either do not know each other at all, who are just acquainted, or have had a previous non-sexual relationship. The sexual encounter may involve petting, oral sex, and/or sexual intercourse (kissing alone does not constitute a hook-up) (adjusted from Paul, 2006).

Sexual Attitudes about Hook-Ups

As could be assumed there are gender differences in regards to sexual attitudes. Previous research indicates that men tend to have more non-judgmental attitudes toward and a greater interest in experiencing a hook-up than women (Regan & Dreyer, 1999). In a study by Clark and Hatfield (1989), similar results were found. In this study, a male or a female confederate would walk up to students on a college campus and ask three questions: 'would you like to go on a date with me', 'would you like to go back to my

apartment', and lastly, 'would you like to have sex with me'. They found that 50% of both males and females agreed to go on the date. They also found that 75% of men said "yes" to the sexual invitation while not a single woman said yes to the same question. This could be interpreted as men having more desire to hook-up than do women, and it also suggests that women are more willing to go out with a stranger if there is a probability of a relationship.

Sexual Motivation in Regards to Hook-Ups

Along with studies of sexual attitudes about hook-ups, there have also been studies focusing on the difference in sexual motivation in regards to hook-ups. In a study done by Paul (2006), a focus group methodology was used to discuss what made a hook-up good, and in turn, what made a hook-up bad. It was found that both male and female students described feeling 'social pressure to hook-up so I'll maintain my reputation with my friends'. Also in this same study, many students described engaging in a hook-up to get a "confidence booster" as their main motive.

There has also been some research on the question of who hooks up more because of sexual motivation between the genders. A study by Oliver & Hyde (2003) found that males exhibit more permissive attitudes toward, and greater interest in experiencing, uncommitted sexual activity than do females. Another study by Paul (2006) indicated that males are sexually motivated by feelings of desire, social status, and experience a sexual hook-up as positive and gratifying. However, in the same study, it was also found that while males hook-up for sexual motivation, females tend to engage in hook-ups for hopes of gaining a romantic relationship.

As found with previous research, males and females tend to have different motives for sexual hook-ups. A study done by Regan and Dreyer (1999) was conducted by asking college students a series of questions about their sexual motivations. They found that 46.9% of males stated sexual desire as their motive for engaging in a hook-up while only 29.3% of females stated the same reason. In contrast, 43.9% of females reported that an increase in relationship probability was their motive for engaging in a hook-up while only 9.4% of men stated this as the reason. These two findings elaborate the differences in motives between males and females.

There has also been research focusing on the different experiences that occur with sex. It was found that females traditionally have been known to link love with sex, while males have been known to separate the two (Glass & Wright, 1985). Glass and Wright (1985) found that females typically will not sleep with someone they do not love, unlike males. Since it has been found that females are motivated to engage in a hook-up because of hopes for a relationship, this finding would make sense.

Motivations versus Expectations

So far, it has been acknowledged that past research has focused on attitudes, motives, and experiences of a hook-up. However, as mentioned, expectations are the main focus of this study. It is known that expectations and motivations overlap a great deal, but there are differences. The main difference between motivations and expectations is that motives are the drives that people experience which make them want to engage in a behavior. The expectations are what the person involved in the behavior predicts to get from it. According to definition, expectations are things that are most

likely to occur, centering on the future (Merriam-Webster, 2007). For example, this would raise the question “is sexual intercourse expected during a hook-up?”

The reason for studying expectations over motives is that expectations of a hook-up have rarely, if at all, been studied directly. To go along with this idea, this study is going to observe the expectations a person has before going into a hook-up and see if there are any changed expectations after the hook-up. Perceptions of individuals after a hook-up have not been studied. People often engage in behaviors that they later reconsider (sometimes positively, sometimes negatively), and given the interpersonal complexities involved in hooking up, it is worth considering whether college students change their perceptions after these experiences."

Research Questions and hypotheses

There were three research questions observed during this study.

