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A Gendered Grievance: The Persistence of Sexual Harm in Greek Life

By

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Amidst increased public attention towards sexual assault in Greek life, colleges and universities across the United States have constructed policy, developed trainings, and established survivor support services in an attempt to prevent and respond to sexual violence and sexual harassment. Additionally, students in Greek life, predominantly women, have issued calls for cultural change within their student communities. This dissertation utilizes interviews from 47 Greek life members on the UC Davis campus to examine the socio-cultural and structural conditions within Greek life that enable sexual harm to persist, and to identify constraints community members confront when attempting to advocate for change. I examine gendered subjectivity in relation to sexual harm, illustrating how women and men position themselves in proximity to sexual harm, as potential victims and bystanders, respectively, and the strategies they undertake to manage risk. Although most women, and some men, understand sexual harm as a social problem undergirded by structural inequality, institutional imperatives of the university and Greek life more broadly fail to support structural interrogations into harm and inequality. In the absence of larger structural changes, students rely on individual strategies and adaptations to manage the threat of sexual harm.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This project begins with a public complaint put forth by sorority women of the of Davis Collegiate Panhellenic Association (referred to henceforth as *Panhellenic*). In an open letter addressed to their fraternal counterparts (the Interfraternity Council, or IFC) in December of 2020, Panhellenic cited a long history of strained relations resulting from the "ill-education of members of the IFC community and the mistreatment of survivors as it pertains to sexual assault and harassment (Davis Collegiate Panhellenic Association [DCPA] 2020).This statement identified and articulated a problem within the community—a problem that has put community members in "unsafe situations" and led to the "mistreatment of survivors" of sexual assault. Leaders of the Panhellenic sororities announced their decision to "enter a period of disaffiliation/separation from IFC chapters" and outlined a list of action items aiming to improve education and awareness about sexual assault and "create a safe environment for Panhellenic women" (DCPA 2020)

This document represents what Sara Ahmed (2021) refers to as a *collective complaint*. Ahmed writes that "a collective compliant is how you show that the judgement that there is a problem is shared" (2021:277). Individual complaints may be dismissed, swept under the rug, or terminated due to lack of evidence. A collective compliant however, in compiling related grievances, declares the existence of a *shared* problem, or a social problem. In this case, women identified sexual harm as a persistent and pressing issue in the Greek life community. Panhellenic women aimed to instigate both cultural and institutional change within their community via this collective complaint. This dissertation examines the socio-cultural and structural conditions within Greek life that enable sexual harm to persist as a social problem

despite collective complaints, and identifies constraints that community members confront when attempting to advocate for change. I argue that although sexual harm in Greek life (as in many spaces) is a *structural* issue, women are often forced to confront it as an *individual* problem.

Given the abundance of news stories, cultural references, and research on the topic, most people need little additional frame of reference to connect Greek life with sexual assault. Colleges and universities in the United States have constructed policy, developed trainings, and established survivor support services in an attempt to prevent and respond to sexual violence and sexual harassment on campus. Greek life often receives special attention in this regard, perceived as a high risk campus subculture. Students who join sororities and fraternities are well aware of the negative perceptions of Greek life, and while they may bristle at stereotypes, many agree that Greek life has "a problem" with sexual assault and seek solutions to improve their community climate around sexual harm.

In examining Greek life in the wake of this complaint, I hoped to learn more about how students understood and negotiated the complex problem of sexual harm. Furthermore, I was interested in the discussion of such issues: (1) against a social back drop where discourses of consent and sexual harm are rapidly expanding, and (2) where stakeholders demand increased accountability from both perpetrators and institutions.

Although conversations about sexual harm might be found across a variety of campus communities, the Greek system is a bounded, or *closed* community, somewhat less permeable than other organizations. One cannot drop in and participate at will; rather, each member must go through a recruitment and initiation process. The ability to draw boundaries around a community can offer a chance to set guidelines and expectations that are (theoretically) easier to enforce via the threat of exclusion or expulsion. There are also challenges presented by a community setting;

for example, the difficulty of "causing a scene" within your social circle, or the danger and precarity of calling out high status people within a community.

While Greek life constitutes an institution and may share similarities with other regulated institutions such as the workplace or the university (and often operates under university supervision), it is also a lively social community. Individuals in this community often are not simply bound together as members of the same organization; they are expected to consider each other *brothers* and *sisters*, developing close personal bonds that extend beyond college. Students must balance institutional imperatives with community demands. To the extent that conflicts or problems arise in this community, members must determine whether to address it internally or elevate the issues to request institutional intervention. Greek life offers the opportunity to examine the social problem of sexual harm within a highly structured campus community.

Sorority and fraternity life is notoriously associated with sexual assault, binge drinking, and hazing on college campuses across the United States. Greek life serves as a lightning rod for discussion of sexual assault on campus and news articles break with predictable regularity, showcasing the persistence and insidious nature of these issues. Although issues related to sexual harm on campus certainly are not limited to sorority and fraternity life, Greek organizations offer an established campus community where these problems crop up repeatedly. The university is charged with investigating any report of sexual assault, although many instances never make it that far. Survivors of sexual assault often seek resolution within the community, either by sharing their stories with leaders from their organizations, or a friend or leader from the perpetrator's organization. Although sexual assault occurs fairly frequently within the UC Davis Greek life community, every three to four years, a larger scandal rocks the community.

Like many Greek life communities, UC Davis experiences a *groundhog day effect* with cases of sexual assault—they recur with predictable frequency. As an exclusive, insular, and tightly bound social community, Greek organizations must perpetually confront instances of sexual harm. Once every couple of years, however, this crisis boils over into a public forum. Both students and staff have referred to the fact that every few years, a survivor steps forward to tell their story of sexual assault within the Greek Community. Calls for action soon follow, and leaders of both sororities and fraternities pledge action on behalf of their organizations and express commitment to stand with survivors. Occasionally this is accompanied by a disaffiliation from the named fraternity, a social sanction imposed on certain fraternities by sororities until they demonstrate a commitment to change. Despite these commitments, incidents of sexual harm in these communities emerge at a predicable pace.

This study seeks to understand how students within a campus community understand the issue of sexual harm in terms of who is impacted, why it persists, and what actions might be taken to address the problem. Student accounts reveal that within Greek life, sexual harm cannot be addressed without attending to the sociocultural and structural factors that enable it to persist. Despite efforts to draw attention to these features, students must often rely on individual strategies to combat the threat of sexual harm.

Sexual Harm as a Gendered Grievance

While experiences of sexual assault and harassment are not exclusively experienced by women, the problem of sexual harm frequently arises as a *gendered grievance*. By this I mean a problem identified and thrust into the community spotlight by women. Although most community members who participated in this study agreed that sexual harm is an issue in the community, it is most often the sororities (rather than fraternities) who express displeasure at the

status quo and call for action and for change. Panhellenic leaders called out the "ill-education of members of the IFC community and the mistreatment of survivors as it pertains to sexual assault and harassment" in their open letter to IFC (DCPA 2020). In this case, the issue of sexual harm is a gendered grievance not because women are the only victims—they are not. Rather, they lodge the collective complaint about sexual harm, initiating this grievance process.

The emergence of sexual harm as a gendered grievance is exacerbated by the fact that much of this community is organized and divided by gender. This is particularly pronounced with the IFC and Panhellenic councils. All fraternities and sororities within IFC and Panhellenic are gender segregated, and while some are trans inclusive, they are, by and large, single gender organizations. Panhellenic governs women's organizations, and IFC governs men's organizations. The rules governing Panhellenic sororities differ from the rules governing IFC fraternities, thereby creating friction and difficulty when addressing shared issues. Technically, the Panhellenic Council has no voice in the policies or agreements of the IFC, and vice versa. However, given their longstanding social relationship, the organizations have a vested interest in maintaining a friendly and positive relationship. When public complaint or grievance arises, however, it is almost always the women's organizations identifying problems with one or more fraternities.

While almost all participants noted that men could be victims of sexual harm, and that women could perpetrate sexual harm, it often emerges as a social problem through the individual or collective complaints of women. Disaffiliation has historically been a strategy used by women's organizations to sanction men's organizations in poor graces or simply keep the members of their organization safe. It generally involves placing a moratorium on hosting social events in partnership with the offending fraternity. While the objective of disaffiliation is to

broadly make the community safer for all members, the discourse around disaffiliation implies an adversarial relationship between men and women. Women have elevated the issue, lodging grievances with men's organizations. Indeed, Panhellenic consistently emerges as the complainant, the party issuing the equity complaint, and IFC takes position as the respondent, the party against whom the complaint is filed.

Students reported that the mishandling of an allegation by a fraternity was the final straw leading to the disaffiliation of 2020. Furthermore, that this disaffiliation (and most others) occurred between sororities and fraternities' points to the centrality of heterosexual relationships (albeit fraught) in Greek social life—a point discussed further in Chapter Two. Notably, disaffiliations seem to resemble a broader pattern of recurring gendered complaint. Like a chronically dysfunctional heterosexual pairing, Panhellenic expresses deep dissatisfaction with the status quo—the culture of sexual harm in Greek life. In response, IFC acknowledges the problem, expressing contrition, and indicates a desire to change. The sincerity of this desire, and ability to take meaningful action towards change remains a persistent question.

Panhellenic and IFC statements posted to *Instagram* preceding the announcement of wholesale disaffiliation illustrate the nature of this long-standing tension. Panhellenic wrote that they were "appalled at the lack of action and accountability that we have seen and are urging for those Greek organizations to make the proper changes" (Davis Panhellenic 2020). Their statement stood outside of the "offending" organizations—they were apparently witness to the outrage, but not the central offenders. IFC's statement, on the other hand, was clearly that of the respondent—they wrote, "we want to acknowledge that we still have more work to do and must continually ensure our current and incoming members are educated on these topics" (UCD Interfraternity Council 2020). While Panhellenic expressed a commitment to hold (presumably

IFC) organizations accountable, IFC committed to holding their own members and organizations accountable.

These statements of commitment to "stand by survivors" and "educate ourselves" serve as record that a complaint was issued, but as Ahmed (2021) notes, complaints can get *filed away* or *buried.* Once IFC acknowledges the complaint, it can be let out, or vented, enabling dismissal. Within this dynamic, "You can send the complaint away by letting it out" (Ahmed 2021:84). The venting releases tension, but absent structural change, these events unfold in a recursive fashion and women's organizations resurrect this complaint again and again.

