

# 10

## Sexualities

Part of the “whole college experience,” many students say, involves going to parties, getting drunk, meeting someone new, making out, and maybe having sex.<sup>2</sup> These are **hookups**, one-time nonromantic sexual encounters. As one student describes it: “There’s this system that’s like, you’re gonna get drunk, randomly meet randoms, and just, like, whatever happens.”<sup>3</sup> Scholars call this system **hookup culture**, a norm on many American residential colleges in which casual sexual contact is held up as ideal, encouraged with rules for interaction, and institutionalized in much of higher education. All told, 70 percent of students will hook up at least once before graduation.<sup>4</sup>

For *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*, your first author asked 101 students to share their experiences with hookup culture. And they did, submitting over a million words of gossip, theories, rants, celebrations, and stories. The resulting book, together with lots of other excellent research, has given scholars a pretty good idea of what sex looks like on campuses today.<sup>5</sup>

To begin, most students report being eager to experiment with their sexuality, at least a little. They also report feeling pressure to do college “right,” which seems to require a casual attitude toward sex. Many students believe, or think that their peers believe, that

college is a time to go wild and have fun. They may even believe that separating sex from emotions is what sexual liberation looks like.

For students who are enthusiastic about casual sex—up to 25 percent—this works out well.<sup>6</sup> Casual sex raises their self-esteem and lowers rates of anxiety and depression. Students who don't take well to hookup culture, though, often struggle. About a third abstain from hooking up altogether, leaving many feeling isolated from their peers. The remainder of students, just under half, participate with mixed feelings and mixed experiences.

There are reasons why casual sex has so captured college life. Understanding hookup culture's history helps us see that sexualities, though deeply personal, are also expressed in a context.<sup>7</sup> This chapter builds on the last, exploring how gendered ideas, interactions, and institutions shape our sexual experiences. It also considers who benefits most from the social organization of sexuality: the distribution of pleasure, violence, and power. Throughout, it will become clear that the answer to the following question is no:

Q+A

**Gendered ideas, interactions, and institutions may affect almost every part of my life, but some things are personal and my sexuality is mine and mine alone, isn't it?**

You probably suspected it. We've already encountered the sexual regimes of the Puritans, the romantic Victorians, the revelers of the 1920s, and the experimental teenagers of the 1950s. In all cases, sexual attitudes and behaviors were strongly influenced by the cities, circumstances, and societies in which these individuals lived. The same is true now. To understand how, we'll learn about the rebels of the sexual revolution, see what followed, take a closer look at sexuality today, and end somewhere that might be familiar.

## SEX: THE NEAR HISTORY OF NOW

After World War II ended in 1945, birth rates increased in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and most European countries. In the United States, they rose from just over two children per woman to a high of nearly four.<sup>8</sup> By 1970 the number of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds had increased by over 50 percent.<sup>9</sup> We call this generation the “baby boomers.”

Youth often push boundaries set by adults and the boomers were no exception. Members of this generation protested the intractable Vietnam War and fought for African Americans' civil rights. Violent attacks by American government authorities—both on the Vietnamese and on American anti-war and civil


rights protesters—stirred a more general resistance to authority. Boomers’ desire to find their own way rather than conform to dominant norms of sex and gender fed into the growth of the women’s movement, gay liberation, and the sexual revolution.<sup>10</sup>

These movements reinforced permissive rather than punitive attitudes about sex, including rising approval of nonmarital sex and sex between teenagers.<sup>11</sup> The timing was perfect. The first birth control pill went on the market in 1960, and by 1965, it had been prescribed to six million women.<sup>12</sup> That year, the U.S. Supreme Court granted married people the unrestricted right to use birth control. It extended that same right to single people in 1972 and legalized abortion in the first and second trimesters in 1973. Suddenly men and women could have sex together for fun with substantially less fear of an unintended pregnancy or pregnancy-induced marriage.

Life was changing for sexual minorities and trans men and women, too. In the summer of 1969, a group of trans, gay, and nonbinary folks changed history when they revolted against police harassment in New York’s Greenwich Village, kicking off several nights of protest that would be dubbed the “Stonewall Riots.”<sup>13</sup> The Gay Liberation Front, one of the first gay rights organizations, was founded a week later. On the anniversary of the riots, the first gay pride parades were held in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco.

By 1973 “homosexuality” would be removed from the American Psychiatric Association’s list of mental disorders.<sup>14</sup> In 1977, San Francisco would elect the first openly gay person to public office. Inspired by “black is beautiful,” “gay is good” became a rallying cry, and Americans began coming out in record numbers. Four years after Stonewall, there were almost 800 gay and lesbian organizations in the United States. Sexual minority men and women weren’t just out of the closet, they were out and proud.

In the next decade, gay men’s communities would be devastated by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.<sup>15</sup> In the United States, though not in other countries, HIV



If you *really* love him...

**Rubbers – Every Time!**

Facing a hostile federal government, gay men in the early HIV era organized their own safer sex campaigns. Love for each other, and for their community, was one basis on which they mainstreamed the use of “rubbers,” or condoms.

affected gay men early, alongside injection drug users and other vulnerable populations. The first reports were in 1981. Within ten years, 8 to 10 million people were infected.<sup>16</sup> A diagnosis was a death sentence.

Because gay men were a disparaged population, politicians were slow to support research, prevention, and treatment. Gay men responded by protesting government inaction and exploitation by pharmaceutical companies. They also turned to their own communities, organizing the most effective safer sex campaign the world has ever seen. Way ahead of the medical community, light years ahead of heterosexuals, and unsupported by the federal government (which banned AIDS prevention materials that acknowledged homosexual sex), gay men became the first people in history to normalize condom use.

Out of fear of HIV, many children in the 1980s and 1990s received at least some comprehensive sex education, the kind that encourages abstinence but also teaches young people how to engage in sexual activity more safely. This education delayed the onset of intercourse and increased the chances of contraceptive use, without increasing the frequency of sex or number of acquired partners.<sup>17</sup> But there was swift backlash.<sup>18</sup> The federal government refused to offer funding for anything other than abstinence-only sex education, the kind that instructs students to refrain from sex until marriage and provides no practical information beyond strategies for saying no. Beginning in the mid-1990s, millions of federal dollars would be spent on these programs, which studies have shown to have no effect at all, not even on rates of abstinence.<sup>19</sup>

Just as comprehensive sex education was becoming more rare, the internet arrived, changing the media landscape. Among other things, the internet raised the level of competition between media producers exponentially. In 1955, the “Golden Age” of television, there were four channels. That’s one for every 41.5 million Americans. By 1994, there was one for every 1.7 million Americans.<sup>20</sup> As of this writing, in addition to hundreds of cable channels, there are 170 million active webpages on the internet. That’s one website for every 45 people on the planet.

With so much competition for attention, people making media content learned that more was more.<sup>21</sup> More fighting, more explosions, faster cars, scarier monsters, bloodier gore, cruder humor, and bigger and badder disasters. And more sex, too. So much sex that some have argued that media has become “pornified,” with only a thin line between so-called pornographic and so-called non-pornographic media.<sup>22</sup> Most young people aren’t receiving comprehensive sex education at school, but they’re getting quite an education online.

Harkening back to the 1920s, when women had to be “sexy” to get treated to a night on the town, women’s bodies have borne more of this pornification than men’s. Women in media, particularly conventionally attractive and feminine white women, are often portrayed as sexual objects. **Sexual objectification** is the reduction of a person to his or her sex appeal. To be clear, it’s not the

same thing as finding someone's body desirable; it's attraction to a body in the *absence* of an acknowledgement of the internal life of the person desired. Both men and women are objectified in popular culture, and gay men more than heterosexual men, but women overall are objectified much more.<sup>23</sup>

Pornography itself has become more extreme, too. Today the pornography industry makes billions of dollars a year producing material that is substantially more exploitative and violent than in earlier eras, involving more physically punishing sex acts and degrading language.<sup>24</sup> At the same time as there is more pornography than ever, it is accessed more easily, and a record number of Americans agree that it is morally acceptable.<sup>25</sup> PornHub, one of the industry's largest websites, reported 28.5 billion visits in 2017; that's 81 million visitors a day.<sup>26</sup>

Why have so many young people embraced pornography? Maybe because they think that to disapprove of it would be to disapprove of sex itself. Despite the efforts of abstinence-only educators and against the wishes of many conservative-leaning Americans, the core tenets of the sexual revolution—that we should embrace and explore our sexualities—have become powerful ideas in the United States.

## SEX AND "LIBERATION" TODAY

In the decades since the 1960s, the longstanding pressure to say no to sex has been replaced by a different pressure. Many young people in the United States, though by no means all, have come to feel that grasping their sexual freedom, enacting their sexual liberation, and empowering themselves require them to say yes.<sup>27</sup> Yes to learning about sexuality; to talking about it, brashly; to feeling comfortable seeing it, in all its explicitness; and to displaying one's body sexily. Yes to kink, also, and other marginalized forms of sexual expression and whatever activities promise pleasure or discovery. And yes to doing it casually, just for fun. To say no to any of these things, the logic goes—to be conservative about sex, take sex seriously, or simply be uninterested in sex—is to deprive oneself of freedom, liberation, and empowerment. Saying no is now considered old-fashioned, even regressive.

Consider that today many people believe that being a virgin is a liability after a certain age.<sup>28</sup> About a third of fifteen- to twenty-four-year-olds say that they feel pressure to be sexually active, and half of women and a third of men report losing their virginity before they're ready.<sup>29</sup> "I thought that only nerds, religious nuts, and momma's boys were untouched when they started college," asserted a white heterosexual woman (in reality, half of traditional-age students are virgins when they start college).<sup>30</sup> On college campuses, some young people

choose to lose their virginity in a one-time hookup just so they can say they did.<sup>31</sup> Only about 5 percent of Americans are now virgins on their (first) wedding night.<sup>32</sup>

The conflation of sexual liberation with saying yes comes out of the intersection of the women's movement and the sexual revolution. Feminists at the time were fighting the Victorian ideas of separate spheres and opposite sexes. These were behind the gendered love/sex binary, that idea that women are primarily interested in love and men primarily in sex, and the sexual double standard, judging women harshly for their sexual behavior and lauding men for theirs. To dismantle these ideas, feminists needed to do two things: (1) undo the sexist idea that women didn't "belong" on the masculine side of the binary, which included the right to have and enjoy sex without criticism, and (2) undo the androcentric idea that things on the feminine side of the binary weren't valuable and good, which included a desire for love and commitment.

