

TOPIC 6

Social Groups

TO MANY, SOCIOLOGY IS ABOUT SOCIAL GROUPS. GROUPS play an immensely important part in social life. Groups are elements embedded in larger social structures, and group membership determines much of our identity as individuals. In many ways, groups are key links between the individual and the larger society. A T-shirt slogan found around many sociology conventions reads, “Sociologists do it in groups,” and this sentiment simply underscores the perceived importance of groups to sociology. The idea of “social groups” may seem simple at first, but there are many types of groups and the study of social groups will illustrate how crucial groups are to the creation and maintenance of society.

Sociology likes to typify groups based on a distinction between those that are “primary” and those that are “secondary.” Primary and secondary groups rest along a continuum that distinguishes these polar opposites on several criteria. Primary groups are smaller, depend on face-to-face interaction, and have strong identification of the members with the groups. Examples of this type would include one’s family or peer group. As we move along the continuum toward groups that are more secondary, these have attributes indicating they are larger, that they depend on indirect communication, and that the members identify rather weakly with the group. Examples here would include a city or a large corporation. There are other groups that have some of both primary and secondary group characteristics like a fraternity or sorority, perhaps a small church. It is important to note that even within large, complex secondary groups are small primary groups; cities are composed of neighborhoods and families,

and corporations are made up of personal primary work groups or teams.

Another dimension of social groups is the formal-informal dimension. Bureaucracies are large and formal groups—they have hierarchy and rules that create the organization and channels of communication for its members. At the same time, there are lots of informal groups, like a peer group, whose activities are largely free of hierarchy and formal rules. Groups, formal or informal, provide an organizing principle in social life, and while we might believe some of them create problems for us (bureaucracies, for instance, might dehumanize us personally), they are critical to the smooth operation of large numbers of people. Many universities are prime examples of formal bureaucratic groups. In these same settings, we can find many informal activities among students and faculty that are critical to the survival of the group. Again, as we see, social life is lived along a continuum that includes diverse structures and activities, and groups point this out once more.

As the Internet emerged in the past twenty years, new “communities” or “groups” have taken shape as well. This will be discussed in more depth later, in Topic 15, but it merits discussion in our “Social Groups” topic, because people who “meet” and “chat” and support one another around a multitude of issues are performing functions much like more traditional, non-cyberspace groups. Sometimes cyber-acquaintances move on to face-to-face meetings and form relationships that may even end in marriage. Sociology will be very interested in whether cyber-groups and communities can enrich or replace social groups as we knew them before the Internet.

The three readings in this section include a work by Ronald Poulson, *et al.*, that studies college students regarding religious beliefs, alcohol, and risky sex. It is especially interesting in this study to see how gender alters the impact of the three main variables. How do you think this fits with experiences in your university or college? Second, Kraybill talks about the struggle of a religious group, the Amish, and how they have managed to maintain their members and beliefs through resisting change in a society that changes very rapidly. But, the author poses the question to us at the same time, are the Amish becoming more modern even as they resist the ways of the larger society? Finally, Fatima Mernissi, shows how a sociologist from Morocco, who is shopping for a dress

in the United States, extends the concept of a harem to include the rigid expectations U.S. women face with regard to their body's size. Meeting the Western cultural expectations for being thin can be as compromising to women's freedom as a harem in the East.

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Alcohol Consumption, Strength of Religious Beliefs, and Risky Sexual Behavior in College Students

Although a strong correlation between college students' alcohol consumption and risky sexual behavior has been reported in some studies, other research findings do not agree that there is such a relationship. According to some researchers, these conflicting reports may be related to varying cultural and religious orientations associated with different regions of the country.

Given the contrasting results of the cited research, coupled with the possible effect of the region where the students live, we designed our study with two major purposes in mind. First, we wanted to estimate the incidence of risky sexual behavior at a large university in a geographic region that has been largely ignored in previous research, namely the predominantly rural, conservative agricultural area in the southeastern United States commonly referred to as the bible belt.

Our second aim was to examine how both drinking patterns and strength of religious convictions are related to risky sexual behavior. The links between religious beliefs and alcohol consumption and the relationship between alcohol consumption and risky sexual behavior in college students have been examined in many previous studies. Yet we know of no other study that has examined the relationships among all three of these variables simultaneously.

The typical sexual behavior of many college students places them at risk for contracting serious sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Current estimates are that one in every four new cases of HIV infection occurs in people under the age of 25 years, the age group of a major percentage of undergraduate college students. Moreover, several studies have reported that high numbers of students engage in risky sexual behaviors, such as unprotected intercourse or inconsistent use of condoms.

Research findings clearly indicate that 75% or more of college students are sexually active. Caron et al. found that 86% of first-year college students were already sexually active and that 34% had experienced two or more new sexual partners since arriving at college. In a national survey, Douglas et al. found that 86.1% of college students reported that they had engaged in sexual intercourse and that 34.5% of the respondents in their study had had six or more sexual partners during their lifetimes.

A primary concern is that fewer than 25% of the students who are sexually active report consistently using condoms in every sexual encounter. To further compound the risks associated with unsafe sexual practices, college students with multiple partners were significantly less consistent in overall condom use, particularly when alcohol was involved, according to Desiderato and Crawford.

Alcohol Consumption

Alcohol consumption is one major factor that has been repeatedly linked to unsafe sexual behavior. In a national sample of more than 17,000 college students, Wechsler et al reported that “binge” drinkers were 7 to 10 times more likely than “nonbinge” drinkers to engage in unplanned and unprotected sexual activity. Desiderato and Crawford found that in the 11 weeks before their survey of undergraduates, 90% of the respondents had consumed alcohol at least once, and alcohol had preceded the last occurrence of sexual activity for a majority of the students (66% of the men and 53% of the women). Desiderato and Crawford also found that both the frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption had a significant bearing on the number of sexual partners that students had during the previous 11 weeks. When drinking alcohol preceded sexual activity, 41% of the students said that they either did not use condoms at all or were much less likely to do so.

