

LET'S GET IT IN

Making sense of *Jersey Shore*'s sex slang

Not so long ago, young adults went to bars, got drunk, brought home willing partners, and "hooked up" or "messed around" or just plain "fucked." But the cast of MTV's hit reality show, *Jersey Shore*, has debuted a new phrase for what happens when two postadolescents stumble home from the club and into the bedroom: "getting it in." The term is so clinical that it barely qualifies as a euphemism, but even so, it's become the phrase of choice for *Jersey Shore*'s entire tanned-and-laundered cast.

The phrase "get it in" seems to date back to at least 2004, according to the website Urban Dictionary, but it didn't seem to really catch on until late 2009, when *Jersey Shore* debuted. Given that most of the cast's conversations revolve around sex, they have to find a language to talk about it. They can't say "fuck" without getting bleeped. "Screw" and "hump" are too generic and too retro, respectively. "Bang" is too 1990s. "Intercourse," "coitus," or just plain "sex" are undoubtedly either too boring or too multi-syllabic. And certainly nobody is "making love" in the *Jersey Shore* house. With few exceptions (notably on-again-off-again-ad-infinitum couple Sammi and Ronnie), most of the hookups are strictly one night only.

Examples of usage demonstrate the fast, perfunctory, and usually forgettable sex that the phrase describes. Cast member Pauly D explains how it works: "Every situation is different. I don't need much time. You take every

situation for what it is. I know what it is. Get these girls in bed, talk to them a little bit, and get it in." In one episode, Pauly and his buddy Mike (who goes by the nickname "The Situation") pick up two sisters from Canada at one of the clubs frequented by the cast. One of the girls has a fiancé, but as Mike tells the cameras, "Me and Pauly don't care. We were tryin' to get it in, to get to the business real quick." Angelina gets it in with Vinny even though she hates him; a delighted Snooki sing-songs, "I'm gettin' it in tonight," when she thinks she's found a random guy who's "DTF" (*Shore* speak for "down to fuck"). Gawker.com writer Brian Moylan, who recaps *Jersey Shore* for the site, defines it this way: "A crass description of a sexual encounter, especially one that is done with urgency due to either time constraints or excessive horniness of one of the parties."

The vocabulary extends to other MTV fare as well, and beyond. The latest season of *The*



Sandwich-uation: Mike interrupts Vinny's hookup with some egg-salad action in a not-atypical scene from *Jersey Shore*.

Real World, set in Las Vegas, shows drunken cast member Adam staggering to the threshold of roommate Leroy's doorless room and saying, "Roy Lee's gettin' it in right now." (Leroy was, in fact, in bed with a girl he'd picked up at a club.) Rappers Impirio and Cru's song "Get It in Dot Com" appeared in several episodes of *Jersey Shore*'s second season. Facebook fans of *Jersey Shore*'s Ronnie linked to a blog called Getitin.com, "dedicated to the fine art of #GII." And even before *Jersey Shore* premiered, 50 Cent released a song called "I Get It In." (Sample lyrics: "I can't be responsible for what I say or I do when I talk intoxicated/ Shorty say I told her I love her/ I put her out the next mornin' sayin' bitch I must have been faded.")

So why do the cast members—and others—use this particular phrase so often? Is it because they know that the sex they are having is nothing more than a quick, impersonal act? Or is it because "getting it in" seems to signify an act of power, specifically for the guys who say it? After all, online definitions suggest that "getting it in" is largely defined from a hetero male perspective. The Online Slang Dictionary provides this definition: "Refers to the male putting his penis inside of the female's anus or vagina." Urban Dictionary notes that the phrase can be defined simply as to "fuck bitches." One contributor provides sample conversation to illustrate:

BOY: girl you gonna let me "get it in"?

GIRL: of course i am.

Another UD user notes, "If you got game you can get it in with the chicks." While "you" could feasibly be a male or female, the definition suggests that the agent—the one who "gets"—is the one who must seek permission and use strategic moves to complete the act. The songs by Impirio and Cru and 50 Cent use exclusively male protagonists who seek to "get it in." (50 Cent warns, "I better leave with more hos than I came here with.")