As we've seen, they got half of what they wanted. Women can now enter male-dominated arenas and embrace at least some masculine qualities and interests, including being sexual and having sex for sex's sake, like a stereotypical man. But the androcentric devaluation of femininity is stronger than ever, leading some to think that desiring love and commitment is sweet but a little pathetic. This was based on the idea that the cavalier approach to sex characterized as masculine was what a natural, freely expressed sexuality would look like, whereas a more careful approach to sex, especially one that emphasized the context of loving care, was overly cautious and even repressed. A feminine approach to sex, in other words, was framed as "repressed" and a masculine approach to sex as "free."<sup>33</sup> The very definition of sexual liberation came to be modeled on a male stereotype of sexuality.

Many women today take this definition for granted, leading them to believe that adopting a masculine approach to sex is a way of grasping their liberation and gaining equality with men. This is especially true among white, heterosexual women raised in middle- and upper-class families. One woman fitting this description explained her approach to sex: "I railed against the idea that women were needy, dependent, easily heartsick, easily made hysterical by men, attention-obsessed, and primarily fixated on finding romance," she said insistently.<sup>34</sup> "I did this by proving how very like a boy I could behave." She engaged in what she called "sexual tomboyery":

*I figured the best way for a girl to reject oppressive sexism would be to act in exact opposition of what our sexist society expects of a decent woman; to get exactly what she wants from men, whenever she wants it. In essence, objectify them back.*

Many young women feel the same. And many young men accept this definition of liberation, too.

Granted, there are many good things about this. The imperative to say yes means greater tolerance for other peoples' choices. This opens up possibilities for new identities and practices, from pansexuality to roleplay.<sup>35</sup> Once considered a sin akin to bestiality, for example, oral sex is now widely accepted. We no longer fear that masturbation causes blindness. Over a third of women and almost half of men have engaged in anal sex. Nine out of ten Americans report that they would accept a lesbian, gay, or bisexual family member or friend. People of all sexual orientations are increasingly interested in exploring forms of consensual nonmonogamy like **polyamory** (the open practice and encouragement of long-term intimate relationships with more than one partner at a time) and **open relationships** (in which committed partners agree that each can have sexual encounters outside the relationship). On many other measures as well, Americans are not as puritanical as they once were.

The new imperative to say yes to sex, though, isn't merely a lifting of old rules, it's a new set. Real sexual freedom would be the right to have sex or not, however one likes, and for any reason, without social consequences. It's not really freedom if you *have* to say yes. In fact, it can feel quite oppressive for people who don't want to say yes, don't want to say yes right now, or don't want to say yes to just anything or anyone. Many people who identify as asexual, alongside immigrants from more conservative countries and people who hold tightly to their faith, do not feel free in this context at all.<sup>36</sup>

But a person doesn't have to be religious or conservative to feel pressured by these new sexual norms. After voluntarily turning down a hookup with a friend of a friend, for example, a student who considered herself quite radical worried that she was being a prude:

*I'm so embarrassed by that, and so I want to distance myself from it. I "know" that I should want to have sex all the time, and should take advantage of it when I get the chance; especially when it's a girl who's showing interest in me. But I didn't. . . . [P]ressure to be sexual was and has been SO CONSTANT for so long. . . . I feel as if by not voluntarily taking part in it, I am weird, abnormal, and a prude.<sup>37</sup>*

Young people today often feel like having sex is more of an expectation than an opportunity.

Moreover, the sexual playground promised by this new set of rules is not necessarily equally fun for everyone. Even if we are more sexually free now than we have been in the past, freedom is not the same thing as equality. To what, exactly, are we saying yes? Like the women of the 1970s, today's young women want to say "yes to sex and no to sexism."<sup>38</sup> But that's easier said than done.

Similarly, coming out of the closet is now an unquestioned destination for anyone who has even an inkling of same-sex sexual desire. Accordingly, men and women with these desires often feel compelled to be "out," lest they be

seen by others as repressed, cowardly, or ashamed. Recall, though, that the idea that homosexuality is an identity is rather new; both in the United States and elsewhere, the notion that homosexuality can be merely a behavior persists. In China, for instance, most men over the age of forty don't recognize a gay identity, even those who have frequent sexual liaisons with other men.<sup>39</sup> Younger Chinese men are more likely to adopt a Western-style gay identity, but they do not necessarily value coming out to everyone. Some Americans think similarly.<sup>40</sup> A national survey asked self-identified heterosexuals if they'd ever had a sexual encounter with someone of the same sex: Ten percent of women and 2 percent of men said they had.<sup>41</sup> Researchers studying sexually transmitted infections have found this to be frequent enough that they define the population as "men who have sex with men" (MSM) and "women who have sex with women" (WSW) rather than queer-identified.

Being out is considered psychologically healthy in many parts of the West today and many people proudly identify as a sexual minority. But some don't. Research on voluntarily closeted men and women shows that some people happily "decenter" their same-sex desires, opting not to act on them, without suffering from shame or a sense of repression.<sup>42</sup> To insist that everyone who feels such desire *must* identify as a sexual minority and live openly as such is no less coercive than insisting that people *may not* do these things. Being out is good and fine, but true freedom would mean embracing the choices people make, regardless of whether they match one's personal model of liberation.

The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to exploring the way that heterocentrism and gender inequality shape how we think about and engage in sexual activity. It will look at how we define sex, divide up desire, and array ourselves in a hierarchy of attractiveness. It will also discuss how we "do" sex and the relationship between our sexual scripts and sexual violence.

## GENDERED SEXUALITIES

### *Sex Defined*

Most Americans continue to assume, absent clear signs otherwise, that new people they meet are heterosexual and committed to **monogamy**, the open practice and encouragement of long-term intimate relationships with only one person. Accordingly, our institutions are still organized around the assumption that every sexual or romantic couple involves one man and one woman, as indicated by things like "his" and "hers" embroidered towels and wedding ring sets. This is especially obvious around Valentine's Day, when companies offer hotel rooms fit for a "king and queen," spa packages for "beauty and her beast," and



romantic dinners for “Romeo and his Juliet.”

Reflecting this hetero- and **mononormativity**—the normalizing of monogamy—the word “sex” is generally used to refer to one sexual activity in particular: penile-vaginal intercourse. Euphemisms like “home base” and “all the way” are widely understood to refer to that specific activity. It’s the “it” in “Did you do it?” This is the **coital imperative**, the idea that any fully sexually active couple must be having penile-vaginal intercourse (also known as “coitus”) and any fully completed sexual activity will include it.<sup>43</sup> When we ask young people directly what they think “counts” as sex, essentially 100 percent will say intercourse, but there’s plenty of disagreement about everything else.<sup>44</sup>

Especially in certain circumstances, like virginity loss, the imperative has substantial power. Many young people don’t think they’ve truly lost their virginity until a penis goes into a vagina, no matter how many genitals they’ve encountered or sexual acts they’ve performed.<sup>45</sup> This includes some gay men and lesbians. And though nonheterosexuals generally have more expansive definitions of sex, the penis is still often centered. About 90 percent think penile-anal intercourse counts as sex, for example, but there’s more confusion about what counts as sex between women.<sup>46</sup>

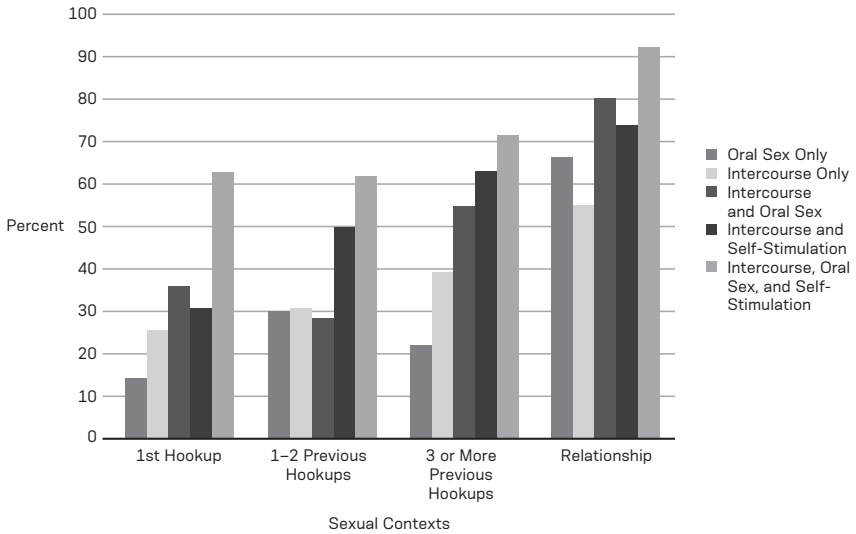
By unnecessarily constraining sexual options, the coital imperative creates potential problems for men and women having sex together, too. When penile-vaginal intercourse is defined as “real sex,” and everything else is just “foreplay,” having penile-vaginal intercourse can feel compulsory. If intercourse is undesired, difficult, or impossible—when women experience pain when penetrated or when men struggle to maintain erections—the coital imperative defines their sexuality as dysfunctional.<sup>47</sup>

Since men reliably have orgasms during intercourse, but women do not, the coital imperative also prioritizes an activity that privileges his orgasm at the expense of hers.<sup>48</sup> So does the practice of women performing oral sex upon men sooner in a relationship than men perform it on women, as well as more often and with more intent to produce orgasm.<sup>49</sup> These two facts result in an **orgasm gap** in mixed-sex pairings, a phenomenon in which women report fewer orgasms than men. Women having sex with men enjoy, on average, only one orgasm for every three of their partners’.<sup>50</sup>



“Mr.” and “Mrs.” decorative pillows and other his and her sets highlight how our institutions still assume that all sexual couples include a man and a woman.

**FIGURE 10.1 | PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN HAVING AN ORGASM IN FOUR SEXUAL CONTEXTS, BY OCCURRENCE OF SELECTED SEXUAL BEHAVIORS**



Note: Oral sex refers to receiving oral sex.

Source: E. A. Armstrong, P. England, and A. C. K. Fogarty, "Orgasm in College Hook-ups and Relationships," in *Families as They Really Are*, ed. Barbara Risman (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2009).

Myths about men's and women's bodies suggest that this gap is inevitable, with the female orgasm finicky and the male orgasm, if anything, too eager.<sup>51</sup> But this isn't the case. Some countries have larger orgasm gaps than others: the one in the United States, for example, is twice as large as the ones in Brazil and Japan.<sup>52</sup> When women have sex with women, they have two to three times as many orgasms as women who have sex with men.<sup>53</sup> As the far right column in Figure 10.1 shows, when college women are in relationships with men and a variety of forms of stimulation is used, they have orgasms 92 percent of the time.<sup>54</sup> And, when women are alone, their rate of orgasm is as high as 96 percent.<sup>55</sup> Even women who never have orgasms with male partners often do regularly when they masturbate.<sup>56</sup> Women could have just as many orgasms as men if participants decided to prioritize it.