Not all researchers agree that alcohol is a determining factor in the incidence of unsafe sexual practices. Temple and Leigh found no

significant relationship between alcohol consumption and sexual intercourse without a condom for respondents' most recent sexual encounter or their most recent encounters with new sexual partners. Leigh concluded that risky sexual behavior may be more a function of general risk taking than the simple consequence of the disinhibiting effects of alcohol. One important consideration is that, in the studies cited earlier, older adult samples were used; in other studies, higher rates of unprotected sex associated with alcohol used in adolescent and college-aged samples were found (see Temple and Leigh, 1992, for a discussion of possible age differences).

More recently, MacDonald and colleagues offered a controlled series of studies using a variety of methods (correlational and experimental, laboratory and field studies) focusing on college students. Their findings suggest that alcoholic intoxication does increase the probability of engaging in risky sexual activity, such as sex without using a condom.

Another possible explanation for the conflicting reports may be an intervening variable, such as how liberal or conservative the attitudes are in a particular geographic region. Leigh's studies were conducted in San Francisco, where participants' views regarding alcohol use and sexual behavior may be more liberal than the views of students in the rural southeastern United States. In sum, liberal attitudes may very well be related to greater risk-taking behavior. People of different geographic regions may also be more willing to disclose personal information about their sexual practices.

Religious Beliefs

Religious affiliation and the strength of religious convictions may contribute to a person's decisions about alcohol consumption. College students who reported that participating in religious activity was "not at all important" to them had a significantly higher likelihood of binge drinking than students for whom religion was somewhat important in their lives.⁶ In a large sample of adolescents, Donahue and Benson found that stronger religious values were correlated with lower rates of drug and alcohol use and with a lower incidence of premarital sexual intercourse.

Hawks and Bahr compared the drinking patterns of respondents belonging to abstinence-oriented religious groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), with the drinking patterns of those belonging to less-restrictive religious groups and those

with no religious affiliation. The Mormon respondents reported far less alcohol use than the other two groups. More specifically, only 31% of the Mormon group reported some alcohol use during the most recent 30-day period, compared with 63% of the respondents from other religious groups and 68% of the nonaffiliated group.

Carlucci et al. reported similar findings when they compared Protestants and Jews, who are more likely to advocate abstinence, with Catholics, who tend to hold a more permissive attitude toward alcohol consumption. These studies indicated that strong religious messages about alcohol abstinence can have a significant impact on personal rates of alcohol consumption.

In sum, reports in the literature regarding the nature of the relationship between alcohol use and unsafe sexual practices are contradictory. Because these conflicting reports may stem in part from regional differences in how conservative or liberal the value system is in a particular region, we chose to concentrate our data collection at a university located in a geographic region that has been underrepresented in past research.

Method

Participants

We drew an “accidental,” or convenience, sample of 210 participants from the general student population at a large university in a rural region of the southeastern United States. Respondents in the study were college students who volunteered to participate; they received neither remuneration nor course credit for their participation.

Although this was a sample of convenience, the participants’ characteristics were generally consistent with relevant demographic characteristics on this particular campus. For example, 61% ($n = 129$) of the respondents in this study were women, and 39% ($n = 79$) were men, whereas 59% of the university student body were women and 41% were men. The ethnic status of respondents represented in our study was 9% African American ($n = 20$), 86% European American ($n = 180$), and 4% other categories ($n = 8$). On this campus at the time of the survey, African American students were 12% and European Americans were 84% of the student population.

Respondents in this study ranged in age from 18 to 36 years, with a mean age of 21 years. The mean age of students at the university was 20.6 years. All selection and methodological procedures were approved

by the psychology department's Human Subjects Review Committee (HSRC) and were in accord with the ethical standards and requirements set by the committee.

Materials

We collaborated with graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in psychology research methods courses to develop an extensive survey. The students assembled in small groups and collectively created a series of questions according to each group's areas of interest. The three general areas were alcohol and other drug use, sexual behavior, and religious orientation.

The 88 questions that were unanimously agreed upon by the entire class were compiled in a single questionnaire, and these questions were pilot tested under the direction of the first author. Copies of the entire questionnaire are available from the first author.

Procedure

We instructed student experimenters to solicit at least 10 participants. No student experimenter was allowed to administer more than 10 surveys. Each participant was read a summary that explained the purpose of the study, including the information that responses were anonymous and confidential. Both the researcher and the participant signed a consent form before the survey was administered. Participants were able to complete the survey in a comfortable, private setting, avoiding further discussion with the researcher or other participants.

Upon completing the questionnaire, participants were instructed to seal their surveys in envelopes provided by the experimenter, were thanked for their assistance, and were given an opportunity to ask questions or express any concerns. All sealed envelopes were given to the course instructor (first author) for processing.

Results

The vast majority of respondents (84%) reported having engaged in sexual intercourse. One third (34%) of the entire sample reported a frequency of one to three times per week, and one quarter (27%) reported a frequency of one to two times per month. Only 27% of the respondents reported they consistently used condoms, whereas more than one half (60%) reported their condom use was inconsistent.

Thirteen percent of the respondents reported that they had never engaged in any form of safer sex practice. This high rate of unprotected sex, along with the fact that almost half of the respondents (48%) reported having engaged in sexual intercourse with multiple partners during the past year, indicated that many students were placing themselves at a significant risk for contracting STDs, including HIV.

Although virtually all students reported using precautionary methods to prevent pregnancy, many tended to use mostly unreliable methods or methods that do not provide any protection from STDs (e.g., rhythm method, withdrawal, and birth control pills). It appeared that participants were more concerned with preventing pregnancy (52%) than with protecting themselves from STDs (38%). Thus, whereas most students' intentions were good, almost half (43%) stated that they did not use protective methods because they were in love and trusted their partners.

