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Our culture has given rise to a fairly new term: 'hook-up'. If you were to ask my mother what this term means, she would feign some sort of response. More than likely she would not even be close to what the students on the Middlebury campus or people aged 17-23 would offer as an explanation. Through our membership in this demographic, we have learned what it means to 'hook-up'. 'Hook-up' is a social fact entrenched in everything that comes with that title. 'Hook-up' has grown into so much more than just a term our student body and age group uses. To delve into the term 'hook-up', the works of Emile Durkheim play an intricate role. 'Hook-up' is a social fact that is then linked to many other social facts such as gender, relationship, and commitment. Because it is a social fact, 'hook-up' then takes on many more sociological musings. 'Hook-up' brings about discussions of the normal and the pathological, and the idea of the sacred and the profane. While we would like to act as though 'hooking-up' is no big deal, it comes to reason that this social fact is not just a simple term to be thrown around; instead it is so much more than that.

As Emile Durkheim has explained, social facts are external to us, they coerce us, and they entail a sort of collective consciousness. Specifically, "They come to each one of us from outside and can sweep us along in spite of ourselves... What constitutes social facts are the beliefs, tendencies and practices of the group taken collectively... Currents of opinion, whose intensity... impel us..." (*The Rules of Sociological Method*, 53-55). The term 'hook-up' does all three of these things. We have created and defined the term, while letting it also define our demographic. As a member of the Middlebury College community, 'hook-up' means to have sex with no strings attached. Because college students felt the need to create this term and make it an

everyday topic in the dining hall gives it credence and power. 'Hook-up', while we may not realize it, is external to all of us. Our demographics culture and society has created its meaning, which as you age, changes. Its creation and plasticity is evidence of its externality. 'Hook-up' is also a social fact that coerces all of us. You do not go through a 24-hour period, especially on the weekends, without 'hook-up' coming up in conversation. The idea that we should be 'hooking-up' with other Middlebury students is coerced on us by our peers and parties every weekend. We have learned that it is something we are supposed to be doing as members of this 'hook-up culture'. This idea of our peers coercing the term upon us also proves that 'hook-up' is wrapped up in a collective, the Middlebury student body, and members of our age group.

Our peers coerce the 'hook-up' on us, because in the Middlebury campus bubble, 'hooking-up' is 'normal'. To the student body, if you 'hook-up' with someone, then you are fulfilling your role as a normal college student. However, if you are one of those students who do not fulfill this role, you are seen as the pathological. To be a member of the Middlebury student body and not 'hook-up' over the weekend, you resist the idea of the social fact. And when you resist the force that pushes you to 'hook-up', you feel the social fact's presence. Emile Durkheim explained this form of resistance when he said, "I may not be conscious of the pressure that they are exerting upon me, but that pressure makes its presence felt immediately [when] I attempt to struggle against them." (*The Rules*,53). You further realize you are in the presence of a social fact if you feel an anxiety about 'hooking-up'. If you are anxious about fulfilling your role as the typical college student, you feel the coercion of the social fact. You begin to wonder what the 'right' and 'wrong' ways are to have sex, and what it means to be 'normal'.

While 'hooking-up' is the normal thing to do on campus and not 'hooking-up' is pathological, outside of college 'hooking-up' becomes the pathological. Emile Durkheim incites

a strong discussion of the normal and the pathological in regards to crime in which we can substitute the term ‘hooking-up’. According to Durkheim, crime is “an integrative element in any healthy society...Crime...consists of an action which offends certain collective feeling which are especially strong and clear-cut...crime is necessary...indispensible to the normal...one does not go without the other.” (*The Rules*, 98-101). To society, ‘hooking-up’ is this pathological, and indispensable to the normal. Akin to binge drinking, adults see ‘hooking-up’ as something that you outgrow upon graduation. To non-members of the college student demographic, it is a relief to believe that ‘hooking-up’ is something limited to the four years when you are in the college institution. As college students, we know that outsiders think this way. And while on the campus it is within the normal to ‘hook-up’, we do know that in the bigger picture it is not normal. Therefore, in one group you are within the normal if you ‘hook-up’, while in another group you are the pathological. Such a complicated variance of normal and pathological further enforces ‘hook-up’ as a social fact. As a society and culture, we need the idea of this pathological, of the person who ‘hooks-up’ with everyone in sight, to reinforce that the opposite is the normal.