Given the familiar nature of this cycle, Panhellenic began to feel like a broken record as the promises of IFC to "do better" remained unfulfilled. The decision by all Panhellenic presidents to publicly disaffiliate from all IFC chapters illustrated their desire to enact a more severe sanction/forceful action and call for change. In their open letter announcing the Panhellenic-IFC disaffiliation released in December 2020, Panhellenic leaders wrote:

> We have seen time and time again the ill-education of members of the IFC community and the mistreatment of survivors as it pertains to sexual assault and harassment. The Panhellenic community has determined that in order to ensure the health and well-being of our members, as well as to mend our strained relationship with IFC, we must take a step back. (DCPA 2020)

This dynamic (Panhellenic as complainant, IFC as respondent) was centrally threaded throughout discussions of sexual harm in the Greek community, and often emerged in my data. Gender, as a culture and an institution, shapes the way individuals experience and relate to sexual harm, as well as the way they envision possible solutions.

Literature Review

Conceptualization and analysis for this project has been informed by feminist scholarly work on gender and sexual violence, and research on sexual harm in Greek institutions and, more

broadly, on college campuses. Feminist analysis of consent, sexual violence against women, and gender structure theory provide theoretical grounding for this research project, while prior research on the persistence of sexual violence across college campuses, and in Greek life, offers important context to the research site. Although I initially intended to use consent as a key concept in analysis, this feature fell to the wayside during data collection. If feminist interrogations of consent challenge a neoliberal consent model and draw attention to larger structures of inequality, student discussions of consent were largely divorced from larger structural analysis. This does not mean that students did not talk about structural inequality, rather *consent*, as a concept, did not invite those insights during our discussion. Informed by the binary division of Greek organizations into fraternities and sororities, students (women in particular) home in on gender inequality as a key feature of Greek life, enabling sexual harm to persist in their community.

Sexual Harm in Greek Life

Sexual harm on college campus across the United States remains a pervasive problem despite the abundance of research and resources that have been directed at the issue in recent decades. Prior research estimates that women and gender non-conforming students face the highest rates of sexual assault, estimated to be between 20% and 36%, compared with men at roughly 12.5% (Cooper and Dranger 2018; Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 2000; Krebs et al. 2007; Mellins et al. 2017). Sorority and fraternity life in the United States has a particularly notorious reputation when it comes to sexual violence. Numerous studies have demonstrated that students participating in Greek life experience higher risk of sexual assault than their non-Greek associated peers (Jozkowski and Wiersma-Mosley 2017; McMahon 2010; Mohler-Kuo et al. 2004; Tyler 2023).

Scholars studying sexual violence in Greek life have identified cultural and structural conditions particular to this subculture that exacerbate the problem of sexual harm. In their examination of social fraternities, Martin and Hummer conclude that "fraternities create a sociocultural context in which use of coercion in sexual relations with women is normative and in which the mechanisms to keep this pattern of behavior in check are minimal at best and absent at worst" (1989:458). They argue that key features of fraternity life, such as valorization of aggressive masculinity, commodification of women, excessive alcohol use, and brotherhood loyalty, contribute to coercive sexual encounters with women, and a higher likelihood of secrecy or cover-ups when nonconsensual sexual encounters occur. Peggy Reeves Sanday (2007) describes how fraternities can be "rape-prone" environments that encourage social and sexual dominance of women to confer masculine status. Within this culture, objectification and routine debasement of women help establish a male status hierarchy, while cementing a fraternal patriarchy in which men "share a common interest in upholding the original contract which legitimizes masculine right and allows them to gain material and psychological benefit from women's subjection" (Pateman 1988:113).

Some researchers have suggested that single-sex environments, such as fraternities or athletic teams, are more likely to value a particular form of hyper or hostile masculinity that is associated with violence, aggression, and dominance over women (Boeringer 1996; Mosher and Sirkin 1984). Although not all men in these contexts may participate in sexual aggression against women, they may be more comfortable tolerating or endorsing sexist attitudes and behavior (Loh et al. 2005). This enables a *rape-supportive* environment that normalizes men's sexual aggression and women's passivity in sexual encounters (Boswell and Spade 1996; Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997).

Additionally, researchers studying campus sexual violence argue that participation in a fraternity is associated with higher *rape myth acceptance* (Boeringer 1996; Humphrey and Kahn 2000; Martinez et al. 2018; McMahon 2010; Murnen and Kohlman 2007). Rape myths can be described as "attitudes and beliefs that are generally false yet widely and persistently held and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women" (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994:134). This might include believing women are "asking for it" by wearing particular clothing or engaging in particular behavior (e.g., going into a room alone with a man), dismissing rape on the basis that either party was drinking alcohol, a belief that women lie about rape to "get back at guys," or believing rape to be a deviant and isolated event (McMahon 2010). Such cultural dimensions contribute to a social environment that normalizes coercive sexual behavior, while blaming victims for the harm that befalls them.

The emphasis on drinking alcohol and partying associated with Greek life has added an additional element of risk for sexual harm. Minow and Einolf (2009) found that sorority member's participation in the fraternity party scene was associated with higher rates of sexual assault compared with non-sorority women, or sorority women who did not participate in party culture. As Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney (2006) have pointed out, it is not simply the presence of alcohol that creates risk; rather, it is the way fraternity men leverage their control of party resources (e.g., distribution of alcohol, regulation of private and public spaces within a fraternity house, arranging rides home) to pressure women into sexual situations. Beyond this imbalance of resources, "gender neutral expectations to 'have fun,' lose control, and trust one's party-mates become problematic when combined with gendered interactional expectations"—gendered expectations such that women be *nice* and deferential to their fraternity party hosts (Armstrong et al. 2006:495). Women are likely to experience a dilemma where they must *break*

gender and party expectations—and risk becoming a "buzzkill" or "bitch"—in order to directly confront coercive sexual situations (DeSantis 2007).

Although women may be aware, and even critical of such dynamics, they remain involved in Greek life for the social benefits it provides. Status hierarchies within the Greek system can confer prestige and power to women in top-tier sororities (Handler 1995). While women may find themselves lacking in power relative to men, they may trade in on heterosexual appeal to garner greater status in sorority standings (Hamilton 2007). This subordinate adaptation is what Schwalbe et al. refer to as "trading power for patronage . . . [a way] to derive compensatory benefits from relationships with members of the dominant group" (2000:426). Additionally, some women take pleasure in the sexual attention they receive from fraternity men. Alan D. DeSantis spoke to sorority women who expressed that dressing up and flaunting their bodies was a "way of having fun, exerting power, and validating their attractiveness and sexuality" (2007:72). For these women, participating in a (hetero)sexualized culture was not a problem, though they may have taken issue with gendered power asymmetries.

Such dynamics within Greek life refer to a broader literature on gender as an institution. Feminist scholars have analyzed gender as an institution, or social structure, in order to draw attention to the way gender is more than an individual identity or performance, but is embedded though multiple levels or dimensions of society. Judith Lorber (1994) illuminates how gender is constituted through interpersonal interactions, as well as through social organization (e.g., gendered division of labor). By viewing gender as an institution, we can attend to: (1) the creation of gendered selves, (2) gendered cultural expectations in interaction, and (3) organizational practices and the distribution of resources or goods according to gender (Risman 2004). Shared arrangements of gender form what Raewyn Connell (2002) terms a *gender order*,

an often taken-for-granted understanding of gender relations between men and women. The division of individuals into *men* and *women* enables, and even *justifies* the production of gender inequality (Acker 1992, Lorber 1994). The structural dimensions of gendered power, and the interplay between individual and structural constraints in sorority and fraternity life is a central concern of my research examining efforts to address sexual harm in this community.

Feminist Demands for Accountability and the Neoliberal Turn

Recent decades have seen growing demands for institutional response to the problem of sexual assault on college campuses. In response to both public and policy demands, universities have established Title IX offices to investigate allegations of sexual assault and harassment, opened survivor support service centers, established mandatory sexual assault prevention trainings, and, in California, enacted an "affirmative consent" standard. California SB 967 offered a codified contribution to growing discourses of sexual consent in the United States. According to SB 967,

> "Affirmative consent" means affirmative, conscious, and voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity. It is the responsibility of each person involved in the sexual activity to ensure that he or she has the affirmative consent of the other or others to engage in the sexual activity. Lack of protest or resistance does not mean consent, nor does silence mean consent. Affirmative consent must be ongoing throughout a sexual activity and can be revoked at any time. The existence of a dating relationship between the persons involved, or the fact of past sexual relations between them, should never by itself be assumed to be an indicator of consent. (Student Safety: Sexual Assault SB-967, 2014)

By insisting that consent be active and ongoing, legislators hoped to confront the particularly intractable and persistent problem of sexual assault on college campuses. Consequently, numerous universities throughout the United States have revised their sexual assault policies to include similar affirmative consent standards.

Current efforts to curtail sexual violence within the university setting can be traced back to the anti-rape work undertaken by feminists and feminist legal scholars of the 1970s and 1980s.

Much of this work sought to challenge popular and legal understandings of consent through examinations of sexuality and rape law (e.g., Brownmiller 1975; Rich 1980; Dworkin 1987; MacKinnon 1987; Estrich 1987). Traditional rape laws scrutinized a complainant's (rather than defendant's) behavior, often assessing the strength of their complaint based on their conformance to normative feminine roles. Convictions required utmost resistance on the part of the complainant, and a demonstration of physical force (Munro 2008; Klein 2008). By the 1970s, states began to eliminate physical resistance requirements and included threat to harm as forcible compulsion (Klein 2008).

At a superficial level, the concept of consent appears relatively straightforward. Within the realm of sexual consent, many have heard the slogan, "no means no," and the subsequent refrain, "[only] yes means yes." While succinct, such affirmations of sexual rights are deceptively simple. Pamela Haag (1999) notes that considering long histories of sexual violation, feminists have understandably sought to establish essential, unconditional properties of consent that could not be misinterpreted or dismissed. This has involved an insistence on the literal meaning of *yes* and *no*. Still, "once interpretive pressure is exerted on the word *yes*, its commonsense clarity evaporates" (Haag 1999:xvi). An honest examination of the social context and conditions of consent requires an incorporation of the concepts of *power*, *coercion*, and *social pressure* into any analysis of sexual consent. Under what conditions can consent be obtained, and what conditions render the utterance "yes" suspect? How and when can we determine "yes" to be a free and accurate expression of individual will or desire? Furthermore, and notably, expressions of consent could be verbal or physical, either enthusiastically given or subtly assented.