Research Question 1: What are the expectations that college have about hook-ups? In other words, what does a person expect to get out of a hook-up?

Research Question 2: How do expectations of males and females differ?

Based on previous research, it was hypothesized that male students would report having significantly more hook-ups than female students. Also, it was predicted that male students would expect a pleasurable sexual experience significantly more than female students. Lastly, it was hypothesized that female students would expect a romantic relationship to form after a hook-up significantly more than male students.

Research Question 3: Do expectations about the relationship change after a hook-up?

Method

Participants

A total of 66 participants took part in this study. A number of participants had to be deleted for several reasons: leaving more than five answers blank, having duplicate responses, or the participant's were under the age of 18. Thirty-three percent of the participants were males ($N = 22$) and 67 percent of the participants were female ($N = 44$). The participants' average age was 20-years-old (ranging from 18 to 29), and were predominantly Caucasian (62.7%). The participants ranged by class level including: freshman ($N = 27$), sophomore ($N = 14$), junior ($N = 11$) and senior ($N = 14$).

The only people that were ineligible to take part in this study were those under the age 18 (due to informed consent agreement) and those that were not enrolled in college. Since petting and oral sex were included in the definition of a hook-up, the participants could have been either a virgin or sexually active. Those that have never been involved in a hook-up were also able to participant because they could have expectations as well. Also, this study examined both heterosexual and homosexual hook-ups.

Materials

A questionnaire, which was created by the researcher, was used in this study (Appendix A). There were 31 questions divided into four sections: demographics, hook-up history, hook-up expectations, and changed expectations after hook-ups. The demographics looked at sex, age, class level, ethnicity, religious affiliation, Greek affiliation, relationship status and sexual orientation.

The questions in the hook-up history section of the questionnaire consisted of questions such as: 'How many hook-ups have you been involved in since beginning college?' These questions were designed to get at an individuals experience in previous sexual encounters.

The next section of questions was about the expectations of a hook-up. There were open-ended and closed-ended questions in this section. The closed-ended questions were answered on a Likert scale (1 being none and 7 being all). A sample closed-ended question consisted of: ‘In most of your hook-ups, to what extent did you expect to have a pleasurable sexual experience?’ A sample open-ended question was: ‘What do you expect to get from an ideal hook-up?’ These questions were specifically designed to get at what a person predicted would happen in a hook-up.

The last section of questions was about the changed expectations a person might have after engaging in a hook-up. The questions in this section were to be answered on a yes or no basis. If the participant responded with yes, they were asked to elaborate. A sample question in this section was: ‘After a hook-up, have you ever had an ongoing romantic relationship with the person you hooked up with?’

Procedure

The questionnaire was posted on the *Psychological Research on the Net* website (Krantz, 2008). The participants who chose to take part in this study were first asked to read an informed consent (Appendix B). In this consent, it was mentioned that if the participant had previously experienced non-consensual sexual relations to no longer complete the questionnaire. Since the research was on choices participants make in regards to their sexuality, nonconsensual relations were beyond the scope of this study.

Once the participant signed the informed consent electronically, they were then sent to the questionnaire. At the top of the questionnaire, the participants could read the exact definition, mentioned earlier, that was used to determine what constituted a hook-up and what was not. They then filled out the questions starting with demographics.

