

Sexual Behavior in Young Adulthood

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The nature of sexual relationships in emerging adulthood appears up for grabs to many professional and amateur observers. Certainly some changes are afoot, with terms like “hooking up” and “no strings attached” becoming common parlance. To begin with, the majority of Americans are indeed sexually experienced by age 20, although this is not new news. And in early adulthood, most romantic relationships involve a sexual component. Among young adults ages 18 to 23 who are in any form of romantic relationship, only about 6% are *not* having sex of some sort. At the same time, the median age at marriage—and most people still wish to marry—has risen to 26 for women and 28 for men. Together, these two facts mean that many emerging adults are “trying on” sexual relationships for several years before “settling down.” That is the essence of *serial monogamy*, the central theme among romantic relationships in contemporary America. Emerging adults regularly—but temporarily—move into and out of intimate relationships. They aren’t doing without relationships, but those relationships have become less serious and shorter in length. In other words, many are keeping their options open. Indeed, in a nationwide survey of young men, 62% of unmarried 25- to 29-year-olds said they were “not interested in getting married anytime soon.”

Despite this, emerging adults still powerfully proscribe deviations from the idea of monogamy, even if those relationships are fairly brief. In other words, the script is to have only one sexual partner at a time. To overlap is to cheat, and cheating remains a serious norm violation. So young Americans start and stop relationships—and start again. Indeed, in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (hereafter, Add

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Health), just under 70% of adults ages 18–27 say they’ve had more than one sexual partner so far. About 18% of them report between 6 and 10 partners, while 17% of men and 11% of women say they’ve already had sex with more than 10 people.

Let’s start with virginity data, however. Data from the Add Health study note that 16% of adults between 18 and 23 have *not* had intercourse. By age 27, that figure decreases to 8%. Most young-adult virgins can be classified by one or more of these descriptions: they’re averse to risk taking, they have high career expectations for themselves, they have limited attractiveness, or they’re very religious. In fact, religiosity is often a central reason for maintaining virginity well into the 20s. Just as in the teen years, religiosity predicts more conservative sexual behavior among unmarried emerging adults. However, the story about religion and sex is not as simple as it might sound. More on that later.

Virginity, of course, doesn’t necessarily entail abstinence from all sexual activity. Many participate in other sexual activities. Plenty of virgins (and nonvirgins) masturbate. According to data from the online College Social Life Survey (CSLS), one in four college men reported that they had masturbated in the past 24 hours. By contrast, only 8% of women said they’d masturbated in the past 24 hours.¹

Oral sex, considered a gateway to other forms of sexual expression, is also common—including among many virgins. The clear majority of young adults who’ve ever experienced oral sex have already done so by age 18. All ages reported a relatively tight range of between 70% and 85%, meaning that only about 15% of young adults had their first experience of oral sex during early adulthood. Unlike many teenagers, most emerging adults don’t label oral sex as “sex.” They perceive oral sex differently than teenagers do, because—especially within relationships—oral sex becomes a common component of foreplay. Although in high school oral sex was often how teens maintained a “technical virginity,” that idea becomes much less important thereafter, because “who went exactly how far with whom” makes little sense within the new social circles that young adulthood and college bring. In college “technical virginity” appears to be primarily a religious thing: intercourse becomes the line past which many Christians believe they shouldn’t go. This common approach enables them to feel better about both the rule kept—no intercourse—and the freedom to pursue and give sexual pleasure.

Heterosexual anal sex, however, is a comparatively new addition to the sexual script of some young people. Only 16% of 18- to 24-year-olds in the early 1990s said they had ever experienced anal sex, a number that is higher than the figure reported by 50- to 54-year-olds who'd had decades longer to have tried it. In the Add Health data, 23% of 18- to 27-year-olds reported ever having had anal sex. Published studies of its prevalence among college student samples reveal divergent figures, ranging from 9% to 32%, depending upon the site and age of the sample, suggesting local sexual marketplaces develop their own norms about what's included in the sexual repertoire, and what's not.

Hooking Up

Hooking up is most accurately characterized as a paired activity that could lead to sex but is itself not necessarily sex. As a relatively new norm, it continues to generate a good deal of concern among parents. It is synonymous with college life, though there's no inherent connection between the two. In fact, the conventional wisdom that college students are the most sexually active young Americans is untrue. That distinction belongs to young adults who never enrolled at all. They are more likely to have more frequent sex and more sexual partners, and to commence sexual relationships quickly.

