

The Bait & Switch of Hooking up

*The dark side of
a touchy subject*

By Kenny Luck

eBook

Talk about a rough crowd.

One hundred and fifty college students on the campus of the University of Southern California have poured into a lecture hall to hear me. To make matters worse they have no idea what's coming. All they know is that they have come to a "Relationships Forum" and that some older guy is going to be talking on sex, love, and dating. What they do not know is that I am about to gently but firmly pass along what I know about a coming apocalypse of consequences related to their favorite past time – hooking up. The forecast for tonight's meeting is increasing clouds with a 100% chance of thundershowers and golf-ball sized hail. We are going to have an *adult* conversation about *adult* things because they are swimming in the deep end of very *adult* behaviors that have big consequences their *young adult* minds can't quite comprehend yet.



This is what I know about my audience from all the research smarter people than me have been compiling on the hookup generation:

- Just under half of the freshmen in the room already have had sexual intercourse in high school.
- Over half of the students in front of me have had oral sex within the last 30 days.
- Three quarters of the females have had “casual” intercourse in the last year.
- Every third boy I see has had three or more sexual partners within the last year.
- 75% of the girls and 55% of the guys who have had sex in high school or college privately regret it and wish they could have a “do-over”¹

After letting them know we were going to set course for the stormy waters of sex, love, dating, hooking up, and what the latest research is revealing on the subject, I made an appeal of sorts to help soften the inevitable blow. The subject of young adult sex is, literally, *touchy* on many levels. So my appeal went like this:

*“Tonight, please remember that **I am** not your mom or your dad, your rabbi or your pastor. But I am your friend. Friends watch out for each other. Friends advise and guide with your best interests at heart. Friends tell you what they know – especially if it will protect you from harm. So please repeat after me: **KENNY IS MY FRIEND.**”*

And with one voice they all indulged me and labeled me a “friend.”

Likewise, whether you are a young adult or a parent, a virgin or actively sexual, *please remember* before you read on that I am, above all, your friend. I am a friend who has dedicated a lot of his life to researching, writing, and speaking on the topic of sex and relationships. I am a friend who has psychologically assessed thousands of sexually broken people. I am a friend who spends a lot of time reading articles no one cares to read about love, sex, and dating because I hate the heart ache and pain connected to the misuse and abuse of sex between men and women. So as your friend please allow me to say to you up front – *your personal approach to sex and sexual activity as a young adult matters more than you could ever imagine.*



A SEXUAL JUNGLE

The sexual landscape resembles a war zone.

War zones afford little control to those caught up in them and, as time passes, they desensitize soldiers and citizens alike. A new normal pervades and, along with it, a new mentality that breeds newer behaviors that once upon a time seemed inconceivable.

Young adults today live in an environment where every aspect of their existence is sexualized by culture. In the thick jungles of this sexual war zone, morals are overwhelmed by a trillion dollar digital marketing barrage. Like wallpaper, display screens and media everywhere normalize every type of sexual engagement. Now even those shades of black and white are turning grey with much enthusiasm. Young adults feel entitled to engage in this world of “sexcraft” but they are not ready for it on multiple levels. Recent research and surveys among high school and college students reveal a pendulum swing of titanic proportions. Today young adults live in a culture where:

SEX IS EXPECTED

Young adults feel obligated to be with a lot of people sexually and are not having much success going against this pressure. Over 50% of all high school graduates, across multiple studies, report having had sexual intercourse. For those 16 years or younger engaging in sex, these young adults will have between 3-5 more sexual partners before the age of 20.²



THE SEXUAL EXPERIENCE IS TAINTED

Feelings of obligation and peer compulsion are the worst drivers for sexual encounters. Thirty percent (30%) of these encounters for females 16 and older are NOT voluntary. For girls under the age of 15 that number increases to over forty percent (40%). To this end, it is no surprise that twenty percent (20%) of college females report being forced to have sex against their will. These sexual experiences are bad.³



YOUNG ADULTS ARE DEPERSONALIZING THEIR SEXUAL PARTNERS

The “have sex and move on” mentality has caused young adults to completely bypass the connecting process which affords others consideration. Potential sexual partners exist to meet a need and in the process are depersonalized and discounted emotionally. Lust, not love, is the driver of the hook up mentality which engenders a condition of strong *emotional detachment*. Boys are using girls. Girls are using boys. Neither sex is really caring or considering what they are *actually doing* to each other and to their relational futures.⁴

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL ARE NUMBING AND FUELING HOOK UPS

Casual sex, in both the high school and college settings, is being directly correlated with an increased presence of drugs and alcohol. What students and young adults can't or won't consider sober, they will find the courage to experiment and indulge in while intoxicated. It's also important to note that the majority of non-consensual sex and sexual violence occurs in the context of a hook up when alcohol or drugs are present.⁵



Have sex and move on with your life right? It didn't mean anything.