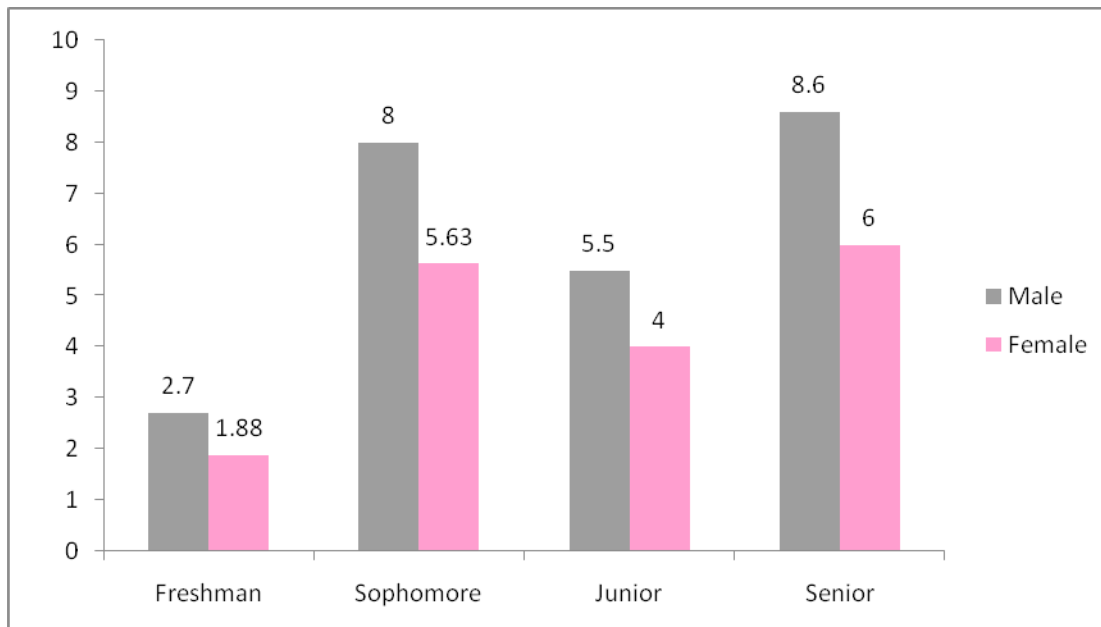
Once the participants were finished, they were debriefed (Appendix C). The whole procedure lasted between 15-30 minutes, depending on how elaborate the answers participants gave.

Results

Patterns of Hook-Up Behavior

The first item examined was the number of hook-ups males and females had since they began college. It was found that males ($M=5.6$) had more hook-ups than females ($M=4.23$) since beginning college; however, the difference was not significant: $t(64)=-1.14, p=.26$. When class level was added as a factor, similar results were found. A two-by-four (gender by class level) Analysis of Variance was used to measure this. It was found that freshman males ($M=2.7$) had more hook-ups than freshman females ($M=1.88$), sophomore males ($M=8$) had more hook-ups than sophomore females ($M=5.63$), junior males ($M=5.5$) had more hook-ups than junior females ($M=4$), and lastly, senior males ($M=8.6$) had more hook-ups than senior females ($M=6$). There was no significant main effect for gender: $F(1,3)=.61, p=.44$. Also, no significant interaction was found: $F(1,3)=.36, p=.78$. Despite these findings, there was a significant main effect found for grade: $F(1,3)=6.07, p<.01$ (Figure 1).

Figure 1: This graph shows the difference in the number of hook-ups participants had but categorized by grade level and gender.



There were a couple of interesting frequencies found when examining the data. The first was that 33 participants (50%) had used some form of drug or alcohol during the majority of their hook-ups. This means that on the other end, 50% of the participants had never or almost never used any form of alcohol or drugs during a hook-up. A number of the participants reported that they were drunk or high when they engaged in a hook-up resulting in their regrets about that hook-up.

Another interesting frequency was with STI protection and gender. It was found that 15 of the 66 participants reported never using any form of STI protection during a hook-up. To be more specific, 12 females (18%) had never used any form of STI protection, while only 3 males (14%) were unprotected. Through the open-ended responses, participants reported that the risks of a hook-up consist of: STIs, pregnancy, emotional distress, rape and molestation, gaining a bad reputation.

Expect Pleasurable Experience

The next item examined was whether males or females expected a pleasurable sexual experience from a hook-up more. Through an independent t-test, it was found that males ($M=5.23$) expected a pleasurable sexual experience from a hook-up more often than females ($M=4.95$); however this was not found to be significant at $t(64)=-.59, p=.56$.