Intertwined in this discussion of the normal versus the pathological, is the phrase ‘should’. “Should I be ‘hooking-up’ with people?” “Should I not be ‘hooking-up’ with people?” The phrase ‘should’ is a testament to the idea of normal. If you ‘should’ do something, then the power of a social fact and the collective is coercing an idea of normal upon you. If you do not question whether you should or should not ‘hook-up’, you are in an entirely different category. If in regards to ‘hooking-up’, you think, “Of course I do this all the time and I love it!” you are then categorized as the ever-feared sociopath. This is because you do not question whether what you are doing is either good or okay. Instead you have no regrets, remorse, or shame. To adults this is a grave problem, because, if you do not see what you are doing as wrong, then you cannot be

‘fixed’. It is also a deeper problem. If you do not admit that there may be something wrong with ‘hooking-up’, then you do not reinforce the ever important ‘normal’.

Society feels such a strong need to enforce the normal and the pathological, especially with ‘hooking-up’ because it also feels a need to reinforce the sacred in opposition to the profane. Durkheim offers an explanation of the sacred and profane dichotomy: “Above the real world where his profane life passes he has place another which, in one sense, does not exist except in thought, but to which he attributes a higher sort of dignity than to the first.”

(*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 469-470). To society, ‘hooking-up’ is profane. It tears down the sacredness of virginity, its inherent tie to innocence, and monogamy. The concern over protecting the sacred and promoting the normal while attacking the profane and pathological brings society together in a form of collective effervescence. Explicitly stated by Durkheim, “There can be no society which does not feel the need of upholding and reaffirming at regular intervals the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which make its unity...” (*Elementary Forms*, 474-475). People are brought together when “Vital energies are over-excited, passions more active, sensations stronger.” (*Elementary Forms*, 469). The collective is brought together in their anger or indignation against ‘hooking-up’.

Society, besides imprinting ideas and concerns over the normal and the pathological, also enforces expectations related to gender, relationships, and commitment, all social facts in themselves. College students as members of society are expected to strive for ‘healthy’ committed relationships. We are not supposed to ‘hook-up’ with a variety of people without monogamy or commitment. Again, college students who ‘hook-up’ are another social fact’s pathological and profane, and reinforce the normal. The concern over ‘should’ arises again. We

‘should’ not ‘hook-up’; we ‘should’ find a partner to partake in a relationship; we ‘should’ have this relationship be monogamous.

Further tied to societies concerns and expectations of relationships and commitment is the social fact of gender. While ‘hooking-up’ is seen as pathological and profane for anyone, it is especially so for women. On campus and all across society, women are labeled as sluts and whores if they ‘hook-up’ with a multitude of men. This is tied to the stereotypical expectations of women. They are particularly sacred and in need of protection. They do not seek out sexual adventure. Instead, they are expected to wait for ‘the right one’ and to be monogamous. Men, on the other hand, do not need to be protected, or wait for ‘the right one’. When they ‘hook-up’ with everyone and their sister, their sexual transgressions are high-five-able rather than eye-roll inducing. Society has created the normal man who plays the field and sleeps around. The woman who does this is the pathological, the whore.

During a post-coital snuggling sessions with another Middlebury student, whom she had been ‘hooking up’ with for a few months, one of my friends heard the words, “I like you a lot and I think you are really cool....but I would never date you.” So does this mean that I, as the pathological, non-hook-up person on campus will in fact fulfill the overall societal norm and find a relationship here? This question, while embarrassing for a defined independent women to ask, hovers over me continually. Should I be ‘hooking-up’? Should I keep holding on to my standards? Are my standards really that important? Will I be the twenty-six year old virgin scared to admit it to her boyfriend? Does any of this really matter? Thinking about ‘hooking-up’ and all of the anxieties and concerns that are entrenched within this overarching social fact takes up far too much of my time. But, living in this ‘hook-up’ rampant culture in Middlebury makes it impossible not to. Durkheim would tell me that I fit into what society expects and sees as

normal. However, what about the culture that I have lived in for almost four years? If the Middlebury culture sees 'hooking-up' as the normal and not pathological or profane, then would he support 'hooking-up'? I appear to be a walking contradiction. I am the normal and the pathological all at once. Maybe the next step is to define this in-between person. What new social fact do I fulfill?