



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 A Good Samaritan
Response to Hookup
Culture
(*Chastity*, pp. 38-45)

Suggested Article:

📖 Sexuality and Spirituality
in American Adolescents
(*Chastity*, pp. 84-88)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

Institute for Faith and Learning
Baylor University
One Bear Place #97270
Waco, TX 76798-7270
Phone 1-254-710-4805
www.ChristianEthics.ws

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

A Good Samaritan Response to Hookup Culture

What college students living within hookup culture need most is a listening and sympathetic ear. They need someone who sees them for who and where they really are, and who sympathizes with their uncertainties, their confusion, and, sometimes, their regret and loss.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Meditation†

The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: “What are you going through?” It is a recognition that the sufferer exists.... For this reason it is enough, but it is indispensable, to know how to look at him in a certain way.

This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth.

Only he who is capable of attention can do this.

Simone Weil (1909-1943)

Reflection

The hookup culture that pervades Catholic, mainline Protestant, private-secular, and public universities in America is “a true culture of casual sex, in that it sells its citizens the notion that the ‘normal’ attitude to have about sex is an ambivalent one — ambivalence about both one’s partner and sexual intimacy,” Donna Freitas explains. But rather than making them “happy or fulfilled,” she notes, for many students “this learned ambivalence [is] a kind of suffering in and of itself.”

College students generally define hookups with three criteria.

- ▶ *Hookups involve some sexual intimacy*, ranging from a kiss to “having sex,” however the students define that term. Using this wide range of intimacy is intentional, because it allows students to report more encounters as a hookup. (There is great social pressure to be hooking up.) It also protects reputations: “By leaving the content of a hookup vague, women can protect their reputations by implying they did ‘less’ even if they did ‘more,’ and men can imply the exact opposite.”
- ▶ *Hookups are brief*—“as short as five minutes of kissing or as long as an entire night of ‘sex.’” Theoretically, they happen just once, but “plenty of supposed one-time hookups...turn into ‘serial hookups’ or friends with benefits.”
- ▶ *The participants are not supposed to get attached*, but should remain ambivalent about the experience and their partner. Freitas calls this the “social contract” of the hookup. While it “truly defines the hookup, it is also the part that most students — both men and women — struggle with and typically fail at upholding,” she notes. Students “find themselves caring about each other and wanting something more, even though in theory they promised not to do this very thing.”

A fourth “unofficial” criterion is alcohol, which students use to dull their emotions and minimize their responsibility for the hookup. In



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, is Senior Scholar in The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2016 Institute for Faith and Learning

theory, hooking up should be “a fun, one-time, unfettered, and exciting experience of sexual intimacy,” but within a hookup *culture* it actually involves fulfilling others’ expectations more than satisfying one’s sexual desire. “Hookups are just what people do in college, so you do them, too. Sexual intimacy is turned into something you shrug at, and you must prove you can do that shrugging along with everyone else around you.”

How should Christians respond to hookup culture? How can we best help college students who feel trapped within it? Freitas warns, “Offering preachments on chastity, warnings against premarital sex, and talk of sexual sin—however nicely these are put—is akin to talking loudly over the pleas of those young people who come to us for help, and offering advice to them as though we cannot even see their lives.” She urges us, instead, to see students with (what Simone Weil calls) the “creative attention” that the Good Samaritan models in Jesus’ parable.

“Few Christians are paying such creative, restorative attention to young adults struggling within hookup culture,” Freitas fears. Yet, “only through such self-emptying attention which allows us to truly see these young adults for who and what they are, can their deep spiritual needs be met.”

Study Questions

1. What are the defining features of hookup *culture* on most American college and university campuses? How does it deflect students from chastity?
2. Freitas reports that hookup culture does not exist on a subset of Christian college campuses. Why is this?
3. How and to what extent, according to Donna Freitas, are college students being victimized by hookup culture?
4. What does Simone Weil mean by “creative attention”? How is it exhibited by the Good Samaritan? Consider why Freitas commends it as a Christian stance toward students caught up within hookup culture.

Departing Hymn: “Help Us to Help Each Other, Lord”

Help us to help each other, Lord,
each other’s cross to bear;
let each some friendly aid afford,
and feel another’s care.

Help us to build each other up,
your Spirit in us move;
increase our faith, confirm our hope,
and fill us with your love.

Up into you, the living head,
let us in all things grow,
till you have made us free indeed
and spotless here below.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788), adapted from “Try Us, O God, and Search the Ground”

Suggested Tunes: DUNFERMLINE or ST. PETER (Reinagle)

† Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001 [1951]), 64-65.

A Good Samaritan Response to Hookup Culture

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand the nature of hookup culture on America college campuses.
2. To explore Simone Weil’s idea of “creative attention.”
3. To frame a Good Samaritan response to students who seek alternatives to hookup culture.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Chastity (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn, “Help Us to Help Each Other, Lord,” locate one of the familiar tunes DUNFERMLINE or ST. PETER (Reinagle) in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/) or Hymnary.org (www.hymnary.org).

