

# Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

## When Sex Is Only Sex: The Campus Culture of "Hooking Up"

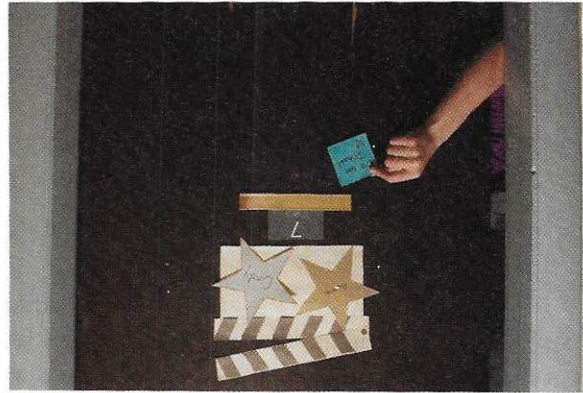
**Bryne:** My mom told me once that she didn't have sex with my dad until after they were engaged.

**Katy:** I guess times have really changed!

Have you ever been in a sexual situation and not been sure of the right thing to do? Most colleges and universities highlight two important rules. First, sexual activity must take place only when both participants have given clear statements of consent. The consent principle is what makes "having sex" different from date rape. Second, no one should knowingly expose another person to a sexually transmitted disease, especially when the partner is unaware of the danger.

These rules are very important, but they say little about the larger issue of what sex means. For example, when is it "right" to have a sexual relationship? How well do you have to know the other person? If you do have sex, are you obligated to see the person again?

Two generations ago, there were informal rules for campus sex. Dating was considered part of the courtship process. That is, "going out" was the way in which women and men evaluated each other as possible marriage partners while they sharpened their own sense of what they wanted in a mate. Because, on average, marriage took place in the early twenties, many college students became engaged and married while they were still in school. In this cultural climate, sex was viewed by college students as part of a relationship



that carried a commitment—a serious interest in the other person as a possible marriage partner.

Today, the sexual culture of the campus is very different. Partly because people now marry much later, the culture of courtship has declined dramatically. About three-fourths of women in a national survey point to a relatively new campus pattern, the culture of "hooking up." What exactly is "hooking up"? Most describe it in words like these: "When a girl and a guy get together for a physical encounter—anything from kissing to having sex—and don't necessarily expect anything further."

Student responses to the survey suggest that hookups have three characteristics. First, most couples who hook up know little about each other. Second, a typical hookup involves people who have been drinking alcohol, usually at a campus party. Third, most women are critical of the culture of hooking up and express little satisfaction with these encounters. Certainly, some women (and men) who hook up simply walk away, happy to have enjoyed a sexual experience free of further obligation. But given the powerful emotions that sex can unleash, hooking up often leaves someone wondering what to expect next: "Will you call me tomorrow?" "Will I see you again?"

The survey asked women who had experienced a recent hookup to report how they felt about the experience a day later. A majority of respondents said they felt "awkward," about half felt "disappointed" and "confused," and one in four felt "exploited." Clearly, for many people, sex is more than a physical encounter. In addition, because today's campus climate is very sensitive to charges of sexual exploitation, there is a need for clearer standards of fair play.

### What Do You Think?

1. How extensive is the pattern of hooking up on your campus?
2. What do you see as the advantages of sex without commitment? What are the disadvantages of this kind of relationship?
3. Do you think men and women are likely to answer the preceding questions differently? Explain.

SOURCE: Based in part on Marquardt and Glenn (2001).

Historically, the social control of sexuality was strong, mostly because sex often led to childbirth. We see these controls at work in the traditional distinction between "legitimate" reproduction (within marriage) and "illegitimate" reproduction (outside marriage). But once a society develops the technology to control births, its sexual norms become more permissive. In the United States, over the course of the twentieth century, sex moved beyond its basic reproductive function and became accepted as a form of intimacy and even recreation (Giddens, 1992).

