Navigating the Risks of Party Rape in Historically White Greek Life at an Elite College: Women's Accounts[1]

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Landmark research from before the 2010s shows that college women rarely held institutions responsible for allowing rape-prone party contexts to persist and failing to support survivors. Yet, the college landscape has changed profoundly since these studies were published, with prominent anti-rape campaigns and updated guidelines to Title IX policy. To update a research stream that has provided the basis for theorizing about sexual violence within college peer cultures, we examine 121 intensive interviews with 68 women who are at heightened risk of party rape because of their involvement in historically white sororities. Several key findings emerged. First, women were highly invested in the Greek party circuit. Second, participants blamed institutions for failing to do more to keep them safe. Reflecting their focus on institutions, women also proposed that institutional authorities change their policies so sororities could move parties out of fraternity houses and into sorority houses. Third, women took on the labor of trying to protect themselves and other women at parties by designating monitors. However, they reported that, with this system, other women could be deemed responsible, not for being assaulted, but for failing to prevent rape. Finally, women found ways to identify and exclude men they deemed "rapey" from Greek gatherings. However, boycotting an entire fraternity was more controversial and harder to sustain. Overall, women's preferred prevention strategies reflect a strong desire to avoid disturbing the Greek party scene. Implications for research and policy on gender and sexual violence prevention in higher education are discussed.

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The effects of sexual assault on well-being are severe. They include psychological distress and suicidality (Dworkin et al. 2017), self-blame (Donde 2017), alcohol and drug addiction (Ullman et al. 2013), and chronic health conditions (Santaularia et al. 2014). Across colleges and universities, administrators have committed resources to sexual assault prevention (Richards 2019). However, many implemented strategies have had limited or short-term impact (DeGue et al. 2014, Jouriles et al. 2018), and most college campuses' social and built environments still provide opportunities for sexual violence (Armstrong, Hamilton and Sweeney 2006, Boswell and Spade 1996, Hirsch and Khan 2020, Martin and Hummer 1989). In addition, university processes for handling complaints of sexual assault and helping survivors are often inadequate and even counterproductive (Bedera 2022, Cruz 2020, Khan et al. 2021, Nesbitt and Sage 2021).

Researchers show that the racially segregated, class-privileged, and male-dominated historically white Greek party scene (Boswell and Spade 1996; Hamilton and Cheng 2018) provides a conducive environment for party rape (Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006; Humphrey and Khan 2000; Martin and Hummer 1989; Sanday 1992; Stombler 1994). Party rape is a unique form of sexual violence that takes place at an "off-campus house or an on- or off-campus fraternity and involves… plying a woman with alcohol or targeting an intoxicated woman" (Sampson 2002: 6, as cited in Armstrong et al. 2006).

Party rape is a pervasive problem for women in historically white Greek life (Armstrong, Hamilton and Sweeney 2006, Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson 2018). Women in Historically White Greek Life, or HWGL, are socializing with privileged fraternity men who are generally in the racial majority and enjoy a host of gender, race, and class privileges (Hamilton and Cheng 2018). These privileges allow fraternity men in HWGL to operate with a "hyper level of anonymity" (Ray and Rosow 2010: 541) and reduce accountability for how they treat women (Ray and Rosow 2010).

By contrast, on predominantly white college campuses, Black fraternity chapters lack houses, and Black men lack anonymity. Racial surveillance and racist stereotypes about Black men's sexual dangerousness force Black fraternity men to be highly aware of how they treat women, how others might evaluate their behavior, and how their actions could reflect on the larger group (Ray and Rosow 2010). Such findings call attention to the role of race as a fundamental factor shaping how college students socialize and how Whiteness matters for students' gendered interactions (Grundy 2021).

Many influential studies on college women's responses to party rape and sexual violence were conducted before a 2011 US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights "Dear Colleagues Letter, or DCL" (Office for Civil Rights 2011) produced dramatic changes in the college landscape. The DCL letter was followed by highly visible campus anti-sexual violence movements and awareness campaigns, like End Rape on Campus (EROC) and KnowYour IX (Gronert 2019, Heldman, Ackerman and Breckenridge-Jackson 2018).

Overall, studies conducted before these changes showed that in assigning responsibility for party rape, women in HWGL did not generally point to aspects of the social and physical environment (Boswell and Spade 1996, Stombler 1994). Nor did they tend to fault institutions

for failing to protect students. Instead, data collected before the 2010s indicates that women tended to blame women who were assaulted (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013, Hamilton and Armstrong 2009, Stombler 1994).

People's recognition that sexual violence is an important social problem, as well as their beliefs about the causes and impacts of sexual force and solutions for addressing it, are not fixed: they vary across time periods, groups, and social and legal contexts and pressures (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson 2018; (McMahon and Baker 2011)). However, despite a spike in public and policy interest in sexual violence, knowledge about how college women today understand and respond to party rape remains limited. Further, even within existing research on sexual violence in college peer cultures, knowledge about how women arrive at solutions for reducing sexual violence is sparse.-The topic is important because without an understanding of women's motives for selecting particular prevention strategies, policymakers are in danger of creating unworkable solutions.

To fill gaps in the literature and update a research stream that has provided the basis for theorizing about sexual violence within college peer cultures, we examine the accounts of 68 women who are at heightened risk of party rape because of their involvement in historically white sororities (Armstrong, Hamilton and Sweeney 2006, Harris and Schmalz 2016, Humphrey and Kahn 2000). We identify women's frames for understanding potential solutions to sexual violence within HWGL. A frame is a "lens through which people observe and interpret social life" (Small et al. 2010: 4); frames promote particular assumptions and expectations about interactions and events. Frames allow certain aspects of the social world to come into view while blocking others. Crucially for our paper, frames structure how people understand and evaluate their own and others' actions (Young 2011; see also Goffman 1974).

A focus on women's framing allows us to uncover the multiple and even contradictory ways that participants understand, explain, and justify their actions regarding sexual assault prevention in HWGL. In identifying participants' frames for sexual assault prevention, this article provides empirical evidence of women's consensus that universities have a legal and moral obligation to prevent sexual violence and support survivors.