Alcohol consumption was also quite high for this sample of students. Only 25% of the respondents reported no regular use of alcohol, 46% reported typically using alcohol one to two times per week, 23% reported using alcohol three to four times per week, and 7% reported using alcohol five or more times per week, on average.

When asked how often they had been intoxicated in the past month, 24% of the respondents reported never, 23% reported being intoxicated one or two times, 17% reported three to four times, 13% reported a frequency of five to six times, and 22% reported a frequency of seven to eight times. One third (33%) reported having consumed so much alcohol that they passed out at least once during the past month.

Seventy-eight percent of the respondents reported that they had made one or more decisions while drinking that they later regretted. With regard to sexual activity, more than one third of our sample (39%) reported having used alcohol to enhance their sexual experiences, and 68% of the respondents reported that alcohol had at some time had a negative effect on their sexual behavior. Students in this study (70%) reported that they were less likely to use condoms when they consumed alcohol before engaging in sexual activity.

The strength and nature of a person's religious beliefs may also play a major role in decisions about sexual activity. We found that 60% of our respondents believed in attending church or attended church on a regular basis, 78% believed that God operated in their daily lives, and 80% believed that they would go to heaven when they died. Although at least one quarter (27%) of the participants believed that premarital sex was a sin, most of our respondents (66%) did not feel that premarital

sex was a sin. Most respondents (77%) also did not believe that alcohol consumption was a sin. . . .

Risky sexual behavior was positively correlated with alcohol consumption, $r = .41$, $p < .001$, but not with religious beliefs, $r = .11$, not significant (*ns*). However, alcohol consumption was negatively correlated with religious beliefs, $r = .21$, $p < .004$.

The men had significantly higher rates of alcohol consumption, $M = 27.79$, $SD = 7.80$, than the women, $M = 23.45$, $SD = 7.10$, $t(191) = 3.97$, $p < .001$. The men also had higher rates of risky sexual behavior, $M = 7.92$, $SD = 1.14$, than the women, $M = 7.36$, $SD = 1.16$, $t(198) = 3.37$, $p < .001$. Men and women did not, however, differ significantly in their overall frequency of sexual activity: $M = 2.80$ for men, $M = 2.69$ for women, $SDs = 1.24$ and 1.16 respectively, $t(197) < 1$, *ns*. We also found no noteworthy differences for strength of religious beliefs $M = 10.21$ for men and 10.86 for women, $SD = 3.23$ for men and 2.76 for women, $t(202) = 1.53$, *ns*. Because there were sex differences for two of the three variables, we analyzed the correlations separately for women and men.

For the men in this sample, only one correlation was significant: Alcohol consumption was correlated with risky sexual behavior, $r = .30$, $p < .009$. Strength of religious convictions was unrelated to the other two variables, $r = .05$, for alcohol consumption and religious beliefs, and $r = .03$ for risky sexual behavior and religious beliefs.

The pattern of correlations was quite different for women; all three correlations were significant. Alcohol consumption was positively correlated with risky sexual behavior $r = .42$, $p < .001$. Strength of religious beliefs was negatively correlated with both alcohol consumption, $r = -.33$, $p < .001$, and risky sexual behavior, $r = -.22$, $p < .02$.

Discussion

We examined the relations among alcohol consumption, strength of religious convictions, and risky sexual behavior in students at a large university in a relatively conservative, rural region of the United States. Our findings supported recent research documenting the high incidence of risky sexual behavior in college students. The number of students who were sexually active in our sample (84%) was comparable to findings in previous reports (75% and 86%). The proportion of students reporting consistent use of condoms was also quite similar (27% in our study compared with 24% and 21% in other studies).

Many of our participants (48%) were engaging in sexual intercourse with multiple partners.

Our findings were consistent with reports from previous research that alcohol use is a common practice on college campuses. Many of the students were using alcohol to the point of intoxication on a regular basis (one third of our respondents reported being intoxicated more than five times in the past month).

Such excessive use of alcohol is clearly linked to impaired judgment. More than three quarters of our respondents reported they had made decisions while under the influence of alcohol that they later regretted, and two thirds reported that alcohol had at some time had a negative impact on their sexual behavior.

In particular, 70% of our respondents reported inconsistent use of condoms while under the influence of alcohol, almost twice the rate reported by Desiderato and Crawford. This high rate of inconsistent condom use may have been attributable, in part, to the fact that almost half of our respondents reported they had only one sexual partner, perhaps making them feel less vulnerable to the risks associated with unprotected sex: 43% of the respondents reported that they did not use protection because they were in love and trusted their partners. We should underscore that existing research findings suggest that many college students may not be faithful in their dating relationships.

Alcohol consumption was strongly related to risky sexual behavior for both women and men in our study. We found intriguing sex differences for the three variables and their interrelationships. Men had higher rates of alcohol consumption and higher rates of risky sexual behavior than women did, even though the overall rates of men's and women's sexual activity did not differ. Although the sex difference for religious beliefs was not significant, religion appeared to have a different effect on women than it did on men. Women with stronger religious convictions tended to consume less alcohol and were less likely to engage in risky sexual behavior, which was not true for men. This is surprising, given the relatively high degree of religious convictions expressed by both women and men in our sample.

The observed gender differences may be attributable to broader societal attitudes regarding the use of alcohol. More specifically, alcohol consumption to the point of intoxication may be viewed as permissible for men but inappropriate for women. These attitudes may be different in geographic regions where people have more or less conservative values, because conservative values often include different expectations for

men's and women's behavior. Thus, a critical question stemming from our study is whether religious sanctions against the use of alcohol and premarital sex influence women and men differently. If there is a difference in the effects of religious conviction, why is this the case? Additional research is needed to address these complex issues.

Limitations of Present Study

Although our findings in this study are consistent with previous research and provide insights regarding the interrelationships among three important variables, the methods we used prevent these findings from being generalizable to other students on this campus or on other campuses. Indeed, these tentative data need to be validated by means of randomized sampling techniques.

