What’s Love Got to Do With It?
Understanding the College ‘Hookup’

by Suzanne Shanahan, Associate Director

The scene: my college dorm’s basement bathroom on a Sunday morning early in my freshman year. As hungover girls crowded around the sinks, I caught a friend’s eye in the mirror. What happened when she left last night’s party with a boy neither of us had ever seen before?

“Oh,” she said with a knowing look, “we hooked up.”

….They stumble home together late Saturday night, roll around in bed, then pass out. The next morning, it’s as if nothing happened.

Laura Vanderkam, July 25, 2001, USA Today

Is this a typical Saturday night for your average college student? Maybe. Maybe not.

Since the late 1990s the popular press has been increasingly intrigued (ok, let’s just say obsessed) with the adolescent “hookup”—a one-time encounter, most often fueled by alcohol, that can include anything from kissing to intercourse with no expectation of a further relationship. Media accounts routinely lament the increasingly explicit and casual nature of college sexuality. Rolling Stone depicts college life as dominated by a “booze-fueled culture of the never-ending hookup.” Washington Post journalist Laura Sessions Stepp’s recent book, Unhooked, quips that hookups are as “common as a cold.” For many, crisis is imminent: cavalier sexuality marks a decline of romance and traditional dating, of the nuclear family, and perhaps even of civilization itself. But this lurid fascination may be misleading. Indeed, what may be lost in the frenzy to say something, or anything, on this topic is perspective—both empirical and ethical. Despite the surety of many accounts, there is in fact still considerable ambiguity about what is really going on. How prevalent is hooking up? What does the average college student think and feel about love, relationships, and sex? What are the short- and long-term physical and psychological implications of this behavior?

Social scientists have more recently stepped into this fray. They seek to disentangle the salacious anecdotes and moral generalizations in search of more systematic data and explanations. The standard account and purported prevalence of the hookup culture is clearly troubling. But for social scientists, the rush to judge in the absence of clear empirical evidence is itself an ethical challenge. The hookup culture may well be problematic, but for social scientists interested in normative questions, step one is getting the facts right. Toward this end, several recent studies seek to fill this empirical void. They offer five in-
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important insights that might shape our collective judgment about college hookups.¹

First, college students do hook up. They do have sex, and contrary to prevailing stereotypes, many who do so do it sober. Further research has found that a significant proportion of all hookups occur between pre-existing friends. Some estimate that students will hook up between six and seven times over four years of college. During approximately 40 percent of these encounters they will have intercourse. What we don’t know is what the actual numbers mean, now and in the future. Is this a lot and if so, by what metric?

Second, throughout the 20th century, casual sex has been a feature of the college experience for some. There has always been a mix of sexual and romantic relationships on college campuses including casual sex, serious long-term committed relationships, and shorter-term dating relations. What is different today is not the repertoire of relations—this remains the same—but the relative prevalence of each type. Students pretty consistently claim that hooking up is challenging dating and longer-term relationships for the top spot in this array. Students routinely describe their campus as having a “hookup culture.” This shift does not, however, mark some extraordinary departure from former patterns.

Third, there are significant populations of students who do not participate in the hookup culture—ever. On some campuses this population is thought to be at least 25 percent of the student body. One campus study found that more than half of seniors and more than two-thirds of freshmen reported they did not hook up in the previous year. And a 2006 study at Harvard found that nearly 50 percent of students surveyed had never even had intercourse. Clearly, not everyone is doing it. The question then is why, or perhaps more appropriately, why not? How do individual values interact with broader cultural norms to affect sexual decision-making?

Fourth, while it does appear that hooking up is increasingly normative—in both the sense of “being ok” and being more common—there is significant ambiguity about whether this means that “the relationship” itself is dead. Preliminary research has found that approximately 45 percent...
The Anonymity Test  
by Bronwyn Lewis ’08

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU COULD MAKE YOURSELF INVISIBLE?

On the surface, it seems like a simple enough question—something your niece or nephew might ask in a conversation about which power they would choose if you could be a superhero. And yet somehow invisibility is a much different sort of super power than the ability to fly or breathe underwater.