**LATENT FUNCTIONS: THE CASE OF PROSTITUTION** It is easy to see that prostitution is harmful because it spreads disease and exploits women. But are there latent functions that help explain why prostitution is so widespread?

## Thinking About Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender

### Hate Crime Laws: Should We Punish Attitudes as Well as Actions?

On a cool October evening, nineteen-year-old Todd Mitchell, an African American, was standing with some friends in front of their apartment complex in Kenosha, Wisconsin. They had just seen the film *Mississippi Burning* and were turning over a scene that showed a white man beating a young black boy while he knelt in prayer.

"Do you feel hyped up to move on some white people?" asked Mitchell. Minutes later, they saw a young white boy walking toward them on the other side of the street. Mitchell commanded, "There goes a white boy; go get him!" The group swarmed around the youngster, beating him bloody



Do you think this example of vandalism should be prosecuted as a hate crime? In other words, should the punishment be more severe than if the spray painting were just "normal" graffiti? Why or why not?

in Iran, women who dare to expose their hair or wear makeup in public can be whipped; and not long ago, a Nigerian court convicted a divorced woman of bearing a child out of wedlock and sentenced her to death by stoning; her life was later spared out of concern for her child (Eboh, 2002; Jefferson, 2009). Gender also figures in the theories of deviance you read about earlier in the chapter. Robert Merton's strain theory, for example, defines cultural goals in terms of

and leaving him on the ground in a coma. The attackers took the boy's tennis shoes as a trophy.

Police soon arrested the teenagers and charged them with the beating. Mitchell went to trial as the ringleader, and the jury found him guilty of aggravated battery motivated by racial hatred. Instead of the usual two-year sentence, Mitchell went to jail for four years.

As this case illustrates, hate crime laws punish a crime more severely if the offender is motivated by bias against some category of people. Supporters make three arguments in favor of hate crime legislation. First, as noted in the text discussion of crime, the offender's intentions are always important in weighing criminal responsibility, so considering hatred an intention is nothing new. Second, victims of hate crimes typically suffer greater injury than victims of crimes with other motives. Third, a crime motivated by racial or other bias is more harmful because it inflames the public mood more than a crime carried out, say, for money.

Critics counter that while some hate crime cases involve hard-core racism, most are impulsive acts by young people. Even more important, critics maintain, hate crime laws are a threat to First Amendment guarantees of free speech. Hate crime laws allow courts to sentence offenders not just for their actions but also for their attitudes. As the Harvard University law professor Alan Dershowitz cautions, "As much as I hate bigotry, I fear much more the Court attempting to control the minds of its citizens." In short, according to critics, hate crime statutes open the door to punishing beliefs rather than behavior. In 1993, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the sentence handed down to Todd Mitchell. In a unanimous decision, the justices stated that the government should not punish an individual's beliefs. But, they reasoned, a belief is no longer protected when it becomes the motive for a crime.

### What Do You Think?

1. Do you think crimes motivated by hate are more harmful than those motivated by greed? Why or why not?
2. Do you think minorities such as African Americans should be subject to the same hate crime laws as white people? Why or why not?
3. Do you favor or oppose hate crime laws? Why?

SOURCES: Terry (1993), Sullivan (2002), and Hartocollis (2007).

financial success. Traditionally, at least, this goal has had more to do with the lives of men because women have been taught to define success in terms of relationships, particularly marriage and motherhood (Leonard, 1982). A more woman-focused theory might recognize the "strain" that results from the cultural ideal of equality clashing with the reality of gender-based inequality.

According to labeling theory, gender influences how we define deviance because people commonly use different

## Thinking About Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender

### The Meaning of Class: Is Getting Rich “the Survival of the Fittest”?

**Jake:** My dad is amazing. He’s really smart!

**Frank:** You mean he’s rich. He owns I don’t know how many

businesses.

**Jake:** Do you think people get rich without being smart?

It’s a question we all wonder about. How much is our social

position a matter of intelligence? What about hard work? Be-

ing born to the “right family”? Even “dumb luck”?