The contentious landscape of affirmative consent (and how to define it) within higher education reflects a long history of contestation in discussions and applications of sexual consent. Ideal forms of consent are an abstraction for which there is no real referent; "consent has looked like and does look like what it has been socially interpreted and conceived to be" (Haag 1999:xv). Although Janet Halley (2016) endorses the norm of seeking consensual sex, she raises serious doubts about whether we might achieve cultural change through legal and carceral means. Furthermore, Halley (2016) argues that the push for affirmative consent requirements is rooted in a branch of dominance feminism that, through increasing engagement with the state, has shifted decidedly to the right to endorse repressive, excessively protectionist, and paternalistic reforms. Carefully tracing arguments both for and against affirmative consent, Aya Gruber concludes that by bundling all reform within a consent *catchall*, we fail to have a more meaningful dialogue on "the empirical and normative beliefs about how sex happens, how it should happen, the benefits and harms of sex, and the role of criminal law in regulating sexuality" (2016:458).

In addition to concerns about state interpretation and application of affirmative consent through the legal system, numerous scholars have identified the problematic assumptions embedded in the classical, liberal model of consent. Tracing historical connections between American liberalism and modern, liberal feminist sexual rights movement, Haag (1999) teases out the relationship between *consent* and *patriarchy*. Constructions of consent have presupposed the classic liberal ideal of a free, self-actualizing, and autonomous subject. And although Haag (1999) acknowledges that feminist activists have benefitted from a sexual rights frame, the legacy of the liberal tradition has failed to illuminate the context and complexities of sexual power, often casting women as either: (1) victims, or (2) free and equal sexual subjects despite

asymmetrical power relations. As Carole Pateman states, “Modern contractual patriarchy both denies and presupposes women’s freedom and could not operate without this presupposition” (1988:231-232). The gender/race/class *neutrality* of the individual autonomous subject erases and obscures the particular, embodied positions these subjects occupy, and the dynamics that may restrict or compromise their access to free choice and self-determination. And though articulations of affirmative consent can challenge dominant heteronormative scripts, they can simultaneously “demonstrate the normalizing and disciplinary impetus of sexual assault decisions” (Gotell 2008:877). Rational sexual subjects are gendered, mandating a diligent and cautious femininity, and active masculinity mindful of the risk of ambiguously consensual sex. As long as the reconfiguration of sexual interactions relies upon a model emphasizing individual risk and responsibility, we must be mindful of the ways it also enacts a neoliberal rationality of governance (Gotell 2008).

When confronting the problem of sexual harm, gender scholars have sounded the alarm that a neoliberal, identity “neutral” framing of sexual violence risks rendering the power dynamics that shape and enable sexual violence invisible. Where radical activist anti-rape work was centrally concerned with revealing and dismantling patriarchal structures, institutionalized response systems have tended to focus on modifying individual behavior (Bumiller 2008; Pascoe and Hollander 2016; Pease 2019). Karen Boyle (2019) discusses what she calls the *uneven absorption* of feminist theory in policy and practice. According to Boyle, the conventions of policy and law often force difficult linguistic choices that can flatten, rather than articulate the multiplicity of continuums in feminist theorizing. For example, the expansive framing of “gender-based violence” can obscure the gendered specificality of such violence. Demands for institutional response to the pressing problem of sexual assault on college campuses has led to

policy action such as California Senate Bill 967, or the affirmative consent bill. While the bill has retained vestiges of the feminist concepts that helped bring it into existence, it is stripped of any gendered analysis of sexual assault. When feminist analysis breaks through into policy, foundational structural concepts such as patriarchy can fall by the wayside.

As research on *violence against women* has grown, so too has the general understanding of the complexity of factors contributing to such violence. Advocates, policy makers, and educators have increasingly turned towards gender neutral terms and concepts to incorporate and address a wider range of harm—for example, consider that a discussion of *intimate partner violence* can reckon with interpersonal violence experienced by a person of any gender (Walby et al. 2017). While gender-neutral language *can* enable a broadened critique of structural inequality and sexual violence, incorporating an intersectional analysis that considers other structural inequalities, such as racism, or heterosexism, it often fails to do so. Rather, by leaving such elements unnamed, we see a diminished focus on the broader socio-cultural context in which these relationships and this violence takes place. For Boyle, "what is important about feminist naming practices is that they take place within an analysis of patriarchy in which an understanding of gender inequality is essential" (2019:21). Pease (2019) argues that institutional and state responses to violence against women often favor "depoliticized" and "gender-neutral" framing that pathologize individual actors rather than confronting broad structures of inequality that are foundational to the persistence of this violence. In this paper, I explore the tension between the personal and the structural in relation to sexual harm. Despite a recognition that sexual harm within Greek life is a deeply embedded structural problem, responsibility regularly gets redirected onto individuals who must devise personal strategies in response.

Research Amidst a Pandemic

I began working at the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life (OSFL) as a graduate assistant in January 2020. I spent the first couple months at OSFL getting my bearings, attending staff meetings, and doing paperwork and administrative tasks. The small Sorority and Fraternity Life team was comprised of two full-time staff, one undergraduate assistant, and me. Meetings generally consisted of checking in about the activities of Greek life, ensuring each group met requirements to be a registered student organization, preparing for upcoming deadlines, and managing various crises (both major and minor) that cropped up in the process of supporting student-led organizations.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 brought unexpected complications to our work at the Center for Student Involvement (the larger department in which the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life was housed). As classes pivoted to online instruction, university departments scrambled to decide how to continue operations and support students with limited guidance. Eventually, public health directives tightened guidelines for student gatherings. Concerns for Greek life were not solely limited to social gatherings, but included oversight of protocols for residential facilities. The Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life worked to advise the university's Greek organizations how to continue operations in a socially distanced manner. Chapters could no longer host gatherings or social events, and since academic instruction moved online, much of the community moved back home and/or dispersed throughout the country. Given that student life effectively ceased all in-person operations, I struggled to imagine how to pivot research and data collection for this project.

Online operations continued into fall of 2020, and Greek organizations tentatively prepared to hold virtual recruitment for potential new members. Many chapters struggled with

attrition, as the social components of Greek life (a major draw for many students) were deeply impacted by COVID-19 protocols. Still, many incoming freshmen sought opportunities to build and find community in a highly restricted social environment. Greek life held the promise of a pre-existing network of friends that a new student might loop into, given the limited opportunities students had to socialize organically with their peers.

As organizations prepared to adapt to the *new normal* of online operations, they were confronted with additional upheavals. Students noted that the intensity of the summer of 2020 generated discussions within Greek life about police brutality and racial injustice. Some historically white fraternities and sororities grappled with the legacy of racism within their organizations, and were prompted to consider their continued complicity in supporting a racist and classist organizational structure. This broader context provided fertile ground for more expansive conversations about social justice and accountability within Greek life—including accountability for survivors of sexual violence.

In early October 2020, a member of one of the Panhellenic organizations on campus publicly shared her experience of sexual assault in the Greek community. In a post on *Instagram*, she detailed the struggles she faced as a survivor coming forward, as well as the failures of the respective fraternity in responding to her allegation. The publicity of this event revealed longstanding tensions between sororities and fraternities around a culture of sexual harm. It sparked a community-wide conversation about the complacency of all Panhellenic and IFC organizations in addressing issues of sexual assault. If IFC organizations were accused of perpetuating a culture where sexual assault goes unchecked, the Panhellenic community was accused of associating with "known perpetrators" and not holding them accountable.

Panhellenic leaders quickly responded to this crisis with their own *Instagram* post, offering a statement of support for survivors, and promising that further discussion and action would be taken to address deeply rooted issues of sexual harm. IFC made a concurrent post of a similar nature, expressing support for survivors, with a commitment to "improve education and outreach" (UCD Interfraternity Council 2020). At the time, Panhellenic leaders expressed frustration and discontent with IFC's handling of sexual assault, believing that fraternities did not take the issue of sexual assault seriously enough, and often failed to take action when accusations were levied against their members. The women also felt that when men's organizations *did* take action, it was often to sweep such matters "under the rug," or shut down discussion of allegations. Describing the central event precipitating the disaffiliation, and another instance of sexual assault, one Panhellenic president said:

> It was very brave of these women to come forward. And in both cases, the executive boards of the fraternities tried to cover it up. And instead of trying to hold their members accountable for their actions, [the fraternity boards] lied. They tried to cover it up. And they refused to face consequences because they were like, "We don't want that reputation getting out there, so we're going to handle it internally," which basically meant do nothing. And that was really frustrating for us because I had girls reaching out to me at the time that [didn't] feel safe in this community [and didn't] feel like they [had their] best interest at heart. And that's how I felt, too. I think [the fraternity boards] care more about the organization itself and protecting the name of the organization than they do about doing what's right. And at that point, [Panhellenic] presidents decided to start having a conversation about disaffiliating from IFC as a whole.

Spurred by the allegations of this fraternity's mishandling of sexual assault, Panhellenic leaders began to discuss what meaningful actions they might take. Their discontent seemed to have reached its apex. According to the Panhellenic leaders, the frequency of sexual assault combined with fraternity attempts at "cover-up" propelled their action. In the past, sororities would often disaffiliate from a fraternity, effectively putting them on temporary probation. In other words, the sorority would temporarily suspend holding social engagements with the

fraternity in question. These disaffiliations were inconsistent and piecemeal sanctions, however, and decided on a chapter-by-chapter basis. If the intent was to impair the offending fraternity's ability to host socials, the inconsistent implementation of such action reduced efficacy. One Panhellenic leader asserted, "Probation only does so much. It's just saying that we're not going to party with you, but individual members can still go hang out with the men there and some of [the men] just don't really even care, which was the issue."