Within the context of the human community, the power of invisibility is inherently linked to being freed from social accountability for one’s actions. It raises an interesting question—can we consider ourselves moral beings if the only thing stopping us from acting unethically is the possibility that others would find out? Is that social accountability at the very heart of human morality? Or does the ultimate test of a man’s moral makeup lie in what he does when no one is watching?

Recently Duke students came face to face with this very issue.

The Duke campus was up in arms last fall over the debut of a new college gossip website where students of a particular school could post, well, anything about anyone—anonymously. In fact, boasting the tagline “Always Anonymous… Always Juicy…,” the site’s creator—a 2005 Duke grad—unashamedly appealed to its users to post whatever they wanted with no fear of anyone ever finding out their identity.

With anonymity comes considerable power. Nameless contributors could suddenly ruin reputations, avenge petty grudges, and reveal prejudices they would never espouse publicly. Females were called out by name for their sexual activity as well, only women are supposed to feel ashamed about it. As word spread about the website, it became the talk of campus. Those who were mentioned by name were mortified—and livid. Some threatened legal action. Campus leaders discussed the possibility of having the Office of Information Technology ban the site from all Duke computers. One ambitious Duke senior managed to write a computer program that temporarily shut it down. Members of the Honor Council supported such efforts, but maintained that simply shutting down the site would miss the point—that some members of our community lack a basic respect for one another.

As the Honor Council chair, I struggled with the best way to respond to the site and students’ use of it. On the one hand, I was dismayed by the vicious nature of the site’s content and deeply disappointed in the Duke students who contributed to it. But I knew that students do not respond to moral scolding and that forming a public effort to discredit the site could potentially backfire.

On the other hand, every conversation I had with real, live, non-anonymous students reassured me that the site’s users were in the minority on the Duke campus. Duke students recognized a highly troubling instance of behavior wholly contrary to the spirit of our community and actively and vocally opposed it.

Honor Council members and other students continued the discussion and debate on campus until the Duke student newspaper, The Chronicle, ran a story about the website, and the buzz surrounding the site died down. For most of campus, the novelty seemed to have worn off—who really cares about the opinions of people who won’t even put their names on their comments, anyway? For all its supposed power, in the end, anonymity couldn’t help but mask cowardice.

The site is still running, and people are still posting, but general traffic on the site has fallen off considerably. The vast majority of campus seems to have converted their disdain for the site into disinterest, either of which are laudable ethical responses to such a phenomenon in my book.

In this case, giving voice to the dissenters was more productive than attacking the negative behavior of the participants. I’m all for taking a stand against the wrongdoing of a few. This time, I realized we’d do better to celebrate the disgust of the many instead.
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of seniors report being currently in a committed relationship and 70 percent report being in a relationship of six months or more at some point during college. Could this mean, as some scholars have claimed, that hookups do not replace dating relationships but rather are a pathway to them? Might students be initiating longer-term relationships with sexual activity?

We do know that the overwhelming majority of college seniors—men and women alike—expect to be in a committed relationship within a year of graduation. Even higher numbers expect to marry and, according to one source, on average before the age of 27. And as many as nine out of ten expect to have children. They do not appear to eschew relationships or the traditional family. On the contrary, they embrace them.

Do we then think differently about hooking up if it is, as one scholar hypothesizes, just another route to the same end? Or do we worry about the health and integrity of these future relationships if hooking up is the pathway?

Finally, perhaps the greatest challenge this more recent research poses is to the notion that hooking up necessarily signals the decline of youthful romance, and with it the decline of sexual ethics. Some research reveals that both romance and morality may feature heavily in students’ sexual decision-making. In one preliminary study, for example, almost 50 percent of all students (men and women) said that their desire to be in love affects their sexual decision-making “quite a bit” and an additional 50 percent indicate that this desire affects their thinking at least somewhat. Statistics are significantly higher when students are asked about how their morality affects their sexual decision-making.

So, what’s love got to do with it? Perhaps a lot more than we might think. This data is, of course, merely suggestive. But it does at least challenge the taken-for-granted notion that college students are uniformly cynical about love, sex, and relationships. Like all of us, students struggle with how to achieve intimacy, how to negotiate their commitments, and how to express their desires. In helping us to better understand what those struggles look like today, social science data provides some much-needed signposts for assessing this complex ethical terrain.