THE BAIT AND SWITCH OF THE CULTURAL NARRATIVE

Ask any young adult who is sexually active the following questions:

1. Does a pat on the back communicate something to you?
2. How about when another person hugs you?
3. What about when you high five a friend?

Their responses, like yours, would be immediate and expected. A pat on the back communicates encouragement. A hug communicates comfort or closeness. And a high five signals agreement. Then ask the same young adult:

4. What about sex with another person?

Uh-oh.

The idea that less intimate forms of touch communicate something to the other person but the most powerful form of human touch *does not* is the biggest lie the hookup culture is selling to young adults. It's the idiotic notion that you can have intercourse with someone, it means nothing, and you can simply "move on" with your life. Though young adults go along with the cultural narrative, privately over 55% of young men and women involved in hookups do so because they want to pursue a long-term relationship with the other person. Research shows that is exactly what their body thinks is happening as it reacts to sexual contact by releasing massive amounts of oxytocin, dopamine and vasopressin which are designed to create a strong emotional attachment (especially for first timers). The hookup mentality of emotional detachment after sex is delusion and fantasy when confronted with the science of physical touch. In fact, the detachment of emotions from the physical act is neuro-chemically impossible.

SEX COMMUNICATES COMMITMENT.

Brain mapping, MRI's, and *PET* Scans reveal that sexual contact (in any form) is the “weaponized uranium” of the physical touch arsenal, able to set off nuclear events in the brain. And just like enriched uranium, when used in the right context it can create an energy which forges maximum closeness and bonding for a lifetime. Likewise, sex used out of context in unhealthy ways can destroy people emotionally.

The current neuroscience of sex has researchers now preaching caution, great care, and management of this powerful form of touch. They see (literally) how sex lights up the brain and how it has long term consequences both negative and positive based on what choices are made. They are finding that, especially with young adults, the initial “spark” can disintegrate into a nuclear meltdown, the “fall-out” of which can span decades in the future.

A very dark side of the “touchy” subject is emerging from all the new research flooding in from neurobiology, neuroendocrinology, psychology, and all disciplines of behavioral science. Young adults and those working with them need to know that science has exposed, once and for all, the hookup fraud. The result? At the expense of exploring the intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and psychological dimensions of a relationship, young adults have become dramatically one dimensional and relationally handicapped. The hookup narrative in today's culture is a tsunami of deception and is creating a wake of devastating losses on the relationship landscape that will take young adults years, if not a lifetime, to recover from. Misguided young adults are *mismanaging* touch and, in the process, are being diverted from the one goal that could fulfill the promise of that initial spark – *getting to really know the other person*. The math of this miscalculation is as simple as it is insidious and as painful as it is promising *depending* on the sexual choices young adults make. And while the scientific conclusions are unassailable, the common sense conclusions are equally compelling.

Common sense and our intuitive nature tell us that when the primary concern and focus of a relationship is physical, it clouds, pollutes, or obscures other dimensions of interaction between two people. A fire is started and a pattern of interaction centered on touch begins coloring *all* interactions and thinking. And when a “schedule of touch” is kicked off, the guy begins to automatically focus on his next move with the girl and all his activities in the relationship have to

lead toward his next physical goal. For the girl it is much more complicated. She has to balance her desire to keep the relationship with the other considerations of not being a “slut,” a “tease,” or a “prude” with respect to the boy. This guessing game can and will go on, shallowly sustaining a relationship until the first winds of conflict or frustration blow in and expose it. Inevitably, the most important dimensions of relationship, the ones that help relationships survive conflict and tests, have been supplanted and sabotaged by the easiest one to develop *later* – the physical. The one dimensional relationship is the equivalent of a one legged stool that simply can’t support any weight or pressure. Collapse is just a matter of time.