Panhellenic was fed up with the empty commitments to "do better" and the subsequent lack of action. They sought a more collective, coordinated call for change in the Sorority and Fraternity Life (SFL) community. Pandemic protocols had already put a stop to organized socials between organizations, putting a natural pause in social relationship between organizations. Panhellenic saw this as an opportune moment to formally disaffiliate from IFC fraternities. Sorority leaders expressed a desire for the community to use this time to re-imagine what a reformed IFC-Panhellenic relationship might look like. In their open letter to IFC, the respective leaders of Panhellenic wrote:

> The Panhellenic community has determined that in order to ensure the health and well-being of our members, as well as to mend our strained relationship with IFC, we must take a step back. We believe that this time of virtual learning is a great opportunity for chapters to restructure and reevaluate their policies, educational programs, and reflect on their chapter/council values. After much deliberation, Panhellenic has decided that it is in our best interest to enter a period of disaffiliation/separation from IFC chapters, as both of our communities take this time to grow and develop internally. As a whole, Panhellenic may decide to re-affiliate gradually with IFC chapters on an individual basis, if we see significant work being done to educate their members and create a safe environment for Panhellenic women. (DCPA 2020)

Panhellenic leaders expressed great optimism that things could *actually* change this time. In the social downtime, momentum grew for this Panhellenic *#MeToo* movement. Those spearheading the disaffiliation hoped that organizations would take the time to reflect upon their policies and values. Panhellenic leadership met throughout the fall 2020 quarter to create a

checklist for IFC fraternities to follow in order to meet requirements for re-affiliation. Some of the action items included in the document suggested that all fraternities (a) appoint a designated member to coordinate sexual assault prevention education, (b) reach out to their national organizations and advisors for resources related to sexual assault prevention, and (c) review bylaws and policies related to risk management and processes for reporting. This checklist served as a sort of "list of demands" to fraternities, with the hope of improving the climate around sexual harm within the community. Panhellenic leaders proposed implementing a graduated timeline for re-affiliation with IFC fraternities over the course of the year. They sought to reconsider the centrality of alcohol and partying in sorority-fraternity relations. Sorority leaders, in particular, wanted to encourage relationship building outside of a sexually-charged party scene. Commenting on the disaffiliation, one Panhellenic president said:

> Panhellenic was like, we're fed up, you guys do nothing. You need to educate your members better, and we need to see change before we continue to have events where alcohol is involved. So part of the process is they have to have sober events with sororities. [It can't be that] the only time that we interact [is] at parties. And [they have to] work on their brotherhoods. And then philanthropies is next. They have different stages [to reach] until they can eventually go back to the partying [with us]. And we're hoping that it makes a difference.

Partying was held out as the metaphorical carrot, the final stage of re-affiliation that IFC organizations would be rewarded with, should they follow through with the directives issued by Panhellenic. Sorority leaders expressed interest in hosting more "sober socials," suggesting group activities such as paintball nights, pumpkin carvings, or movie nights.

During my inquiry into the Panhellenic-IFC disaffiliation, I discovered that the two councils were not the only members of SFL publicly reckoning with a culture of sexual assault. Thus far, my discussion has focused on IFC fraternities and Panhellenic sororities. While these councils often dominate representations of Greek life in popular culture, they are by no means

the only Greek culture on campuses across the United States. Historically Black Greek organizations (also called the *Divine Nine*), Latinx Greek and Asian Greek organizations, Arab sisterhoods/brotherhoods, and broader multicultural organizations, make up the multi-cultural Greek landscape. While most campuses have a Panhellenic Council and Interfraternity Council, the councils governing multicultural Greeks can vary from campus to campus. At UC Davis, the United Sorority and Fraternity Council governs most of the Latinx and Arab multicultural organizations, the National Panhellenic Council governs Black Greek life, and the Asian Sorority and Fraternity Council governs the Asian Greek community on campus.

While the disaffiliation between Panhellenic and IFC might have received more attention in the broader campus community, allegations within the United Sorority and Fraternity Council (USFC) were roiling Latinx Greek life, as well. In this case, accusations were not localized to UC Davis, but regional in scope, involving Latino brotherhoods throughout California. Upon scouring the social media accounts and websites of various sororities and fraternities for information relating to sexual harm, I found several open letters written by Latina sororities at UC Davis. Such letters were statements of support for sexual assault survivors written in response to the spate of allegations emerging about a culture of harm and sexual assault within Latino Greek organizations. In turn, most Latino fraternities released statements expressing their commitment to stand with survivors, take all sexual assault allegations seriously, and ensure transparency moving forward. Unlike Panhellenic and IFC, USFC has existed as a "mixed" council. Latina sororities did not necessarily "band together" to formally disaffiliate as a group from men's organizations, however many made independent decisions to step back from social life with USFC fraternities in the wake of these public allegations.

Methods

Research Setting and Context

Of the roughly 31,000 undergraduate students on the UC Davis campus, approximately 5% participate in Greek life. The body of SFL is comprised of six different governing councils: (1) Professional Sorority and Fraternity Council (PSFC), (2) Asian American Sorority and Fraternity Council (ASFC), (3) United Sorority and Fraternity Council (USFC), (4) National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), (5) Davis Collegiate Panhellenic Association (DCPA), and (6) Interfraternity Council (IFC). PSFC houses the professional fraternities and sororities on campus, often assembling around a particular career interest, and most of them are co-ed. ASFC contains four Asian interest sororities; and during the course of this study, two ASFC fraternities were kicked off campus (originally six), though a new fraternity was in the process of attempting to establish a chapter on campus. NPHC, or the *Divine Nine* are the historically black fraternities on campus. USFC, or the "multicultural Greeks," include fraternities and sororities organized around cultural affinity. Although these groups within USFC are generally organized around a particular cultural identity (e.g., Latino, Arab), they are broadly referred to as multicultural Greek organizations. The two traditionally "social" (historically white) councils have the highest numbers of registered students: Panhellenic sororities and IFC fraternities. Table 1.1 outlines the number of chapters in each council and relative size of each council within Greek life.

Table 1.1 Composition of Greek Life Councils

COUNCIL	NUMBER/TYPE OF CHAPTERS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PROPORTION OF GREEK LIFE
Panhellenic (DCPA)	10 sororities	653	44.3%
Interfraternity Council (IFC)	13 fraternities	374	25.4%

Table 1.1, continued

COUNCIL	NUMBER/TYPE OF CHAPTERS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PROPORTION OF GREEK LIFE
Professional Sorority and Fraternity Council (PSFC)	7 co-ed; 1 sorority	282	19.1%
United Sorority and Fraternity Council (USFC)	7 sororities; 3 fraternities	117	7.9%
Asian Sorority and Fraternity Council (ASFC)	4 sororities	35	2.4%
National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)	2 sororities; 2 fraternities	12	0.8%

My position as graduate student assistant with the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life offered a direct entry point into my research site. Working alongside staff that supported sororities and fraternities on campus, I familiarized myself with the six different Greek councils, and day-to-day operations of staff. I took field notes during this time, paying particular attention to incidents and activities broadly related to misconduct and organizational relationships. Although my work was primarily administrative, I was able to attend and observe the annual Greek life-mandated sexual violence prevention (SVP) trainings from 2020-2024. Due to the pandemic, the trainings in 2021 were held via videoconference. SVP trainings gave additional insight into institutional positions with respect to sexual harm, as well as student response to this "mandated" content. Field notes from my work with the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life helped supplement and contextualize my interview data. Upon learning about the IFC-Panhellenic disaffiliation, as well as USFC disaffiliations, I collected media related to these actions, including news articles in the school paper, the *Instagram* feed of campus Greek

councils and chapters, as well as any additional information I could glean from chapter or national websites.

Sample and Research Design

With permission from my supervisor at the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life, I began outreach to chapter presidents in the early months of 2021. Though I initially targeted my outreach to IFC and Panhellenic organizations, I expanded the pool of eligible participants to include all members of Greek life after I learned about conversations taking place with the USFC. In the first round of data collection, I contacted each chapter president via email, inquiring about whether they would be interested and available to participate in an interview about consent and sexual harm in their community. This was followed by a second round of outreach, emailing all active members of Greek life to ask, "if the issue of consent has come up as a topic of discussion within [their] chapter and if [they] might be willing to share [their] thoughts and understandings of this issue." To be eligible to participate in this study, students had to be over 18 years old and have been an active member of their chapter for at least one quarter.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted via *Zoom* and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. My interview protocol had two primary sections. The first section included questions about how students came to be involved in Greek life, how it "fits" with their identity, what they enjoy about it, or conversely what they did not like about it. The latter half of my questions specifically targeted my topic of interest and included questions such as:

- *Within your organization or community, do you believe there are problems around communication, consent, sexual assault, or boundary violations?*
- *How would you describe the problem [of sexual harm]? What do you think is different/unique about how the problem operates in your community?*

- *Can you tell me more about your relationship to the problem [of sexual harm]? What effect does the problem [of sexual harm] have on your life? On other members in your organization? Who struggles most with this? Why?*
- *What fears do you think most [Greek members, members in your organization] might have when entering a conversation about consent or sexual assault?*
- *What challenges do you face in trying to ensure environments where folks generally feel safe/respected and what goals do you have in maintaining good relationships within and outside your chapter?*

The questions were constructed to elicit students' diagnoses of the problem of sexual harm. The aim was to understand how sexual harm "showed up" in their community, who was impacted, and how they managed the problem. Beyond individual experiences of sexual harm, the goal was to see how students contextualized or framed this issue as social problem, that is, is sexual harm a problem exacerbated by particular social dynamics, or a problem that required broader community intervention?

I leveraged the context of the disaffiliations (regardless of whether students were a member of one of the impacted councils) to make inquiries into the respective climate of Greek life within different spheres. For example, I suspect the disaffiliation greatly aided my ability to recruit men within IFC chapters for this study—a group over-represented in my sample in relative proportion to Greek life as a whole. In the wake of this upheaval, it seemed they were more willing to talk to me to "clear the air" than they would have been if my outreach seemed guided by stereotypes rather than precipitated by a public event. Still, men in fraternities with more troubled reputations could have been hesitant to participate. Although the study aimed to build a broad and diverse sample, it was limited to those who responded to the email and were able to schedule time to meet. While participants were occasionally recruited via referral, the vast majority of the research sample was collected through cold email outreach. The sample was therefore likely biased towards those in Greek life who considered sexual harm to be a pervasive problem, and those who were interested in taking action to shift this problem. Furthermore, just

as IFC members might have been looking to clarify their position in relation to allegations of a climate of harm, Panhellenic members also had a vested interest in reframing their public image as social sororities.