We naturalize the orgasm gap, though, treating it as inevitable, because we tend to believe that women are genuinely less sexual than men.<sup>57</sup> But that isn't true either. Instead, we've divided up desire, taking from women the pleasure of lust and taking from men the pleasure of being lusted after.

## *Divided Desire*

To be sexy is to be an object of desire for others; to be *sexual* is to have the capacity to experience sexual desire.<sup>58</sup> Most of us want to both feel sexual and be sexy but, thanks to the gendered love/sex binary, we learn to divide these phenomena by gender.<sup>59</sup> Men are sexual, we are told, and women are sexy. Men desire and women are desirable. Men want women. And what do women want? Women want to be wanted.

In sex education, for example, boys' sexuality is overtly linked with pleasure, if only because his orgasm is mentioned in the context of reproduction.<sup>60</sup> Girls are more likely to get warnings about pregnancy and sexual coercion. The clitoris, the organ responsible for female orgasm, is almost never mentioned. Parents, likewise, rarely discuss the pleasurable aspects of sex, especially with their daughters.<sup>61</sup> Teenage girls are taught to think of their sexuality as something that can "get them into trouble" and are more likely than teenage boys to associate sex with violence, disease, pregnancy, and "bad reputations."<sup>62</sup>

Media echoes this privileging of male desire. Much of it assumes a **heterosexual male gaze**, meaning that content is designed to appeal to a hypothetical heterosexual man.<sup>63</sup> Plot-lines and visuals intended to incite men's desire draw our attention to men's **subjectivity**, their internal thoughts and feelings. This is an acknowledgment that they are sexual, which is good, but it's also a prescription. A particular kind of woman is consistently portrayed as sexually desirable, repetitively implying that she is the only proper object of their sexual attraction. In this way, men undergo a process of **sexual subjectification**: they are told what their internal thoughts and feelings should be. For men attracted to women, this prescription may limit their



Real women and girls are seen through lenses formed by omnipresent sexually explicit images of women's bodies presented as desirable objects for the gaze of the presumptively heterosexual male consumer.

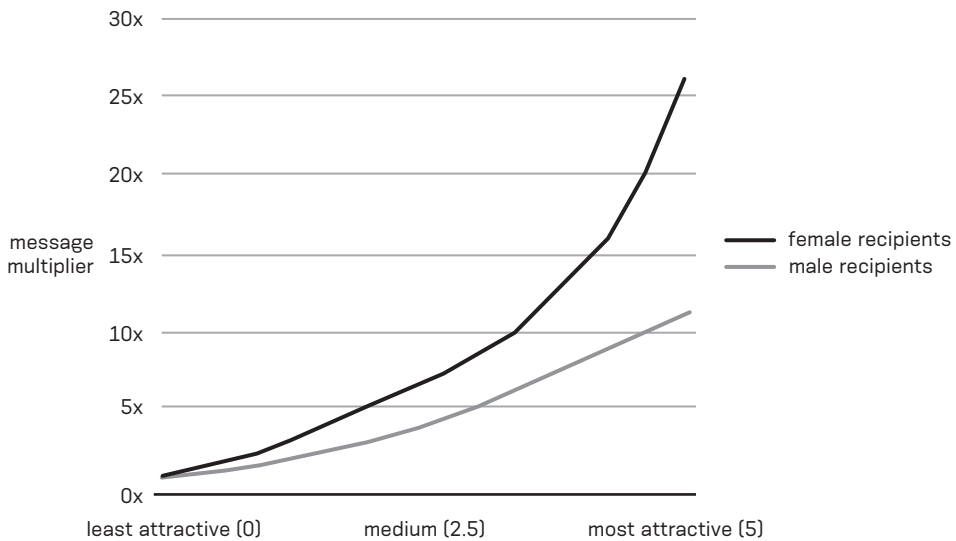
ability to recognize when they're attracted to women outside the very narrow ideal; for men attracted to men, it may limit their ability to recognize attraction at all.

For women, the heterosexual male gaze means being regularly exposed to idealized images of female bodies. As a result, many women internalize the idea that their value is heavily dependent on their ability to conform to a narrow and largely unattainable definition of attractiveness, whereas men's value is somewhat less so.<sup>64</sup> In one survey, people were three times as likely to say that women, compared to men, face "a lot of pressure" to be physically attractive.<sup>65</sup> Research on lesbians is mixed. Some hints that they may be protected because they are uninterested in male sexual attention, but other research suggests that the idealized images still take a toll.<sup>66</sup>

We see this outsized emphasis on women's versus men's attractiveness in data collected from online dating sites and apps. Data from OkCupid, for example, the third most popular platform, reveals that both men and women value attractiveness in each other, but men much more so (see Figure 10.2).<sup>67</sup> The most attractive men receive ten times the average number of messages; the most attractive women receive twenty-five times the average.

This asymmetric emphasis on women's appearance suggests that, at least in the abstract, women's value is less tied to who they are and what they do, and

**FIGURE 10.2 | NUMBER OF MESSAGES RECEIVED VS. RECIPIENT'S ATTRACTIVENESS**



Source: Christian Rudder, "Your Looks and Your Inbox," *OkTrends* (blog), November 17, 2009. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20100725135317/http://blog.okcupid.com/index.php/your-looks-and-online-dating>.

more tied to how they look. Understanding this, many women **self-objectify**, internalizing the idea that their physical attractiveness determines their worth. During sex, worrying about how they look may translate into a process called **spectating**, watching one's sexual performance from the outside.<sup>68</sup> Spectating women might try to stay in sexual positions they think are flattering, arrange their body to make themselves look thinner or curvier, try to keep their face looking pretty, and ensure they don't make embarrassing noises. They may even avoid orgasm because doing so means losing control of these things. Because of spectating, some women have "out-of-body sexual experiences" in which they don't focus much on how sex *feels*. And, sure enough, research has shown that the more a woman worries about how she looks, the less likely she'll experience sexual desire, pleasure, and orgasm.<sup>69</sup>

While heterosexual men are less likely to be sexually objectified, gay and bisexual men in same-sex encounters can be positioned as the objectifier, the objectified, or both. Standards of fitness and attractiveness among queer men, and in media content aimed at them, can be as unrealistic as those aimed at women. In response, sexual minority men report higher levels of self-objectification than heterosexual men and a sense of being under an objectifying gay male gaze.<sup>70</sup> One man interviewed about his experiences, for example, complained that sex often left him feeling "used" by men:

*You get tired of being used. . . . [I] was just nothing but this little receptacle. . . . It wasn't reciprocal. . . . I need to feel like some attention is to me and I'm not just this machine. . . . It makes me one dimensional. It just makes me an object.<sup>71</sup>*

It may be that the objectifying gaze isn't so much heterosexual as it is masculine, reflecting a stereotypically male orientation toward sex that emphasizes "scoring" over connection and (as the black, lesbian, feminist writer Audre Lorde describes it) "sensation without feeling."<sup>72</sup>

The discomfort of being sexually objectified may also help explain why so many heterosexual men are uncomfortable among gay and bisexual men. Used to being the subject, suddenly they may be an object. Many women and queer men have grown accustomed to this feeling, whether they enjoy it or not. For the heterosexual man who has generally been spared an objectifying gaze, it might be quite disconcerting to suddenly be on the other side of such a one-sided relationship.

### *The Erotic Marketplace*

Not everyone is considered worthy of an objectifying gaze. The phrase **erotic marketplace** refers to the ways in which people are organized and ordered according to their perceived sexual desirability. The term *market* is typically

used to describe the abstract space in which goods and services are attributed economic value. In the erotic marketplace, some people have more erotic “capital” than others.<sup>73</sup> Data from OkCupid is useful here, too.

**RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY** As the chapter on intersectionality showed, race is gendered.<sup>74</sup> Racism and colorism play a role in the erotic marketplace, then, as does the socially constructed gender of race. Racial stereotypes about black and Latino men—epitomized in the “black buck” and “Latin lover” archetypes—portray them as especially sexual and sexually skilled compared to white men.<sup>75</sup> This is a double-edged sword, and a sharp one. By virtue of these stereotypes, they may be desired as sexual partners—“I think when a white guy approaches you he just wants a trophy. That’s how it always comes off,” said one African American man about his experience in gay bars—but being fetishized doesn’t necessarily feel good.<sup>76</sup> It’s just another type of sexual objectification.

There’s also the possibility that black and Latino men may be perceived as *too* masculine and, therefore, sexually dangerous. Representations of Latino men in media often portray them idling on the street, oozing a vaguely threatening sexuality, and harassing women who nervously walk by; the stereotype of black men as sexually dangerous to white women has its roots in the white supremacist need to demonize black men after the end of slavery.<sup>77</sup> Based on these notions, some potential partners may avoid black and Latino men.

Consequently, black and Latino men may police their own behavior, knowing that racism means that their acts will be judged more harshly than those of white men.<sup>78</sup> This kind of decision has been described as a **politics of respectability**, a form of resistance to negative racial stereotypes that involves being “good” and following conservative norms of appearance and behavior.<sup>79</sup> Because people of color are marked categories in the United States, anything they do may be read by others as reflecting not individual choice but group characteristics. Thus, they face an additional layer of concern when making sexual choices: the possibility of affirming harmful beliefs about their racial group. This includes a heightened risk of being prosecuted or suffering violence.

For Asian men, stereotypes based on race are straightforwardly negative. When asked to describe how Asian Americans were stereotyped, Michael, a Chinese American, responded that it “blends in with Asian-women-in-America stereotypes.”<sup>80</sup> He elaborated: “Asian men are smooth. Expected to be submissive. Expected to be quiet and not speak up and express their feelings. And they’re supposed to be small-dicked.” Asian men are seen by some as unmasculine and, therefore, sexually deficient.<sup>81</sup> Research shows that even some Asian women may think so.<sup>82</sup> This led one man of Japanese and Mexican descent to say: “Even the Asian girls that I liked, they would always like White guys.”<sup>83</sup>

We see these gendered racial patterns in the OkCupid data. In terms of compatibility, as measured by an algorithm, all races match with all other races

**TABLE 10.1 | PERCENT CHANCE THAT A MAN IN EACH RACIAL GROUP WILL RECEIVE A RESPONSE FROM AN INQUIRY**

| Racial Group     | Men Messaging Women | Men Messaging Men |
|------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| White            | 29%                 | 45%               |
| Native American  | 28%                 | 44%               |
| Middle Eastern   | 26%                 | 48%               |
| Pacific Islander | 25%                 | 38%               |
| Latino           | 23%                 | 42%               |
| Asian            | 22%                 | 38%               |
| Black            | 22%                 | 35%               |
| South Asian      | 21%                 | 38%               |
| <b>Average</b>   | <b>28%</b>          | <b>43%</b>        |

Source: Christian Rudder, "How Your Race Affects the Messages You Get," *OkTrends* (blog), October 5, 2009. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20111008215612/http://blog.okcupid.com/index.php/your-race-affects-whether-people-write-you-back/>.

rather equally.<sup>84</sup> But all races aren't equally valued in the erotic marketplace. Table 10.1 lists how often men receive replies. In a society that centers and elevates whiteness, we would expect that white men would have an advantage, and they do. White men are more likely than men of any other race to get a response from women and the second most likely, after Middle Eastern men, to get a response from men. In both cases, Native American men follow close behind these men in popularity.