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Wiki sites show how users understand the phrase as connoting an inherent power differential between two parties. One person on Urban Dictionary defines "get it in" as "to be successful at something difficult." The implication is that the agent's prowess comes from his ability to find an elusive "in" for the requisite "getting." Another illustrates with a usage example: "If you continue to court her this aggressively, I am certain

you'll get it in sooner rather than later." *The Situation*, for his part, certainly understands that "getting it in" is an opportunity to wield power. He makes a girl from the club wait in his bedroom while he sits at the kitchen table, enjoying a late-night egg sandwich. He brags that she'll still be there in bed, waiting for him, when he's finished eating and ready to have sex.

So what happens when the women of *Jersey Shore* use the phrase? In one episode, Snooki announces that she's excited for a hot guy she met at the club to "come over and, ya know...get it in." But when her hookup, taking a page from *The Situation*'s playbook, wants to eat first, Snooki stands around impatiently, telling him, "I've been waiting forever." She visibly put out that she's made to play second fiddle to his snack, and the scene is a sharp contrast to the one in which Mike takes his sweet time eating while his girl patiently waits by herself.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the women of the *Shore* are both accepted and derided for "getting it in." On the one hand, the guys like the free-spirited party-girl roommates: Deena Nicole, a friend of Snooki's who joined the cast in season three, is greeted with high-fives from the guys when she reveals that she can club, creep, and drink just like one of them. Ousted roommate Angelina wins Ronnie's respect when she acts like "a pimp," juggling two guys at the same time.

Once the girls of the house "get it in" with random guys from the clubs, though, it's a different story. Vinny, for example, refuses to cuddle with Snooki after she hooks up with two different guys on two different nights. The cast chastises Angelina for "getting it in" with Vinny when a guy named Jose has taken her on a date and bought her a watch.

The parade of never-named girls that the guys bring home from clubs don't fare much better. Girls who refuse to "get it in" are dismissed immediately. And once Mike, Vinny, and Pauly "get it in," they quickly shift to slut-shaming their willing partners, noting that they can't remember the girls' names, or bragging about returning to the club the next night to find new partners.

But perhaps the most interesting thing about both the phrase and the activity it describes, in the context of *Jersey Shore*, is that no one talks about enjoying sex, or helping their partners enjoy it. Everyone just talks about "getting it in" in the same manner they might talk about eating a sandwich—it's nothing more than scratching a biological itch. (Indeed, eating is just about the only thing that cast members seem to treat with anything approaching passion.)

And perhaps that's what makes "get it in" so interesting, and so emblematic of the performative times in which *Jersey Shore*'s cast engages in its one-nighters. Unlike its 1970s predecessor "get it on," which invokes low lights, waterbeds, and the slow jams of Marvin Gaye and Barry White, "get it in" provides a clinical image of the actual act of part A fitting into part B in a way that no other expression does. (Even "smash," the show's other go-to euphemism, is slightly more oblique.)

Jersey Shore's gratuitous presentation of random and impersonal sex has garnered a great deal of negative criticism since the show premiered. But rather than encouraging decadent sex as the glorious capper to a night of profligate drinking and dancing, as some critics worry it does, *Jersey Shore* does the opposite: Its language represents sex as nothing more than a boring game with body parts.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21

Off the *Shore*, the term “get” has been shown to have similar connotations: Consider the three Princeton grads who competitively kept track of their “gets,” as revealed early in 2011 on Jezebel when the e-mail correspondence of one of them, a state department employee named Robert Huber, was leaked. The e-mails were stews of conjugation, with such convoluted phrases as “got to get” and “getting got” serving to present sex as profoundly unerotic cultural currency—and painting an ugly picture of the power used in its pursuit. In one e-mail, Huber writes, “I didn’t get to get [name redacted], as she fed me some line about ‘moral compass’ as I tried to ram it in her,” a turn of phrase that reveals how little the person on the receiving end of “it” matters to the experience.