Three core questions anchor our analysis. First, from their perspective, what is at stake for women in HWGL as they make decisions about how to prevent party rape? From their perspective, what do women stand to lose, and what do they stand to gain, in endorsing particular prevention strategies? Second, how do women in HWGL today assign blame and responsibility for party rape and its negative consequences? Third, what kinds of prevention strategies do women imagine as possible, and which strategies do they take it upon themselves to enact? How do women arrive at these particular strategies, and not others?

In what follows, we first review recent changes to universities' social and legal landscape that necessitate an update of the literature. Then, we discuss the concept of "sexual geographies" and explain how it relates to women's experiences of fraternity parties and their solutions for sexual violence. Following that, we highlight how membership in HWGL creates a unique set of costs and benefits that privileged college women consider as they grapple with potential solutions for addressing sexual violence at fraternity parties. In so doing, we attend to the race, gender, and class dimensions of women's risks – and solutions for - party rape. Then we provide a brief sketch of the history behind a fundamental inequality that greatly bothered our participants: historically white fraternities can host parties, but sororities cannot.

A NEW SOCIO-LEGAL CONTEXT SURROUNDING COLLEGE SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Currently, there are strong reasons to suspect that women's framing of party rape may have changed dramatically since foundational studies on college peer cultures and sexual violence were published (Armstrong, Hamilton and Sweeney 2006, Boswell and Spade 1996, Martin and Hummer 1989, Martin 2016, Stombler 1994). This body of research was conducted before a 2011 US Department of Education "Dear Colleagues Letter" that dramatically changed the college landscape. The Letter, addressed to higher education institutions, argues that Title IX, as a civil rights law, requires colleges to do everything within their power to prevent sexual assault and preserve students' access to education. The Letter also contends that Title IX requires colleges to offer students a grievance procedure for complaints of sexual violence (Ali 2011). Sexual violence scholars call the impacts of the letter "profound" (Hirsch and Khan 2020: xxiv). Schools stood to lose hundreds of millions of dollars in federal support for violations of Title IX, and the Obama administration placed at least 223 colleges and universities under investigation (Anderson 2017).

In addition, anti-sexual violence campaigns that sought to combat stigmatizing slut-shaming and blame-the-victim approaches became more visible following the 2011 Dear Colleagues Letter (Gronert 2019; Heldman, Ackerman and Breckridge-Jackson 2018). These campaigns circulated messages like, "If you are a survivor… your experience is valid, it's not your fault, and you are not alone (End Rape on Campus 2022)."

One major work on college sexuality, *Sexual Citizens* (Hirsch and Khan 2020), was published after these sweeping changes in the social and legal landscape. However, it takes as its central question how college students construct sexual desire and consent and not women's efforts to reduce sexual violence. A study from the same dataset focuses on college men and their rationales and strategies for reducing the risk of sexual violence (Wamboldt et al. 2019).

Most men in that study described themselves as highly motivated to stop a potential assault because of concerns about liability, reputation, and personal morality, even though these considerations did not prevent sexual assault from occurring on campus (Wamboldt et al. 2019). In their article, the authors note that college women reported highly individualized preventative strategies related to their own socializing and drinking but seldom talked about intervening to help a close friend. In our study, by contrast, sorority women are the focal population. Taking advantage of this sample, we investigate how women in sororities might engage in in-depth discussions of preventative efforts aimed at other women as well as themselves.

SEXUAL GEOGRAPHIES AND PARTY RAPE

The concept of "sexual geographies" (Hirsch and Khan 2020), refers to how the spatial and social dynamics of a place – including access to the space, control over resources, feelings of comfort and ease, and physical features of the environment such as lighting and seating - shape sexual interactions. In line with other research on campus sexual violence (e.g., Armstrong et al. 2006; Boswell and Spade 1996; Martin 2016; Ray and Rosow 2012), the concept also draws attention to how students' resources and social position affect how they will experience a space. For instance, a first-year student could find herself at a fraternity party in her first week on campus with few friends and little knowledge of how men approach women at these parties. She is at heightened risk of rape because others are not looking out for her, she feels less comfortable, and may not know the alcohol and drug content of the drinks. Finally, depending on the campus layout and her class status, she may need a ride home to her dorm but lack the funds to pay for one, potentially making her reliant on untrustworthy peers for a place to sleep or help to get home.

The concept of "sexual geographies" develops past research that identified how particular aspects of the college party scene affected women's vulnerability to sexual violence (e.g., Armstrong, Hamilton and Sweeney 2006; Boswell and Spade 1996; Humphrey and Khan 2000; Martin and Hummer 1989; Sanday 1996). For instance, Boswell and Spade (1996) showed that fraternities that pose the highest risks for sexual violence share several key features: heightened pressure to drink (as compared to lower-risk fraternities), social norms that prevent supportive heterosexual relationships and encourage humiliating sexual jokes about women, lack of comfortable seating, and deafeningly loud music. These social and spatial features hinder groups of men and women from engaging in friendly conversations and create "faceless victims" (Boswell and Spade 1996: 44).

Other researchers later picked up Boswell and Spade's (1996) essential insights about the role of context and space in producing party rape (e.g., Armstrong et al. 2006; Grundy 2021). Pertinent to HWGL, Armstrong et al. (2006) warned that "situations where men have a home turf advantage, know each other better than the women present know each other, see the women as anonymous, and control desired resources (such as alcohol or drugs) are likely to be particularly dangerous" (p. 495).

HISTORICALLY WHITE FRATERNITY HOUSES AS SITES OF EXCEPTIONAL RISK

As exclusive organizations that cater to young, racially and socioeconomically privileged men who want to socialize, historically white fraternities have long been sites of excess and risk (DeSantis 2007). Critics of HWGL have often noted the linkages between fraternities and hazards such as hazing, binge drinking, and sexual violence (Flanagan 2014, Wade 2017b). In what follows, we briefly preview how fraternities arrived at this point. We also explain how it

has come to be that within HWGL, partying and drinking take place mainly at fraternity houses, not at sororities.

First, in 1984, the National Minimum Drinking Age Act increased the legal drinking age from 18 to 21 (US Congress 1984). As a result, drinking among college-age students was pushed out of public bars and campus events. On many campuses, male-controlled fraternities, which operated with little supervision or rule enforcement, became the major site of prohibited undergraduate drinking (Flanagan 2014, Hechinger 2017). Sororities could not host these parties because each sorority continues to have a "house mom," or live-in adviser, who enforces rules, including restrictions on alcohol and male visitors (for an example of the role's duties, see Texas State 2019). The role is a living relic of past eras when affluent, white parents expected the sorority to ensure their daughters' chastity and marriageability (Freeman 2018).