At the moment of relational abandonment, no matter what we tell ourselves and no matter what “feel good” advice friends give to soften the blow or ease your conscience, *break-ups are painful*. Brain researchers have even located the area of the brain affected by break ups after sexual and chemical bonding occur. They found that break-ups affect the same area of the brain where physical pain is registered! You can actually see it on brain scans. In effect, the science of sexual entanglement supports what the heart already knows – a young adult can’t compartmentalize a sexual involvement away from the rest of who they are. Everything we do – especially sex – involves our whole person. Researchers are seeing on LED screens how attempting to rationalize, justify, or compartmentalize hooking up flies in the face of how your body is designed and how it creates unconscious damage to the brain.



NOW YOU KNOW.

This is why there is absolutely no mystery behind the fact that most young adult relationships initiated by under twenty-one year olds fail. We *know* why most of them fail. They fail because, by intention or by default, they become one dimensional until ultimately the relationship is tested, exposed, and abandoned by the normal ups and downs of life. The cultural narrative emphasizing sex first or sex as the primary focus after starting a relationship, is a painful “bait and switch” proposition most young adults don’t realize until they have already been hooked or burned.

If you are a young adult, parent, or youth worker reading this, the emerging story doesn’t end there. Against the black back drop of the hookup malaise, a bright new wave of true sexual experimenters are turning up and fueling a growing tide against the hookup narrative. They are the new radicals deciding to experiment with a newer, more challenging, and healthy approach.

THEIR APPROACH IS TO WAIT.



NEWSFLASH: VIRGINS HAVE THE LAST LAUGH

Recently I watched a 26 year old woman confess to being a virgin on a popular reality dating show. The snickers, giggle snorts, and dropped jaws of the other women competing for the affections of the lucky bachelor were over the top. Directly, indirectly, passively, and actively she was mocked. After soaking in all this research over the last year on sexual practice and the long term effects on relationships I blurted out loud to my plasma screen *“that girl is going to have the last laugh!”*

AND SHE WILL.

The promiscuous can mock virgins (or those who choose to wait at any point in their sexual journey) all they want but the latest research should shut them up. Among the findings from the *Medical Institute for Sexual Health* were these revelations regarding virginity and long term health:

- College students who are having or have had sex are three times more likely to be depressed than their friends who are virgins.
- Girls who are more active sexually in high school and college are three times more likely to attempt suicide than their counterparts who are virgins
- Boys who are more sexually active in high school and college are seven times more likely to attempt suicide than their friends who are virgins
- Long range studies show that virgins who waited until marriage to have sex report higher levels of sexual, marital, and emotional satisfaction as well as significantly lower divorce rates.
- Married couples who were virgins report significantly higher sexual satisfaction than unmarried people who have had multiple partners.⁶

Make no mistake. It is a good bet that those who were sexually active had no way of connecting the dots to the long-term consequences and losses associated with their choice to be sexually active prior to marriage.

How could they know that depressive and suicidal thoughts later in life can be linked directly to the repeated chemical onslaught caused by repeated sexual experiences, bondings, and losses of attachment?

How could they know that the pattern of sexually bonding with someone, breaking up, and then sexually bonding with other sexual partners would eat away at their ability to bond with others in the future?

How could they know that casual sex molds the brain in negative ways the same way that monogamous, mutually exclusive sex molds the brain in positive ways?

How could they know that hooking up (sexually bonding) then cutting off relationships with people leads to relationships that become shorter and shorter and feel progressively worse after they end?

Who was telling them that sex cannot be dismissed as an activity with little or no impact on their whole person?

Who was warning them that their built in ability to attach and connect to others was being burned out?

How could they know that all the chemicals repeated sex releases again and again would desensitize them emotionally and cognitively resulting in an inability to create strong emotional attachments in the future?

The answer to these all these questions is now being answered and supported by brain mapping and neuroscience with respect to the young adult brain. That is, the young adult brain is still forming into the mid-twenties along with what researchers call a young person's "cognitive maturity." This simply means that the *young adult brain is not physically equipped yet to connect the long term consequences of the behaviors they get involved in until much later.* This *does not* mean that young adults are not smart or intelligent. Lots of smart people make horrible decisions. It just means that young adult brains need guidance, advice, and strong mentors informing them so that they can manage and discipline themselves sexually while their brains are maturing and making these important connections.