While most students who responded were eager to share their story, some approached the interview with a degree of caution. In initial outreach, I indicated that I worked with the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life as a graduate assistant. Given the widespread negative press about problems in Greek life, I felt it could be helpful to situate myself as someone friendly with the community. That said, my proximity to university administration could have led some participants to be less candid with me. Although I clarified my position as a PhD student and researcher, I believe that a handful students perceived me as part of the university's governing structure, or someone that could "get them in trouble." Some students reiterated chapter policies, stating that their fraternity "does not serve alcohol;" and while I know this to be policy for many fraternities, I also know from the bulk of the interviews, coupled with my work in the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life that fraternities simply do not abide by this policy. In the course of such an interview, some students even "told" on themselves, explaining a risk management strategy that indicated they do indeed serve alcohol to guests. Notably, at the start of many interviews, students tended to perform, or narrate, a more positive version of Greek life to me (an outsider), though through the course of the interview most seemed to become more comfortable, offering nuanced or critical takes on Greek life. Aside from such observations, my position as a mid-thirties, lesbian, middle class, white woman perhaps enabled me to leverage some similarity with IFC and Panhellenic respondents while utilizing my personal distance from Greek life to ask questions as in interested observer, unfamiliar with the ins-and-outs of Greek social life. While I understood Greek life stereotypes from media portrayals, I had less familiarity with

multicultural Greek organizations upon starting this research. With these interviews, I was very much an outsider, and sought these interviews to understand how the well-documented social problems of "white" Greek life may manifest or differ from issues facing other Greek life communities.

I conducted interviews with 47 Greek life members, which served as the primary data for this study. I additionally interviewed one member of a non-Greek student organization with close ties to the USFC council. This interview was scheduled at the recommendation of USFC members who cited close ties between Latinx student groups, suggesting overlap between Greek and non-Greek organizations in this community. Panhellenic and IFC organizations represented the vast majority of the sample. While I was able to interview at least one student from each council, the smaller sample size (from ASFC and NPHC, in particular) limited my ability to identify patterns within those councils. Students will be identified by pseudonym and their respective council. Table 1.2 shows the number of participants by council. Table 1.3 shows the demographic data for the participants, including their pseudonyms, ages, gender, sexual identity, which council they participate in, and race.

Table 1.2. Participation by Council

Council	Interview Participants
Interfraternity Council (IFC)	19
Panhellenic (DCPA)	17
United Sorority and Fraternity Council (USFC)	5
Professional Sorority and Fraternity Council (PSFC)	4
Asian Sorority and Fraternity Council (ASFC)	1
National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)	1
Non-Greek Latinx Student Org	1
Total	48

Table 1.3. Student Interview Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Sexual Identity	Council	Race
Aaron	20	Man	Gay	IFC	Nat. Hawaiian/Pac. Isl.; White
Adrianna	21	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	Hispanic/Latino
Akira	21	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	Asian
Ana	19	Woman	Heterosexual	USFC	Hispanic/Latino
Andrea	19	Woman	Lesbian	Panhellenic	White
Caleb	19	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White
Chandra	22	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	Asian; South Asian
Cody	22	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White
Danielle	18	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	White
Danny	21	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	Asian
Dara	21	Woman	Lesbian	Panhellenic	Asian; White
David	20	Man	Bisexual	IFC	Middle Eastern; White
Devon	22	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	Black/African Am.
Ella	20	Woman	Heterosexual	PSFC	Asian
Gabe	22	Man	Gay	IFC	Hispanic/Latino
Gemma	22	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	White
Hannah	20	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	White
Heath	22	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White
Isabella	23	Woman	Heterosexual	USFC	Hispanic/Latino
Jared	21	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White
Jason	20	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White
Javier	21	Man	Heterosexual	USFC	Hispanic/Latino
Jen	21	Woman	Heterosexual	ASFC	Asian
Jess	20	Woman	Heterosexual	PSFC	White; Asian

Table 1.3, continued

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Sexual Identity	Council	Race
Julie	21	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	White
Kate	22	Woman	Bisexual	Panhellenic	White
Kiana	22	Woman	Heterosexual	NPHC	Black/African Am.
Lana	20	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	White
Lauren	21	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	White
Luke	21	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White
Manuela	22	Woman	Bisexual	Latinx Org	Hispanic/Latino
Marielle	20	Woman	Bisexual	USFC	Hispanic/Latino
Matthew	22	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White
Melissa	22	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	White
Mia	21	Woman	Bisexual	PSFC	Hispanic/Latino
Michael	22	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White
Natalie	22	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	White
Owen	21	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	Middle Eastern
Peter	19	Man	Heterosexual	PSFC	Asian
Raphael	21	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White
Sam	21	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White
Shira	22	Woman	Bisexual	Panhellenic	White; Middle Eastern
Thomas	21	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	Hispanic/Latino; White
Toby	19	Woman	Bisexual	Panhellenic	White
Trevor	22	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White; Middle Eastern
Valeria	21	Woman	Heterosexual	USFC	Hispanic/Latino
Vanessa	21	Woman	Heterosexual	Panhellenic	Asian
Zayn	20	Man	Heterosexual	IFC	White

Over the course of my time at the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life, I conducted interviews with three staff members working with students in Greek life. Finally, I conducted one additional interview with a staff member from the Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs (OSSJA), the office that investigates student misconduct, save sexual harassment and assault, which are handled by the Title IX office. I also contacted the Title IX office, although they did not respond to my request for an interview.

All interviews were transcribed and uploaded to *NVivo* for coding and qualitative data analysis. I developed initial codes from interview notes and memos, having some sense of emerging themes of data collected. After the interviews were complete, I applied topic codes such as "alcohol problems," "intervention," and "risk management." As I combed through the data, I returned to previously coded transcripts to ensure consistency in the identification and application of emerging patterns, developing more thematic codes as interview transcripts were reviewed.

Research Design Terminology

The term *sexual harm* was used in this study as an umbrella term to encompass sexual assault and sexual harassment, but also as a term that focused on perceptions of the person at the receiving end of unwelcome behavior. *Sexual harm* was a term used in interviews with students in order to capture a wider spectrum of behaviors, rather than focusing solely on *sexual assault*, which itself is defined as an unwanted, non-consensual *sexual act*. Given that many people are prone to minimize their experiences of unwelcome touching or sexual attention, I hoped that a more open-ended term might elicit a wider range of narratives from participants.

Additionally, throughout the dissertation I refer to *men* and *women*. All of the students who participated in my research identified with binary categories of man or woman. This is not

to say that gender non-conforming or nonbinary individuals do not participate in Greek life. That said, with exception of the co-ed professional fraternities, all sororities and fraternities are single gender organizations. While some are trans inclusive, individuals joining must live and identify as a woman (for sororities) or as a man (for fraternities). In this way, Greek life undoubtedly reinforces a gender binary. The terms *women* and *men* were not used to render those community members who may identify as nonbinary invisible, but to highlight and draw attention to the impact of this strict binary on sorority/fraternity relations. By and large, these are traditional organizations that structure student life in a binary fashion.

Framing the Study

This study began with the intention to interrogate the concept of *consent*, and understand how students grappled with issues of consent. However, the data pulled the research more directly toward an analysis of gender inequality. While students utilized the word *consent* to discuss appropriate behavior when seeking sexual activity, they did not generally interrogate the relationship between consent and sexual harm. Given the explosion of popular discourse on consent in recent years, I assumed that participants might lean on the term heavily in discussions of sexual harm. Although consent served as an appropriate prompt to talk about issues of sexual harm, students generally assumed that everyone would know what consent means, including those perpetrating harm.

Students spoke about their experiences and frustrations with Greek life, their efforts to prevent and intervene in risky situations, and the challenges they have faced when advocating for change. Throughout these discussions, gendered contrasts began to emerge with respect to students' experiences and understanding of sexual harm. In other words, within the structure of

Greek life, students tended to identify the problem of sexual harm as a *gender* problem, not necessarily a *consent* problem.

In order to contextualize the problem, students' relationships to Greek stereotypes will be explored in Chapter Two. Although students pushed back on negative associations with Greek life, they detailed a lopsided culture of partying that exacerbates risk of sexual harm. In Chapter Three, gendered subjectivity will be examined in relation to sexual harm, illustrating how women and men position themselves in proximity to sexual harm as potential victims and bystanders, respectively, and the strategies they undertake to manage risk. Such subjectivities are often related to a particular framing of the problem as structural or individualized, a topic I will explore in Chapter Four. Chapter Five will discuss student avoidance of institutional avenues for reporting and seeking redress in the wake of an incident, and internal student activism (such as the disaffiliation) as a response to the failure of both fraternities *and* the university to meaningfully address issues of sexual harm within the community. Finally, the concluding chapter will summarize findings, discuss implications, and suggest how this research advances our understanding of sexual harm in a structured student community.

CHAPTER TWO

GREEK CULTURE AND INSTITUTIONS

While sorority and fraternity life organizations operate independently, their reputations are intertwined. One fraternity member commented, "If you have one chapter on campus that has a very bad reputation and is just not a good fraternity—they get kicked off, and they're in trouble with the school, and they lose their charter for whatever reason, as a hypothetical—that reflects poorly on all of Greek life." Members of fraternities and sororities are acutely aware that a scandal emerging from one chapter will have impacts that reverberate across the entire community. The distinctions and boundaries drawn between and amongst fraternities and sororities have little relevance to a scrutinizing public. Participants in this study frequently disputed the reduction of their community into a monolithic hotbed of alcohol abuse, hazing, and sexual assault. The perception that Greek life receives a disproportionate amount of "bad press" compared with other campus communities is widespread among members at UC Davis. Members grappled with Greek stereotypes throughout our discussions, frequently contesting their accuracy, while simultaneously acknowledging that some stereotypes do indeed reflect real issues in the community.

The vast majority of students interviewed expressed a great deal of ambivalence about the broader *culture* of Greek life. Many reported that they would never have expected to join a Greek organization before coming to campus, and most stated that *their* organization was not like *other* sororities or fraternities. When asked why they joined their chapter, students often mentioned their own initial misgivings about joining Greek life, but were looking for community—a way to make UC Davis feel "smaller." They were quick to mention that fraternities and sororities were values-driven organizations and frequently expressed a

connection to the philanthropic causes they support, initially downplaying Greek life's reputation as a party culture.