We believe it possible that these data may be quite consistent with general drinking and sexual practices at this university. For the past 3 years (three data-collection periods), we collected pilot data ($n = 321$) regarding risky sex practices at this university. A different group of experimental psychology students, who self-selected themselves into different sections of research methods classes, collected the preliminary data. We failed to find any appreciable statistically significant differences between their pilot data and data featured in this study. Although the findings are not conclusive, they suggest that student behaviors among all those sampled seem to be quite consistent.

The second methodological concern is that our data were based on self-reports. In such reports, respondents may desire to present themselves in a more favorable light or engage in what has commonly been termed *social desirability*. Whether this means that respondents will overstate or understate their behavioral tendencies relative to alcohol consumption and risky sex is unclear. Researchers suggest that if report bias does occur, it is more likely to result from underreporting, rather than overreporting, the frequency of problematic behavior.

A third methodological issue concerns the general temptation to treat correlational results as if they were true experimental results. We are certainly aware of the possible "third variable" problem when explaining research findings on the basis of correlational data. However, our goal was not to model risky sex behavior causally, but to examine the strength of the relationships among alcohol, religious beliefs, and risky sexual behaviors in a group of college students in the rural southeastern United States.

Our preliminary data pointed to the possibility that many of our participants believed in a form of religion that is inconsistent with that taught in Christian churches in the bible belt. Our conversations with local clergy and religious leaders, for example, clearly suggested that premarital sex is a sin. Yet three quarters of our participants stated that it “should not be” and “is not” a sin.

Furthermore, drinking to excess was not considered a sin by many of our participants. In light of the reasonable percentage of participants who stated that they attended church on a regular basis, these findings appear quite intriguing. Perhaps the local clergy may want to address how students appear to go about reducing possible cognitive dissonance by modifying their thoughts rather than their behaviors. This may be particularly true for many of our male participants, whose behaviors and religious beliefs appeared to be unrelated. All too often, men are told that having sex implies “manhood” or being a “real” man. Such attitudes may lead men to believe that they are invulnerable to HIV and other STDs. Indeed, parents, educators, and administrators may want to direct even more safer-sex campaigns toward men and their behaviors.

The high incidence of unsafe sexual practices is placing college students at risk for contracting STDs, including HIV. Our preliminary findings highlight the need for more detailed examinations of the interrelationship among alcohol consumption, religious beliefs, and risky sexual behavior among students who attend universities in the bible belt. We could then compare behaviors in this and other regions of the country to see whether or not there is a link between religious value systems and the rates of alcohol consumption and safer sex practices. These kinds of studies could provide crucial data for educating college students about the consequences of their behaviors.

NOTES

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2. For further information or a copy of the questionnaire, please write Ronald L. Poulson, PhD, Department of Psychology, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC 27858-4353, or PoulsonR@Mail.ECU.EDU.

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STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How do alcohol consumption and religious beliefs affect risky sexual behavior?
2. How does gender influence the relationship between the variables?

17

READING

DONALD B. KRAYBILL

The Amish

Modern Amish?

Booming machine shops in some Amish settlements hold sophisticated manufacturing equipment powered by air and hydraulic pressure. Some Amish craftsmen use the latest fiberglass techniques to manufacture horse-drawn carriages. Hundreds of Amish-owned microenterprises place entrepreneurs in direct relation with the outside world on a daily basis. Successful Amish dairy farms in the more progressive settlements are efficient operations that use feed supplements, vitamins, fertilizers, insecticides, chemical preservatives, artificial insemination, and state-of-the-art veterinary practices. Professional farm consultants advise Amish farmers in some settlements about their use of pesticides, fertilizers, and seed selection. New Amish homes in the more progressive settlements tout up-to-date bathroom facilities, modern kitchens with lovely cabinets, formica, vinyl floor coverings, and the latest gas stoves and refrigerators. In spite of cherished stereotypes, some Amish are embracing certain aspects of modernity.

Modernization, however, varies considerably from settlement to settlement across North America. Among the more conservative Amish groups, refrigerators and indoor bathrooms are taboo. Cows are milked by hand and hay balers are not pulled in fields. It is reasonable to hypothesize that Amish adaptation to modern life directly varies with the population density of non-Amish who live in the same geographical area. In other words, innovative Amish behavior appears highly correlated with urbanization. Amish settlements in more isolated rural areas are, generally speaking, more resistant to modernizing influences.¹ Settlements such as the one near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, situated in the

midst of a rapidly urbanizing region, are quite progressive in their use of technology and openness to the outside world.

The Amish do indeed cling to older customs in their church services, in their attitudes toward education, and in their rejection of individualism. The lack of electricity in their homes blocks the door to microwave ovens, air conditioners, toasters, doorbells, televisions, clothes dryers, and blow dryers. But does a rejection of high school education, cars, and public-utility-line electricity mean that the Amish are a premodern folk society? The unusual mixture of progress and tradition abounding in Amish society poses interesting questions about the meaning of modernization. How have the Amish responded to the pressures of modernity? What strategies have they employed to cope with modern life in the twentieth century? They have drifted along with the stream of progress in some areas of their culture but have staunchly and successfully resisted it in others. . . .

Dimensions of Modernity

To what extent have the features of modernity penetrated Amish life—their organizational structure as well as their cultural consciousness? The facets of modernity identified by social analysts are legion. The following, somewhat arbitrarily selected dimensions of modernity are not exhaustive nor do they follow a causal sequence.² Typically underscored by sociologists, these factors do, however, distinguish modern worlds from nonmodern ones. After a brief discussion of each dimension, we will explore the ways in which the Amish have grappled with it.

Modern societies by and large are highly *specialized*. In nonmodern societies social functions from cradle to grave—birth, work, play, education, worship, friendship, and death—revolve around the home. They often, in fact, occur in the home. In advanced societies such social activities “grow up” and leave home, and as they depart, they split into specialized spheres. These cradle-to-grave functions eventually become lodged in specialized institutions—birthing centers, fitness spas, day care centers, schools, grooming salons, factories, hospitals, golf courses, hospices, and funeral homes. It is in these sharply differentiated settings that experts deliver their highly specialized services. The automobile and mass transit enable modern folks to spend their days shuttling from site to site to both deliver and receive such services. The imprint of structural differentiation and functional specialization is thus stamped across the face of modern life.