Through the open-ended responses, it was found that both men and women reported having expectations of a pleasurable experience during the majority of their hook-ups. Forty-two percent of the participants mentioned that during a hook-up they expected to have a “pleasurable experience”, “sex”, or an “orgasm” during their hook-up.

Expect Relationship

Another item examined was the expectation of a relationship as a result of a hook-up. An independent t-test found that women ($M=1.42$) expected a relationship to form more often than males ($M=1.36$). However, this was not found to be significant at $t(63)=.422, p=.674$ (Figure 3).

Since the means were low, there were a number of open-ended responses that the participants stated did not want a relationship to form as a result of a hook-up. A number of responses reported that a bad hook-up consisted of: “the guy would become obsessed” or “would be caused by one party wanting to see the other again.”

Other Significant Findings

Unlike what was specifically hypothesized, there were a few other findings that were found to be significant. Through an independent t-test, it was found that males ($M=2.95$) expected a better reputation among their peers as a result of a hook-up significantly more than their female counterparts ($M=1.55$): $t(64)=-3.63, p<.01$. The

other significant finding was an expectation of a better reputation from the opposite sex. An independent t-test found that males ($M=2.82$) expected popularity from the opposite sex more often than females ($M=1.75$): $t(64)=-2.48, p=.02$.

Changes in hook-up attitudes and expectations

This was the last section of the questionnaire that focused on the expectations people have after the hook-up has already occurred. None of the results in this section were found to be significant between males and females. It was found that 27 participants (41%) had changed expectations after the hook-up had occurred. These changes were reported to be: “I no longer wanted a relationship with that person”, “decided I wanted a relationship after all”, “the person I hooked up with turned out to be someone did not expect them to be”, and “bad experiences with drunken guys being unable to perform or going too quickly”.

Second, 44 participants (67%) reported feelings of regret after a hook-up. Through the open-ended responses, it can be seen that some of these regrets consisted of: “being too drunk”, “did not really want to engage in the hook-up from the beginning”, “hooking up with a friend”, and “losing good friends”.

Furthermore, it was found that 39 participants (59%) began a romantic relationship with someone that they had hooked up with. Through the open-ended responses, it can be seen that people did have relationships after the hook-up, got married, or just remained friends and lovers. However, some the participants did report that their romantic relationship was short lived, or that they started dating for the wrong reasons.

Lastly, it was found that 59 participants (89%) had remained in contact with the majority of people they had hooked up with. However, as indicated in the previous

paragraph, a number of participants began a relationship. For those that did not begin a romantic relationship, they reported that they talked on the phone or popular instant messaging systems, became friends, or continued to hook-up with each other.

Discussion

In this study, the researcher set out to examine what college students' expected from a hook-up. Men did not report hooking up significantly more than females, thus disconfirming the first hypothesis. The reasoning for this could be a result of changing times and women gaining a greater sense of sexual agency instead of having a passive sense of sexuality (Pittard & Robertson, 2008).

As expected, seniors did report having the most hook-ups while freshmen reported having the fewest. The reasoning for this is probably being because seniors have been in college for four years while freshmen are new to the campus lifestyle.

Along with number of hook-ups, it was found that men did not report expecting a pleasurable experience significantly more than females, disconfirming the second hypothesis. Clearly, a significant number of college students go into a sexual hook-up without pleasure as a primary expectation. This could indicate that hook-ups are not as superficial or simple as once thought. This may have to be looked at in future research through a different type of study.

Along with the first two hypotheses, it was originally hypothesized that females would expect a romantic relationship to form as a result of a hook-up more often than their male counterparts. Contrary to what was found by Paul (2006), females did not report expecting a romantic relationship significantly more than males, disconfirming the last hypothesis. Interestingly, neither males nor females reported going into a hook-up

with forming a relationship as a primary expectation, but when asked about the romantic probability of a hook-up, 59% of the participants stated that a romantic relationship did form as a result of the hook-up. It seems that those who engage in a hook-up do not know exactly what they expect to happen, what they want, or what they should expect. It could also be that a relationship can form unexpectedly.

