

Hookup Culture: Inside and Outside the Bubble

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“Hookup culture” is a phrase that dances through conversations at CA, and yet to my knowledge there’s no concrete definition. Components of hook up culture affect all members of our community whether or not they are engaging in hook ups. Within my first week at CA as a new sophomore, I found myself receiving attention from multiple senior boys. They would stand at the end of the hallway audibly whistling as I walked by. At first, I was flattered; after all they were much older and they were *noticing* me. Yet, it wasn’t long before dread flooded into my conscious: I started to doubt what I wore to school each morning, and I was cautious about how I walked into the Stu Fac (1), planning my route so as to get food without facing my back side to the senior section. The panic and the dread I experienced are not unique, as they speak to the hookup culture we had at CA that in many ways still exists now.

But first, what is a hook up? While perhaps a popular term due to its vagueness a hookup can be anything from a kiss or “makeout” to more intimate behaviors, but that it’s hallmark is the impermanence of sexual relationships between two people. Hookup culture is the cultural norms that stem from power dynamics and how we interact with one another when planning to “hook up”. Hook up culture is the comments made about who’s “attractive” or “desirable”. In the external world beauty standards weigh preference on white cisgender heteronormative people, with body image standards emphasizing thin women and fit muscular men. CA is not immune to such beauty standards, with the ones in our community mirroring those in our media. Not only is the beauty standard within hookup culture damaging because it suggests that physical features are only attractive if they fit within conventional unrealistic standards, but it leaves us all feeling like we are not enough. Frankly, I am unsure how to change this problem, as these beauty standards extend further than CA, into Hollywood, social media, the fashion industry, and beyond.

Hookup culture is also consent or lack thereof. Is leaving a dance with someone “to go for a walk” consent to make out with them? (2) While our society tends towards dominant male culture (3) and the importance of consent is frequently omitted, CA does not. This was not always true. At my first dance sophomore year, upperclassmen guys perched on the edge of the dance floor scoping out the colorful landscape of teenage sweat like animals circling their prey. Now, such behavior is not acceptable. Instead, the importance and definition of consent has since been added to both freshman and sophomore seminar classes’ curriculums. A club known as “Consent Culture” started on campus, tackling discussions about consent at CA. This past year, lessons around consent were added into the handbook. The new rules underscored the importance of affirmative consent (4) emphasizing that under state law one can not consent below the age of 16, or under the influence of alcohol. Senior class leaders reminded my class were during the first week of school that “hooking up” with underclassman was deplorable. Given the spectrum of maturity between ages 14 and 18, doing so would take advantage of a

power dynamic, and is illegal. CA has made leaps and bounds in a short two years and yet there's still work to be done.

Some parts of the CA hookup culture are unavoidable. As high school students, dances will likely always cause rumours, but hopefully we can learn to be kind and empowering in our conversations about them. Similarly, dancing in close quarters in minimal clothing has been a hallmark of high school for decades and it is an aspect of our social lives that is unlikely to disappear. However, it is crucial that such dancing is consensual, and that clothing decisions are made because of self preference and not peer pressure or to please others. While CA may not be able to change the external world's relationship with hookup culture, we can and should continue to improve our own.

(1) CA's cafeteria

(2) Nope!

(3) Sense that male bodies have normative cultural permission to occupy space, assert physical dominance and initiate romantic and physical relationships.

(4) Explicit, informed agreement to participate in a sexual act without coercion. Not saying "no" is not affirmative consent.