The degree to which specialization has shaped Amish life varies of course among Amish settlements, but without exception the Amish world is clearly less differentiated than modern society. The rejection of high school and the primacy given to agriculture have minimized occupational specialization. As Amish families move from farms to microenterprises as well as into factory work in some settlements, the degree of occupational specialization will likely increase. It will undoubtedly remain low as long as high school and college remain taboo. Terminating education at eighth grade effectively deters members from pursuing professional jobs. The relatively low degree of occupational specialization has also minimized social class differences and contributed to the relative homogeneity of the Amish social structure. The rising numbers of Amish microenterprises in some settlements may over time encourage the emergence of a three-tier class structure consisting of farm owners, business entrepreneurs, and day laborers. . . .

The pluralism of modern life means that many individuals face many views of reality—a bewildering array of beliefs and opinions. The common sentiments of traditional cultures dissolve in the streams of pluralism. The wide assortment of ideas and clashing lifestyles focuses the stark relativity of modernity since “it all depends” on who you are, on where you’re from, and on your point of view. The religious beliefs of individuals become especially fragile and vulnerable to change as discrepant world views collide in the public media of mass society.

At both structural and cultural levels the Amish have remained aloof from the pluralism of modern life. Their theological stance of separation from the world has in many ways insulated them from the forces of diversity afoot in the modern world. The Amish community does interact with the surrounding society, tapping the use of professional services—medicine, dentistry, and law. Moreover, they are frequently buying and selling supplies and services for personal use as well as for business purposes. The practice of endogamy, the use of the dialect, the prohibition on membership in public organizations, the taboo on political involvement, and the rejection of mass media are among many of the factors that help to preserve the cultural boundaries that separate the Amish from the winds of pluralism. All of these factors impede structural assimilation and preserve the homogeneity of Amish life.

More importantly, Amish parochial schools bridle interaction with outsiders—both peers and teachers—and restrict consciousness. Amish

children do not study science or critical thinking, nor are they exposed to the relativity and diversity so pervasive in higher education today. The Amish rejection of mass media, especially television, severely limits their exposure to the smorgasbord of modern values. The tight plausibility structure embodied in the Amish community thus helps to hold the forces of pluralism at bay. . . .

In contrast to the discontinuities of modern culture, Amish societies exude continuity. Social relationships are more likely to be primary, local, enduring, and stable. The rejection of automobile ownership, bicycles, and air travel places limits on Amish mobility. To be sure, the Amish do travel in hired motor vehicles and in public busses and trains, but, all things considered, the amount of mobility is relatively low. The rejection of college and consequently of professional work enables young adults to live in their childhood communities, which increases the longevity of social ties with family, neighborhood, and place. Parents teach occupational skills to their children.

Amish schools are a supreme example of continuity. Children often walk to school, where they may have the same teacher for all eight grades. The teacher, responsible for some thirty students, may relate to only a dozen households, since many families have several children in attendance. Such continuity contrasts starkly with modern education, where children may have dozens of teachers in a few years and teachers relate to hundreds of families. . . .

The Amish commitment to a rational mentality that calculates means and ends has grown as their farming enterprises expand and as they enter the larger world of commerce via cottage industries. Although Amish entrepreneurs engage in planning to keep their businesses afloat, there is, however, decidedly less planning activity among the Amish than typically found in modern life. The absence of artificial means of family planning, career planning, and time management reflects a less rationalized approach to life—a greater willingness to yield to nature and destiny. The rejection of science and critical thinking in Amish schools, the taboo on theological training for ordained leaders, and the lack of a formal theology attenuate the level of rationality in the collective consciousness.

The tentacles of bureaucracy have barely touched Amish society. Their social architecture is remarkably decentralized, small, and informal. A central national office, with an executive director and professional staff have never developed. Church districts are organized as a loose federation in each settlement, and there is little centralized or

formal coordination between settlements. The decentralized character of Amish society fosters diversity in the struggle with modernity. Different settlements and different church districts even within affiliations adapt at different paces and in different directions. The *Ordnung*, the body of policies regulating the life of the community, is generally not written down but is a fluid, dynamic set of understandings. The hierarchical, formal, rationalized structure of modern bureaucracy has simply not developed in Amish society. . . .

The . . . traits of modernity encourage *individuation*—the widely heralded triumph of modern culture. The modernizing process unhooks individuals from the confining grip of custom and encourages individualism to flourish. In traditional societies, individuals for the most part are under the tight thumb of kin, tribe, and village. Modern culture with its ideology of individual rights, liberties, privileges, and freedoms celebrates the individual as the supreme social reality. To question the rights of an individual has become a cardinal and unforgivable sin. The personal résumé is, of course, the ultimate document of individuation, and one that is missing in Amish files. Modern individuals are free to pursue careers and seek personal fulfillment, but they also carry the responsibility to succeed—“to make it”—a responsibility that entails the fear of failure.

The subordination of the individual to the community is the fundamental key that unlocks many of the riddles and puzzles of Amish life and sharply distinguishes their culture from modern ways. *Gelassenheit*, submitting and yielding to higher authorities—parents, teachers, leaders, and God—structures Amish values, symbols, personality, rituals, and social organization. Personal submission clashes with modern individualism and its concomitants of self-achievement, self-expression, and self-fulfillment. By contrast, the Amish vocabulary of obedience, simplicity, humility, and the posture of kneeling—for baptism, prayer, confession, and ordination—reflect a premodern understanding of the individual. Clothing, for instance, is used in modern life as a tool of self-expression. In Amish life, uniform dress serves as a badge of group identity and loyalty as well as a symbol of self-surrender to community priorities. The taboo on photography, publicity, jewelry, and other forms of personal adornment bridles an individualism that otherwise might foster pride and arrogance. The Amish rejection of individualism—that supremely cherished value of modern culture—reflects the heartbeat of a counterculture that has not absorbed modern ways. . . .