In the mid-1980s, plaintiffs' personal-injury cases were becoming more frequent and lucrative. Multiple lawsuits sought – and won - large payouts from fraternities. One 1985 lawsuit resulted in a $21 million personal injury award (Hechinger 2017). Drinking deaths, serious injuries, criminal assault, and sexual violence were pervasive enough that by 1986, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners listed fraternities as posing the 6th greatest financial liability for insurers (Flanagan 2014, Hechinger 2017). At this point, fraternities faced minimal options for affordable insurance coverage and the high risk of losing all their assets to lawsuits (Flanagan 2014, Glovin 2013, Hechinger 2017).

In response, fraternities took several steps, including developing national risk management policies that indemnified national and local organizations from being held liable for members' dangerous and illegal behavior (Flanagan 2014). Nonetheless, fraternities continue to be sites of reckless undergraduate partying (Flanagan 2014, Wade 2017a). Personal injury

lawsuits for assault and battery, sexual assault, injuries from slipping and falling, and hazing still

occur (Flanagan 2014). Given the hazards and costs associated with the relatively unregulated

historically white fraternity party scene (Armstrong, Hamilton and Sweeney 2006, Wade 2017a),

it makes sense that national sorority leaders have continued to forbid sororities to host parties

with alcohol or to get rid of house moms, despite attempts by students and stakeholders at some

universities to change these policies (Kingkade 2017, White 2017).

At the same time, historically white fraternity houses now have exclusive access to two

of the most important social assets on campus: physical space to host parties with alcohol and a

relative lack of surveillance and rule enforcement. As a result, most on-campus parties within

HWGL occur at fraternity houses, and fraternity men enjoy a "home-turf advantage" over

women (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013: 90).

Benefits of Historically White Greek Life for Women

Despite these risk factors, the draws of membership in a historically white sorority are

powerful. Gaining admission to a sorority within HWGL serves as a stamp of approval for

women's raced, classed, and gendered self-presentations; it also provides women with peer

networks and experiences to further refine these self-presentations (Armstrong and Hamilton

2021, Hamilton and Armstrong 2021, Ispa-Landa and Oliver 2020). Being in a sorority helps

women conform to a hegemonic feminine ideal involving domination over other women,

especially those who lack social class privileges and whiteness (Hamilton et al. 2009).

In the US today, over 360,000 undergraduate women belong to a historically white

sorority across the 670 college campuses that include a historically white sorority chapter

(National Panhellenic Conference 2020). Studies show that many women gain status,

enjoyment, and self-esteem from participating in HWGL (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013,

Handler 1995, Silver 2020, Stuber, Klugman and Daniel 2011). Longer-term, participation in HWGL pays off in terms of ultimate class location for women. At age 30, many women from affluent families who participated in HWGL at a large public university benefited from the social networks of HWGL and their parental resources. They married high-earning men from wealthy families, thus maintaining their family of origins' class status (Armstrong and Hamilton 2021, Hamilton and Armstrong 2021).

Shorter-term, college women report that men's sexual attention at fraternity parties brings enjoyment and self-confidence. In today's hookup culture, hooking up with a high-status peer is viewed as a valuable "win" for both women and men (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013, Handler 1995, Harris and Schmalz 2016, Wade 2017a).

In sum, participation in HWGL continues to provide a privileged group of young women with short- and long-term benefits while also placing them in a position of exceptional vulnerability to sexual violence. Scholarship conducted before recent changes to the legal and social environment indicated that women in HWGL rarely attributed responsibility for party rape to institutions or to male perpetrators (Armstrong, Hamilton and Sweeney 2006, Armstrong and Hamilton 2013, Stombler 1994). There is also more recent work on rape prevention strategies, but it focuses primarily on men (e.g., Wamboldt et al. 2019) or on institutional messaging by the college (e.g., Bedera and Nordmeyer 2015). Thus, we lack knowledge about how college women in today's sociolegal context understand party rape, seek to prevent it, and respond to its occurrence. Given the benefits and risks of HWGL, how do young women in today's social and legal environment make sense of, and seek to respond to, the threat of party rape at fraternity parties?

<div align="center">METHODS</div>

The interviews analyzed in this study are part of a larger project on how women in historically white sororities reconcile tensions between their ideals of women's empowerment and their participation in a college social system that disempowers them vis-à-vis fraternity men (Author). The National Panhellenic Conference, or NPC, the umbrella organization for the 26 historically white sororities in the US and Canada, bans sororities from serving alcohol at parties or hosting opposite-sex guests. Moreover, a "house mom" who functions in loco parentis within each sorority chapter enforces these national policies. Central (a pseudonym) enforces laws against underage drinking, with college policies banning both sororities and fraternities from serving alcohol to underage students (for whom Greek parties are largely aimed). However, the traditional lack of supervision in fraternity houses results in a lack of enforcement at fraternity parties, where alcohol is often served at events. (Names of individuals, their sorority chapters, and the college are given pseudonyms throughout the paper.)

In the winter of 2017, we posted recruitment fliers offering $40 Amazon gift cards to sophomore women in historically white sororities interested in participating in an interview study about "social networks and sorority life." We interviewed all women who contacted us and completed an online scheduling form that showed them to be eligible for the study (i.e., in their second year of college and a member of a historically white sorority), leading to a first cohort of 37 women. In 2019, wanting to learn more about the historically white sorority experience, we added a second cohort of 16 sophomore women. We used the same recruitment methods for the second cohort as we had with the first cohort. All women identified as cisgender.

Over the course of the interviews, our sophomore respondents repeatedly mentioned instances of sexual assault on campus. They noted the role of risk managers/wellness chairs (a student leadership position within each sorority) in helping sorority women navigate the issue of

campus rape. After hearing these reports, we decided to interview risk managers as part of our study in addition to the core interview sample of sophomore women. Between 2017 and 2019, we sent emails to each of 24 risk managers who were serving in that role, inviting them to participate in interviews with us; we eventually obtained interviews with 15 out of the 24 of the risk managers. We were able to interview risk managers from 10 of the 12 sorority chapters on campus. Risk managers were also given $40 Amazon gift cards as a token of appreciation for their time.