Conversely, black and Latino men are among the least likely to get a response from either women or men, with Latino men doing somewhat better among men messaging men. This suggests that the stereotype of hypermasculinity hurts more than helps black and Latino men in the erotic marketplace. Asian men, too, are among the groups that get the least frequent responses. In one study of online dating behavior, college-educated white women were actually more likely to respond to a white man without a college degree than an Asian man with one.<sup>85</sup>

Racism—both the kind that fetishizes and the kind that denigrates—also affects the desirability of women. Asian women, by virtue of being seen as extra-feminine, are viewed by some as more sexually malleable than white women; this may make them appealing to men who are looking for subservient partners. One white American man who prefers Asian women explained: "I'm kind of a soft guy. I really find [white] American women overly aggressive."<sup>86</sup> There is some evidence that this dynamic plays out among sexual minority men, too, with Asian men being seen as sexual partners who will play a feminized role.<sup>87</sup>

**TABLE 10.2 | PERCENT CHANCE THAT A WOMAN IN EACH RACIAL GROUP WILL RECEIVE A RESPONSE FROM AN INQUIRY**

| Racial Group     | Women Messaging Women | Women Messaging Men |
|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Middle Eastern   | 50%                   | 52%                 |
| Pacific Islander | 46%                   | 49%                 |
| Asian            | 44%                   | 53%                 |
| Latina           | 43%                   | 50%                 |
| South Asian      | 43%                   | 63%                 |
| White            | 42%                   | 51%                 |
| Native American  | 42%                   | 49%                 |
| Black            | 34%                   | 47%                 |
| <b>Average</b>   | <b>42%</b>            | <b>51%</b>          |

Source: Christian Rudder, "How Your Race Affects the Messages You Get" and "Same-Sex Data for Race vs. Reply Rates," *OkTrends* (blog). Retrieved from <http://blog.okcupid.com/index.php/your-race-affects-whether-people-write-you-back/> and <https://web.archive.org/web/20110116062331/http://blog.okcupid.com/index.php/same-sex-data-race-reply/>.

Table 10.2 shows that Asian, Pacific Islander, South Asian, and Middle Eastern women do very well in the erotic market. These are the four groups most likely to receive a response from women messaging men, and three of the top four from women messaging women. In contrast, black women face a situation similar to that of Asian men. Racial stereotypes that masculinize African Americans relative to whites undermine a black woman's value in the erotic marketplace. Black women—whether they are college educated or not—are least likely to receive a response.<sup>88</sup> Latina women fall somewhere in between.

Actual dating and marriage patterns reflect what we see online.<sup>89</sup> White people are more likely to marry Latinos, Native Americans, or Asians than they are to marry black people. Perhaps the stereotype of the "feisty Latina" or "hot Latin lover" is less costly to Latinas and Latinos than the stereotype of the "angry black woman" or "scary black man" is to African Americans. Here the intersection of gender and race matters, too. White men are more likely to marry Asian than black women, and white women are more likely to marry black men than Asian men.<sup>90</sup> Reflecting colorism, lighter-skinned racial minorities are more likely to intermarry with whites than darker-skinned minorities.

Evidence further suggests that people are more comfortable experimenting with interracial relationships than they are committing to them.<sup>91</sup> When white teenagers date white peers, they introduce them to their parents 71 percent of the time, but nonwhite girlfriends or boyfriends get to meet parents only 57 percent of the time. Black teenagers are also reluctant to introduce their white boyfriends or girlfriends, though the difference is smaller. In general, the rate of interracial dating tends to decrease as levels of commitment increase. People are more likely to date partners of a different race than they are to live with them



and they're even less likely to marry them. Sexual minorities of both sexes are more likely to date interracially, but race clearly still plays an erotic role.<sup>92</sup>

**EROTICIZED INEQUALITY** Gender also straightforwardly shapes ideas about how men and women should couple. Because of sexism, for example, couples in which the man appears to have more power than the woman seem most natural and desirable. Cultural norms dictate that men be taller, stronger, bigger, older, and more educated than their female partners, and have a higher-status job that brings in more income. It doesn't have to be a Cinderella story, but we've learned to feel attracted to a gentle asymmetry.

The data on age puts this in stark relief. Age is an imperfect measure of both attractiveness and accomplishment: personal maturity, career success, and financial security. As we've already seen, men seeking women put a premium on attractiveness (which for women is conflated with youth) and a younger woman's lesser accomplishment is no drawback (and may even be desirable). Men seeking women on OkCupid report that they'll consider dating women who are quite a lot younger, but only a bit older.<sup>93</sup> As they age, men's lower bracket stays low. The average thirty-year-old man, for instance, says he's interested in dating a woman as old as thirty-five and as young as twenty-two. A man at forty will date a woman as old as forty-five but as young as twenty-seven.

This is what men say, anyway. In practice, men mostly seek contact with the youngest women in their reported age bracket and women who fall *below* it.<sup>94</sup> Their willingness to date "down" suggests that they prefer or will accept a mate whose career is "behind" their own. The average woman, conversely, prefers to date a man who is her age or older. As women age, they will accept about five years on either side. In actual messaging, they tend to focus on men their own age. At some point in this skewed erotic market, the oldest and most accomplished women and the youngest and least accomplished men are boxed out.

For men, then, being bigger, stronger, and older, having advanced degrees, and enjoying a high-prestige, well-paid occupation are always advantages. For women, all these things carry both advantages and disadvantages. Gains may help her catch an accomplished man, but she might reasonably worry that too many gains could knock her out of the competition altogether. Meanwhile, her ability to attract men may decrease as she ages, while the men in her same age cohort become relatively *more* attractive. His achievements count more toward his attractiveness than hers do, and fading looks harm her more than him.

Many women understand this. In a study of newly admitted MBA students, respondents were asked to indicate their expected future salaries. Half were told that their peers would see their answers and half were told they'd be confidential. There were no differences in the salaries reported by men and women in the latter group, but single women who thought their peers would see their answers reported salary goals \$18,000 lower than single women promised

confidentiality.<sup>95</sup> They also reported lower ambitions, less interest in leadership, and less willingness to travel. Men and non-single women didn't show this difference. Concerned that seeming too ambitious or being too successful might make them unattractive to men, women sometimes moderate their career goals. They're not delusional if they do. Women who make more money than the men they're dating are less likely to get married and, if they are married, more likely to get divorced.<sup>96</sup>

Discrimination based on conformity to gender expectations isn't limited, of course, to mixed-sex matches. The very limited research on women seeking women suggests that they have a slight preference for feminine women.<sup>97</sup> A wider literature on men seeking men has found preferences for "straight-acting" men, reflecting the hegemony of masculinity and androcentric bias against femininity.<sup>98</sup> On Grindr and other apps, some men try to enhance their erotic capital by advertising their masculine qualities and concealing their feminine ones, a practice described as **mascing** (a portmanteau of "masculine" and "masking").<sup>99</sup>

Mascing may include expressing an interest in sports, emphasizing one's interest in the outdoors, or growing a hearty beard. It may even include identifying as heterosexual. "[T]here are a lot of guys out there that are like me," said one heterosexual-identified man who regularly sought out other men for sex.<sup>100</sup> Many of these men actually avoided gay-identified men, preferring other heterosexual-identified men or ones who identify as bisexual. One explained that he liked "straight guys" because "I identify with them more because that's kinda, like [how] I feel myself. And bi guys, the same way. We can talk about women [and watch] hetero porn."<sup>101</sup> It's probably not necessary for every stirring of one's loins to prompt an identity crisis, but prejudice against femininity—whether in oneself or in others—is still androcentrism, even when men who have sex with men are doing it.

While our individual preferences seem very personal, the data from OkCupid and other research into sexual preferences reveal that our aggregated choices conform to social hierarchies.<sup>102</sup> Gender and race hierarchies clearly shape our ideas about who is an appealing and appropriate sexual and romantic partner. And, as the next section will show, when two people are in the position of acting on their sexual attraction to one another, gendered dynamics persist.

### *Gendered Scripts*

When sexual interactions unfold in real time, they are guided by information we've gleaned about what sex is, how it works, who does what, and what it means. This knowledge, or set of instructions, is called a **sexual script**, the social rules

that guide sexual interaction.<sup>103</sup> Because of sexual scripts, people with a shared culture usually engage sexually in similar ways. Generally, sexual scripts assume sex occurs between two people. They kiss first (closed mouth), then have close body contact with more kissing (open mouth), and only then move to grabbing and squeezing. Once this all has occurred, the couple gets horizontal. Then there's more kissing and groping, including the touching of genitals through clothes. Clothes start coming off; usually tops before bottoms. If it's a mixed-sex couple, her clothes usually come off first (her shirt, his shirt, her pants, his pants, etc.); it's a toss-up if it's a same-sex couple, but their sexual interactions may be guided by differences in gender performance rather than their identity. The scripts of both mixed-sex and same-sex couples may still have a somewhat rigid ascending order of intimacy: fellatio before cunnilingus, oral before penile-vaginal, penile-vaginal before anal, and oral before anal, all depending on what body parts are involved.

We tend to be especially careful to follow sexual scripts when we are first becoming sexually active, or first becoming active with a new partner. Scripts are particularly helpful when we're concerned about doing sex "right." They create predictability and ease social interaction: *Did they kiss me back? Aha, now I have clearance to try for second base.* We police one another around these sexual rules. In some cases, they're even enforced with laws. The rule that French kissing comes before fondling, for instance, isn't just a guideline; someone who moves straight to second base could be charged with sexual battery, a legal term for unwanted but nonviolent sexual touching.

The sexual script is also gendered, featuring more masculine and more feminine roles. The masculine role in sex is an assertive one involving making the first move, touching first, pushing the interaction along, and removing a partner's clothes. The feminine role in sex is responsive. A feminine sexuality is one which waits, never acts or initiates. The feminine partner is put into sexual positions by the masculine partner. The masculine partner penetrates; the feminine partner is penetrated.