The Amish have made collective choices. But many of these decisions have been reactive responses to choices imposed on them by modern life. The Amish have been less likely to be proactive—deliberately initiating choices, for such initiatives parallel the modern impulse to plan, order, and control one's environment. The Amish have made collective choices not to be modern. They have rejected higher education. But in many other cases they have surely conceded to modernity by accepting the use of modern forms of technology.

Their collective decisions, however, have restricted individual choice. Individuals are not free to wear what they want, to aspire to professional occupations, to own a car, or to buy a television set. This does not necessarily mean that Amish folks are dour and unhappy. A variety of evidence suggests that they are as happy and satisfied, if not more so, than many “homeless” moderns. The range of occupational options and lifestyle choices available to the individual in Amish society is of course quite narrow. And although a restricted range of choices may suffocate the modern spirit of freedom, it also removes the burden of incessant decision making with its concomitant guilt, stress, and anxiety from the shoulders of many Amish persons.

The Great Separator

... The hallmark of Amish culture has been its highly integrated community where all the bits and pieces of social life, from birth to death, are gathered into a single system. To avoid the fragmentation that accompanies modernity, the Amish have separated themselves from the modern world. In order to stay whole, to preserve their community, they have separated themselves from modernity—the greatest separator of all. The Amish impulse to remain separate from the great separator has become a significant strategy in their cultural survival.

Seen in this light it is not surprising that a fundamental tenet of Amish religion is separation from the world—a belief that sprouted in the seedbed of European persecution and is legitimated today with references to the scriptures. This linkage between the fragmentation of modern life and the integration of Amish society unlocks many of the Amish riddles. For only by being a separate people are they able to preserve the integrity of their tightly knit community. Many of the seemingly odd Amish practices that often perplex outside observers are in

fact social devices that shield their subculture from the divisive pressures of modernity that threaten to tear their corporate life asunder.

NOTES

1. A competing explanation to this hypothesis is the fact that some of the smaller, more rural Amish settlements are also newer. These are sometimes made up of families who want to maintain a more traditional Ordnung and have sought more rural isolated areas where they can continue in farming. Consequently a self-selection factor may complicate what otherwise appears to be an inverse relationship between urbanization and traditional Amish practices.
2. As Berger (1977) and Kraybill (1990) have shown, the various features of modernity are highly interrelated and not easily separated into discrete categories for causal analysis.

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- Kraybill, Donald B. 1990. "Modernity and Modernization," *Anabaptist-Mennonite Identities in Ferment*. Occasional papers no. 14, pp. 91–101. Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What attributes distinguish the Amish as a cohesive group?
2. Based on what you have read in the Kraybill research, what would you predict for the future of the Amish? Will they prosper or slowly lose their community?

FATIMA MERNISSI

Size 6: The Western Women's Harem

It was during my unsuccessful attempt to buy a cotton skirt in an American department store that I was told my hips were too large to fit into a size 6. That distressing experience made me realize how the image of beauty in the West can hurt and humiliate a woman as much as the veil does when enforced by the state police in extremist nations such as Iran, Afghanistan, or Saudi Arabia. Yes, that day I stumbled onto one of the keys to the enigma of passive beauty in Western harem fantasies. The elegant saleslady in the American store looked at me without moving from her desk and said that she had no skirt my size. "In this whole big store, there is no skirt for me?" I said. "You are joking." I felt very suspicious and thought that she just might be too tired to help me. I could understand that. But then the saleswoman added a condescending judgment, which sounded to me like an Imam's *fatwa*. It left no room for discussion:

"You are too big!" she said.

"I am too big compared to what?" I asked, looking at her intently, because I realized that I was facing a critical cultural gap here.

"Compared to a size 6," came the saleslady's reply.

Her voice had a clear-cut edge to it that is typical of those who enforce religious laws. "Size 4 and 6 are the norm," she went on, encouraged by my bewildered look. "Deviant sized such as the one you need can be bought in special stores."

That was the first time that I had ever heard such nonsense about my size. In the Moroccan streets, men's flattering comments regarding

my particularly generous hips have for decades led me to believe that the entire planet shared their convictions. It is true that with advancing age, I have been hearing fewer and fewer flattering comments when walking in the medina, and sometimes the silence around me in the bazaars is deafening. But since my face has never met with the local beauty standards, and I have often had to defend myself against remarks such as *zirafa* (giraffe), because of my long neck, I learned long ago not to rely too much on the outside world for my sense of self-worth. In fact, paradoxically, as I discovered when I went to Rabat as a student, it was the self-reliance that I had developed to protect myself against “beauty blackmail” that made me attractive to others. My male fellow students could not believe that I did not give a damn about what they thought about my body. “You know, my dear,” I would say in response to one of them, “all I need to survive is bread, olives, and sardines. That you think my neck is too long is your problem, not mine.”

In any case, when it comes to beauty and compliments, nothing is too serious or definite in the medina, where everything can be negotiated. But things seemed to be different in that American department store. In fact, I have to confess that I lost my usual self-confidence in that New York environment. Not that I am always sure of myself, but I don’t walk around the Moroccan streets or down the university corridors wondering what people are thinking about me. Of course, when I hear a compliment, my ego expands like a cheese soufflé, but on the whole, I don’t expect to hear much from others. Some mornings, I feel ugly because I am sick or tired; others, I feel wonderful because it is sunny out or I have written a good paragraph. But suddenly, in that peaceful American store that I had entered so triumphantly, as a sovereign consumer ready to spend money, I felt savagely attacked. My hips, until then the sign of a relaxed and uninhibited maturity, were suddenly being condemned as a deformity.