Some think hooking up has replaced dating as the normal means by which young adults begin romantic and sexual relationships. Is this true? Not exactly. As head of the CSLS survey, sociologist Paula England has (so far) collected data from over 10,000 college students.² Her study reveals a variety of things about hooking up among them:

- 34% said they'd never hooked up at all.
- The median number of hookups by senior year is four.
- Just under half of hookups are the first time with a person; the rest were repeats.
- 78% of women and 74% of men said they regretted at least one hookup.
- 26% of women said, "yes, I was definitely interested" in a romantic relationship after having hooked up, compared with 19% of men.
- Men are 50% more likely than women to disrespect someone who hooked up with them.

While it may seem that hookups aren't consonant with the overarching norm of serial

monogamy, they nevertheless coexist. Hooking up while unattached is considered acceptable, but not while in a romantic relationship with someone else. Although it happens, it's a physical violation of the relationship—even if sex doesn't occur—and subject to interpersonal sanction. In other words, a hookup can end a relationship much quicker than it can start one.

Hookups are typically alcohol-fueled, sometimes regretted, and often foster mixed emotions. In a study where researchers actually lived in the residence hall with students, sociologists Laura Hamilton and Elizabeth Armstrong note that many women both enjoy hooking up *and* find it confusing and awkward. They conclude that women feel pressure to participate in traditional, committed romantic relationships, and yet the educational and career expectations upon them combine to encourage them to enjoy sex (by hooking up) in a way that doesn't threaten to entangle them in time-consuming relationships. Marrying at 22 or 23 seems out of the question, so they wish to avoid letting relationships get too far emotionally.

Does online social networking contribute to hooking up? Only indirectly, I suspect. It doesn't make sex happen, but its nature—the rapid gathering of information and the manipulation of others' perceptions about oneself—contributes to the *mentality* of the hookup. It's about managing impressions, stories, and events in a world of change where friends and associates come and go rapidly. Online social networking also poses a ready risk to real romantic relationships, since posts and photos of people and parties can imply that one's boyfriend or girlfriend may not be as monogamous as one thought.

Friends with Benefits

Most young adults don't actually use the term "friends with benefits," at least not when they describe such relationships for themselves. Some associate these with casual sex, but this is not quite accurate. Casual sex implies no relationship at all, like a one-night stand. The majority of nonromantic sexual relationships, however, last longer than a night and are commonly generated by people who already know each other. Truly casual and random sex is far less common, and largely unattractive to women. Indeed, the most common sources for friends-with-benefits relationships for women are ex-boyfriends.

Ironically, researchers find that friends-with-benefits relationships actually impede openness rather than foster it, and exhibit little sustained passion. Only 1 out of 10 such relationships blossoms into a romantic relationship. Friends with benefits are almost always exclusive relationships, meaning they don't coexist alongside a romantic relationship. To attempt both at once would constitute a serious violation of serial monogamy norms.

Despite the media attention, longstanding friends-with-benefits amount to just over 1% of all sexual relationships among adults ages 18 to 23 in the Add Health study (and are only slightly more prevalent after that). Easy, accessible, and stable sex with “no strings attached” is rare and far more the domain of fantasy than reality. The vast majority of sex is still experienced in romantic relationships. (However, even many of those relationships are fragile and succumb within six months).

Within more stable relationships, sexual frequency tends to increase for a period of time and then diminish with familiarity, as is the pattern in marriage. Among college relationships that lasted at least four months, one study notes that 63% of respondents reported having sex at least twice a week. That figure rises to 72% and 80% among relationships that lasted seven months to a year and more than a year, respectively, then drops into the 40s and 30s as relationship duration increases from one to three years and beyond. Besides coursework and studying, sexual frequency is often interrupted by distance, work, roommates, or other living-arrangement challenges.

In reality, however, the relationships among many young adults vary widely: some are short, some are very short, while a majority of them last 6–12 months. “Selectivity” processes occur too, weeding out the more committed (into marriage): as emerging adults move through their 20s, the unmarried ones don't appear to form longer relationships, but rather shorter ones. Despite the brevity of many such relationships, most emerging adults don't express particular regrets about the number of sexual partners they recall (although some do). Many see sex in their emerging adult years as an opportunity to learn about themselves, what they like or dislike sexually, and the type of person they'd eventually like to marry. And many feel that the sexual and relationship experience they gain constitutes a skill set they can transfer to subsequent relationships.