As students touted the less notorious aspects of Greek life (philanthropy and service), I recalled a particularly notable moment in my graduate career while working as a teaching assistant for a course covering the topic of stigma. Students were asked to write a paper about a stigmatized subculture, and one student (presumably in a sorority) wanted to focus her paper on the stigma of being involved in Greek life. Despite the social benefits of being involved in Greek life, this student felt that the negative perceptions of Greek life were akin to the experience of stigma. Similarly, participants in this project felt that Greek life received unfair criticism from peers and excessive scrutiny from campus administration, suggesting that they were well aware of stereotypes associated with Greek life, and often felt maligned by such narratives. In particular, the participants resisted reductive narratives that painted all sorority or fraternity members as affluent, white *bimbos* and *jocks*. Still, many students conceded that broader cultural stereotypes related to alcohol, partying, and gender had some merit.

Broad Stereotypes

What are the stereotypes and narratives that students have confronted? Stereotypes generally tended to cluster around *who* joins Greek life, and relatedly, *what* they do in Greek life. In other words, stereotypes coalesced around the identity of the typical *frat bro* or *sorority girl*, and the activities central to Greek participation.

For the male participants involved in Greek life, discussion of stereotypes conjured a particular image of the *frat bro*, primarily concerned with "drinking, hooking up with women, and generally being rambunctious and disrespectful," as one of the interviewees said. No fewer than seven participants mentioned fraternity life's association with *Chad culture* or *Chads and*

Brads. References to *Chad culture* or *Chads and Brads* invoked the stereotype of an entitled, affluent, white, heterosexual fraternity brother. For example, a fraternity brother named "Chad" might strut around campus in Bermuda shorts, a preppy t-shirt, and boat shoes. His dad is probably a lawyer (a former fraternity brother himself), and ready to intervene when Chad finds himself in hot water following a "boys will be boys" moment. Notably, the term *Chad* also has been used within *incel* circles to reference a sexually successful, "alpha" man (*incel* being short form for "involuntary celibate," a status and identity embraced by young men who desire but have never had sex with a woman). These associations tend to cluster around an aggressive "toxic masculinity"—a fraternity brother who drinks to excess, hazes new members, and sexually coerces women. Men often admitted their biases prior to joining Greek life, assuming that fraternity life revolved around "drinking and partying and girls" (Caleb, IFC). Sorority members, on the other hand, generally resisted assumptions that they were *airheads*, more concerned with gaining the attention of fraternity men than their own sisterhood or academic performance.

Participants also noted the class and racial associations with Greek life (whiteness and upper-middle class). One participant, Lana (Panhellenic), conceded that she imagined sorority girls as "wealthy, privileged, mean, and catty." She said, "That's just kind of the image that I had in my head beforehand, just from media and everything." In fact, the participants cited media portrayals of Greek life as the primary driver of the stereotypes that have circulated about sorority women and fraternity men. Andrea, a lesbian in a Panhellenic sorority stated, "All these movies are portraying [sorority life] like the popular, beautiful girls go to these fraternity parties and meet these hot, rich men, and that's their life, and then … [it's] happily ever after." Similarly, Kate remarked, "I think one of the biggest stereotypes of [sororities] is that it's only for skinny,

white girls." Women generally took issue with the notion that all sorority girls are wealthy, white, vacuous, superficial, and willing to betray other women in order to garner standing with desirable fraternity men.

"It's Different Here." Misconceptions and Exceptionalism

When discussing universalizing stereotypes, participants frequently dismissed them as *misconceptions*. Josh (IFC) commented, "The super bad hazing and stuff, that's not how it is. Most people probably come to college with that misconception. They're like, 'Oh, it's just a bunch of alpha male dudes trying to be alpha.' In my experience, it's just down to earth people." Although many participants admitted that they held stereotypical beliefs about sorority and fraternity life upon entering college, they were quick to criticize such beliefs as one-dimensional and inaccurate. To the extent that stereotypes regarding hazing, racism, and sexual assault have veracity, participants were quick to disavow such practices.

Whether applied to their own organization, or the UC Davis Greek community more broadly, most students subscribed to a sort of *organizational exceptionalism*, whereby their chapter was somehow different from other Greek organizations. If the common perception of Greek life is that it is a hotspot for hazing, binge drinking, and sexual assault, UC Davis Greek organizations purport to be a kinder, gentler, more inclusive cultural space. This notion allowed the participants to engage with dominant stereotypes, while simultaneously distancing themselves and their organizations from the most problematic and harmful characterizations of Greek life.

Students perceived UC Davis Greek life to be an outlier amidst the bastion of "traditional" Greek life. Kate (Panhellenic) noted that,

> Davis is a pretty open and welcoming community, I think, compared to a lot of bigger universities. In Greek life, specifically, I just felt we were trying to be more progressive

> and trying to improve things more so than maybe some of the bigger southern universities that were more set in older, traditional ways.

Students in the social (historically white) sororities and fraternities often pointed to southern Greek life as the quintessential, stereotypical Greek experience. The virality of *TikTok* "Bama Rush," (videos shared by students at the University of Alabama documenting their experiences of rush week) for instance, provided an easy contrast to their own Greek community. Students often cited southern institutions as the prototypical representation of Greek life, largely responsible for its associations with hazing, binge drinking, classism, racism, and accentuated gender-/hetero- normativity. UC Davis Greek life, on the other hand, was frequently cast as a substantially more liberal community than its counterparts on more "traditional" or southern campuses in the United States. Hannah (Panhellenic) commented,

> My sorority does a lot of stuff that's for diversity, equity, and inclusion, so we really stress making sure that everyone feels included when we do recruitment—that it's a very equal process for everyone. I think that there's a lot of stereotypes of racism and things like that within the Greek community, but I would say, Davis is hyper aware of that and is very careful about that type of thing, and hazing doesn't really exist.

Where chapters on other college campuses might condone, or even endorse some of more problematic traditions and recruitment practices, students at UC Davis often acknowledged that more work was required to address systemic inequality both within their community, and the Greek system at large. Participants positioned themselves as potential agents of change, recognizing social problems emerging from such institutions, and seeking to mitigate some of the most egregious issues.

Just as students in the social sororities and fraternities distanced themselves from "traditional" southern Greek life, participants from multicultural organizations drew distinctions between their chapters and predominantly white organizations. Recall that the United Sorority and Fraternity Council (USFC) represents multicultural Greek organizations on campus. One

USFC sorority member, Ana, noted that she did not even know that multicultural Greek organizations existed until she came to college:

> I honestly did not know that there was multicultural Greek life until I came on campus. So, what I knew was just that [IFC/Panhellenic] party. That's all. That's all they really do, and I felt like that's not what I really wanted to do. I don't want to join an organization just to do that. I wanted more than that. I feel like [with] the multiculturals, you earn your letters. You don't just have to look a certain way, or get along with someone for you to automatically become a member. No, you have to go through a *process*. You have to really dive deep into the organization, and you are going to earn your letters, which I feel like is a big differentiator because I know that for the predominantly white Greeks, you tend to just rush for a week, and then *boom*, you're in. That is not how it works for a multicultural. It's a completely different thing. You have to actually earn it. It's a lot of time. It's a lot of commitment. Every organization has its own process, but that's the difference.

Like Ana, Marielle (USFC) only knew about predominantly white organizations until she met others in Latina sororities. Compared with Panhellenic sororities, she distinguished her organization as less focused on interacting with fraternal counterparts:

> So the difference between the Panhellenic/IFC and USFC and other organizations that aren't predominantly white—for me, a huge thing that I saw was the idea of socialization and social interaction. Even just looking at it, Panhellenic and IFC are focused a lot more on interacting with one another than doing anything else. Of course they have their stated philanthropies and core values and everything, but based on what you see from their members online, from their social media, a lot of it is being together with other organizations. Of course, social interaction is very important. But I feel like that was such a huge part of it for them, just being social.

Other USFC members shared similar sentiments, perceiving their council to be less focused on partying than IFC and Panhellenic. Furthermore, USFC members stressed the importance of removing all chapter symbols (i.e. letters or insignia) from party spaces. Javier (USFC) explains:

> [IFC and Panhellenic] keep their letters around, which I guess is a culture thing. For us, our letters, you can't see them at any party. You don't see them anywhere. They'll be wearing their shirts while they're partying and stuff. If you see us anywhere near that type of stuff [like alcohol], you don't see letters. In USFC, we don't affiliate with drinking or partying because it's unprofessional.

Although USFC groups do indeed host parties, it is considered highly inappropriate and unprofessional to drink while wearing your letters (i.e., representing the organization). For the USFC students, partying can happen alongside Greek life, but it should not be a core feature of their Greek life. Furthermore, since multicultural Greeks generally do not have the resources to establish and insure official chapter houses, their parties are not centrally organized around fraternity houses. Instead, kickbacks or smaller, informal parties might be held at a member's apartment or house, creating symbolic distance between the party and the Greek organization.

Participants in USFC organizations contrasted their reverence of organizational mission (as divorced from partying) with the perceptions of Panhellenic-IFC blurring of social and professional lines. This emphasis on "professionalism was also discussed during conversations on values and service. Marielle explained that non-white organizations placed greater emphasis on community service and involvement than IFC and Panhellenic. To some extent, this perspective was supported by end of year records—while IFC/Panhellenic organizations often raised more philanthropy funds, other Greek organizations frequently logged more community service hours relative to size.

As "multicultural" Greeks, Latinx fraternities and sororities found greater community in other Latinx organizations (e.g., Hermanas Unidas, Danzantes del Alma, Mujeres Ayudando la Raza, etc.) than other Greek chapters. In fact, while interviewing a member of a USFC chapter, they recommended being in touch with other Latinx affinity organizations due to their social ties. To the extent that USFC collectively attempts to address issues of sexual harm, other Latinx organizations outside of Greek life would be privy to those community dialogues. Multicultural Greek participants also emphasized the relationships they built with chapters on other campuses. Valeria (USFC) explained this broader connection: "To us, the Greek life or the Greek

community is more of like what we're doing to help the Latino community—using our own pillars and values, and the time and resources that we have." To that point, Valeria emphasized the low relative cost of joining her sorority versus a Panhellenic sorority. As financial constraints often pose barriers to those interested in Greek life, Valeria noted that keeping dues low reflected their priorities in valuing accessibility.

Students in the SFL community were quick to dispel the notion that all members of Greek life are arrogant *Chads and Brads*, or vacuous *bimbos*. They reported feeling prematurely judged by other students when disclosing their participation in the sorority and fraternity system. Because of this, they reflexively distanced themselves from broad stereotypes that portrayed their community in a negative light. That said, after articulating their issues with totalizing stereotypes, students revealed a more complicated and often critical perspective of their community. For students in IFC and Panhellenic organizations, partying is a cornerstone of the Greek experience. Whether or not students rejected or embraced the party culture associated with Greek life, they admitted it has an outsized influence on the SFL community, and contributes to some of their most intractable problems, including issues of sexual harm.