“And who decided the norm?” I asked the saleslady, in an attempt to regain some self-confidence by challenging the established rules. I never let others evaluate me, if only because I remember my childhood too well. In ancient Fez, which valued round-faced plump adolescents, I was repeatedly told that I was too tall, too skinny, my cheekbones were too high, my eyes were too slanted. My mother often complained that I would never find a husband and urged me to study and learn all that I could, from storytelling to embroidery, in order to survive. But I often retorted that since “Allah had created me the way I am, how could he be so wrong, Mother?” That would silence the poor

woman for a while, because if she contradicted me, she would be attacking God himself. And this tactic of glorifying my strange looks as a divine gift not only helped me to survive in my stuffy city, but also caused me to start believing the story myself. I became almost self-confident. I say almost, because I realized early on that self-confidence is not a tangible and stable thing like a silver bracelet that never changes over the years. Self-confidence is like a tiny fragile light, which goes off and on. You have to replenish it constantly.

“And who says that everyone must be size 6?” I joked to the saleslady that day, deliberately neglecting to mention size 4, which is the size of my skinny twelve-year-old niece.

At that point, the saleslady suddenly gave me an anxious look. “The norm is everywhere, my dear,” she said, “It’s all over, in the magazines, on television, in the ads. You can’t escape it. There is Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Gianni Versace, Giorgio Armani, Mario Valentino, Salvatore Ferragamo, Christian Dior, Yves Saint-Laurent, Christian Lacroix, and Jean-Paul Gaultier. Big department stores go by the norm.” She paused and then concluded, “If they sold size 14 or 16, which is probably what you need, they would go bankrupt.”

She stopped for a minute and then stared at me, intrigued. “Where on earth do you come from? I am sorry I can’t help you. Really, I am.” And she looked it too. She seemed, all of a sudden, interested, and brushed off another woman who was seeking her attention with a cutting, “Get someone else to help you, I’m busy.” Only then did I notice that she was probably my age, in her late fifties. But unlike me, she had the thin body of an adolescent girl. Her knee-length, navy blue, Chanel dress had a white silk collar reminiscent of the subdued elegance of aristocratic French Catholic schoolgirls at the turn of the century. A pearl-studded belt emphasized the slimness of her waist. With her meticulously styled short hair and sophisticated makeup, she looked half my age at first glance.

“I come from a country where there is no size for women’s clothes,” I told her. “I buy my own material and the neighborhood seamstress or craftsman makes me the silk or leather skirt I want. They just take my measurements each time I see them. Neither the seamstress nor I know exactly what size my new skirt is. We discover it together in the making. No one cares about my size in Morocco as long as I pay taxes on time. Actually, I don’t know what my size is, to tell you the truth.”

The saleswoman laughed merrily and said that I should advertise my country as a paradise for stressed working women. “You mean you

don't watch your weight?" she inquired, with a tinge of disbelief in her voice. And then, after a brief moment of silence, she added in a lower register, as if talking to herself: "Many women working in highly paid fashion-related jobs could lose their positions if they didn't keep to a strict diet."

Her words sounded so simple, but the threat they implied was so cruel that I realized for the first time that maybe "size 6" is a more violent restriction imposed on women than is the Muslim veil. Quickly I said good-bye so as not to make any more demands on the saleslady's time or involve her in any more unwelcome, confidential exchanges about age-discriminating salary cuts. A surveillance camera was probably watching us both.

Yes, I thought as I wandered off, I have finally found the answer to my harem enigma. Unlike the Muslim man, who uses space to establish male domination by excluding women from the public arena, the Western man manipulates time and light. He declares that in order to be beautiful, a woman must look fourteen years old. If she dares to look fifty, or worse, sixty, she is beyond the pale. By putting the spotlight on the female child and framing her as the ideal of beauty, he condemns the mature woman to invisibility. In fact, the modern Western man enforces Immanuel Kant's nineteenth-century theories: To be beautiful, women have to appear childish and brainless. When a woman looks mature and self-assertive, or allows her hips to expand, she is condemned as ugly. Thus, the walls of the European harem separate youthful beauty from ugly maturity.

These Western attitudes, I thought, are even more dangerous and cunning than the Muslim ones because the weapon used against women is time. Time is less visible, more fluid than space. The Western man uses images and spotlights to freeze female beauty within an idealized childhood, and forces women to perceive aging—that normal unfolding of the years—as a shameful devaluation. "Here I am, transformed into a dinosaur," I caught myself saying aloud as I went up and down the rows of skirts in the store, hoping to prove the saleslady wrong—to no avail. This Western time-defined veil is even crazier than the space-defined one enforced by the Ayatollahs.

The violence embodied in the Western harem is less visible than in the Eastern harem because aging is not attacked directly, but rather masked as an aesthetic choice. Yes, I suddenly felt not only very ugly but also quite useless in that store, where, if you had big hips, you were simply out of the picture. You drifted into the fringes of nothingness.

By putting the spotlight on the prepubescent female, the Western man veils the older, more mature woman, wrapping her in shrouds of ugliness. This idea gives me the chills because it tattoos the invisible harem directly onto a woman's skin. Chinese foot-binding worked the same way: Men declared beautiful only those women who had small, child-like feet. Chinese men did not force women to bandage their feet to keep them from developing normally—all they did was to define the beauty ideal. In feudal China, a beautiful woman was the one who voluntarily sacrificed her right to unhindered physical movement by mutilating her own feet, and thereby proving that her main goal in life was to please men. Similarly, in the Western world, I was expected to shrink my hips into a size 6 if I wanted to find a decent skirt tailored for a beautiful woman. We Muslim women have only one month of fasting, Ramadan, but the poor Western woman who diets has to fast twelve months out of the year. "*Quelle horreur*," I kept repeating to myself, while looking around at the American women shopping. All those my age looked like youthful teenagers.