In practice, of course, people rarely behave in purely feminine and masculine ways, but men who have sex with women and women who have sex with men will probably recognize these dynamics. People who have sex with people of the same sex may recognize them, too, as masculinity and femininity are not features of male-bodied and female-bodied people, respectively, but can be "done" by anyone of any body and identity. Some gay and bisexual men may be in the habit of playing more of a responsive than assertive role in sex. And gay and bisexual women are quite obviously capable of playing an assertive role with one another, otherwise they would never have sex at all.

Because the script puts women in the position of enacting a feminine version of sexuality that is responsive to sexual activity but doesn't initiate it, women might not ask their male partners for orgasms or tell them how to give them

one.<sup>104</sup> Because of the coital imperative and a gendered love/sex binary that prioritizes his sexualness and her sexiness, orgasmic equality would require quite a bit of reimagining of what is sexually possible. The script adds one more layer of difficulty, because now she doesn't just have to *feel* differently (not just sexy, but sexual), she has to *act* differently (not just receptive, but assertive). Likewise, men enacting a masculine version of sexuality have to do the same: see themselves as sexy, not just sexual; learn to prioritize her orgasm as well as their own; and find a way to be responsive in bed alongside being assertive. All of this is a lot to overcome, especially the first few times two people are in bed together.

The same masculine imperative to have sex, and the defining of reluctance as feminine, is also behind the **push-and-resist dynamic**, a situation in which it's normal for men to press sexual activity consistently in the direction of increasing sexual intimacy (whether he wants to or not) and for women to stop or slow down the accelerating intimacy when he's going "too far" (whether she wants to or not).<sup>105</sup> This interferes with people's ability to enjoy what they're experiencing. Men may be thinking about what they *aren't yet doing*. Women, in turn, can't get too swept away because they can't necessarily count on men to pace intimacy comfortably. They, for their part, are left thinking about what they *might do*. In neither case are men and women actually thinking about what they *are doing*, making it difficult for either partner to be in the moment, simply experiencing pleasure.

The push-and-resist dynamic also, predictably, contributes to sexual violence.

### *Sexual Violence*

In the United States, one in three women and one in six men have experienced sexual violence; young people, the working class and poor, racial minorities, people with disabilities, people who are imprisoned, and gender-nonconforming people are at highest risk.<sup>106</sup> Men are the vast majority of perpetrators, representing 97 percent of people arrested for sexual assault.<sup>107</sup> These men often don't believe their behavior constitutes sexual assault, even when it matches legal definitions.<sup>108</sup> Men who rape are more likely than other men to have been sexually or physically abused themselves.<sup>109</sup>

**THE POLITICS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE** That we even identify sexual assault as a crime and collect these statistics is rather new. Among the English who colonized the United States, women were property.<sup>110</sup> Men could do whatever they wanted with their property, including rape it. If you raped someone else's property, though, you damaged the goods. So rape was a crime, but it was a property crime; more like theft than assault. Enslaved people were also

defined as property, so the men given legal right to own them could violate them with impunity.<sup>111</sup> The colonists denied Native American men property rights, so unless Native women were owned by or married to white men, raping them wasn't a crime at all.<sup>112</sup> Much of this was true until about 150 years ago.

Even then, things didn't change right away. Well into the 1970s, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault went largely unregulated by the government. Violence between intimate partners was seen as part of men's legitimate right to "govern" their own homes. Sexual harassment was so normalized that there was no name for it.<sup>113</sup> And rape—especially when perpetrated by a friend or acquaintance—was often dismissed as an occupational hazard of being female. Until 2014, the United States government defined rape as a crime against women; raping men was not a crime, leaving male victims invisible and with no legal remedies.<sup>114</sup>

To change this, activists raised money, recruited volunteers, opened domestic violence shelters, and staffed rape crisis lines.<sup>115</sup> They redefined sexual violence as a crime, collected data to demonstrate its prevalence, and argued that state involvement was essential to protecting victims' rights.<sup>116</sup> Rates of rape began to decline.<sup>117</sup> In 1986, the Supreme Court criminalized sexual harassment. In 1993, marital rape became illegal in all fifty states. In 1994, Congress increased criminal penalties for sexual violence and began funding special sexual assault units in police departments. In 2013, this was extended to include protections for immigrant and Native American women.

These are impressive accomplishments, but there is a lot of work left to be done. It's still hard for victims to get justice. Commonly, they are unsure whether what happened to them was a crime or worry they won't be believed.<sup>118</sup> **Victim blaming**, identifying something done by victims as a cause of their victimization, is common, and many victims fear that they will face more trouble than the person who assaulted them.<sup>119</sup> Only one out of every three sexual assaults is reported to the police.<sup>120</sup> Of those that are reported, only 2 percent will lead to a conviction. In comparison, twice as many robberies are reported to police, with nearly three times as many convictions.

Even in best-case scenarios, convictions can be cold comfort. In 2015, Stanford swimmer Brock Turner was discovered behind a dumpster with his hands inside an unconscious woman. He was convicted, in part thanks to a medical exam and two eye witnesses, and was sentenced to six months in jail for assault with intent to rape and sexual penetration with a foreign object. Turner's father objected to any sentence at all, saying that it was a "steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action."

But it wasn't just his father who minimized Brock Turner's criminal behavior. The judge, too, expressed concern for Turner's future and stated that he didn't believe that Turner would be "a danger to others." Imagine being the victim in that courtroom. After being sexually assaulted, she submitted to a legal

medical exam, reported to police, and suffered through a criminal trial, only to hear the judge say that he worried that prison time “would have a severe impact” on her assailant. It turns out Turner only served half his sentence anyway. Three months—a summer vacation’s worth of punishment.

Rape myths frequently underlie the decisions and judgments of police officers, medical examiners, lawyers, judges, jurors, and the victims themselves, including the persistent belief that sexual crimes are falsely reported more often than other crimes (they’re not).<sup>121</sup> For male victims, women of color, and anyone who carries socially stigmatized characteristics, it’s even harder to get justice; police officers sometimes decide whether to investigate reports of sexual assault based on the victim’s race, age, sexual orientation, or income level.<sup>122</sup> Men of color are more likely than white men to be put on trial and be convicted and, when they are, they receive harsher sentences.<sup>123</sup> Black men are three and a half times more likely to be wrongly convicted of sexual assault than white men, and especially likely to be wrongly convicted if the victim is a white woman.<sup>124</sup> Continuing, and increasingly intersectional, work on this issue is critical.<sup>125</sup>

**RAPE AND CULTURE** We have a long way to go before sexual violence becomes rare, but it could be. In fact, it’s extraordinarily rare in some societies.<sup>126</sup> Instead of an inevitability, sexual violence is a cultural artifact. Some environments make it more likely than others. Environments that facilitate sexual assault—ones that justify, naturalize, and even glorify sexual pressure, coercion, and violence—are called **rape cultures**.

The idea that men are naturally sexually aggressive is part of rape culture, as is the idea that women are inherently vulnerable to men.<sup>127</sup> Vulvas and vaginas are socially constructed as passive and physically delicate (flower-like, easily crushed or bruised) or simply thought of as a vulnerable space (a “hole”).<sup>128</sup> Penises, in contrast, are symbolically active and strong; they become “rock hard” and are used to “hammer” and “pound,” while men’s highly sensitive testicles are usually left out of this equation altogether.<sup>129</sup> All of this contributes to our tendency to believe that men can effectively use their penises as weapons, their bodies are otherwise invulnerable, and women are helpless to defend themselves. In cultures where rape is rare, the social construction of men’s and women’s body parts emphasizes the vulnerability of the penis and testicles (sensitive, floppy, fleshy structures exposed on the outside of the body), the power of the muscles surrounding the entrance to the vagina, and the mysterious depths into which penises must blindly go.<sup>130</sup>

Alongside this social construction of the body are media reflections of rape culture.<sup>131</sup> Routine in regular programming are images that glamorize scenes of sexual force, sex scenes in which women say no and then change their minds, and jokes that trivialize sexual assault, especially of men. Rape scenes in movies and on television are common plot twists or character devices and often are

**DON'T LET A  
NIGHT FULL  
OF PROMISE...**

**TURN INTO A  
MORNING FULL  
OF REGRET.**

**DON'T LEAVE YOURSELF MORE VULNERABLE  
TO REGRETFUL SEX OR EVEN RAPE.  
DRINK SENSIBLY AND GET HOME SAFELY.**

For advice and information, visit [www.herts.police.uk](http://www.herts.police.uk) and [www.hertssunflower.org](http://www.hertssunflower.org)  
Always dial 999 in an emergency.

Images courtesy of Safer Watford

This campaign is funded by the County Community Safety Unit, a joint unit between Hertfordshire Constabulary, Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

This British police campaign that intends to reduce the incidence of rape does so by putting the onus of preventative action on the woman, as do campaigns on many U.S. college campuses.

purposefully designed to be sexually titillating to male viewers. Fictional perpetrators are disproportionately men of color and, since 9/11, Muslim.

When news media covers sex crimes, they often focus on the victim's behavior, reporting on whether she was drinking alcohol, flirting prior to the assault, wearing sexually provocative clothes, or making risky choices.<sup>132</sup> White women get more sympathetic coverage. Perpetrators who seem "respectable"—wealthy, white men, for instance—are most often given the benefit of the doubt. Not uncommonly, stories about rape are described as "sex scandals," as if they are equivalent to a story about a celebrity's kinky fetish.

Rape culture also encourages and can even compel men to enact the push-and-resist dynamic, sometimes aggressively. As a result, many people who have sex with men experience a range of sexual pressure, manipulation, coercion, and force throughout their lives. It starts in elementary school.<sup>133</sup> Much of this isn't criminal, just cruel and dehumanizing. Altogether it reveals what feminist writer Robert Jensen calls a "continuum of sexual intrusion."<sup>134</sup> Many sexualized interactions, as a result, end up being coercive and manipulative, even when not criminal.

Americans' confusion about this was on full display in 2017, when a story about a first date with the comedian Aziz Ansari was published.<sup>135</sup> According to his date, after a dinner over a bottle of wine, they went to his apartment and he quickly initiated sexual activity. Without ascertaining her comfort level or consent, Ansari undressed them both and began kissing and touching her breasts, pulling her hands toward his penis, and putting his fingers in her mouth and vagina. When she asked him to "slow down" or mentioned that she felt "forced," which she did repeatedly, he would stop momentarily and then start again. Nothing she said or did persuaded him to stop trying to push her into sexual activity.