Doing Ethics: Wayne Norman

Professor Wayne Norman is the new Mike and Ruth Mackowski Professor of Ethics in the Kenan Institute for Ethics and Trinity College of Arts & Sciences. He has written or co-edited five books, including Citizenship in Diverse Societies (Oxford 2000, co-edited with Will Kymlicka) and Negotiating Nationalism: Nation-building, Federalism, and Secession in the Multinational State (Oxford 2006).

Ethics in Action Editor Aimee Rodriguez sat down with Wayne over a triple espresso macchiato, his third of the day. Not that anyone’s counting.

So the story is you became a philosopher by working in a gold mine. Is that true?

I suppose you could say that’s where my career began. I spent my undergraduate summers working in a gold mine about 400 miles north of Minnesota. There’s certainly a lot of time to think when you’re working in the dark for eight hours a day, a mile underground. And it paid my entire way through school. In between shifts I’d read my philosophy books for the next school year.

I was hooked enough to go to graduate school, which, fortunately, was financed by scholarships and teaching. I did all my heavy lifting, so to speak, in the library at the London School of Economics.

Did you study business ethics at the LSE?

No. I did my thesis in political theory. It served me well when I took up my first job as a professor in Canada in the late 1980s, just as the country was entering into a long constitutional crisis centered around demands for special status by the Quebecois and Aboriginal peoples. There were a lot of similar issues involving national and religious minorities that were arising in Europe around then. And multiculturalism, feminism, and immigration were becoming of wider concern in the U.S. at the same time.

In one way or another, all of these problems were about the challenge of running democratic societies that contain citizens with many competing identities. Oddly enough, political philosophers, from Plato to the great Harvard professor John Rawls, had said very little about the politics of identity.

So how did you go from political philosophy to business ethics?

It began when I accepted my first chair in business ethics at the University of British Columbia in 1997. I was attracted to this position somewhat opportunistically: it was an endowed chair, it was based in one of the first interdisciplinary ethics research centers in the world, and it came with more dedicated research time and funding. The catch was that all of my teaching would be in an MBA program in the business school. Until then I’d taught only in philosophy departments.

It seems to have turned out well!

Yes, that catch turned out to be one of the best things that ever happened to me professionally. It exposed me to a much wider range of teaching and learning methods than I’d previously imagined. And also to more ambitious aims in teaching: namely to help students bring out the best in themselves as persons, citizens, and leaders, and not merely to improve their intellects or cognitive skills.

You mean it hadn’t always been your aim to help students in these ways?

That’s a very good question! When ethics is taught in a philosophy department it’s very typical to focus entirely on ethical theories and on the arguments that can be used to justify or refute these theories. As philosophers, we assume that we need an ethical theory to choose the best course of action in our lives, or to design the best social or political institutions. So in class we’d concentrate all our time and energy on the reasoning processes needed to evaluate ethical theories, taking for granted that students are already motivated to do the right thing.
How does that differ from teaching ethics in a business school?

When I began teaching in a business school I was shocked to realize in the first week that my dean and my colleagues thought that my primary aim as a professor of ethics was to make the MBA students ethical! In other words, to spend much more of my time motivating them to want to do the right thing in business contexts and not merely to give them the tools to make wise ethical decisions once they were motivated in this way. Soon, however, it became second nature for me to see the tasks of motivating and inspiring the students and giving them the tools to be effective ethical managers to be two sides of the same coin.

Do you think that ethics can be taught?

In particular to undergraduates or to MBA students who may be in their late 20s or 30s?

Absolutely. But I do understand why some people are skeptical. They think that if folks haven’t learned why it’s important to be ethical by the time they’re adults, there’s not much you can say to them in a university classroom. If they haven’t learned it on their mother’s knee, how can some professor succeed? And the skeptics are probably right about this. But this skepticism presupposes that learning about ethics is *exclusively concerned* with learning how to be motivated to do good when you are tempted to do wrong. This might be just a small part of ethics education.

What other sorts of challenges arise for students of business ethics?