According to the writer Naomi Wolf, the ideal size for American models decreased sharply in the 1990s. "A generation ago, the average model weighed 8 percent less than the average American woman, whereas today she weighs 23 percent less. . . . The weight of Miss America plummeted, and the average weight of Playboy Playmates dropped from 11 percent below the national average in 1970 to 17 percent below it in eight years."¹ The shrinking of the ideal size, according to Wolf, is one of the primary reasons for anorexia and other health-related problems: "Eating disorders rose exponentially, and a mass of neurosis was promoted that used food and weight to strip women of . . . a sense of control."²

Now, at last, the mystery of my Western harem made sense. Framing youth as beauty and condemning maturity is the weapon used against women in the West just as limiting access to public space is the weapon used in the East. The objective remains identical in both cultures: to make women feel unwelcome, inadequate, and ugly.

The power of the Western man resides in dictating what women should wear and how they should look. He controls the whole fashion industry, from cosmetics to underwear. The West, I realized, was the only part of the world where women's fashion is a man's business. In places like Morocco, where you design your own clothes and discuss them with craftsmen and -women, fashion is your own business. Not so in the West. As Naomi Wolf explains in *The Beauty Myth*, men have

engineered a prodigious amount of fetish-like, fashion-related paraphernalia: “Powerful industries—the \$33-billion-a-year diet industry, the \$20-billion cosmetic industry, the \$300-million cosmetic surgery industry, and the \$7-billion pornography industry—have arisen from the capital made out of unconscious anxieties, and are in turn able, through their influence on mass culture, to use, stimulate, and reinforce the hallucination in a rising economic spiral.”³

But how does the system function? I wondered. Why do women accept it?

Of all the possible explanations, I like that of the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, the best. In his latest book, *La Domination Masculine*, he proposes something he calls “*la violence symbolique*”: “Symbolic violence is a form of power which is hammered directly on the body, and as if by magic, without any apparent physical constraint. But this magic operates only because it activates the codes pounded in the deepest layers of the body.”⁴ Reading Bourdieu, I had the impression that I finally understood Western man’s psyche better. The cosmetic and fashion industries are only the tip of the iceberg, he states, which is why women are so ready to adhere to their dictates. Something else is going on on a far deeper level. Otherwise, why would women belittle themselves spontaneously? Why, argues Bourdieu, would women make their lives more difficult, for example, by preferring men who are taller or older than they are? “The majority of French women wish to have a husband who is older and also, which seems consistent, bigger as far as size is concerned,” writes Bourdieu.⁵ Caught in the enchanted submission characteristic of the symbolic violence inscribed in the mysterious layers of the flesh, women relinquish what he calls “*les signes ordinaires de la hiérarchie sexuelle*,” the ordinary signs of sexual hierarchy, such as old age and a larger body. By so doing, explains Bourdieu, women spontaneously accept the subservient position. It is this spontaneity Bourdieu describes as magic enchantment.⁶

Once I understood how this magic submission worked, I became very happy that the conservative Ayatollahs do not know about it yet. If they did, they would readily switch to its sophisticated methods, because they are so much more effective. To deprive me of food is definitely the best way to paralyze my thinking capabilities.

Both Naomi Wolf and Pierre Bourdieu come to the conclusion that insidious “body codes” paralyze Western women’s abilities to compete for power, even though access to education and professional opportunities seem wide open, because the rules of the game are so different

according to gender. Women enter the power game with so much of their energy deflected to their physical appearance that one hesitates to say the playing field is level. “A cultural fixation on female thinness is not an obsession about female beauty,” explains Wolf. It is “an obsession about female obedience. Dieting is the most potent political sedative in women’s history; a quietly mad population is a tractable one.”⁷ Research, she contends, “confirmed what most women know too well—that concern with weight leads to a ‘virtual collapse of self-esteem and sense of effectiveness’ and that . . . ‘prolonged and periodic caloric restriction’ resulted in a distinctive personality whose traits are passivity, anxiety, and emotionality.”⁸ Similarly, Bourdieu, who focuses more on how this myth hammers its inscriptions onto the flesh itself, recognizes that constantly reminding women of their physical appearance destabilizes them emotionally because it reduces them to exhibited objects. “By confining women to the status of symbolical objects to be seen and perceived by the other, masculine domination . . . puts women in a state of constant physical insecurity. . . . They have to strive ceaselessly to be engaging, attractive, and available.”⁹ Being frozen into the passive position of an object whose very existence depends on the eye of its beholder turns the educated modern Western woman into a harem slave.

“I thank you, Allah, for sparing me the tyranny of the ‘size 6 harem,’” I repeatedly said to myself while seated on the Paris-Casablanca flight, on my way back home at last. “I am so happy that the conservative male elite does not know about it. Imagine the fundamentalists switching from the veil to forcing women to fit size 6.”

How can you stage a credible political demonstration and shout in the streets that your human rights have been violated when you cannot find the right skirt?

NOTES

1. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1992), p. 185.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
4. Pierre Bourdieu: “La force symbolique est une forme de pouvoir qui s’exerce sur les corps, directement, et comme par magie, en dehors de toute contrainte physique, mais cette magie n’opère qu’en s’appuyant sur des dispositions déposées, tel des ressorts, au plus profond des corps.” In *La Domination Masculine* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1998), op. cit. p. 44. Here I would like to thank my French editor, Claire Delannoy, who kept me informed of the latest debates on women’s issues in Paris by sending me Bourdieu’s book and many others. Delannoy has been reading this manuscript since its inception in 1996 (a first version was published in Casablanca by Edition Le Fennec in 1998 as “Êtes-Vous Vacciné Centre le Harem”).

5. *La Domination Masculine*, op. cit., p. 41.
6. Bourdieu, op. cit., p. 42.
7. Wolf, op. cit., p. 187.
8. Wolf, quoting research carried out by S. C. Woolly and O. W. Woolly, op. cit., pp. 187–188.
9. Bourdieu, *La Domination Masculine*, p. 73.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Women confront many different restrictions in society. How does a dress shop constitute restriction for Western women as a harem does for Eastern women?
2. Explain “symbolic violence,” a concept Mernissi uses from the work of Bourdieu, as it relates to women and their bodies.