Women consented to the interviews, and a college ethics committee (IRB Board) approved all study procedures).

Including the 37 women in Cohort 1, the 16 women in Cohort 2, and the 15 Risk Managers, our dataset includes interviews with 68 women in historically white sororities. In the findings section, we note when an interview quote is from a risk manager; all other quotes are from sorority women who were not in this formally appointed role.

Follow-up interviews can be especially helpful in situations where the researcher wants to learn more about a sensitive topic, as research participants may be more willing to "open up" after the first interview (Weiss 1994). The followed up with the 37 women who were recruited as our first cohort of sophomores in historically white sororities in 2017 in the spring of their junior (2018; n=27) and senior (2019; n=26) years. To date, the second cohort of women, recruited in 2019 and interviewed during the 2019-2020 school year, have only been interviewed once. (We did not conduct interviews during the COVID-19 shutdown). Overall, the multiple interviews with our first cohort of 37 women between 2017-2019, our second cohort of 16 women interviewed in 2019-2020, and the interviews with 15 risk managers between 2017-2019, led to a total of 121 interviews.

Women in our sample came from predominantly privileged positions both economically and socially and were obtaining an elite education by nature of their enrollment at Central, a highly selective university with an acceptance rate of less than 15%. Women in historically white sororities made up 40% of the female population at Central. Reflective of the nationwide historically white Greek population, our sample of women in Cohorts 1 and 2 skews affluent. (We did not ask Risk Managers for demographic information.) For instance, 38% of the women in Cohorts 1 and 2 reported annual household incomes between $250,000 and $5 million or over. The sample of women in Cohorts 1 and 2 is also predominantly White: 60.4% of women self-identified as White, 26.4% as Asian, and 13.2% as Hispanic/Latinx. Notably, there were no Black/African-American women in our sample. We were told that Black and African-American students almost exclusively rushed sororities in the National Multicultural Greek Council. (See Hughey 2010 on the experiences of nonwhite students in WGLOs.) See Tables 1 and 2 in the Appendix for more detailed information about Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 participant demographics, and Table 3 for details on Risk Managers.

A team of trained graduate students conducted one-on-one interviews lasting between one to three hours. Interview topics covered women's reasons for rushing a historically white sorority, their experiences and perceptions of social life in HWGL, and how they viewed the pros and cons of being in a historically white sorority. Interviews were designed to be open-ended, allowing participants' concerns to emerge and guide the conversation. Our research team frequently took advantage of our unfamiliarity with Greek life on campus to ask participants to "explain" or "teach" us about aspects of sorority life (Young 2004). Participants appeared to enjoy explaining sorority life at Central to interested outsiders and often did so at great length. Members of the team met weekly to listen to and analyze audio recordings of the interviews,

ensuring that all interviews followed a semi-structured format and that interviewers were following up on conversational markers or passing references that seemed particularly salient (Gerson and Damaske 2020). Interviews were recorded and transcribed for later coding.

Throughout our first wave of interviews, sexual assault, personal safety, and the college's inaction were dominant themes that women introduced into the interview without prompting. While our initial interview guide did not include questions about sexual assault, participants began describing a campus incident involving drugging and sexual assault and discussing what they believed should be done to prevent additional assaults. We used follow-up probes to capture how women felt about existing prevention efforts and to understand their reasoning about potential solutions. Follow-up probes included questions like, "What do you think needs to be done to make Central safer for women?

We further refined our interview protocol in Wave 2 and Wave 3 to include questions about how women felt about university responses to a sexual assault, like, "To your knowledge, what resources are available to someone who has experienced sexual harassment or assault?"; "Where would you direct someone to go and why?"; "Tell me about the kinds of actions your sorority takes if a sister is sexually assaulted or harassed?"" Risk managers responded to the same questions about sexual assault and were asked to describe the scope of their responsibilities and their understanding of their role vis-a-vis formal legal and college systems.

Our codebook captured women's perceptions of the HWGL party scene and the types of action being taken in response to the problem of sexual assault on campus. Codes included items such as "only frats host parties is a problem," "alcohol and drugs, "hookup culture," "lookouts," and "sober sisters." While coding, we wrote memos detailing the patterns we observed and passages that stood out as being inconsistent with dominant themes we had identified and

discussed these memos and observations as a team. Members of the research team met weekly to discuss and revise the codebook and analytic memos, to ensure that the research team members agreed about when and how to apply the codes. In our final rounds of analyses, we re-analyzed all the excerpts in which a participant explained what she thought should be done to solve the problem of sexual violence in HWGL.

In what follows, we detail our findings from the 121 intensive interviews culminating from our conversations with the 68 research participants. Our data were gathered in 2017-19, before the Abolish Greek Life movement took hold in the fall of 2021 and therefore capture a moment when frustration with sexual violence against women was high, but women were still strategizing about reform in ways that did not include abolishing the system. Our semi-structured, open-ended interviews allowed us to capture a broader range of responses to party rape than have previously been documented, including proposals for change and efforts to sanction and exclude alleged rapists.

<div align="center">WHAT IS AT STAKE? STATUS and SOCIAL CONNECTIONS</div>

There was a great deal at stake in decisions about handling sexual violence at fraternity parties for sorority women. Women described how their self-worth, reputation, and preferred lifestyles were bound up with being active on the HWGL party circuit. Several participants echoed sorority promotional materials and said that sororities were focused on sisterhood and women's empowerment. However, most were blunt in reporting that, despite the rhetoric, the key benefit to being in a HWGL sorority was the social capital, status, and fun that came from attending fraternity parties. As Sadie put it, "What we're paying for is to go to parties - like go have formals and events. Everyone dresses nicely." Research suggests that the socioeconomic resources of women in HWGL, coupled with on-campus property and alumni endowments that

facilitate formals and events, result from longstanding race and class privilege (Hamilton and

Cheng 2018, Ray and Rosow 2012).

Andrea said that if a sorority was perceived to be insufficiently active on the party circuit,

people began to wonder why it existed. Taking part in Greek parties was a core component of

sorority women's lives and identities. Andrea, a woman who belonged to a sorority that had a

reputation for not being "social enough," explained,

> There's a thing called the Social Six… [the three top-tier sororities and three middle-tier
>
> sororities who were known to socialize most actively with fraternities]. And this year
>
> during recruitment, there was talk like, if you're not in the social six, why are you in
>
> Greek Life at all?' which was shit. In my opinion, it's very mean to say that.