The public reaction to this story, mixed between people who saw his behavior as exploitative and those who saw it as entirely routine, reveals considerable disagreement about how hard men are allowed to push, how much pushing women are expected to tolerate, and how hard women should have to try to get men to listen to them. The fact that many or even most women have multiple experiences like these is part of why the revelation of movie producer Harvey Weinstein's decades of abuse of women in the entertainment industry, alongside dozens of other men outed for similar behavior around the same time, snowballed into a hashtag. By saying #metoo, millions of women confirmed the sheer ubiquity of coercive behavior, from merely selfish to truly egregious.<sup>136</sup>

The preponderance of this push-and-resist dynamic doesn't make just for confusing and uncomfortable sexual interactions, it also gives camouflage to people who are intent on exploiting their peers, making aggressive sexual behavior seem normal or, at least, not so far from the norm. When men behave this way, it is often brushed aside as "boys will be boys." This is exculpatory chauvinism: giving men a pass for their exploitative, cruel, and otherwise thoughtless and dehumanizing behavior. The dynamic is also a catalyst for sexual assault.



We teach men, and even women, that being sexually aggressive is good, then expect them to parse the difference between pushy and criminal. It can be a thin line, and sometimes people cross it.

We see all of these dynamics, and more, on many college campuses today.

## COLLEGE HOOKUP CULTURE

The prototypical American college party today is a drunken mix of elation and recklessness. “Things get out of hand,” sociologist Thomas Vander Ven observes, “but in an entertaining sort of way.”<sup>137</sup> Indeed, the party is euphoric in part because it’s just a little dangerous. At its climax, it’s a world apart—Vander Ven calls it “drunkworld”—a place where it’s normal for people to “fall down, slur their words, break things, laugh uncontrollably, act crazy, flirt, hook up, get sick, pass out, fight, dance, sing, and get overly emotional.”<sup>138</sup> Casual sex, by virtue of being slightly reckless but oh-so-exhilarating, fits right in.

This kind of party is most often associated with fraternities, and rightly so. Fraternity men invented this party in the 1800s and began sharing it with wider and wider circles of peers beginning in the 1920s.<sup>139</sup> At the time, and well into the 1970s, colleges acted like substitute parents, treating students like children by imposing curfews, censorship, and punishments for drinking and sexual activity.<sup>140</sup> The boomers successfully pushed back against these practices, and that’s when things really got wild. The minimum drinking age was eighteen, so students could party pretty much as hard as they wanted, and they did.<sup>141</sup> By 1978, when the movie *Animal House* cemented the relationship among college, alcohol, and sex, it was routine to have all-out parties in residence halls. The alcohol industry took notice, spending millions of dollars in the 1980s to convince college students to drink.<sup>142</sup>

Then, in 1987, the balance of power on campus shifted. The federal government convinced all fifty states to raise their drinking age to twenty-one. Now students who wanted to party had a problem. Campus authorities were policing residence halls, bars and clubs required an ID, and most sororities weren’t allowed to throw parties with alcohol. First-year students, especially, were unlikely to have upper-class friends living in private apartments and houses. On many college campuses, then, a fraternity house was the only place students knew to go to party like they thought they should. The men who belonged to fraternities wealthy enough to have private houses happily filled that void, claiming a role at the center of college life.<sup>143</sup> This gave a small group of students—ones who were disproportionately wealthy, white, and heterosexual, and almost exclusively men—a lot of power to shape their peers’ social and sexual lives.



Thirty-eight fraternity members attempt to squeeze into a Volkswagen Bug in 1959. Shenanigans have been a part of fraternity life for more than 200 years.

This is the background to life on many residential college campuses today. The men of wealthy, historically white fraternities—or, on some campuses, men in other formal or informal fraternity-like brotherhoods—still have an oversized influence on the college party scene. Members of this segment of the male college population also tend to be especially enthusiastic about hooking up, so they throw parties that facilitate nonromantic one-time sexual encounters.<sup>144</sup> Worrisomely, fraternity men are also more likely, on average, to report rape-supportive attitudes and admit to having committed acts of sexual aggression.<sup>145</sup>

Students attend these parties for myriad reasons, but one reason is because the fraternity party has become *the* college party: the way all students are supposed to want to have fun.<sup>146</sup> The mass media reflects this, socializing young people into believing that college life is really as crazy as it looks on TV.<sup>147</sup> These sexy, raucous parties resonate, too, with the current definition of sexual liberation: saying yes instead of no and, for women, grasping one's "liberation" by acting like a stereotypical guy.

This is why hookup culture dominates most college campuses. It's not because everyone is doing it, and it's certainly not because everyone likes it. A third of students say that their intimate relationships on campus have been "traumatic" or "very difficult to handle."<sup>148</sup> Between two-thirds and three-quarters wish they had more opportunities to find a long-term romantic part-

ner.<sup>149</sup> Instead, hookup culture dominates campuses because the students who *do* like it have a great deal of power, and the cultural messaging students receive—both about higher education generally and the relationship among sex, fun, and liberation—all conspire to make hookup culture seem “right.” This suits some students better than others.

### *Who Hooks Up?*

Most students overestimate how often their peers are hooking up, as well as how “far” they go and how much they enjoy it.<sup>150</sup> According to a survey of over 24,000 students at twenty-one different colleges and universities, the average number of hookups reported by seniors is eight.<sup>151</sup> A third of students won’t hook up at all and 20 percent of seniors report that they have yet to lose their virginity. Only 14 percent of students hook up more than ten times in four years.<sup>152</sup> Almost half of first-time hookups include just kissing; fewer than a third include intercourse.<sup>153</sup>

Fraternity and sorority members hook up almost twice as much as everyone else, while students who are nonwhite, poor or working class, and non-heterosexual hook up with their peers less often than their counterparts.<sup>154</sup> For sexual minorities, for example, college parties are not always safe or friendly. Though girl-on-girl kissing is common, it’s generally assumed to be for male attention. Some women use this activity to explore their attraction to other women, but others report only doing it if they’re confident that the other woman is heterosexual.<sup>155</sup> These latter women are actually *more* homophobic than women who don’t kiss other women at parties.<sup>156</sup> The irony is not lost on gay, bisexual, and questioning women, who often feel not only invisible but taunted by the practice. While gay and bisexual men report higher rates of hooking up than average, they generally don’t find the hookup scene welcoming; they’re more likely than any other group to go off campus to hook up.<sup>157</sup>

While black men hook up somewhat more than average, black women, Latino and Latina students, and Asian men and women are less likely than white students to hook up.<sup>158</sup> This is in part because when students of color hook up, they risk affirming harmful beliefs about their racial group, so some embrace a politics of respectability. Some may explicitly define hooking up as something typical of white students and choose to distance themselves from the behavior.<sup>159</sup> “We don’t sleep around like white girls do,” said a Filipina American expressing this view.<sup>160</sup> “If I started hooking up,” said an African American man, “my friends would be saying I’m, like, ‘acting white.’”<sup>161</sup> Some men of color further assume they can’t get away with the same level of sexual aggressiveness as white men.<sup>162</sup> And they’re probably not wrong. The erotic marketplace plays

a role here, too, racializing desirability. Just like in the wider culture, black women and Asian men tend to rank low in the erotic hierarchy on campus, while Asian and white women and white men tend to rank high.

Research also suggests that class-privileged students hook up more often than other students.<sup>163</sup> Among women, this may be because peers are much quicker to ascribe the “slut” label to working-class women, even when they are less sexually active than their richer peers.<sup>164</sup> Working-class students may also be more focused on getting through school and may not think they can afford to focus on their social lives. One Latina and white woman observed:

*Some of these girls don't even go to class. It's like they just live here. They stay up until 4 in the morning. [I want to ask,] "Do you guys go to class? Like what's your deal? . . . You're paying a lot of money for this. . . . If you want to be here, then why aren't you trying harder?"*<sup>165</sup>

Students from families with tight budgets are also likely to have a job outside of school and may live at home to save money. These students have less time to spend partying and less opportunity to do so. Sharing a small house with one's parents—often a car or bus ride from the party—isn't conducive to casual sex or heavy drinking.<sup>166</sup> Students who live at home, especially young women, are subject to surveillance from parents who may have rules against drinking, drug use, sexual activity, and staying out late. Lydia, for example, a Latina student who lived at home, imagined that dorm life was more autonomous: “They don't have parents worrying about when they get home or calling them. . . . They do as they please.”<sup>167</sup>

Men and women hook up at similar rates, but women report higher rates of regret, distress, and lowered self-esteem.<sup>168</sup> The gendered love/sex binary introduced by the Victorians would suggest that this is because women are more interested in love than sex and men are more interested in sex than love. In fact, men are slightly more likely than women to say that they'd be interested in a committed relationship.<sup>169</sup> Women's greater dissatisfaction is probably not due to an aversion to casual sex not shared by men, but to their greater exposure to sexist and subordinating experiences.

### *Gendered Power*

Exactly because of the gendered love/sex binary, it's assumed that men want casual sex and women don't, thus all women are presumed to be hooking up with the hope that a committed relationship will evolve. This logic tells men that every woman they hook up with wants a boyfriend, so they should act aloof after a hookup to ensure the women don't get the “wrong idea.” Women, for their part, may act aloof, too. They understand that some people don't believe women

are capable of being casual about sexual activity, so they go to extra lengths to prove they can be. Whether either of the partners actually *is* romantically interested in the other is beside the point; in hookup culture, revealing a desire for connection is pathetically feminine, and nobody wants to be that.<sup>170</sup>

A majority of college students do form romantic relationships, but these relationships tend to emerge out of a series of hookups, during which both students may act as if they're not interested in each other.<sup>171</sup> In the meantime, because women are stereotyped as less capable than men of controlling their emotions, men have more power in these interactions. Women may enthusiastically participate in hookup culture, then, expecting to experiment sexually with men who see them as equals, but they may discover that many men don't see them that way.

Deanna reflected on just such an experience for *American Hookup*. A guy she had previously been with pulled her aside to glumly tell her that he wasn't interested in a relationship. She told him she was fine with that (and she was), but he pressed on apologetically. "He more and more drastically emphasized asking if I was OK," she recounted, "as if he had somehow damaged me, seeming to expect a flood of tears."<sup>172</sup> His behavior was revealing. She thought they were *both* having fun, but he hadn't seen it that way. Reflecting on their encounters, she wrote:

*The stigma attached to women being the emotional creatures in the relationship and the men being the physical ones had never been so apparent to me. . . . He clearly thought that he was the one with the power to hurt and I was the one that was expected to cry with anguish.*

Some men hooking up with women do not see or treat them as equals, and one in three men report respecting their female partners less after hooking up with them.<sup>173</sup> This is a good recipe for creating feelings of regret, distress, and lower self-esteem among the women who participate.