This physical reality and the need for guidance prior to reaching cognitive maturity is supported by young adults themselves who, upon reflecting on their sexual involvement at a young age, report that they wished their parents had been more involved with them and given them stronger advice, warnings, and boundaries sexually because of the regret and remorse they felt later.

So even though I am not your mom or your dad or your rabbi or your pastor, *I am* a researcher and author who happens to be a dad in real life. So what, exactly, in light of all I know, would I personally tell my own college age kids and every young adult who would listen?

SOME ADVICE FOR MY YOUNG FRIENDS

Stop compartmentalizing - That means stop thinking that you can have sex and move on without any ramifications. You cannot separate any activity from your entire person. It is impossible on every level and has major consequences for your future ability to have great relationships.

Find mentors with healthy relationships you respect – These could be both married and unmarried people depending on where you find yourself on the relationship spectrum.

Your approach matters - I hope you have gleaned that the sex, love, date approach promoted in culture is deeply flawed on all levels. The latest research coming back on your generation shows that it does not deliver in the short or the long term.

If you are dating, focus on dimensions of the relationship other than the physical - Your body will work perfectly on your honeymoon – your body will know what to do, how to react, and you will have a lifetime to practice. In fact, there is no credible research anywhere that suggests you can sleep your way to a great relationship. If you really love another person, you will do better with the hands off or “mostly off” approach.

Understand and manage touch in your dating relationship - I actually heard from a guy who loved a girl so much he told her at the outset of their dating relationship – “I am not going to kiss you on the lips for a long time because I really, really want to get to know *you*.” Wow. Smart guy. He led the relationship and she relaxed and could focus on getting to know him versus worrying over whether she was putting out.

Remember this – if you are 25 or under your body is there but your brain may not be – The science is clear that you should receive guidance and advice no matter how emotionally mature you think you are! By the way, getting advice doesn't stop after the ring goes on.

Your brain is designed to mold itself through attachment and connection with others – Single or dating your brain is hungry for connections with people so get in community with other people. Specifically, get with people who share your convictions about life and relationships as well some of your passions and interests.

Get this – sex, bond, break up cycles weaken sexual restraint – This means if you or the person you are dating are casual sex people, a ring won't make you or that person disciplined and committed.

If you have a past or sexual baggage from previous relationships, DON'T DESPAIR – I have great news for all of those young adults who are ready to make a change and research says your body and brain will cooperate with that decision! While hard to do and very courageous, researchers see how the brain reacts to healthy attachment and starts creating new synapses in a process called neuro-genesis. Remolding your heart around waiting and healthy relationships starts remodeling your brain. I know it's possible because this is my story.



SOME ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG ADULTS

First off, all parents need to know that most young adults believe that they should be guided toward waiting (over 90%). Second, most young adults also plan to be married before the age of thirty (also over 90%). I share these two bits of tribal knowledge as an encouragement to dive into the lives of your kids in this area no matter what your history or background. Your input is needed, wanted, powerful, and effective.

To this end, researchers have found three common denominators among young adults who were able to avoid sexual involvement. Parents who want to help their kids rise above the hookup culture:

RELATE – Young adults with high levels of parent-family connectedness get much of their attachment needs met and secured in the home. Researchers also attach more power to the home over hormones as the determining factor for sexual promiscuity and sexual restraint.

COMMUNICATE – Communication needs to be both preemptive (telling your kids ahead of time what your feelings are about sex and that other kids won't agree) and proactive (reinforcing your values consistently as they pass through adolescence). According to the latest research, teens who talk to their parents about initiating sex tend to wait and have fewer sexual partners.



EXPRESS APPROPRIATE DISAPPROVAL

– The last common denominator among young adults who were able to wait until marriage was parental disapproval of safe sex or perceived non-intercourse as sex. Teens whose parents expressed disapproval of non-marital sex were less likely than their peers to have sex.⁷

FINAL THOUGHT FOR YOUNG ADULTS AND PARENTS

The science speaks for itself. It says unequivocally that the healthiest behavior both physically and emotionally is for persons to wait for a mutually faithful monogamous relationship to experience a fully satisfying sexual attachment and relationship. Marriage is the stable and loving context our bodies indicate that they are designed for. Science also suggests that deviating from this context for sex creates and perpetuates a host of negative physical and emotional consequences that can affect us for a lifetime.