Greek parties were essential for women to uphold their identities as "normal" sorority women.

Participants portrayed access to the HWGL party circuit as a significant benefit of their

sorority membership, even as they acknowledged that fraternity parties could be high-risk and

hostile to women. As Iva summarized,

> One of the biggest benefits… from joining Greek Life is access to parties. But sometimes
>
> they are sketchy. Like… I remember going to a party at [fraternity name] and feeling
>
> super creeped out the whole time... The vibes were bad. They had these drinks out of
>
> syringes… Then later I heard that someone was assaulted at that party. And - I got that
>
> bad vibe that whole time and [yet I] didn't trust that instinct.

Iva overrode her sense that a fraternity party was dangerous, a sign of how far women in

HWGL were willing to go to preserve the benefits they believed they were getting from HWGL.

Women also emphasized the role of alcohol and drugs in sexual violence within HWGL.

As Maeve stated,

I don't want to say Greek Life causes sexual assault, but it pretty much puts all the ingredients in a pot and lights it on a stove…. You get lots of males and females that are very intoxicated and not able to stand up for themselves, and not able to make good decisions. Greek Life provides a place where there's not much restriction, and then there is pressure to go out and hook up with someone.

Maeve's description of fraternity parties as sites of freedom evokes the lack of accountability that prior researchers have linked to HWGL fraternity men's ownership of on-campus housing and racial privilege (Ray and Rosow 2012).

Yet, in the same interview, Maeve said that, on balance, she was glad to have joined her sorority; it gave her a way to bond with like-minded people. As she explained,

Once I joined my sorority, and we started going out together, a lot of them had the same drinking habits, shopped at the same clothing stores, but also just had a very similar personality. I understand how it can seem like what I'm basing that off is superficial traits, but those were the things that I could tie into. I fit in.

Even women like Maeve, who saw the risks of Greek life parties, still found value and pride in their sorority memberships. The social connections that Maeve and other women got from their participation in HWGL help explain why they were motivated to find ways to maintain the HWGL party scene while striving to make it safer for women.

ASSIGNING BLAME AND RESPONSIBILITY: INSTITUTIONAL CRITIQUES

National Panhellenic Council. In attributing responsibility for party rape within HWGL, women offered an institutional critique. They described NPC rules banning women from serving alcohol, barring male guests from entering sorority houses after certain hours, and forbidding men from going upstairs (where women's bedrooms were located) as outdated, unfair, and

contributing to sexual violence against women. (At fraternity houses, the same restrictions either did not apply or were not enforced.) Participants explained that different institutional rules and enforcement unfairly relegated sorority women to the position of vulnerable guests rather than entitled hosts, enhancing power asymmetries.

Women consistently told us that the ideal solution for preventing party rape and other hazards would be to move HWGL parties to sororities. As Aubrey explained,

> Party space is an issue. Sororities aren't allowed to have alcohol or boys – there's so many rules in the house! So fraternities have to have parties, and that makes it unsafe for women, going into a space that is all owned by men. People feel uncomfortable, and that's their only option of socializing. If sororities were allowed to have parties or social events, it would be way more safe and way more comfortable.

Aubrey's thinking was institutional, in the sense that she attributed sexual violence in HWGL to institutional polices forbidding sororities from hosting parties. At the same time, her proposal only pertained to HWGL, as sorority and fraternity chapters in the Multicultural Greek Council did not have access to on-campus housing.

Similarly, women emphasized the unfairness of a situation in which women and men had unequal control over the alcohol and selection of guests because of unequal enforcement of rules. As Elena explained,

> Fraternity parties – it's men dominating the space, choosing who gets to enter the space, choosing the girls. The sorority experience is supposed to provide a space for women, but it's being dictated by men.

Elena's critique focused on the different rights of women and men in HWGL life, which resulted from institutional policies.

At the same time, knowing how to couple an institutional critique of HWGL with efforts to change institutional arrangements was challenging. Participants acknowledged that, as young college students, they were faced with problems that would be difficult for any group of stakeholders to tackle, much less students with little experience navigating the twin bureaucracies of the university and the NPC. As Sadie remarked,

> These discussions of whether Greek life is sexist and leads to whatnot— that's not new. But there aren't easy solutions and it's not easy for 21-year-olds in a sorority… to figure it out. The conversation [about how to handle sexual violence] just keeps happening.

Sadie's comments show how challenging it would be college women to begin effecting changes within an institution with such entrenched practices and such a long history of sexual violence.

Other women described informal attempts to change NPC policies, typically by trying to influence representatives of the NPC when they came for campus visits. For instance, Penelope said she spoke with NPC representatives about how NPC policies banning overnight guests and alcohol at sorority houses were unfair. However, she was met with indifference and resistance, and ultimately gave up. As she explained,

> If a woman wants to sleep with a fraternity man, shouldn't she have the option to do this in her place of living, where there isn't this power dynamic? I find it so demeaning that a house mom and Greek life has the policy and the authority to be like, 'You can't have someone stay over.' And I've advocated for this to every single national [National Panhellenic Council] member, and now I'm just tired and I don't engage.

Women's attempts to influence NPC policies were conducted individually, rather than collectively. For example, no sorority petitioned NPC for a change in policy as a group. This

likely made women's sense of disappointment and futility even greater, as they had to face resistance from sorority authorities on their own.

The University and Title IX policy. Women also offered institutional critiques of the university and its reporting mechanisms. Echoing anti sexual violence movement messaging about survivors' rights to supportive measures (KnowYourIx.Org 2022), women emphasized that the college should do more to reverse its reputation of indifference, insensitivity, and lack of transparency to women who came forward to report sexual violence. They argued that the college administration was unwilling to put its women-identifying students' well-being or safety above other priorities. Iris stated that the college was loathe to take action on sexual assault because doing so could offend alumni and donors, a position she and other women found abhorrent. As she reported,

> They [the administration] prioritize money over everything. So if they're at risk of losing
> a big donor, they won't do anything. They always send emails like, 'Oh we believe
> survivors' but they don't. They don't actually care about their female students.