Notably, we only think that men are better at hooking up because hookup culture is premised on a stereotypically masculine version of sexuality, which is not the only way to experiment with or commit to multiple sexual partners. Consensually nonmonogamous practices, for example, are based on the idea that people can be loving toward multiple partners (in the case of polyamory) or committed to someone emotionally without sexual exclusivity (in the case of open relationships). In neither case does sexual nonexclusivity involve a denigration of commitment or connection, nor require being callous or cold in order to stave off such things.

Hookup culture falsely conflates caring with committed, monogamous relationships because it's based on a gender binary: monogamous, caring sex with just one person (the supposedly feminine kind of sex) and nonmonogamous,

casual sex with multiple partners (the supposedly masculine kind of sex).<sup>174</sup> If we collapse the gender binary, we can imagine many other possibilities, including sex that is casual and caring and nonmonogamous. What would a hookup culture that embraced the feminine look like?

### *Pleasure and Danger*

Sexual pleasure is also unevenly distributed. In first-time hookups, women hooking up with men report 35 percent as many orgasms as their partners.<sup>175</sup> This is the same orgasm gap we see off campus: about one for every three. In this case, though, we know for sure that at least some college men are perfectly capable of giving women orgasms. The orgasm gap in hookup culture appears to be a measure of a couple's interest in each other, with concern for women's orgasms increasing as two people hook up together repeatedly and then enter a relationship. When men and women are in committed relationships with each other, the orgasm gap shrinks from 65 to 20 percentage points, with women having 80 percent as many orgasms as their boyfriends.

Both men and women are likely culprits. For their part, some men appear to value their girlfriends' pleasure, but not that of women with whom they only hook up. One male college student, for example, insisted that he always cared about "her" orgasm.<sup>176</sup> However, when asked if he meant "the general her or the specific," he replied, "Girlfriend her. In a hookup her, I don't give a shit." Other men take a similar approach:

*If it's just a random hookup, I don't think [her orgasm] matters as much to the guy. . . . But if you're with somebody for more than just that one night . . . I know I feel personally responsible. I think it's essential that she has an orgasm during sexual activity.*<sup>177</sup>

To be fair, women often don't put their own pleasure first either: "I will do everything in my power to, like whoever I'm with, to get [him] off," said one woman about her priorities during a hookup.<sup>178</sup> Both men and women tend to believe that men are more entitled to orgasms. This is illustrated most strikingly by a bisexual student who realized, upon putting some thought into it, that he concentrated on giving his partner an orgasm when he hooked up with men, but getting one when he hooked up with women.<sup>179</sup>

If women experience less pleasure in hookup culture than men, they also face more danger. One in four senior women report being sexually assaulted in college, with 10 percent reporting that someone tried to physically force them to have sex; 5 percent reporting that someone tried but did not succeed; and 11 percent reporting that someone had sex with them while they were unconscious or otherwise incapacitated.<sup>180</sup>



Emma Sulkowicz, a visual arts student at Columbia, made national headlines when she began carrying her mattress around campus to dramatize the inaction of university officials after she reported being sexually assaulted by a fellow student.

Heterosexual women are not alone in being at high risk of victimization. They are joined by gay men and bisexual women, who are more likely than heterosexual women to report being assaulted, and bisexual men, who are almost as likely. Trans and nonbinary students almost certainly suffer high rates of sexual assault on campus, though we don't have good research on these populations yet.<sup>181</sup> Heterosexual men and lesbian women have the lowest rates, with 3 percent of both groups reporting rape by physical force and 3 and 5 percent reporting rape by incapacitation, respectively. These numbers are not trivial either. As with the national statistics, the vast majority of perpetrators of sexual assault are male, regardless of the sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation of the victim, with 8 percent of college men reporting behavior matching the definition of sexual assault.<sup>182</sup>

Rates are high on campus in part because hookup culture is a rape culture.<sup>183</sup> Its sexual scripts make coercive behaviors look and feel normal (plying people with alcohol or pulling them into secluded parts of a party), while making a feminized interest in and concern for one's partner off-script (including care about their pleasure and consent). This camouflages the behavior of students who are intent on raping their peers, but it also puts all students at risk of perpetrating rape. If students carelessly and assertively seek sex with strangers and acquaintances, and do so regularly under drunken conditions, with little concern for their sexual partners' well-being, then we might expect high rates of coercion.

And if men are put in the “push” role in the push-and-resist dynamic, then we might expect men in particular to be perpetrators. Serial perpetrators are a problem on college campuses, but a longitudinal study of rape perpetration found that four out of five college men who commit rape before graduating are not serial perpetrators.<sup>184</sup> They rape only once. It may not be the content of one’s character but the context of hookup culture—the risk-loving parties, the pressure to “get” sex, and the normalization of aggressive sexual behavior—that leads some students to commit sexual crimes.

Rape culture also makes it difficult for campus activists fighting sexual violence to hold colleges accountable for effective prevention and fair adjudication, though much progress has been made on this front. In 2011, the Office for Civil Rights released a statement explaining that Title IX, a law that prohibits sex-based discrimination in education, requires colleges to be proactive in reducing rates of sexual violence.<sup>185</sup> Responding to this clarified mandate, students at hundreds of colleges submitted complaints to the Department of Education, arguing that their institutions were ignoring or mishandling sexual assault.<sup>186</sup> The results of the investigations prompted the Obama White House to develop a guide for reducing rates and responding to alleged assaults.<sup>187</sup> The Trump administration has since rescinded the 2011 statement, but not before student



Andrea Pino and Annie E. Clark sit against a wall documenting their efforts to organize student activists across the United States. Thanks to organizing like theirs, almost 500 colleges are or have been under investigation by the Office for Civil Rights for mishandling sexual violence.



activists raised a great deal of awareness and pushed many institutions to institute better and stronger policies.

What happens next will be up to students themselves. The victim of Brock Turner, the Stanford student who served three months in jail on three counts of felony sexual assault, bravely released the statement she made to the court on the day of his sentencing. “Hopefully this will wake people up,” she said, referring to his short sentence. “If anything, this is a reason for all of us to speak even louder.”<sup>188</sup>

Communities can come together to change norms. Bystander intervention programs—ones that educate students about sexual assault and teach them how to spot likely incidents and safely intervene—are effective in reducing rates of sexual violence, so are programs that teach students to recognize sexually coercive behavior and practice assertive and aggressive responses.<sup>189</sup> A next step may be thinking bigger, not only about the acute problem of sexual assault, but the many problems in the wider sexual culture. Promoting a culture that values feminine approaches to sexuality, gives equal importance to female pleasure, embraces sexual minorities and gender-nonconforming students, and addresses intersectional inequalities could be the way to make colleges safer spaces for all students.

## Revisiting the Question

Q+A

**Gendered ideas, interactions, and institutions may affect almost every part of my life, but some things are personal and my sexuality is mine and mine alone, isn't it?**

The women's movement, gay liberation, and the sexual revolution changed the landscape of sexual opportunity for young Americans, but it would be wrong to describe this cultural shift as a simple embrace of freedom. The movements established a new set of rules for sexuality, including a new imperative to say yes to sex. For women this presented a new set of problems. The coital imperative, gendered love/sex binary, sexual double standard, and sexual script continue to give men more power in interactions, create fertile ground for sexual violence, and contribute to the orgasm gap between men and women, while privileging an objectifying male sexual gaze. Men, conversely, are prescribed a narrow heterosexuality, policed if they step outside its boundaries, and put at risk of engaging in criminal behavior.

If the playground is uncomfortable for some heterosexual men and unsafe for many heterosexual women, then sexual minorities, nonbinary individuals, and trans men and women are at even higher risk of rejection, mistreatment, and violence. Troubled sexual dynamics play out among these populations as well. No sexual encounters, regardless of the identities and body parts of the

people involved, are automatically devoid of gendered power, sexual objectification, sexual violence, or other forms of prejudice like racism.

Sex, no less than anything else about life, reflects our cultural values and is shaped by interactional norms and institutional forces. Though it can feel deeply personal, in many ways it's not. That means that efforts to bring about freer and more equal sexual opportunities will involve changing the context in which we make our sexual choices. Since college students (who are disproportionately white and class privileged) are often agents of social change for everyone, it will be fascinating to see how their work influences the sexual opportunities of the generations both ahead and behind them, as well as people who attend college later, commute to college, or don't go to college at all (who are disproportionately nonwhite, poor, and working class).

For young people who don't have a traditional college experience, as well as people well beyond their college years, hookup culture may be just something they read about in a book. The hookup script may have escaped hookup culture, somewhat inflecting everyone's dating experiences, but the wider American culture still very much valorizes love, romance, and monogamous marriage. While some college students are struggling with the dynamics of hookup culture, then, other people are attempting to follow dating scripts that more resemble the 1950s, navigating engagements and weddings and extended families, trying to keep love (and sex) alive in marriage, adjusting to aging and increasingly devalued bodies, and managing divorce, re-entering the dating pool, and possibly remarrying. Even most college students will ultimately turn away from casual sex, and rather soon—two-thirds are married by their thirtieth birthday—and they, too, will face new and different sexual and romantic challenges.<sup>190</sup> What are those marriages like?

### **Next . . .**

Hookup culture may make relationships seem passé, but nearly two-thirds of college students will be married by their thirtieth birthday.<sup>191</sup> These marriages have more potential to be true partnerships than any in history. For the first time in thousands of years, marriage law prescribes to men and women the same rights and responsibilities. One source of oppression for women appears to have crumbled.

And yet, despite changes aimed at giving women equal footing, over the last thirty years women who marry men have become increasingly unhappy with their marriages. The data show that women today experience significantly less wedded bliss than men married to women, women married to women, and single women.<sup>192</sup> In fact, despite the cultural messages that insist that women crave marriage and children more than men do, research shows us that the happiest women are single and without children. This prompts us to ask:

Q+A

**If marriage is better for women than ever, why do women married to men report lower levels of happiness than men married to women, women married to women, and single women?**

An answer awaits.

## FOR FURTHER READING

- Armstrong, Elizabeth. "Accounting for Women's Orgasm and Sexual Enjoyment in College Hookups and Relationships." *American Sociological Review* 77, no. 3 (2012): 435-62.
- Armstrong, Elizabeth, Laura Hamilton, and Beth Sweeney. "Sexual Assault on Campus: A Multilevel, Integrative Approach to Party Rape." *Social Problems* 53 (2006): 483-99.
- D'Emilio, John, and Estelle Freedman. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Ghaziani, Amin. *Sex Cultures*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2017.
- Harding, Kate. *Asking For It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture and What We Can Do About It*. Boston: De Capo Lifelong Books, 2015.
- Wade, Lisa. *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2017.
- Ward, Jane. *Not Gay: Sex between Straight White Men*. New York: New York University Press, 2015.