Not waiting opens us up to sexually transmitted diseases, non-marital pregnancies, and damaged abilities to connect and develop future relationships. Waiting promotes a better bond with your future spouse, less emotional baggage, and more emotional health.

To help young adults and parents explore this topic interactively, I have put together a video-based curriculum that can help take this discussion and interaction into your families, high school, college, or young adult community. It's called **Sex Love Date – Your Approach Matters**. Each session features a visual story from the nationally recognized feature film **Old Fashioned** (2015) combined with a video conversation with nationally recognized authors Sean McDowell and Tindell Baldwin. The companion workbook takes your family or community of students or friends into a deeper discussion and interaction. To preview this curriculum or order simply go to www.sexlovedate.com.



IF YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN

You have just read:

“THE BAIT AND SWITCH OF HOOKING UP”

Why did I title the E-book the way I did?

What IS essential is the picture. I prayed about a creative and biblical concept that would take advantage of biblical truth as it relates to a cultural phenomenon (hooking up) and spiritual battle.

The Bible admonishes all believers not to be tempted, enticed and drawn away “by the *lure* of your own evil desires.” Satan lies into and teams up with the flesh and culture (the world) to create an axis of evil. This axis of voices looks like a trillion dollar marketing universe that is designing and painting a fantastic lure hoping people will take the bait, get hooked firmly, and then reeled in. Victims flop on the deck of the boat gasping for breath. People get sliced open and eaten alive. We see both the confidence and audacity of the Devil baiting Jesus with fancy lures and tempting him in Luke 4 hoping he will bite down. He is relentless. He also failed. But the Scripture says about the Devil that “he left him until the next opportune time,” which means vigilance is required.

The reason? Lures can look so real.

The Bass Pro Shop (the largest outdoor fishing company in the world) has a “lure manager” who oversees the 40,000 fake things (lures) fish bite down on. Similarly, the lure business for the Enemy of our souls is an art form. The hookup lifestyle looks and feels like real meaning and an answer to what ails a generation hungry for love and intimacy. Underneath the veneers of meaning and fulfillment is a razor sharp hook, a violent catching moment, and death. OUR MISSION is to expose the lure, help people see the lure, and equip them to see and pursue the real thing God has for love and relationships.

SEX, LOVE, DATE is the tool that facilitates that journey and that experience in an honest and relevant way. To preview and order go to www.sexlovedate.com.



ABOUT KENNY

Kenny Luck is currently the Leadership Pastor at Crossline Church in Laguna Hills, California. He was previously the Men's Pastor at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California from 1997-2014 and is an expert in the field of men's issues.

He is also the Founder and President of Every Man Ministries which helps churches worldwide to develop and grow healthy men's communities with the goal to end child abuse, fatherlessness and protect women and children.

He has authored and coauthored 21 books, including Every Man, God's Man, Every Young Man, God's Man and the Every Man Bible Studies from the best-selling Every Man Series published by WaterBrook/Random House. Kenny's last 9 works have been published with B & H Publishing Group and are used by churches for in depth studies. He is a featured contributor to Christian Post, Charisma Magazine, Christian Mingle, Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox, New Man Magazine, Men of Integrity, The Journal, and Young Believer Magazine.

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NOTES

- ¹ *Hooked: New Science On How Sex Is Affecting Children, Dr. Joe S. McIlhaney & Freda Bush*
- ² *Medical Institute For Sexual Health*
- ³ *Medical Institute For Sexual Health*
- ⁴ *The End of Sex: How Hookup Culture is Leaving A Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfulfilled and Confused About Intimacy, Donna Freitas 2013*
- ⁵ *6 Ways of Looking At College Hookup Culture, Peter Weber, April 2, 2013 the week.com*
- ⁶ *Hooked: The New Science on How Casual Sex Is Affecting Children, Dr. Joe McIlhaney & Freda Bush*
- ⁷ *Medical Institute For Sexual Health*

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