Over and over, women portrayed the university's implementation and enforcement of Title IX policy as actively harmful — amplifying survivor's pain and heightening women's vulnerability to further damage. Jane, whose roommate had reported a rape to the Title IX office, spoke about the highly rigid and overly bureaucratized process in the following way:

> The Title IX process should not be so mean and horrible. They [the university] need to
> stop caring so much about money and start caring about the people on this campus. I
> think they could... make the Title IX process easier emotionally on the victim. Like my
> roommate has told her story to about probably like 50 different people at this point...
> Like my goodness, we don't need to do these things. This shouldn't be so hard. (Jane)

Jane expected more from the institution.

Another woman, Katrina, had a roommate who considered reporting a sexual assault, but ultimately chose not to. Katrina explained how reporting an assault to the university or law enforcement could further a woman's sense of violation.

If I were to file a report with the university and the police, this system is not in my favor.

I think a lot of people are being deterred by that and try to minimize what

happened, and heal on their own, or even just see a local therapist.

Katrina and other women appeared to know a great deal about the resources available to women survivors, as well as the processes through which university authorities handle sexual assault cases. For them, however, university Title IX office had acquired a reputation for non-responsiveness and a lack of sensitivity that represented a failure of the university's obligations.

Overall, women's critiques of Greek governing authorities centered on sexual assault prevention, in the sense that they believed that being allowed to host parties on their turf would reduce sexual assault. By contrast, their critiques of the university focused on Title IX investigations and adjudications and did not include ideas about how the university could better collaborate with them to develop workable prevention strategies.

PREFERRED PREVENTION STRATEGIES

In light of their sense that the university and the NPC were failing to protect them, women took on the labor of trying to keep themselves and others safe. However, these strategies required a great deal of labor and put women in the position of doing the "dirty work" of sexual assault prevention.

Monitoring Interactions: Sober Sisters. In line with research on the ubiquity of bystander training across college campuses today (Jouriles et al. 2018), women endorsed initiatives, like

the *Sober Sisters* program, in which other women were held responsible for acting as vigilant bystanders at parties, with the aim of preventing individual partygoers from committing assault or becoming victims (for an example of guidelines for a similar "sober sister" or "sober monitor" program as at Central, see Cornell University Sorority and Fraternity Life 2020).

Most women believed that efforts to monitor other individuals at parties were beneficial. They praised the *Sober Sisters* program, which assigns several (usually, one or two) women with the responsibility to refrain from alcohol and monitor others' behavior at fraternity parties. For instance, sober sisters may ask a fraternity man to "cut a sister off" from more drinks, interrupt a conversation between a very drunk woman and a fraternity man, and open closet doors to ensure that a sorority woman is not being raped in a closet. As Esther explained,

> We have a couple people who are always on the lookout… It's for anything – people who are very drunk, people who are falling down… and generally if I see a girl who is in a situation that is possibly dangerous… I go up to them and talk to them, and make sure they're okay. So even if you don't know them, and they are with a guy – you would just be like, 'Hey, come get a drink with me!' and pull them away and be like, 'Are you OK? Do you need help?'

In contrast to the findings from a study of Columbia University women students who reported strategies to keep themselves safe, but not their close friends (Wamboldt et al. 2019), sorority women in our sample took it upon themselves to try to protect other women.

Although women endorsed such efforts, their accounts also hinted at the burdens and labor of this approach. They pointed out that being a "sober sister" was a difficult job and that women were often reluctant to do it, or that women did the job halfheartedly. Participants said

that many women resented having to attend a social event without being allowed to drink and socialize. As Iris explained,

> I think they [sober sisters] help. But I think it should be randomly assigned so everybody has to share the responsibility. I mean, I feel like the sober sisters aren't always super-invested in the job. They don't really want to be there usually.

Given the severity of the problems that sober sisters were supposed to monitor and address - blackout drunkenness and sexual violence - it is no wonder that many women felt put upon and resentful of the role.

Other women described the Sober Sisters program as well-intentioned but difficult to implement, in part because efforts to constrain individuals with higher status were challenging. For instance, in Kinsley's sorority, the sober sister program had initially tasked first-years with the dirty work of looking after others. Kinsley described a conversation in which she told her chapter's Risk Manager about the changes that she believed needed to be made:

> I told her it was terrible that as soon as freshmen join the new pledge class, they're sober sistering that month. And I was like, 'I don't think you can do that because they don't know most of the people in the sorority. But also if I was a freshman and I saw a drunk senior, I would not talk to them. When I was a freshman, I thought seniors were really scary.

Sober sistering could be a job that was delegated to those with the lowest status.

Another issue was that so many instances of risky behavior were occurring at these parties that no one person could handle the oversight needed for multiple individuals. As Kinsley elaborated,

>We have one girl always behind the bar watching the guys mix drinks. There's more of
>them [than just one] which is also fantastic. Because we used to have one [sober sister per
>party], and that's not enough. Like if you're in the bathroom [helping a drunk sister],
>there's probably something else happening that you can't be part of, because you're just
>one person.

The challenges of being a sober sister speak to the risks associated with parties in HWGL. Nonetheless, women believed that sober sisters were essential to keeping them safe at parties—to the point that blame for assaults could and did fall on other women. As Piper explained, when a woman was raped at a fraternity party, there could be questions about whether the "sober sister" had done a good enough job. As she noted,

>If someone's blackout drunk, hopefully a sober sister has noticed and taken care of them,
>so nothing bad could happen medically…. That said, a sober sister can't be responsible.
>They're not responsible for an act of sexual assault - the perpetrator is. This has become a
>problem, because if a member is assaulted, sometimes there's a lot of anger towards the
>sober sister like – 'why didn't you help me?' 'Why didn't you stop them?'

Women took on extensive and burdensome labor and responsibility for preventing party rape in HWGL, even going so far as to risk their own relationships with other women. A sober sister could even be blamed for a party rape that happened while she was on "watch."