Accommodating Porn

Pornography is increasingly a part of this learning process and is at its zenith among this demographic. In a rigorous study of porn usage and norms—one in which researchers interviewed 813 emerging adults—two out of three men said porn use was generally acceptable, while the same was true of half of women.³ In terms of actual usage, however, 86% of men interacted with porn at least once a month, while 69% of women reported no porn use at all. Just under half of men watched porn weekly, while only 3% of women said the same. For women, being in a dating relationship—most of which are sexual—contributes to greater acceptance and use of porn. For men, predicting acceptance and usage is more difficult, in part because both are very common. Nevertheless, greater religiosity is associated with lower acceptance and usage rates in both men and women.

Many emerging adult women tolerate porn within their relationships, despite the fact that it encourages infidelity and inspires false impressions about what's pleasurable to them. Some do so because they report no difference in the way their boyfriends treat them. Most emerging adults wouldn't know the difference, however, since they've not known a world *before* easy porn access. Some do so because they perceive that the world increasingly tolerates porn and thus believe that they ought to as well. Welcoming it in their relationships may never be common, and a slim majority of women remains uncomfortable with it. But many are acclimating themselves to what they see as a porn-saturated world in which they presume men will gravitate toward it. While suboptimal, it seems to them the only strategy that will work.

Premarital Sex

By now it's almost an afterthought to speak of premarital sex. The term itself originally referred to acts of intercourse between a *couple* that occurred prior to marrying. Today it popularly refers to any act of intercourse that occurs prior to a *person* getting married. In 2006, the Guttmacher Institute released a report about the historic prevalence of premarital sex. Their news: about 95% of the American public had their first experience of intercourse before getting married. Even 90% of women born in the 1940s said the same.⁴ Add Health estimates are not much different from this: 89% of young adult

women report sex before marriage. Only 3% postponed sex until marriage, and another 8% are not married and still virgins. Among men, 91% had sex before marriage, less than 2% married before having intercourse, and 8% remain virgins. Some change is detectable, however. In every successive 10-year birth cohort since 1900, premarital virginity rates at age 18 declined for both men and women. Despite year-to-year fluctuations, young Americans are, on average, losing their virginity earlier than their parents and certainly earlier than their grandparents. Thus, premarital sex is “normative” in the sense that it is the average experience of American men and women, Christians included. However, there remain regrets: 54% of women and 16% of men who reported having consensual premarital sex wished they would have waited longer.⁵

Sexually Transmitted Infections

The emerging adult emphasis on *serial* monogamy implies having a series of sexual partners, yet the resulting circulation of partners in sexual networks enables the easier spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced in March 2008 that one in every four teen girls in the United States—over three million—have at least one STI. While that figure is higher than most prevalence estimates, there is no doubt that STIs are a growing problem among emerging adults. Medically managing STIs is estimated to cost Americans \$8 billion per year.

The chance of being infected with an STI varies widely, yet many young adults think every STI is comparable and carries an equal risk of acquisition. The truth is very different. Some, like chlamydia and gonorrhea, can be cured with antibiotics and are typically passed by infected bodily fluid, such as blood, semen, and vaginal or penile secretions. Others, like human papillomavirus (HPV) and genital herpes, can only be monitored and controlled and are transmitted through incidental contact with an infected skin lesion. Herpes affects one in four women and one in eight men. HPV infections, too, are increasing, and because few men ever exhibit symptoms, this is a difficult infection pattern to curb. Development and rollout of the vaccine Gardasil is intended to target this trend.

While STI experiences are becoming more common, the subject remains a

sensitive one, prompting uncomfortable questions about the source of the infection as well as decisions about potentially embarrassing revelations to present and future sexual partners. Women especially agonize over STIs, not just because of possible relationship or fertility consequences, but because of the “moral devaluation” and ideas of sexual “uncleanness” that often accompany their experience with STIs.⁶

Although one might expect contraceptive and condom usage to be soaring as a result, this isn't the case. In the Add Health data, only 50% of never-married sexually active adults ages 18 to 27 said they use contraception “all of the time.” Twenty-one percent said “most of the time.” The rest said “half of the time,” “some of the time,” or “never.” Their overall contraceptive use rate at last sex (about 72%) is not substantially higher than the rate reported when they were teenagers (68%). College graduates—the group most prepared to handle a pregnancy financially—exhibit the highest contraceptive rates, at just under 90%. Those who never went to college display the lowest rates: 65% among men and 61% of women. Because most Christian traditions either tacitly or explicitly discourage nonmarital sex, it's not surprising to find that religiosity is associated with slightly lower contraceptive use, especially at the beginning of relationships.