Finding the desire to do the right thing is not the main challenge for most of our students, nor for most businesspeople I’ve met. They already want to do the right thing, but it’s not always clear what the right course of action is in many complex situations. Often there are different principles—such as ‘promote transparency’ and ‘protect other people’s privacy’—that may give contradictory advice. In some cases, it might look like *every* course of action has regrettable consequences, and it’s a question of how to select the least bad option. And some things, like fiduciary obligations or conflicts of interest or corporate social responsibility weren’t taught to anyone on their mother’s knee—at least I hope not! Much of what we do in university ethics classes is work through these sorts of complex moral landscapes—the ones our graduates will have to navigate in their professional lives.

As a professor at Duke you’ll devote as much time to research as you do to teaching, so what topics will you be investigating?

In general I like to keep a close connection between my research, my teaching, and various kinds of outreach and consulting activities I’m involved in. In the course of consulting and interacting with business people, NGOs, and government officials, I’ve often discovered topics that have not yet appeared on the radar screen of academia, and this allows me to do the sort of research that is highly useful in both the academy and the real world.

For example, with the business ethics program at the Institute, we’ll be working to translate my research into practice and then to get feedback from our business leaders to further shape the research itself. It’s a way of allowing what you learn to inform what you do, and vice versa.

You’ve done pioneering research in the political philosophy of citizenship, multiculturalism, nationalism, federalism, and secession, among other topics. Where are your main areas of interest these days?

The normative evaluation of the world of business has become my primary research focus in recent years, and it will remain so for the foreseeable future.

One of the problems I’m currently trying to address is the question of how business leaders should cope with the vast array of vocabularies out there for evaluating the extent to which firms are ethical. Should businesses aim to be good corporate citizens or to be socially responsible? Should they be ethical or compliant? Should they have good governance, promote sustainable development, or work toward the triple bottom line, etc.?

Different departments and stakeholders use different language and criteria for evaluating a firm’s activities and policies. But it’s not clear that all of these languages are interchangeable, and often they’re coming from some particular (and possibly biased) political perspective. One of my central tasks these days is to sort out some of this mess.

I’m also interested in a number of specific ethical issues, including conflicts of interest and guidelines for ethical lobbying.

Until now, you’ve always lived and taught in urban areas including London, Montreal, Vancouver, and New York. Even your visiting appointments have been in places like Paris, Brussels, Barcelona, and San Francisco. How are you finding the smaller town life in Durham, North Carolina?

We are loving it! For the last several years my wife and I have been living in an 800 sq. ft. apartment in Manhattan, and we’ve come to realize that we simply need more space to breathe. This past summer I mowed a lawn for the first time since the Carter Administration! It’s kind of fun, even if I’m not getting paid $3 to do it—that was the fee I charged per lawn to a local developer in the 1970s when I set up my first business at the age of ten.

And how are you finding your time at the Kenan Institute for Ethics and Duke University so far?

The Institute, the Philosophy Department (which is right upstairs), and Duke have very quickly come to feel like home. Everybody here has been incredibly welcoming and encouraging. And I’m slowly introducing them to the benefits of multiple-espresso work days in kind.

I’ve spent my whole career zigzagging between departments and intellectual communities in philosophy, political science, and management studies. Here at Duke I’m being invited to keep up my activities and interests in all of these areas simultaneously. I feel like I’ve found the natural home for any curious interdisciplinary.
Ethical Crisis and Institutional Change

by Suzanne Shanahan and Noah Pickus

IN RECENT YEARS, WE’VE WATCHED A SERIES OF NOTABLE PUBLIC SCANDALS UNFOLD IN AMERICAN SOCIETY. There was accounting fraud at Enron. The New York Times was accused of plagiarism. Prisoners at Abu Ghraib were tortured. Sexual abuse allegations rocked the Catholic Church. And America’s favorite pastime was identified as a steroid-fueled sport. Is society in an unprecedented moment of ethical decline? Do these ethical crises share a single underlying cause?