Truth Behind the Stereotype: Parties, Hierarchies, and Heteronormativity

Students I spoke with took exception to the idea that *all* sorority and fraternity members are privileged, superficial clones, more concerned with partying and *hooking up* than with academics. Their impetus to push back on such stereotypes as a desire for recognition of their individuality and complexity of their experience was understandable. Such knee-jerk responses served to distance individual participants from what many students eventually acknowledged were firmly established systemic issues. Panhellenic and IFC members' rejection of the image of Greek life (as white, straight, and upper-middle class) is more *aspirational* than *actual*. While

race-based discrimination is no longer allowed in Panhellenic and IFC recruitment, a host of policies and traditions remain in place that serve to uphold a straight, white, affluent norm. For example, annual baseline dues to be in a Panhellenic sorority run upwards of $1,000-$1,500, not including the money required to purchase event-specific clothing and accessories. IFC fraternity dues are no less imposing. Time commitments are also high, with financial penalties levied for missing mandatory organizational meetings and events. Working students struggle to balance obligations of membership with work duties. Furthermore, while there is some racial diversity in most organizations, they indeed remain white-centered organizations. Adrianna, a Latina participant, expressed her frustration after joining what she thought was the "most diverse" Panhellenic sorority:

> It was just too much because I was working two jobs, and then we still have school, and I don't think they were that understanding about it. I'm Mexican and I was friends with the other Latina girls. It felt like it was just us, and then everyone else. Another Latina girl, she expressed—because our dues were going to increase and they were voting on it—how it's just hard because she pays for everything [herself].

Additionally, Adrianna commented that when a Latina member raised concern about organizing an exchange with a fraternity that was already facing sexual assault allegations, the member was dismissed as being "aggressive." Adrianna felt that these sorts of micro aggressions were common in her sorority, and led her to eventually leave.

Despite participant assertions that UC Davis and/or their organization is exceptional, many (Panhellenic women in particular) conceded that Greek life has a "diversity problem." Recent years have seen Panhellenic sororities attempt to implement Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives or committees. When asked about DEI work in sororities, participants cited changes to policies in relation to dress code or appearance that assume a white membership base. Dress codes requiring "nude" color shoes (i.e., light tan), or hair-straightening

requirements, for example, can exclude members with darker skin tones or textured hair. Unfortunately, most interview participants who volunteered to be on a DEI committee expressed frustration that they had little power to change anything that would make a substantive shift in welcoming a wider variety of members. Students understood that the cost and culture of these groups made joining either unattainable or undesirable for lower-income students and for students of color.

This concentration of relative wealth and cultural homogeneity enables an active party scene to flourish. Participants in Panhellenic and IFC organizations shared that Greek stereotypes regarding parties and alcohol abuse had some merit. Danielle (Panhellenic) commented,

> Alcohol use [and] partying is just part of Greek life, and I think a lot of people, especially people who have family or parents who have been in it, and have their own stories from their college days . . . do come into it with that specific, not goal—but they want that, as part of the experience.

Though several participants expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with Greek life party culture, access to party spaces was often an allure for incoming members. Membership in a sorority or fraternity offers the promise of *belonging* to a particular organization, as well as admission to social spaces enlivened by music, alcohol, and sexual opportunities. This is particularly evident in the case of Panhellenic and IFC chapters. Whereas students across different councils reported joining Greek life to find community with shared values, only IFC-Panhellenic members cited *parties* as a core feature of the Greek experience. Whether or not these students "bought-in" to the scene, they generally admitted that their experiences as members in social sororities and fraternities were greatly impacted by the dominance of party culture.

Beyond this, many students articulated that the structure, or ecology, of this aspect of Greek life contributed to the persistence of sexual harm. The primacy of a party scene dominated

by IFC fraternity houses structures status hierarchies between chapters and fortifies heteronormative power relations between sororities and fraternities. Though not all members in Greek life embrace the scene with the same level of enthusiasm, it remaines the social lifeblood of the community—a primary way that members socialize, and chapters establish community reputations.

The Power of the Party

The ecology of the Greek life party scene is riddled with power asymmetries, as large fraternity houses control primary resources required to host social exchanges (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; DeSantis 2007; Hamilton 2007; Hirsch and Khan 2020; Ispa-Landa and Oliver 2020). Regardless of whether individual participants endorse and participate in this aspect of Greek life, they recognize it as a core feature of their community.

Although parties are a central site for Greek social relations, within the IFC-Panhellenic dynamic, Panhellenic houses are not allowed to host parties. They similarly have curfew restrictions on male guests visiting the sorority house. Such policies are historically rooted in upholding the morality of "traditional" white, upper-middle class femininity (DeSantis 2007). Currently, the National Panhellenic Conference (the national body overseeing all Panhellenic organizations), has indicated that such policies are in place "to create safe spaces for women on college/university campuses and support good citizenship, scholarship, leadership and engagement on campus" (NPC, 2022).

Although the stated intention of these policies is to keep sorority women safe, the result has been that women must rely on fraternity men in order to access party spaces. Akira (Panhellenic) expressed her frustration over men's monopoly on the party scene, and the disproportionate power it gives to IFC organizations: "Sororities can't throw parties; it's the guys

that throw parties. We can't have alcohol in our house, we can't have—I don't know—anything, and so a lot of power has been given to predominantly male organizations."

In their research examining sexual assault on college campuses, Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) found that men's control over fraternity parties often leaves women vulnerable to sexual assault. Party norms dictate that attendees participate in evening activities in a convivial fashion and show deference and graciousness to their fraternal hosts. This can constrain women's ability to respond to men's sexual expectations or advances. Mia, a woman in a professional sorority that socializes with IFC fraternities, commented upon the sexual expectations that may accompany entrance to a fraternity party:

> A lot of times you'll have to get your name on a list. And to get your name on the list, I think they expect you to—like, you can invite your friends if you put your name on the list—but you have to probably have sex with them that night or oftentimes, they'll be like "Oh, are you going to like have sex with me?"

It was evident from the interviews that women understand that their ability to participate in Greek social life may depend on staying in the good graces of fraternity men. Sorority women who want to engage in Panhellenic-IFC social life seemed to worry that rebuffing a popular or high-status fraternity brother could compromise their own position in the scene. They noted that their reliance on men's organizations to offer access to valuable social spaces can create a situation where they feel obligated to "go-along" with men's sexual advances for fear of retaliation.

In addition to controlling access to party spaces, men may also orchestrate rides home. While fraternity brothers might sleep at the fraternity house after a long night of partying, sorority women must consider how to get home safely. For example, Armstrong et al. assert that "Getting women drunk, blocking doors, and controlling transportation are common ways men try to prevent women from leaving sexual situations" (2006:491). When parties are hosted at

fraternity houses, women's reliance on men's willingness to drive them home can compromise their ability to safely decline sexual advances. Devon (IFC) explained hearing about one such situation:

> Being able to talk to both a victim and a perpetrator of sexual assault and hear both stories of what happened [is wild], where one person is like, "Oh, I just didn't realize [she felt that way]. Why didn't [she] say anything?" The other person is like, "No, I was very uncomfortable, but I was scared that he might not take me home after if I [said no]."

In many of these cases, women reported that the circumstances for ascertaining consent are compromised by environmental factors. While women may not have labeled all such encounters as "sexual assault," many were acutely aware of their relatively precarious position at fraternity parties. Given that much of this precarity is *built-in* to the structure of the Greek party scene, individual women must build strategies around this inequality, effectively having to individualize what is a socio-cultural (structural) problem, a point that will be discussed in the next chapter.

The premise of the Panhellenic-IFC disaffiliation illustrated the importance of parties to these Greek campus communities. That the main "stick" of women's disaffiliation strategy was a refusal to associate at parties with fraternities demonstrates the centrality of the exchanges (formally organized parties between fraternities and sororities) in this relationship. Still, the power of the Panhellenic "party strike" was undercut by the fact that fraternities could continue to host "open" parties, regardless of affiliation status. Women, on the other hand, were expected to relinquish access to social spaces in order to hold firm on the disaffiliation. Despite widespread support for the disaffiliation, many female participants experienced this action as unfairly restricting their own social life, rather than penalizing the fraternities.

In the midst of the disaffiliation, Josh (IFC) expressed skepticism of its efficacy: "[My sister] was in a sorority here and she just graduated, too. She was like, '[If you] tell sorority girls

they can't go to parties [then] no one will join.' It's just how it is." To Josh, access to fraternity parties is a major draw for all members of Greek life. Although sorority women organized to disaffiliate from one or more fraternities, they experienced the greater "burden" of restricted access to social spaces. During the disaffiliation, when women would "break rank" and attend open parties, they were often blamed for the failure of these efforts to make change:

> All the girls in sororities knew what was going on with [redacted fraternity name]. That was just one incident of many in the past, yet they still would be there every single weekend, knowing that it was not a safe space, knowing that these guys have a culture of not respecting women. (Aaron, IFC)

Trevor (IFC) echoed Aaron's statements:

> I think most sororities probably did follow the ban, but there were a few that did not. And because of that, that made [their] whole argument just die completely. [Panhellenic] set the rule, you guys set this whole thing, and then you guys are not following through with it. What the hell? What is that?

Both Aaron and Trevor overlooked the actions of other IFC organizations hosting parties in order to emphasize the responsibility that *women* have to avoid "bad fraternities." Within the ecosystem of the Greek social scene, sororities have relatively little autonomous power. This was primarily exercised in the form of refusal—a refusal to associate or attend parties with fraternal organizations. Unfortunately, this form of "power" does not enable greater freedom and access for women—rather, it constrains their movement and restricts their access. Women who sought out Greek life for access to parties felt such restrictions were unfair and untenable. Despite being in the relatively disempowered position when it comes to Panhellenic-IFC social life, sororities are held responsible for the "failures" of the disaffiliation to create widespread change.