Implications for Christian Ministry Practitioners

The trends can seem daunting to all, especially so to religious Americans. Serial monogamy is generally not the sort of monogamy that Christians idealize. While most Christian leaders and parishioners won't alter their sexual standards, to expect that the emerging adults within their purview can and will navigate all the sexual minefields to their leaders' satisfaction is probably too optimistic. Moreover, religiosity is *not* a universal key to sexual conservatism among emerging adults. Instead, its effects are most evident on sexual attitudes (like the morality of premarital sex, porn, and masturbation), gateway sexual behaviors (like first sex), and delineators of “egregious” sexual patterns, like having lots of sexual partners. Religion is much less adept at distinguishing what social scientists would characterize as normal or average sexual attitudes and behavior. For those, commonsense predictors like age, dating behavior, and sexual attractiveness are far better predictors. Particular affiliations, like Evangelicalism or Catholicism, also don't matter a great deal for sex in emerging

adulthood (when evaluated apart from religiosity). This is in part because the sexualized cultural milieu—the environment in which young Americans form their relationships today—is largely impossible to avoid. Even virgins who wish to remain so until marriage find themselves constrained by this milieu in their search for a spouse. Those who have more devoutly religious personal networks of peers and friends tend to navigate this milieu more effectively. Thus, a renewed focus on *plausibility structures*—close networks of friends and peers who help give legitimacy to particular ideas and ideals as well as provide the social support and control to help attain them—makes sense, because humans are social learners. People tend to live up to, or down to, the action patterns within their immediate social circles. This is how social change happens. Sexual norms don't naturally evolve away from the exclusive and toward the more permissive. The sexual norms of a time and place are always subject to change, albeit slowly.

Notes

¹ Moreover, an additional 37% of men and 40% of women didn't want to answer the question, indicating clear social desirability concerns about the answer. The data come from Makeda Gerressu, Catherine H. Mercer, Cynthia A. Graham, Kaye Wellings, and Anne M. Johnson (2008), "Prevalence of masturbation and associated factors in a British national probability survey," *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 37, 266–278.

² While England's study is impressive and helpful, its sample is not a probability sample from any of the participating colleges, undermining its ability to generate statistics that can be said to be representative of American college students.

³ See Jason S. Carroll, Laura M. Padilla-Walker, Larry J. Nelson, Chad D. Olson, Carolyn McNamara Barry, and Stephanie D. Madsen (2008), "Generation XXX: Pornography acceptance and use among emerging adults," *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 23, 6–30.

⁴ The 95% figure is based on an event-history analysis of data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG). By age 44, 95% of respondents reported having had premarital sex. This figure includes married and unmarried respondents. However, if we took a cross-section of only married adults and looked retrospectively at their premarital sexual behavior, we'd arrive at a figure of 85% for women and 90% for men. The 95% figure noted in the media includes people who were not married and may never do so. Their sexual activity has been entirely nonmarital

and may remain so—their future is not known. So of all the married adults in the NSFG, 85% of women and 90% of men reported having experienced intercourse before they got married. See Lawrence Finer (2007), “Trends in premarital sex in the United States, 1954–2003,” *Public Health Reports*, 122, 73–78.

⁵ See Nigel Dickson, Charlotte Paul, Peter Herbison, and Phil Silva (1998), “First sexual intercourse: Age, coercion, and later regrets reported by a birth cohort,” *British Medical Journal*, 316, 29–33.

⁶ See Adina Nack (2002), “Bad girls and fallen women: Chronic STD diagnoses as gateways to tribal stigma,” *Symbolic Interaction*, 25, 463–485.

Annotated Bibliography

Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. 2004. *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press.

The early bible of emerging adulthood, Arnett’s book originated the term. The book highlights what this new life stage is about and how it came to be, drawing on interviews, statistics, and the observations of fellow social scientists. Chapters on parent-child relationships, college, work, love and sex, thinking about marriage, and religion highlight themes among this group of youth in their decelerated, extended pathway toward becoming full-fledged adults.

Bisson, Melissa A., and Levine, Timothy R. (2009). Negotiating a friends with benefits relationship. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 38, 66–73.

This study of 125 college students sought to investigate both the prevalence of the practice of having sex in a nonromantic relationship with a friend and what such relationships are like. Six out of 10 respondents reported having had at least one such relationship. Concerns included the obvious—that sex would complicate a friendship and raise one-sided desires for romance and commitment. Respondents in such friends-with-benefits relationships often attempt to avoid such “clarification”

and negotiation conversations. The authors conclude that the very reasons such relationships appear attractive are the same reasons that create problems for sustaining them.