Blocklisting. Like women in historically white sororities around the country,[3] women at Central developed online forums where sorority members could anonymously list the names of

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[3] See Table 4 in the Appendix for a list of media reports about blocklisting at colleges around the country. We provide this information to show that blocklisting is a well-known phenomenon; our research participants could be at any number of colleges and universities across the country. Typically, in media reports, blocklisting is referred to as "blacklisting," but we prefer the term "blocklisting" because it doesn't carry the same negative racial overtones.

men who they believed had, or were likely to, perpetrate sexual violence against women. (For a history of this practice, see Heldman et al. 2018). Women saw this blocklisting as part of a prevention effort. As Daisy explained,

> … We have a form. You can anonymously submit any name to our president, and they [the man] will not be allowed to attend the event--anyone that you don't feel comfortable being there--and that's a no-questions-asked policy. I think things like that really prevent these things from happening.

Anonymous forms and reporting mechanisms helped women feel more in control of their party spaces. However, given racialized associations of rape with Black men (Collins 2004) and the role of social status in protecting some men from accusations of rape (Wamboldt et al. 2019), blocklisting could also lead to a situation where lower-status men and men of color were disproportionately publicly accused, with potentially devasting long-term effects.

However, controlling the guest list was not always possible. As women explained, they had the most control over the guest list when the party in question was a formal (which involved dates) or a "crush party" (a party in which men received anonymous invitations to a party, held at a venue off-campus, because a woman had listed them as a crush) Typically, formals and crush parties were held at rented venues off-campus, with buses also being rented for transportation. Amanda, a risk manager, explained how blocklisting worked for different kinds of events:

> Let's say it's a formal. If you put a person on there [the blocklist] who is not allowed to come to our events, we [the Risk Manager and two other designated women] quietly approach you and say, 'Hey, so that person you invited is on the blacklist for a valid reason, please invite someone else.' Same for crush parties. We'll contact the person and be like, 'Hey, we wanted to let you know this person isn't allowed to come to our events.

He will not be receiving an invite.' People are super respectful of that. It's never an issue. Obviously the three of us know who those people are. We know their faces, we know their names. So if somebody did try to show up, we can approach them and be like, 'Hi, you weren't invited, you need to leave.' If they fight us on that, we have boys at our disposal to help remove them. Usually, it isn't a problem. Usually without an invite they don't try to show up.

Preventing a particular man from attending a formal or crush party required cooperation and collaboration with the woman who had invited him. If the man was still intent on attending, risk managers had to rely on fraternity men to "handle" the blocklisted individual.

For parties that occurred in fraternity houses, like mixers (where an entire fraternity invited an entire sorority to their house), the situation was more complicated. Amanda explained that in such cases, there would usually be an effort to use a high-status sorority woman to convince a high-status fraternity member not to let the blocklisted individual into the party.

When it comes to mixers it is tougher. Usually if we have a lot of friends [in the fraternity], one of us has enough weight to go to someone important and be like, 'Hey, for real, this person cannot be at this event or we're shutting it down and leaving and we will not schedule more events with you regardless of the backlash from our own chapter.'

Amanda, risk manager

Amanda noted that there would be "backlash" if the sorority decided to stop partying with an entire fraternity or leave a mixer early. Blocklisting an entire fraternity or putting parties with them "on pause" would undermine the HWGL social calendar and create conflict among women, some of whom would oppose such a decision.

Brooke, who was a risk manager in a different sorority from Amanda's, detailed how her sorority had been unable to reach consensus about boycotting an entire fraternity where women in her chapter had been raped. Ultimately, the women in Brooke's house voted (via an anonymous survey) to resume activities with the fraternity. As Brooke, who was serving as a Risk Manager when we interviewed her, explained,

> There were some incidents [of sexual violence] … so we have made the decision that we don't wanna put our members and our new members in this space… We won't be hosting mixers with this fraternity. But then some people were like, 'well maybe we can start mixing with [fraternity] again.' Because they [the fraternity] were doing a lot of trainings, specifically with the men who were at these encounters, but also the whole fraternity was doing learning… I did an anonymous survey... Most people were like, "I'm okay with it." So we made the decision to go forward with mixing with them.

Amanda and Brooke's accounts shows that it was easier for women to get an individual man permanently blocklisted for "creepy" behavior than to stop socializing with an entire fraternity. Once a fraternity demonstrated that it was "doing learning," most women in Amanda's sorority were eager to move on and resume partying with them.

The contrast between how women reported dealing with individual men who were believed to be "rapey" and how they dealt with an entire fraternity house where a sorority sister had been raped is telling. In the former case, women were eager to identify and exclude an individual for other women's comfort and safety. Blocklisting individual men did not threaten the HWGL party scene, as the parties could always continue without that particular fraternity man's involvement. Women appeared to have a well-oiled machine ready for blocklisting; they had organized a set of practices and routines that helped them with blocklisting. But, to judge by

their accounts, women seemed to be far less prepared to boycott an entire fraternity house. One potential reason is that boycotting an entire fraternity house was more threatening to the entire HWGL party scene. The social calendar, and the raison d'être of HWGL, could suffer if a sorority house voted to remove one of the options for mixers and parties.

DISCUSSION

We found that participants focused on institutions as a critical contributor to party rape. Echoing some aspects of the scholarly notion of "sexual geographies" (Hirsch and Khan 2020), women framed sexual violence at HWGL parties as inherently tied to their location on men's turf. Their proposal – to move parties to their turf – flows from this focus on institutions as a potential lever of change. Thus, our findings suggest a sharp turn away from "blame-the-victim narratives" that put responsibility for sexual violence solely on survivors. Our findings also highlight a distinct way that college women today frame party rape, compared to what was found by authors who gathered data before the 2011 "Dear Colleagues Letter."

Yet, the concept of sexual geographies also draws attention to how other aspects of the social and spatial environment – above and beyond who owns the property – create risk factors. These can include social norms regarding drinking and drugs, consent, the volume of music, party themes, and inclusivity of non-dominant groups. In proposing to move parties to their turf, women did not surface these other social norms, raising the question of whether holding parties at sorority houses would truly reduce risk. Thus, participants did not appear to recognize that the same risks, liabilities, and insurance costs associated with fraternity houses (Flanagan 2014, Glovin 2013, Hechinger 2017) could become issues for their organizations.

Notably, women's proposals to move Greek parties to their residences would have kept the parties largely intact in almost every way, other than location. In their current prevention

strategies, they focused only on suspect individual men, finding it nearly impossible to boycott an entire fraternity. In so doing, women upheld existing heteronormative, high-risk parties as a critical feature of their social order. Thus, women were willing to undertake high-cost efforts that - in their view - would reduce the risks of party rape, but only if these efforts did not threaten to force a disconnect from an entire fraternity or the Greek party circuit.