Even though reputation and popularity were not specific hypotheses, they were both found to be significant in comparison across genders. Specifically, males reported expecting a better reputation among their peers for engaging in a hook-up. This finding was supported by Regan and Dreyer (1999) who also found that males viewed casual sex as a means of enhancing their reputation among other men. This is consistent with the cultural stereotype that men view engaging in sex as a conquest, and with each hook-up they gain another 'notch in their belt'. This also gains them more popularity with other men. In addition, it was also found that males reported expecting more popularity among the opposite sex significantly more than their female counterparts.

Through observing the changes in attitudes portion of the results, it is possible to see that some of the people who engage in hook-ups do not know what to expect, or what they should expect. It seemed that there was a lot of ambivalence between the participants about what they after thoughts should be. When asked about going into a hook-up to get a romantic relationship, most of the participants said no, but when asked had they ever got in to a romantic relationship as a result of the hook-up, the majority of the participants said yes. Perhaps this could indicate that the changed expectations are not really expectations after all, but just a happening. For example, "I did not go into the

hook-up expecting a relationship to form, it just happened.” Perhaps this could have been the case with many of the participants.

As can be seen, hook-ups are common. There is concern for those 15 participants that reported never using any STI protection during a hook-up. Obviously, the majority of the participants are being safe most the time, but it is surprising to find a lack of STI protection used, especially in today’s time with STIs running rampant. Perhaps, this could be a sign of intoxication during a hook-up, or a lack of education in regards to STI protection.

Future Directions

Furthermore, in future studies, it would be interesting to elaborate further and dive deeper with an open-ended interview type of study. This might help future researchers find out what people are expecting to gain from a hook-up. Through a questionnaire, it is difficult to try and interpret at a deeper level what the participants are thinking if they do not elaborate; however, with an interview, the researchers could ask follow-up questions to get at the participants.

Also, it would be better to conduct a similar study with equal numbers of males and females. In this particular study, 66.7% of the participants were females, and the majority was Caucasian. This leaves little room for the minorities or men to have a significant standing in the study.

Lastly, the researcher thought it would be interesting to compare the expectations of those who have hooked up to those individuals who have never hooked up. A person who has never hooked up might have very different expectations or predictions about the hook-up than someone who has experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it seems that there was some ambivalence, or mixed feelings, arising in those that reported engaging in hook-ups, especially when it came to a relationship forming after the hook-up. The results did not seem to add up with what was being said in the open-ended results. This entire study was designed to figure out what it was that people expected to get from a hook-up, but there was so much contradicting evidence found (i.e., I want a relationship/I do not want a relationship) that it is still uncertain what expectations there are to be had as a result of a hook-up. This could be because some people might lack

With the results found in this study, it could be concluded that there is not one specific reason for a person to engage in a hook-up regardless of gender. This led to the complexity of this study which tried to figure out limited explanations and understandings about expectations of hook-ups. Also, it represents the complexity of people in general and realized that not everyone has the same reason for doing any certain behavior.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Hook-Up Expectations Questionnaire

Demographics

1. Age: _____
2. Sex:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
3. Class Level:
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
4. Ethnicity:
 - a. Caucasian
 - b. Hispanic
 - c. African American
 - d. Asian
 - e. Other: _____
5. Religious Affiliation: _____
6. Greek Affiliation:
 - a. Greek
 - b. Independent
7. Current Relationship Status:
 - a. Single
 - b. In a relationship
 - c. Married
 - d. Other: _____
8. Sexual Orientation:
 - a. Heterosexual
 - b. Homosexual
 - c. Bisexual
 - d. Other: _____

Hook-Up History

9. Approximately, how many hook-ups have you been involved in since beginning college?

10. Are the people you most commonly hook-up with
 - a. Strangers
 - b. Acquaintances
 - c. A previous platonic friend
 - d. Other: _____
11. Where do you most commonly meet the people you have hooked up with?
 - a. On Campus
 - b. At a Party
 - c. At a Bar/Club