More than in most societies, in the United States we link

social standing to personal abilities, including intelligence. Every-

one knows that Mark Zuckerberg is the guy who made Facebook

what it is today. He has been on the cover of *Time* magazine and

he has amassed a personal fortune of more than \$30 billion. It is

easy to imagine that this Harvard dropout is a pretty smart guy.

But the idea that social standing is linked to intelli-

gence goes back a long time. We have all heard the words

“the survival of the fittest,” which describe our society as a

competitive jungle in which the “best” survive and the rest

fall behind. The phrase was coined by one of sociology’s

pioneers, Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), whose ideas about

social inequality are still widespread today.

Spencer, who lived in England, eagerly followed the work

of the natural scientist Charles Darwin (1809–1882). Darwin’s

theory of biological evolution held that a species changes

physically over many generations as it adapts to the natural

environment. Spencer incorrectly applied Darwin’s theory to

the operation of society, which does not operate according

to biological principles. In Spencer’s distorted view, society

became the “jungle,” with the “fittest” people rising to wealth

and the “failures” sinking into miserable poverty.

ask Davis and Moore, can we explain the fact that some form of social stratification has been found in every society? Davis and Moore note that modern societies have hundreds of occupational positions of varying importance. Certain jobs—say, washing cars or answering a telephone—are fairly easy and can be performed by almost anyone. Other jobs—such as designing a new generation of computers or trans-planting human organs—are very difficult and demand the scarce talents of people with extensive and expensive training. Therefore, Davis and Moore explain, the greater the functional importance of a position, the more rewards a society attaches to it. This strategy promotes productivity and efficiency because rewarding important work with income, prestige, power, or leisure encourages people to do these jobs and to work better, longer, and harder. In short, unequal rewards (the foundation of social stratification) benefit society as a whole. Davis and Moore claim that any society could be egalitarian, but only to the extent that people are willing to let

### EVALUATE

*anyone* perform *any* job. Equality also demands that someone who performs a job poorly be rewarded just as much as someone who performs the job well. Such a system clearly offers little incentive for people to try their best, reducing the society’s productive efficiency. The Davis-Moore thesis suggests the reason stratification exists; it does not state precisely what rewards a society should give to any occupational position or how unequal rewards should be. It merely points out that positions a society considers crucial must offer enough rewards to draw talented people away from less important work.

Although the Davis-Moore thesis is an important contribution to understanding social stratification, it has provoked criticism. Melvin Tumin (1953) wondered, first of all, how we assess the importance of a particular occupation. Perhaps the high rewards our society gives to physicians result partly from deliberate efforts by medical schools

### What Do You Think?

1. How much do you think inequality in our society can correctly be described as “the survival of the fittest”? Why?
2. Why do you think Spencer’s ideas are still popular in the United States today?
3. Is how much you earn a good measure of your importance to society? Why or why not?

It is no surprise that Spencer’s views, as wrong as they were, were popular among the rising U.S. industrialists of the day. John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937), who made a vast fortune building the oil industry, recited Spencer’s “social gospel” to young children in Sunday school. As Rockefeller saw it, the growth of giant corporations—and the astounding wealth of their owners—was merely the result of the survival of the fittest, a basic fact of nature. Neither Spencer nor Rockefeller had much sympathy for the poor, seeing poverty as evidence of individuals’ failing to measure up in a competitive world. Spencer opposed social welfare programs because he thought they penalized society’s “best” people (through taxes) and rewarded its “worst” members (through welfare benefits). By incorrectly using Darwin’s theory, the rich could turn their backs on everyone else, assuming that the existing inequality was inevitable and somehow “natural.” Today, sociologists point out that our society is far from a meritocracy, as Spencer claimed. And it is not the case that companies or individuals who generate lots of money necessarily benefit society. The people who made hundreds of millions of dollars selling subprime mortgages in recent years certainly ended up hurting just about everyone. But Spencer’s view that the “fittest” rise to the top remains widespread in our very unequal and individualistic culture.

