

Sex on campus: College chaplains on the hookup culture

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A University of Florida frat party in the 1950s. [Attribution](#) [Share Alike](#) [Some rights reserved](#) by [UF Digital Collections](#).

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Read Amy Frykholm's interview with Kerry Cronin, [Boston College's "dating doctor"](#)

Cultural observers have lately seen an irony in current male-female relations: though young adult women are in many ways empowered as never before and have an increasing presence in higher education and in the professions, men still control relations between the sexes.

Mark Regnerus, a sociologist, argues that a numerical imbalance between the genders has enhanced the social power of men. Women now significantly outnumber men on college campuses and in other venues where young adults meet. Since men are relatively scarce, they have the upper hand—hence the creation of a campus culture that caters to male desires. "What many young men wish for—access to sex without too many complications or commitments—carries the day," says Regnerus.

Male control is evident in how much objectifying of women still takes place on college campuses, contends Lisa Belkin, writing in the *New York Times*. She describes a fraternity at Duke that advertised a party at which women were invited to dress as "sluts"—and many women obliged. And whereas feminists of an earlier

generation fought hard against this objectifying culture, says Belkin, contemporary college women seem to go along with it or shrug it off. It might as well be the 1950s, "but with skimpier clothing, fewer inhibitions and better birth control."

In his 2011 book *Lost in Transition*, sociologist Christian Smith worries that the current sexual dynamic is undermining the ability of young men and women to form sustained, intimate and equitable relationships. The hookup culture of promiscuity fosters both psychological pain and numbing indifference.

We asked several college chaplains to comment on this assessment of campus life and to describe their ministry with young adults:

[Tara Woodard-Lehman](#), Westminster Foundation, Princeton University

[Vance Rains](#), Wesley Foundation, Florida State University

[Kori Jones](#), campus minister, Duke University Chapel

[Bruce Benson and Jennifer Koenig](#), chaplains, St. Olaf College

[Diane Kenney](#), United Ministry, University of Southern California

[Eric Van Meter](#), Wesley Foundation, Arkansas State University