Bogle, Kathleen. (2008). *Hooking up: Sex, dating, and relationships on campus*. New York: NYU Press.

The product of 50 in-depth interviews, this book provides the most careful exploration and analysis of hooking up among college students to date. Bogle suspects that hooking up has become the dominant script for intimacy on the campuses she studied. It's not that the respondents don't want conventional relationships, but they perceive them as being in the future. Before that comes education and career-building. Locating a spouse is not a priority during these students' campus experience. Sexual stimuli within media culture only serve to support this route. The author suspects, however, that her respondents overestimate the frequency of their peers' hookups, prompting them to mimic something that is not quite as common as they think. Bogle confirms that hooking up supports, rather than contests, the sexual double standard between men and women and contributes to exploitative relationships characterized by clear power differentials between men and women. Many women, she found, feel forced to settle for less commitment and exclusivity than they would have preferred, encouraging them to lower expectations for subsequent relationships.

Carroll, Jason S., Padilla-Walker, Laura M., Nelson, Larry J., Olson, Chad D., Barry, Carolyn McNamara, and Madsen, Stephanie D. (2008). Generation XXX: Pornography acceptance and use among emerging adults. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 23, 6–30.

To write what is arguably the most illuminating study to date of pornography usage among emerging adults, the authors queried over 800 university students across six campuses about their attitudes and practices concerning porn. Results indicate high usage among men, reinforcing prevailing assumptions that had, until now, been subject to severe social desirability bias in self-reports. The authors explore a variety of factors associated with attitudes about porn and use of porn, suggesting that

religiosity reduces acceptance and usage among men and women. As in other studies of sex, the authors find that it's easier to predict women's actions and attitudes than men's. Substance use and higher numbers of self-reported sexual partners predict more tolerance and usage of porn, especially in women. Traditional family ideals are associated with lower levels of porn tolerance and usage in both men and women.

Finer, Lawrence. (2007). Trends in premarital sex in the United States, 1954–2003. *Public Health Reports, 122*, 73–78.

A product of the Guttmacher Institute in New York, this analysis of four different cycles of data from the National Survey of Family Growth—a federally funded, ongoing data collection project based at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—reveals just how prevalent premarital sex is and has been in the United States. Highlighted in the media in 2007, the study shows that 95% of respondents report having had sex before marrying. Even when considering older cohorts in the data, as well as adults who waited to have sex until at least age 20, the figures suggest that historically premarital sex has characterized at least four out of five Americans, and typically more.

Freitas, Donna. (2008). *Sex and the soul: Juggling sexuality, spirituality, romance, and religion on America's college campuses*. New York: Oxford University Press.

The product of an in-person interview study that spanned several campuses, this book seeks to reveal aspects of college life that may go unspoken by many students. The author sought to evaluate the role of religion in sexual decision making among students in both public and private universities, religious and nonreligious colleges, but found little evidence of such at all but the pair of evangelical colleges. And yet the permissive sexual climates at other universities don't simply run unchecked, for there too students—especially young women—often report dissatisfaction with their sexual and relationship options. They want religion, or at least spirituality, to matter.

Glenn, Norval, and Marquardt, Elizabeth. (2000). *Hooking up, hanging out, hoping for Mr. Right*. New York: Institute for American Values.

This commissioned study included both a survey of 1,000 college women and in-depth interviews with 62 more. Among its major findings are an affirmation that marriage remains a major life goal for the majority of women and that most wouldn't mind meeting that spouse in college; they sense that relationship commitments in college often either ask too much or expect too little. They note that hooking up is widespread, though unevenly practiced, and that the idea and meaning of dating is up for grabs. Indeed, the respondents reported relatively few traditional dates, leading the authors to suggest that contemporary social norms around courtship, mating, and marriage are in disarray. Adults, they note, neither understand nor seem to care a great deal about this situation. The authors conclude with a set of recommendations.

Grello, Catherine M., Welsh, Deborah P., and Harper, Melinda S. (2006). No strings attached: The nature of casual sex in college students. *Journal of Sex Research*, 43, 255–267.

This study of 404 public university undergraduate students reveals several things about casual sex on campus. First, it's predictable: it's most often characteristic of people who experienced first sex earlier in their adolescence (and in a nonromantic relationship), drug users, and students who drink heavily. Such sex is seldom with true strangers and more often with "friends." Men who engage in casual sex show few depressive symptoms, on average, while women with a history of such liaisons report the highest levels of depression.