Put another way, women's alignment with fraternity men put sharp limitations on what they were willing to consider as a sexual assault prevention strategy. Yet, the social arrangements that women were unwilling to challenge or opt out of predictably produce sexual assault. It is possible that these alignments would have to be challenged for prevention efforts to have more robust effects.

Women's proposal to move parties into sorority houses also reflected a racialized sense of entitlement to space. If they had been women of color in an African American, Latina, or Asian sorority, there would have been no option to move parties to their houses. Historically white Greek chapters are the only social organizations at Central to own on-campus property.

Women's strategies and solutions are understandable, considering the critical role of friendships and group associations for college students' well-being and identity development (Khan et al. 2021, McCabe 2016, Silver 2020). They also make sense in light of the class benefits associated with participation in HWGL.

Research suggests that sorority women's long-term economic prospects partially depend on marriage to partners from the same race- and class-segregated college networks, including those facilitated by HWGL (Armstrong and Hamilton 2021; Hamilton and Armstrong 2021). Thus, women in historically white sororities exist at a highly contradictory intersectional location (Crenshaw 1989; Hill Collins 2015): they are simultaneously privileged vis-a-vis other women

and disadvantaged vis-a-vis their male peers. They trade alignment with high-status men, who may ultimately become their higher-earning marriage partners, for a more limited range of sexual assault prevention strategies. In this way, our findings reinforce the point that sexual assault is both a product of and productive of inequalities (Armstrong, Gleckman-Krut and Johnson 2018). One contribution of this research is to identify women's prevention strategies as part of this same inequality dynamic.

At the same time, the current study has limitations. Below, we offer suggestions for how future research could overcome them. First, the women in our sample were attending a highly selective college. Students at elite institutions often strive to achieve cosmopolitan identities as open, inclusive, and egalitarian (Binder and Abel 2019). Future research could leverage a comparative study design to trace whether students' strategies for addressing sexual violence vary by institutional selectivity. Future research could also analyze the prevalence of slut-shaming and other blame-the-victim approaches to sexual violence by college context. The women at a highly selective college in our sample largely eschewed such logic, but we do not know how representative their responses may be.

Second, IRB regulations prevented us from following women into their party spaces and observing their strategies for preventing sexual violence first-hand. Comparing women's accounts of their behavior to observations of their behaviors could be helpful. Observations of parties could also help chart how and when power differentials among men and among women – and just between men and women - could influence women's strategies for staying safe at parties.

Third, our study was limited to accounts by cisgender women of their attempts to avoid sexual violence by men they presumed were cisgender. This focus makes sense since most sexual assaults on campus occur according to these parameters (Hirsch and Khan 2020), and the

party environments that women described upheld heterosexual masculine dominance. Yet, gendered power intersects with many other axes of inequality (Hamilton et al. 2019). We hope that future research will draw on expanded samples of the population to continue developing knowledge about how college students' preferred prevention strategies align with their available resources and positionality. More research is also needed on how men in historically white fraternities make sense of sexual assault prevention strategies at the parties they host. This would expand the growing literature on masculinities and attitudes toward violence against women (Bridges and Pascoe 2018; Fishman et al. 2022; Wamboldt et al. 2019).

We conducted our last wave of interviews in 2019. Our data do not reflect potential changes to women's framing of party rape that may have followed the Trump administration's changes to Title IX regulations in May 2020 and the ensuing activism and legislation that came in its wake. The May 2020 policy changes required that sexual misconduct investigations include live hearings and cross-examining survivors (Holland, Bedera, and Webermann 2020). Anti-rape activists protested that the changes would bring additional trauma to survivors and contribute to the underreporting of sexual assault (Belmas and Rosenthal 2022). In 2021, a federal district court ruling struck down the requirement that if a person refused to be cross-examined, investigators had to ignore their testimony (US Department of Education 2022). Future research could explore how these and other ongoing policy changes and subsequent protests could influence students' thinking about sexual assault prevention strategies.

Past research suggests that the recruitment practices and mission of African American and other Multicultural Greek sororities provide women with greater collective resources to resist sexism than women in historically white sororities (Stombler and Padavic 1997). Future

research could directly compare the preferred sexual assault prevention strategies of women in HWGL and Multicultural Greek Life.

Finally, like most college students in the US, women at Central received sexual assault prevention and intervention training as part of first-year orientation. Women in sororities also underwent additional training associated with the National Panhellenic's Sexual Assault Awareness Task Force, which was established in 2014 (National Panhellenic Conference 2019). Some critics argue that, in educating students in bystander intervention, higher education institutions have sought to pass the responsibility to protect students onto students themselves (Elk and Deveraux 2014). Within this context, women's labor-intensive prevention strategies make sense. Future research could trace and compare the labor costs that various techniques and approaches impose on women.

At the same time, there is cause for hope. The characteristics of safe and unsafe party contexts are known (e.g., Boswell and Spade 1996). Campus-level sexual assault prevention programs that take a social-ecologic framework, including hot spot mapping, are attracting research funding and public attention (Basile 2015, Mahoney et al. 2022). In 2021, Hirsch et al. released "A Sexual Assault Prevention and Community Equity" (SPACE) toolkit that offers a set of practical recommendations for college students to improve the sexual geographies on their respective campuses (Hirsch, Khan, Leichter, and Zeitz-Moskin 2021). With the collaboration of willing and sympathetic officials, college students and their allies can design interventions that improve the safety of party spaces without incurring the costs of blocklisting, especially the potential for it to be racially discriminatory.

For instance, in response to crowded dance parties that could lead to social pressure to drink and hookup, a Yale student group worked with administrators to design appealing

alternatives before, during, and after the dances. Pre-dance mocktail hours allowed students to have more extended, friendly conversations with their dates and other partygoers. Cool-down rooms with water, snacks, and seating during the dances gave students a safe place to take a break from loud, packed parties. Finally, after-dance food and movie screenings offered attractive options and weakened the assumption that partygoers would automatically go home with someone for a hookup (Yale Communication and Consent 2022). Initiatives such as these hold great promise, especially if they avoid overburdening women with extra labor and responsibility. After all, as our findings show, without appealing alternatives, students will cling even to institutions that fail to protect them.

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