SECOND EDITION

LISA WADE • MYRA MARX FERREE

# GENDER

IDEAS • INTERACTIONS • INSTITUTIONS

# GENDER

IDEAS, INTERACTIONS, INSTITUTIONS

SECOND EDITION

---

---

# SOCIOLOGY TITLES

*from*

W. W. NORTON

*The Contexts Reader*, THIRD EDITION, edited  
by Syed Ali and Philip N. Cohen

*Code of the Street* by Elijah Anderson

*The Cosmopolitan Canopy* by Elijah Anderson

*Social Problems*, THIRD EDITION, by Joel Best

*The Art and Science of Social Research* by  
Deborah Carr, Elizabeth Heger Boyle,  
Benjamin Cornwell, Shelley Correll, Robert  
Crosnoe, Jeremy Freese, and Mary C. Waters

*The Family: Diversity, Inequality, and Social  
Change*, SECOND EDITION, by Philip N. Cohen

*You May Ask Yourself: An Introduction to  
Thinking like a Sociologist*, FIFTH EDITION,  
by Dalton Conley

*Race in America* by Matthew Desmond and  
Mustafa Emirbayer

*The Real World: An Introduction to Sociology*,  
SIXTH EDITION, by Kerry Ferris and Jill Stein

*Essentials of Sociology*, SEVENTH EDITION,  
by Anthony Giddens, Mitchell Duneier,  
Richard P. Appelbaum, and Deborah Carr

*Introduction to Sociology*, ELEVENTH EDITION,  
by Anthony Giddens, Mitchell Duneier,  
Richard P. Appelbaum, and Deborah Carr

*Mix It Up: Popular Culture, Mass Media,  
and Society*, SECOND EDITION, by  
David Grazian

*Give Methods a Chance* by Kyle Green and  
Sarah Esther Lageson

*Readings for Sociology*, EIGHTH EDITION,  
edited by Garth Massey

*Families as They Really Are*, SECOND EDITION,  
edited by Barbara J. Risman and  
Virginia E. Rutter

*Uneasy Peace: The Great Crime Decline, the  
Renewal of City Life, and the Next War on  
Violence* by Patrick Sharkey

*Sex Matters: The Sexuality and Society  
Reader*, FIFTH EDITION, edited by  
Mindy Stompler, Dawn M. Baunach,  
Wendy O. Simonds, Elroi J. Windsor,  
and Elisabeth O. Burgess

*American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on  
Campus* by Lisa Wade

*Cultural Sociology: An Introductory Reader*  
edited by Matt Wray

*American Society: How It Really Works*,  
SECOND EDITION, by Erik Olin Wright and  
Joel Rogers

**To learn more about Norton Sociology, please visit [wwnorton.com/soc](http://wwnorton.com/soc)**

---

---

# GENDER

SECOND EDITION

LISA WADE

Occidental College

MYRA MARX FERREE

University of Wisconsin-Madison



W. W. NORTON & COMPANY, INC.  
New York • London

**W. W. Norton & Company** has been independent since its founding in 1923, when William Warder Norton and Mary D. Herter Norton first published lectures delivered at the People's Institute, the adult education division of New York City's Cooper Union. The firm soon expanded its program beyond the Institute, publishing books by celebrated academics from America and abroad. By midcentury, the two major pillars of Norton's publishing program—trade books and college texts—were firmly established. In the 1950s, the Norton family transferred control of the company to its employees, and today—with a staff of four hundred and a comparable number of trade, college, and professional titles published each year—W. W. Norton & Company stands as the largest and oldest publishing house owned wholly by its employees.

Copyright © 2019, 2015 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Sasha Levitt

Assistant Editor: Erika Nakagawa

Project Editors: Taylere Peterson and Diane Cipollone

Managing Editor, College: Marian Johnson

Managing Editor, College Digital Media: Kim Yi

Senior Production Manager: Ashley Horna

Media Editor: Eileen Connell

Associate Media Editor: Ariel Eaton

Media Editorial Assistant: Samuel Tang

Marketing Director, Sociology: Julia Hall

Design Director: Jillian Burr

Director of College Permissions: Megan Schindel

Permissions Specialist: Bethany Salminen

Photo Editor: Travis Carr

Composition: Achorn International, Inc.

Manufacturing: LSC Communications-Harrisonburg

Permission to use copyrighted material is included in the Credits, which begins on page 485.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Wade, Lisa (Professor), author. | Ferree, Myra Marx, author.

Title: Gender / Lisa Wade, Occidental College, Myra Marx Ferree, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Description: Second Edition. | New York : W. W. Norton & Company, [2018] | Revised edition of the authors' Gender : ideas, interactions, institutions, [2015] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018039801 | ISBN 9780393667967 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Sex role. | Sex differences. | Feminist theory.

Classification: LCC HQ1075 .W33 2018 | DDC 305.3-dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018039801>

**ISBN: 978-0-393-66796-7 (pbk.)**

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110

[www.wwnorton.com](http://www.wwnorton.com)

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 15 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BS

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0



---

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**LISA WADE** is an associate professor of sociology at Occidental College in Los Angeles, where she does research at the intersection of gender, sexuality, culture, and the body. She earned an MA in human sexuality from New York University and an MS and PhD in sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is the author of over three dozen research papers, book chapters, and educational essays. Her newest book, *American Hookup: The New Culture of Sex on Campus*, is the definitive account of contemporary collegiate sexual culture. Aiming to reach audiences outside of academia, Dr. Wade appears frequently in print, radio, and television news and opinion outlets. You can learn more about her at [lisa-wade.com](http://lisa-wade.com) or follow her on Twitter (@lisawade) or Facebook (/lisawadephd).



**MYRA MARX FERREE** is the Alice H. Cook Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is the author of *Varieties of Feminism: German Gender Politics in Global Perspective* (2012), co-author of *Shaping Abortion Discourse* (2002) and *Controversy and Coalition* (2000), and co-editor of *Gender, Violence and Human Security* (2013), *Global Feminism* (2006), and *Revisioning Gender* (1998) as well as numerous articles and book chapters. Dr. Ferree is the recipient of various prizes for contributions to gender studies, including the Jessie Bernard Award and Victoria Schuck Award. She continues to do research on global gender politics.

---

---

# CONTENTS

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>PREFACE</b>   | <b>ix</b>  |
| <b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>                                  | <b>3</b>   |
| <b>2 IDEAS</b>   | <b>9</b>   |
| The Binary and Our Bodies . . . . .                    | 12         |
| Gender Ideologies . . . . .                            | 23         |
| The Binary and Everything Else . . . . .               | 29         |
| <b>3 BODIES</b>  | <b>39</b>  |
| Research on Sex Differences and Similarities . . . . . | 41         |
| Defining Difference . . . . .                          | 43         |
| Similarities Between the Sexes . . . . .               | 54         |
| <b>4 PERFORMANCES</b>                                  | <b>67</b>  |
| How to Do Gender . . . . .                             | 69         |
| Learning the Rules . . . . .                           | 75         |
| Why We Follow the Rules . . . . .                      | 78         |
| How to Break the Rules . . . . .                       | 85         |
| The No. 1 Gender Rule . . . . .                        | 88         |
| <b>5 INTERSECTIONS</b>                                 | <b>93</b>  |
| Intersectionality . . . . .                            | 94         |
| Economic Class and Residence . . . . .                 | 96         |
| Race . . . . .   | 99         |
| Sexual Orientation . . . . .                           | 108        |
| Immigration . . . . .                                  | 111        |
| Ability, Age, and Attractiveness . . . . .             | 115        |
| <b>6 INEQUALITY: MEN AND MASCULINITIES</b>             | <b>125</b> |
| The Gender of Cheerleading . . . . .                   | 126        |
| Gendered Power . . . . .                               | 129        |
| Gender for Men . . . . .                               | 135        |
| Can Masculinity Be Good? . . . . .                     | 152        |

|           |   |            |
|-----------|---|------------|
| <b>7</b>  | <b>INEQUALITY: WOMEN AND FEMININITIES</b>               | <b>159</b> |
|           | Cheerleading Today . . . . .                            | 159        |
|           | Gender for Women . . . . .                              | 161        |
|           | The Big Picture . . . . .                               | 184        |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>INSTITUTIONS</b>                                     | <b>191</b> |
|           | The Organization of Daily Life . . . . .                | 192        |
|           | Gendered Institutions . . . . .                         | 196        |
|           | The Institutionalization of Gender Difference . . . . . | 197        |
|           | The Institutionalization of Gender Inequality . . . . . | 201        |
|           | Institutional Inertia and Change . . . . .              | 212        |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>CHANGE</b>   | <b>219</b> |
|           | The Evolution of Sex . . . . .                          | 220        |
|           | The Evolution of Marriage . . . . .                     | 229        |
|           | The Funny '50s . . . . .                                | 233        |
|           | Going to Work . . . . .                                 | 241        |
|           | Work and Family Today . . . . .                         | 244        |
|           | Conclusion . . . . .                                    | 248        |
| <b>10</b> | <b>SEXUALITIES</b>                                      | <b>251</b> |
|           | Sex: The Near History of Now . . . . .                  | 252        |
|           | Sex and "Liberation" Today . . . . .                    | 255        |
|           | Gendered Sexualities . . . . .                          | 258        |
|           | College Hookup Culture . . . . .                        | 275        |
| <b>11</b> | <b>FAMILIES</b>   | <b>287</b> |
|           | Gendered Housework and Parenting . . . . .              | 288        |
|           | Barriers to Equal Sharing . . . . .                     | 304        |
|           | Going It Alone . . . . .                                | 308        |
|           | New, Emerging, and Erstwhile Family Forms . . . . .     | 312        |
| <b>12</b> | <b>WORK</b>   | <b>321</b> |
|           | The Changing Workplace . . . . .                        | 322        |
|           | Job Segregation . . . . .                               | 326        |
|           | Discrimination and Preferential Treatment . . . . .     | 339        |
|           | Parenthood: The Facts and the Fiction . . . . .         | 348        |
|           | The Changing Workplace, Revisited . . . . .             | 351        |
| <b>13</b> | <b>POLITICS</b>   | <b>357</b> |
|           | The State . . . . .                                     | 362        |
|           | Social Movements . . . . .                              | 376        |
| <b>14</b> | <b>CONCLUSION</b>                                       | <b>389</b> |
|           | <b>GLOSSARY</b>   | <b>397</b> |
|           | <b>NOTES</b>  | <b>405</b> |
|           | <b>CREDITS</b>  | <b>485</b> |
|           | <b>INDEX</b>  | <b>487</b> |