Beyond the obvious (and not unexpected) sexism presented by MTV’s reality stars, perhaps the most important point that we ought to consider, regardless of who’s using the phrase, is how the talk of “getting it in” underscores the absence of any demonstrable pleasure in sexual encounters. Whether the act is happening at a Jersey Shore club, 50 Cent’s pad, or a yacht owned by the daddy of a Princeton kid, “getting it in” seems to be primarily about doing the act in order to talk or blog about it later. “Getting it in” is hardly different than finding yourself inside an exclusive club, at which you can check in on Facebook using your iPhone. Immediately, all your friends know that you’ve just entered the building. Later, they can tweet that information, and we can all discuss it on message boards. “Getting it in” is really nothing more than a digital performance, an act not markedly different than the couple of keystrokes it takes to update a Facebook status.

So when the MTV generation is “getting it in,” what exactly are they getting off on? It certainly doesn’t seem to be sex. What the payoff does seem to be is fame and bragging rights. It’s an opportunity to remind viewers that sexual scorekeeping is still a competitive game. No big surprise, right? After all, competition for sex partners is certainly as old as human beings, and surely some of the earliest cave paintings out there must include hash marks. But what MTV is presenting to us now is a double-sided message: Sure, we ladies can say we’re going to “get it in” with the same carefree attitude toward sex as men. We can count our partners and talk about it on tv. But at the end of the night, when it’s time to talk smack and eat an egg sandwich, “getting it in” is still a man’s game—and an unquestioningly heteronormative one, at that. It’s the guys who perform the literal act of putting a penis inside someone’s vagina. The vagina is merely the passive recipient, the means to score, not the scoring mechanism itself.

In spite of what we may wish to believe about reality tv shows depicting greater sexual license for women, it’s the same old story—it’s just hidden better. If we break down the language of “get it in,” we get the message loud and clear: Sexual conquest is still for penises only. When MTV’s reality stars brag about their partner count and anticipate “getting it in,” here’s what we’re really being told: If you want to be a sexual conqueror, you better have an “it” to “get in.” **b**

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in feminist self-defense. I also felt really moved by the activists I interviewed; I really felt the weight of their grief and rage and the desire to see justice done for their own family members, and for other victims. One of the ways I addressed the fact that some of my [interviewees] really wanted to see their son’s or daughter’s killer punished was by looking for other activists who sought a different kind of end point to their advocacy work—the end of the death penalty, for instance. I realized the range of political positions in victims’ rights activism all come from the same basic place, and that is the life-changing experience of losing a family member to violence. In providing a space for the expression of that experience in the book, I also wanted to demonstrate that there are no guarantees for what kind of political and social action will develop out of it.

There seems to be a delicate balance that needs to be struck in terms of effectively advocating for victims’ rights but not doing so in a way that either uncritically supports a racist/classist/sexist prison-industrial complex, or actively promotes what you call “antivictimism.” What kind of discourse of victimization would you like to see popularized?

Yes, there’s a fine line between criticizing victim politics and being antivictim. The victims’ rights movement has been really successful at defining victim politics in law-and-order terms. It doesn’t help, either, that “victim” is such a denigrated term in popular culture. It seems like everywhere women and girls turn they are being told: “Don’t be a victim!” As if victims of violence and targets of oppression can choose whether or not to be victimized. “Victim” has come to signify a passive and manipulative mentality, or a kind of person who refuses to recognize her own decision-making power. The former claim we see being made by people like Charlie Sykes, the right-wing radio host from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and author of books like *A Nation of Victims*, while the latter is made by antivictimist men and women who identify with the legacy of civil rights movements and as feminists.

The credit for the term “antivictimism” belongs to Alyson Cole, author of a great book titled *The Cult of True Victimhood*. She argues that antivictimists shifted public debate from the problem of victimization to the character and mentality of the victim. The problem to solve, then, was the person of the victim, not the social conditions of oppression and domination. These, unfortunately, are the current terms of debate about victimization, and they have to be challenged.

“Victimization” is one of the most important terms we have at our disposal for describing the harms, injuries, and experiences of oppression and domination, and we have to claim it back from those that have made it a dirty word. As a self-defense instructor, I taught my students how to name behavior that is threatening, intimidating, and violent. In naming the behavior, they focused on the source of the problem and the target of their response. The language of victimization functions similarly. It is the language we have for naming power and its effects. **b**

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