In response to these questions, the Kenan Institute for Ethics organized an interdisciplinary group of two dozen faculty and graduate students from across Duke University and the United States to examine ethical crisis and change. Over the past two years this interdisciplinary research consortium, Changing Institutional Cultures, has been investigating how best to understand, assess, and improve the ethical cultures of military, religious, business, and educational institutions.

As we began our work we immediately made two observations. First, there is very little empirical research explaining the nature and origins of ethical crisis, none of which looks across institutional or organizational forms for explanations. Second, while moments of ethical crisis offer opportunities for ethical reflection, there is little consensus about the best strategies to create effective change in these moments. Indeed, organizations often do the very things that we know don’t work in moments of crisis. Two practical and pressing questions arose from these initial findings: How do institutions learn to prepare for, respond to, or recover from ethical crises? And wouldn’t it be helpful to have this information available and accessible to organizations that find themselves in such situations?

To begin answering these questions, we sought to understand ethical dynamics across a range of social institutions and historical periods. We asked, for example, how the introduction of women into higher education institutions at the turn of the century was similar or dissimilar to the racial integration of the military several decades later. Or why contemporary crises seem to affect the Catholic Church more than Islamic institutions.

In gathering and reviewing the existing research on ethical crisis and organizational change and drawing upon a wide range of faculty expertise—including philosophy, religion, law, psychology, business, and public policy—we have collectively developed a novel, interdisciplinary approach to ethical culture and crisis. This approach serves as a framework for understanding why some institutions are more susceptible to crisis or more amenable to redress. It is a framework we expect to be of interest to academics, policy makers, and organizational reformers alike. We’ve identified five key components of organizational structure and purpose that help us to better understand the causes and consequences of ethical crisis: accountability, organizational structure, social contract, identity, and mission.

Accountability refers to how explicitly or implicitly expectations are communicated and enforced within an institution’s hierarchy. Militaries, with their strict, clearly defined chains of command, have explicit accountability regimes while universities, which foster considerable organizational autonomy among faculty and deans, tend toward more implicit accountability regimes.

Organizational Structure ranges from hierarchical to horizontal. The Catholic Church, for example, is a hierarchical organization, while Islam often assumes a more horizontal form. Dissent—political or ideological—is more routine in horizontal forms and may help to diffuse crises before they reach a critical stage. In contrast, a crisis anywhere in a hierarchical organization is a systemic one. Yet hierarchical organizations, like organizations with explicit accountability regimes, are often more amenable to speedy intervention following a crisis.

Social Contract refers to the formal or informal relationship an institution has with its stakeholders. Military and business institutions, for instance, have formal social contracts while those of higher education institutions are more informal. Ethical crises—violations of the social contract—are more readily observed in military and business institutions, and there are formal (if difficult to negotiate) channels for efforts to address such violations. In higher education, the social contract is loosely held amongst a variety of constituencies—students, faculty, parents, alumni, government regulators, civil society—which makes swift identification and remediation of an ethical crisis more difficult. Ethical crises often lead to explicit efforts to clarify the social contract in institutions with either form, as recent calls for greater accountability in higher education indicate.

Identity refers to the emotional sense of belonging that institutions generate and perpetuate. Identity can be a more or less pronounced component of institutional culture and can span the spectrum from strong to weak. Business organizations, for instance, typically have weaker identities than religious organizations. The emotional identity and resulting sense of psychological ownership can also vary significantly within institutions.

Mission refers to either an implicit and diffuse or explicit and detailed statement of being and purpose. What does an institution actually say it does? Business organizations tend to have definitive and detailed mission statements and deviations from the mission are more quickly observed and addressed. Higher education institutions, by contrast, tend to have more general and diffuse mission statements such that while crises may arise less frequently they may also be far more difficult to confront and remediate.

Comparing component combinations both within and between institutions further demon-
strates the explanatory value of this framework. For instance, Islamic institutions in the United States represent a strong sense of communal belonging that is coupled with a highly decentralized and diffused organizational structure. This combination of strong identity and weak structure has enabled Islamic institutions to respond well to the tensions and strains of a post-9/11 America and to be relatively more resilient to ethical crises in contrast to mainstream Protestant organizations. As another example, the explicit accountability and formal social contract seen in militaries may make it easier for such institutions to respond to ethical crises.