Begin with an Observation

“Amid the seemingly endless partying on America’s college campuses lies a thick layer of melancholy, insecurity, and isolation that no one can seem to shake,” Donna Freitas reports.

“College students learn from the media, their friends, and even their parents that it’s not sensible to have long-term relationships in college. College is a special time in life – they will never get the chance to learn so much, meet so many people, or have as much fun again. Relationships restrict freedom – they require more care, upkeep, and time than anyone can afford to give during this exciting period between adolescence and adulthood. They add pressure to the already heavily pressured, overscheduled lives of today’s students, who, according to this ethos, should be focusing on their classes, their job prospects, and the opportunity to party as wildly as they can manage. Hookups allow students to get sex onto the college CV without adding any additional burdens, ensuring that they don’t miss out on the all-American, crazy college experience they feel they must have. They can always settle down later.

“Students play their parts – the sex-crazed frat boy, the promiscuous, lusty coed – and they play them well. But all too often they enact these highly gendered roles for one another because they have been taught to believe that hookup culture is normal, that everyone is enjoying it, and that there is something wrong with them if they don’t enjoy it, too. What could be better than sex without strings? Yet, in fact, many of them – both men and women – are not enjoying it at all.” (*The End of Sex: How Hookup Culture is Leaving a Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfulfilled, and Confused about Intimacy* [New York: Basic Books, 2013], 1-2.)

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to bless college students and guide their discernment regarding faith and sexuality.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 10:25-37 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

Beneath its glamorous appearance in popular culture, the real hookup culture on college campuses is rather mundane and spiritually deadening. It leads students to disconnect their religious faith from their sexuality and to stifle their hopes and dreams for faithful love. This study examines how we can walk beside and best care for the students living within hookup culture.

To better understand and guide how young people relate faith to sexuality, members may read the books Lauren Taylor commends in *Sexuality and Spirituality in American Adolescents*.

Study Questions

1. Donna Freitas lists three defining features of a hookup: participants have sexual intimacy that is brief and (ideally) should not involve or generate personal attachments. Often alcohol is used to dull emotions and avoid full responsibility. "We should distinguish individual hookups from a *culture* of hooking up," she notes. "The latter is a culture where sexual intimacy is obliged, casual, and ambivalent, where sex and one's partners become a shrug...."

Hookup culture undermines the virtue of chastity in several ways. First, it discourages thinking and caring about one's sexuality and planning the role that sex should play in one's relationships and life plans; rather, it presses citizens to cede control of their sexuality to the community's expectations. Furthermore, both celibate singleness and committed marriage become culturally impossible; neither is a way for its citizens to fit in and be "normal."

2. When Christian schools "ban alcohol on campus...this changes everything," Freitas notes. "Alcohol is the fuel of hookup culture, and without it, hookup culture has a difficult time getting off the ground." These schools may have a student-supported purity culture in which "students feel pressure from each other to abstain from sex (to remain chaste according to the standards of Christianity) and to abstain from most forms of sexual intimacy (sometimes this even includes kissing) outside of a committed long term relationship that will lead to marriage." There may be a "ring by spring" culture as well, which is the topic of the next study guide in this series.
3. Students face peer pressure to remain casual and ambivalent toward their sexual activity and their partners. Freitas writes, "Plenty of students, both men and women, loathe hookup culture or, at the very least, live within it reluctantly. They participate because they feel it is the only option they have, at least if they want to maintain any semblance of a normal social life during college. They would like other options; they would like ideas on how not to sacrifice their own needs and desires in the face of peer pressure. They would like a place and some time to puzzle through how they really feel about sex and their sexuality."

Furthermore, in the quotation above (from *The End of Sex*), she explains how this on-campus pressure is layered upon prior expectations students form through "the media, their friends, and even their parents that it's not sensible to have long-term relationships in college." They are shoved toward the roles of "sex-crazed frat boy" and "promiscuous, lusty coed." Of course, feeling pressure and succumbing to it (and even embracing it) are different things. But Freitas raises an important question about how to distribute the moral responsibility for the hookup culture and an individual student's participation in it. The suffering is real, regardless of the extent to which is it self-imposed. Freitas is especially concerned for students who have seen through its limitations on them, but cannot escape it.

4. In giving attention to another person, Simone Weil writes, "The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth." Attention is "creative" when it allows us to see "what does not exist [for us]." Freitas explains, "This is because it is so difficult for us to see suffering.... In fact, we do not like to see those who suffer, so we refuse to see them and, likewise, the suffering itself. In this sense, they do not exist for us." The Samaritan set aside his political and religious agendas to stop, see, and address the suffering of the traveler who was beaten by robbers. Freitas is concerned that we will be so quick to judge and correct students caught up in hookup culture that we will not stop to understand, empathize with, and address their suffering.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.