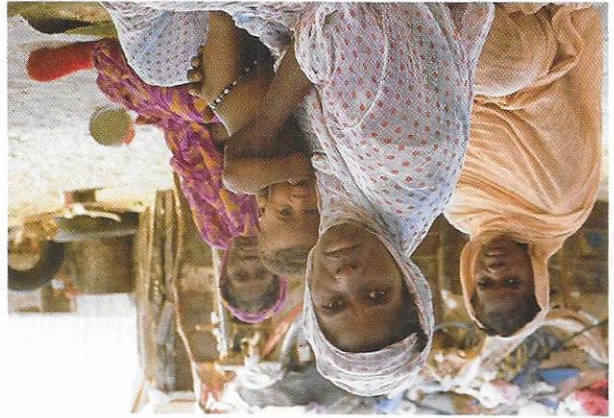
## Thinking Globally

## "God Made Me to Be a Slave"

Fatma Mint Marmadou is a young woman living in North Africa's Islamic Republic of Mauritania. Asked her age, she pauses, smiles, and shakes her head. She has no idea when she was born. Nor can she read or write. What she knows is tending camels, herding sheep, hauling bags of water, sweeping, and serving tea to her owners. This young woman is one of perhaps 500,000 slaves in Mauritania, which represents about 18 percent of that nation's population.

In the central region of this nation, having dark brown skin almost always means being a slave to an Arab owner. Fatma accepts her situation; she has known nothing else. She explains in a matter-of-fact voice that she is a slave like her mother before her and her grandmother before that. "Just as God created a camel to be a camel," she shrugs, "he created me to be a slave."

Fatma, her mother, and her brothers and sisters live in a squatter settlement on the edge of Nouakchott, Mauritania's capital city. Their home is a 9-by-12-foot hut that they built



Human slavery continues to exist in the twenty-first century.

enslaving members of another—still takes place in many countries throughout Asia, the Middle East, and especially Africa. The Thinking Globally box describes the reality of one slave's life in the African nation of Mauritania.

A second type of bondage is *slavery imposed by the state*. In this case, a government imposes forced labor on people convicted of criminal violations or on others simply because the government needs their labor. In China, for example, people who engage in prostitution or other crimes or who are addicted to drugs or engage in political dissent are subject to forced labor. In North Korea, the government can force people to work for almost any reason at all.

A third and common form of bondage is *child slavery*, in which desperately poor families send their children out

from wood scraps and other materials found at construction sites. The roof is nothing more than a piece of cloth; there is no plumbing or furniture. The nearest water comes from a well a mile down the road.

In this region, slavery began more than 500 years ago, about the time Columbus sailed west toward the Americas. As Arab and Berber tribes raided local villages, they made slaves of the people, and so it has been for dozens of generations ever since. In 1905, the French colonial rulers of Mauritania banned slavery. After the nation gained independence in 1961, the new government reaffirmed the ban. However, slavery was not officially abolished until 1981, and even then, it was not made a crime. In 2007, the nation passed legislation making the practice of slavery an offense punishable by up to ten years in prison, and the government now provides monetary compensation to victims of slavery.

But the new laws have done little to change strong traditions and prosecutions are rare and serious penalties for those convicted even rarer. The sad truth is that some societies still endorse slavery or near-slavery so that people like Fatma still have no conception of "freedom to choose."

The next question is more personal: "Are you and other girls ever raped?" Again, Fatma hesitates. With no hint of emotion, she responds, "Of course, in the night the men come to breed us. Is that what you mean by rape?"

## What Do You Think?

1. How does tradition play a part in keeping people in slavery?
2. What might explain the fact that the world still tolerates slavery?
3. Explain the connection between slavery and poverty.

SOURCES: Based on Burkett (1997), Fisher (2011), and Anti-Slavery International (2015).

into the streets to beg or steal or do whatever they can to survive. Probably tens of millions of children—many in the poorest countries of Latin America and Africa—fall into this category. In addition, an estimated 10 million children are forced to labor daily in the production of tobacco, sugarcane, cotton, and coffee in more than seventy nations.