Halpern, Carolyn Tucker, Waller, Martha W., Spriggs, Aubrey, and Hallfors, Denise Dion. (2006). Adolescent predictors of emerging adult sexual patterns. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 39, 926.e1–926.e10

One of the earliest explorations of sexual activity in the third wave of the massive National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, this study sought primarily to classify emerging adult respondents based on their premarital sexual status. The authors estimate that about 8% of the sample are virgins, 2% remained virgins until they married, and 90%—the balance of the Add Health sample—had sex before ever

marrying (many of whom remain unmarried). Virgins were more likely to be younger and nonblack, to exhibit elevated body mass index and greater religiosity, and to report parental sexual conservatism.

Hamilton, Laura, and Armstrong, Elizabeth A. (2008). Gendered sexuality in young adulthood: Double binds and flawed options. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Boston.

This study summarizes two sociologists' ethnographic research conducted in a university women's residence hall. Focusing in part on the hookup, they find that women both enjoy such sexual activity and find it confusing and awkward. They suggest that such ambivalence is explicable by drawing upon social class and gender concerns. That is, social class concerns encourage students to use nonromantic sex as a way to delay commitments that might undermine career ambitions. Yet gender changes in the domain of sexuality offset this. The authors note a persistent double standard about romantic relationships. Such competing expectations create dilemmas for women.

Lefkowitz, Eva S., Gillen, Meghan M., Shearer, Cindy L., and Boone, Tanya L. (2004). Religiosity, sexual behaviors, and sexual attitudes during emerging adulthood. *Journal of Sex Research*, 41, 150–159.

Using data from a survey of 205 public university students, this team of researchers explored a variety of ways in which religious factors might affect sexual decision making. They noted that religious behavior—not affiliation or self-rated importance of religion—was the strongest predictor of actual sexual behavior. They conclude that reference groups, or like-minded sets of friends that result from religious involvement, are a likely key pathway by which religion shapes sexual attitudes and actions.

Nack, Adina. (2002). Bad girls and fallen women: Chronic STD diagnoses as gateways to tribal stigma. *Symbolic Interaction*, 25, 463–485.

Nack interviewed 43 women about their experience with sexually transmitted

infection diagnoses, exploring how they make sense of their sexual selves, as well as others' and their own perceptions about their morality. Themes of "tribal stigma" and the persistent double standard between the sexes emerge repeatedly as women wrestle with the idea of moral impurity as apart from their clinical experience of disease.

Oswalt, Sara B., Cameron, Kenzie A., and Koob, Jeffrey J. (2005). Sexual regret in college students. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 34, 663–669.

In their exploration of sexual regret, the authors surveyed just under 350 students about sexual health issues. They noted that among the sexually active, 72% reported having regretted participating in at least one sexual event in their past. Inconsistency with their morality was the top reason cited for such regret. The only stable predictor of regret over the entire sample, however, was number of partners: the more partners they had had, the more likely they were to report sexual regrets.

Paul, Elizabeth L., McManus, Brian, and Hayes, Alison. (2000). "Hookups": Characteristics and correlates of college students' spontaneous and anonymous sexual experiences. *Journal of Sexual Research*, 37, 76–88.

This study of 555 university students seeks to provide a comprehensive description of the hookup phenomenon and its predictors. Among the sample, three out of four had experienced at least one hookup, and one in three had sexual intercourse with a stranger or acquaintance. While the strongest association appears between hooking up and intoxication symptoms—not surprising—numerous personality-oriented measures also predicted the practice, including impulsivity, harm-avoidance, autonomy, self-esteem, secure and avoidance attachment styles, and relationship styles that emphasize the erotic and the gamesmanship of the pursuit.

Regnerus, Mark D., and Uecker, Jeremy. (2010). *Premarital sex in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

The nature and character of emerging adults' sexual unions is the subject of this book, which draws upon both nationally representative survey data as well as in-

person interviews. The central purpose of the book is to document and describe emerging adults' sexual activity patterns and relationships, answering a variety of research questions, including: What are emerging adults' sex lives and relationships like? What do they wish for? What do they actually do? Do they get the kind of relationships they want? What is the college sex scene really like? What is the sexual market like outside of college? Are there new scripts in American heterosexuality? Where does marriage fit into their thinking, if at all? How prevalent are nontraditional forms of sex, and how have they affected relationship formation and stability? How do culture and religion color the sexual scripts of some? Do young adults' sexual relationships make them happy? The result is an extended look at how unmarried young adults think about and act within their sexual relationships.