The case of ethical codes (variously termed honor codes or codes of conduct) provides another interesting example of how these components combine to help us understand crisis and response conditions. The strong sense of mission and identity often associated with militaries—and embodied in their ethical codes—can provide a highly effective tool in responding to certain kinds of ethical crises. In other cases, those codes can serve as significant barriers to change. For example, with the attempt to integrate women, the strong mission and vibrant, well-articulated identity of the military was a significant impediment to necessary change. It is precisely these moments of institutional crisis and change that we hope to explain.

The central task in the coming year is to develop a series of case studies that will employ this framework to further understand how the attributes of institutional ethos create crisis and response conditions. Understanding this relationship will create new knowledge on crisis, organizational culture, and ethical change. Ultimately, we expect it will offer practical guidance for a range of institutional stakeholders seeking to understand and improve their organizational culture.

Announcements

The 2008 Kenan Distinguished Lecture in Ethics will be delivered by Fiona Terry on Thursday, September 18, 2008 at 5:00 pm. Terry’s book, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action*, won the 2006 Grawemeyer Award for Improving World Order. She is currently with the International Committee for the Red Cross in Sudan and has previously served with ICRC in Yangon and with Doctors Without Borders. Terry’s lecture will address the ethical and practical complications associated with humanitarian work.

Recipients of the Spring 2008 Campus Grants and 2008-09 Graduate Awards have been announced. A full list of winners is available on our website.

The Institute welcomes new Advisory Board members Jonathan Silver ’75, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at New York University School of Medicine; Jimmy Soni ’07, winner of a Mitchell Scholarship for a year of graduate study in Ireland; Michelle Swenson ’77, former Senior Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer for Charles Schwab Institutional; and Rick Weissbourd, Lecturer on Education at the Graduate School of Education and at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Visit dukeethics.org for more information.

Recent Events

March 18, 2008
“In the Bedroom”
Screening and Discussion with Professors Susan Roth and Suzanne Shanahan
Sex, Love and Conflict: A Film Series on the Ethics of Relationships

March 19, 2008
“Business and Human Rights: Perspectives from BP and the United Nations”
Lecture by Christine Bader
Manager of Policy Development at BP and Advisor to the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Business and Human Rights, United Nations

April 4, 2008
“The Nature and Nurture of Morality”
Interdisciplinary Workshop
A day-long event on emergent conceptions of morality and the creation of ethical systems

April 9, 2008
“The Hebrew Republic: From Greater Israel to Global Israel”
Lecture by Bernard Avishai
Guggenheim Fellow and political economist

April 14, 2008
Annual Spring Public Ethics Symposium
An event gathering scholars, policymakers, and community leaders to assess the immigration debate

May 31 - June 1, 2008
Fuqua/Coach K Center on Leadership & Ethics (COLE) Academic Research Conference

For more information about any of our events, please visit dukeethics.org.
“Perception trumps reality 100 percent of the time.”
– Richard Levick, President and CEO of Levick Strategic Communications, during the Duke University School of Law conference panel, “Institutional Response to Crisis”

“There is no book that you can read, there is no quotation that you can put on your mirror, there is no philosophy of good conduct that you can study that will have anything like the impact on your life of having good people around you….Good friends provide us with the right examples, they teach us how to live well, they correct us when we’re wrong. The question for all of us is, ‘Who does that for me?’”
– Eric Greitens, Duke graduate, Rhodes Scholar, Navy SEAL, humanitarian worker, and boxing and marathon champion, during his lecture at Duke University on “The Culture of Character”

“Character counts—I know everyone says that but it’s true. Your reputation and your education are the only two things that you have that can’t be stripped from you.”
– Janet Hill, Vice President of Alexander & Associates, Inc., during the Institute’s “Ethics, Culture and Performance” panel discussion in New York on what she tells son and seven-time NBA All-Star Grant Hill

This newsletter is printed on Utopia Two, 100-lb. text stock. Environmental savings realized by using this paper are summarized below:

- Lbs of Paper used: 640
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- Water Saved in Gallons: 377
- Landfill Waste Reduced in Lbs: 43
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- Energy Consumption Reduced in BTU: 694,143