- d. Through another friend
- e. Other: _____

Answer the questions below according to the following 7-point Likert Scale: 1 = none, 4 = half, 7 = all

12. Of the hook-ups you have been involved in, approximately how many have involved sexual intercourse?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. Of the hook-ups you have been involved in, approximately how many have involved birth control?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. Of the hook-ups you have been involved in, approximately how many have involved protection against STD'S?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15. Of the hook-ups you have been involved in, approximately how many have involved a member of the opposite sex?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16. Of the hook-ups you have been involved in, approximately how many have involved a member of the same sex?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17. Of the hook-ups you have been involved in, approximately how many have involved alcohol or other drugs?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Expectations: Answer the questions below in your own words

18. If you have hooked-up with someone in the past, what expectations have you typically had for those encounters? _____
19. What are the risks of hooking up? _____
20. What do you expect to get from an ideal hook-up? _____
21. What would a bad hook-up be like? _____

Expectations: Answer the questions below according to the following 7-point Likert Scale 1 = None, 4 = Some, 7 = Great Deal

22. In most of your hook-ups to what extent did you expect to have a pleasurable sexual experience?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23. In most of your hook-ups, to what extent did you expect to relieve boredom?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24. In most of your hook-ups, to what extent did you expect to gain a better reputation from your friends as a result to the hook-up?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25. In most of your hook-ups, to what extent did you expect to feel more attractive as a result of the hook-up?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26. In most of your hook-ups, to what extent did you expect to gain an increased popularity among members of the opposite sex as a result to hooking up?

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27. In most of your hook-ups, to what extent did you expect to have an ongoing relationship after the hook-up?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

After hook-up

28. Have your expectations ever changed after a hook-up?
- a. If yes please elaborate _____
 - b. No
29. After a hook-up, have you kept in contact with that person you hooked-up with?
- a. If yes please elaborate _____
 - b. No
30. After a hook-up, have you ever had an ongoing romantic relationship with the person you hooked up with?
- a. If yes please elaborate _____
 - b. No
31. After a hook-up, have you ever had any regrets about the hook-up?
- a. If yes please elaborate _____
 - b. No

Appendix B: Informed Consent

This research is being conducted by Amanda Smitley, a senior psychology major at Hanover College. The questionnaire you are asked to complete is designed to examine the expectations that college students have in regards to sexual hook-ups. The questions are not about the explicit details of these experiences; instead, they are focused on your thoughts and feelings about these relationships.

This study is focused specifically on mutually consensual sexual relations. If you have had sexual experiences which were not mutually consensual, please do not complete this study. (If you are experiencing distress about a non-consensual sexual experience at college, you should contact the Counseling Services Center located on your campus).

The entire questionnaire should take between 15-30 minutes to complete. There are no known risks involved in being in this study, beyond those of everyday life. The information you provide during the questionnaire is completely anonymous; at no time will your name be associated with the responses you give. After you are finished answering all the questions, a more complete description of the project will be provided.

If you have any questions about the questionnaire or this study, please contact Amanda Smitley at smitley@hanover.edu or Dr. Stephen Dine Young, supervising faculty, at younst@hanover.edu.

By clicking on the link below, you are giving your consent to participate in this study. You can stop participating at any time simply by leaving the website.

Appendix C: Debriefing Form

The questionnaire that you just completed is studying the expectations a person may have after a hook-up has occurred. The researcher is predicting that women will expect a romantic relationship to form after the hook-up more often than men. Also, it is expected that men will have more expectations of sexual intercourse during a hook-up than will women. Lastly, it is expected that women will indicate that they have had fewer hook-ups while in college than men. In addition, I will look at whether expectations for relationships change after a hook up has occurred.

Once the study is completed, you may view the results at <http://psych.hanover.edu>. If you have any questions, you can contact Dr. Stephen Dine Young (Hanover College, 812-866-7319) at youngst@hanover.edu.