Fourth, *debt bondage* is the practice by which an employer pays wages to workers that are less than what the employer charges the workers for company-provided food and housing. Under such an arrangement, workers can never pay their debts so, for practical purposes, workers are enslaved. Many sweatshop workers in low-income nations fall into this category.

Fifth, *servile forms of marriage* may also amount to slavery. In India, Thailand, and some African nations, families

## Thinking About Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender

### Female Genital Mutilation: Violence in the Name of Morality

Meserak Ramsey, a woman born in Ethiopia and now working as a nurse in California, paid a visit to an old friend's home. Soon after arriving, she noticed her friend's eighteen-month-old daughter huddled in the corner of a room in obvious distress. "What's wrong with her?" she asked.

Ramsey was shocked when the woman said her daughter had recently had a clitoridectomy, the surgical removal of the clitoris. This type of female genital mutilation—performed by a midwife, a tribal practitioner, or a doctor and typically without anesthesia—is common in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Egypt, and is known to be practiced in certain cultural groups in other nations around the world. It is illegal in the United States.

Among members of highly patriarchal societies, husbands demand that their wives be virgins at marriage and remain sexually faithful thereafter. The point of female genital mutilation is to eliminate sexual feeling, which, people assume, makes women less likely to violate sexual norms and thus be more desirable to men who seek to control them. In about one-fifth of all cases an even more severe procedure, called infibulation, is performed, in which the entire external genital area is removed and the surfaces are stitched together, leaving only a small hole for urination and menstruation. Before marriage, a husband retains the right to open the wound and ensure himself of his bride's virginity.



These young women have just undergone female genital mutilation. What do you think should be done about this practice?

and make threats if the advances are refused. Courts have declared that such *quid pro quo* sexual harassment (the Latin phrase means "one thing in return for another") is a violation of civil rights. More often, however, the problem of unwelcome sexual attention is a matter of subtle behavior—sexual

### What Do You Think?

1. Is female genital mutilation a medical procedure or a means of social control? Explain your answer.
2. Can you think of other examples of physical mutilation imposed on women? What are they?
3. What do you think should be done about female genital mutilation in places where it is widespread? Do you think respect for human rights should override respect for cultural differences in this case?

SOURCES: Crossette (1995), Boyle, Songora, & Foss (2001), and Sabatini (2011).

How many women have undergone female genital mutilation? Worldwide, estimates suggest that at least 3 million girls (most live in Africa) undergo this procedure annually. Although the annual number is declining, globally, the number of women who have been cut in this way exceed 100 million (Kristof & Wu Dunn, 2010; World Health Organization, 2015). In the United States, there are no official data, but it is likely that hundreds or even thousands of such procedures are performed every year. In most cases, immigrant mothers and grandmothers who have themselves been mutilated insist that young girls in their family follow their example. Indeed, many immigrant women demand the procedure because their daughters now live in the United States, where sexual mores are more lax. "I don't have to worry about her now," the girl's mother explained to Meserak Ramsey. "She'll be a good girl."

Medically, the consequences of genital mutilation include more than the loss of sexual pleasure. Pain is intense and can persist for years. There is also danger of infection, infertility, and even death. Ramsey knows the anguish all too well: She herself underwent genital mutilation as a young girl. She is one of the lucky ones who has had few medical problems since. But the extent of her suffering is suggested by this story: She invited a young U.S. couple to stay at her home. Late at night, she heard the woman's cries and burst into their room to investigate, only to learn that the couple was making love and the woman had just had an orgasm. "I didn't understand," Ramsey recalls. "I thought that there must be something wrong with American girls. But now I know that there is something wrong with me." Or with a system that inflicts such injury in the name of traditional morality.

teasing, off-color jokes, comments about someone's looks—that may or may not be intended to harass anyone. But based on the *effect* standard favored by many feminists, such actions add up to creating a *hostile environment* for women in the workplace. Incidents of this kind are far more complex because they involve different perceptions