Hierarchies and Heteronormativity

Participants were keenly aware of the interplay between Greek party culture and hierarchies among Panhellenic sororities and IFC fraternities. My interviews confirmed the

finding that “men are one of the main conduits of a sorority's reputation” (Handler 1995:249). Women were particularly cognizant of the role that fraternity assessments played in their designated ranking. According to members of Greek life, such assessments were generally made on the basis of who is the most fun, flirty, and attractive. Danielle (Panhellenic) commented, “A lot of the [*pause*] heavy air quotes [*pause*] top sororities who are the ones that you would probably imagine to be sorority people. Those chapters, in my opinion, tend to be less diverse in terms of race, body type, and all those other things.” Here, Danielle invoked a shared imagination—the image that first pops into our collective mind when we think, *sorority girl*. Like “stereotypical Barbie,” a stereotypical sorority girl is thin, white, attractive, presumably heterosexual, and upper-middle class. Danielle distinguished “top sororities” from sororities like her own (a lower tier sorority), indicating the correlation between popularity and adherence to conventional beauty standards. Sororities that fall lower on the hierarchy, reportedly have a greater diversity of members with respect to race and body type. Trevor (IFC) had a good friend in a low-tier sorority who told him, “Apparently there’s some frats that won’t even socialize with them just because they have fat girls; they have girls of color there.” Although the participants touted the virtues of “diversifying” the Greek scene, status hierarchies continue to value and reward the thin, white, feminine ideal within a sexualized party scene.

Participants in lower tier sororities cited two reasons for their low status in the hierarchy: (1) perceptions that they were not sexually appealing to fraternity men, and (2) perceptions that they were not fun to socialize with. Toby (Panhellenic) commented that in addition to “hotness,” fraternities look for “how well you can party. So, if you can hold your alcohol, if you can keep up with the guys, if you can play pong . . . that type of stuff is also a huge factor in it.” Whether in a fraternity or sorority, students are attracted to Greek life and the party scene for the promise

of an exciting, fun time. Armstrong et al. (2006) demonstrate how the "production of fun" at Greek parties establishes social expectations that make sexual assault more likely. "A fun partier throws him or herself into the event, drinks, displays an upbeat mood, and evokes revelry in others" (Armstrong et al. 2006:490). Fraternity brothers value women who "go with the flow," play drinking games, and handle their alcohol without getting "messy" or complaining. While many women voiced criticism of men's control over party spaces in interviews, they noted that they must mute their criticisms at parties, lest they be labeled *complainers* and *nags*. Sara Ahmed (2021) explains how the *nag* can become a *hag*, or an undesirable woman; women are seen to turn to feminism out of envy, when men find them undesirable. In this way, the complaint is dismissed as the grumbling of an envious woman. Such characterizations serve as silencing tactic for sorority women who may take issue with fraternity brothers' behaviors.

Vanessa, a member of one of the top-tier Panhellenic sororities, expressed some discomfort with the ranking system:

> A lot of people just want to be in the top sorority. And those rankings are kind of decided based on who the frats like, which I'm not a fan of. But again, at Davis I don't think it's as big an issue as at most other schools. There is a little bit of competitiveness between sororities, especially the top few, but I prefer to avoid that aspect.

Although Vanessa would "prefer to avoid that aspect," women cannot opt out of the sorority ranking systems. As Ispa-Landa and Oliver (2020) point out, women in top-tier sororities must constantly maintain an "attractive" appearance and demonstrate interest in socializing with top-tier fraternities in order to preserve their status at the top. Despite their criticisms of hierarchical ranking, women who want to engage meaningfully in the Greek social scene feel resigned to accept the ranking system.

If women's place in the hierarchy is largely determined by fraternity perceptions of them, are men subjected to similar scrutiny from sororities? Although a few participants referenced that

top-tier sororities prefer to socialize with stereotypically athletic fraternity brothers, they were less likely to cite attractiveness as a main criteria for rankings. This reveals a gendered double-standard in expectations regarding beauty and attractiveness. Top-tier fraternities tend to fall into two categories: (1) *Party Bros*, and (2) *Safe Guys*. Despite having a notorious record regarding sexual assault, fraternities known for partying retain their position at the top of the hierarchy by dominating the party scene. Students attracted to the scene enjoy indulging in a wild night with the sense that "anything" might happen. Houses that throw parties with novel attractions (e.g., a snow machine in the backyard, a wrestling pit, etc.) are simultaneously risky *and* fun. They can "afford" to have a poor reputation regarding sexual assault as long as they continued to host exciting and lively parties. Alternatively, fraternities might build a good reputation among sororities by vocally aligning themselves with women's concerns regarding sexual harm in Greek life. Unlike sororities, men's organizations tend to benefit from their apparent associations with feminism. Whereas men's attentiveness to gender inequality can elevate their social standing in fraternity rankings, articulation of the same dynamics by sorority women can provoke scorn.

The relationship between sororities and fraternities reflects a structurally embedded gender inequality complemented by institutionalized heterosexuality. Sororities and fraternities boasted of their inclusivity towards queer members, however Panhellenic-IFC relations are overwhelmingly guided by heteronormative logics. The term *heteronormativity* is used here to refer to the ways heterosexuality is naturalized as the default orientation for members of Greek life. Still, I want to take Stevi Jackson's advice to move beyond heteronormativity to examine "the link between institutionalized heterosexuality and gender hierarchy" (2018:136). Furthermore, Adrienne Rich (1980) suggests that heterosexuality should be studied as a political

institution, and that compulsory heterosexuality sustains men's power over women, stripping women of their sexual autonomy and potential. That the prestige of women's organizations is determined by fraternity preference is one manifestation of these links. Women's status in Greek life is predicated on their ability to fit into the role of attractive, available (i.e., heterosexual), and deferential woman. Within the Panhellenic and IFC dynamic, sorority life is centrally organized around fraternities in a way that fraternity life is decidedly *not* organized around sororities.

The presumption of heterosexuality heavily guides most aspects of Greek social life. For example, consider that exchanges only happen between sororities and fraternities—three- or four-way exchanges may include multiple organizations, but it is always a "mixed" affair. Party activities such as *cuffing* or *cuffs* prompt and reinforce a particular form of heterosexual mixing. In cuffing, two people are handcuffed (or zip-tied) together until they jointly finish a bottle of alcohol. In an effort to be more inclusive, students have emphasized that you can be cuffed with a friend, and drink water rather than alcohol. Still, most students understood that diverging from hetero-party expectations (i.e., mixed gender with alcohol) would be challenging in a social environment that expects party goers to be game for the evening's festivities.

Another example can be found in the form of dress code requirements. Sororities dictate dress code requirements for their members that frequently privileged a "traditional" feminine appearance, in addition to assuming a white membership base. Women often mentioned that "heat on hair" requirements (i.e., you must straighten or style your hair) neglected to consider members who might have more textured hair that cannot be easily straightened. Andrea (Panhellenic), a self-identified butch lesbian in one of the lower tier sororities, felt like she was the only visibly queer (i.e., gender non-conforming) person in a sorority at UC Davis; she suspected it allowed the sorority to market themselves as "diverse." She explained:

> A lot of it [like the dress codes] is just this grand show of femininity—crazy hair, hours on your makeup, drop all this money on clothes, and a pretty dress, and the highest heels you can wear, stuff like that. Every single meeting that I went to where they were like, "Hey. Here's your dress code for this event," I didn't feel comfortable saying it to a group of people, so I would always go up to whoever was organizing the event after and be like, "Can I wear a suit instead" … They were like, "Yes. That would be fine. Don't worry about it." So, it got kind of easy, but the feeling of discomfort never left. It was always very much like I can wear something that's comfortable to me, but I need to also be aware that I'm going to be the *only* person in this group of 80 people who is not wearing a dress or who's not having their makeup done. So, they were accommodating in that fact, but they never really will understand that feeling [that] you can say that you're accommodating by letting me do all this, but then give me dirty looks for wearing a suit to a formal event. [It is] like you're kind of backtracking there in terms of your level of *woke*, I guess, is a good way to put it. Or, how progressive you're trying to act as an organization like this. You know what I mean? I brought my girlfriend to a formal event and the whole entire time I was so uncomfortable. I was like, "I am never doing this again."

Although Andrea's sorority accommodated her requests, she felt like a perpetual outsider in Greek life. Dress code requirements and outfit suggestions clarified the sorority's "ideal" presentation of femininity, and rendered her style of presentation invisible, or undesirable. She admitted she joined primarily because her mom was in a sorority, and she was looking for friends—although skeptical, Andrea was curious to see if they would "accept" her as a masculine lesbian. Her incorporation into the sorority was strained at best, and she felt particularly unwelcome at mixers hosted with fraternities—spaces with a clear heterosexual imperative.

Aaron (IFC), a gay man, commented:

> Every single gay person who joins a fraternity or Greek life will have to change, and will be different because of it, in order to be sort of comfortable in those spaces. You have to change yourself in some degree. At the end of the day, no matter how accepting or inclusive they want to be, Greek life is just built for straight people.

Aaron experienced Greek life as an aggressively heterosexual space, and although he was "accepted," he felt like a perpetual outsider—it is an example of *diversity* without *inclusion*. Still, Aaron was a member of one of the top-tier fraternities in IFC, while Andrea belonged to a bottom-tier sorority. Andrea's masculine appearance was a jarring affront to compulsory

heterosexuality in Greek life, rendering her invisible at some times, and marginalizing her at others.

Dara, a sorority president who "came out" while in Greek life, felt frustrated that her concerns were given less merit after coming out as lesbian, and that tolerance of her identity was performative or superficial:

> Greek life is performative in a lot of areas and it's performative in queer allyship, allyship [for people of color], and especially survivor and assault allyship. I really saw that when I stepped into that president's role. And at the same time, I figured out my sexuality, so I was being very open about my identity. I came out as lesbian to my whole chapter. And I think that changed the way that a lot of people saw me and my actions towards disaffiliation because [when I said,] "No, don't go party with the frat men." [They were] just like, "Oh no; just because you hate men doesn't mean that, we can't just go."

Women in Dara's sorority understood her lesbianism to indicate a divestment in heterosexuality and in fraternity parties, more broadly. Although Dara admitted that was somewhat true, she felt frustrated that her efforts to change systemic problems in Greek life were undermined by her sexual identity. For heterosexual sorority women, lesbians do not have "skin in the game" and therefore cannot properly balance the needs and desires of (heterosexual) sorority membership. Of course, lesbians are not the only sorority members who would be happy to sever sorority-fraternity ties, though these voices appeared to be in the minority.

Men's power over the party scene compelled a particularly strict adherence to a feminine ideal, both in appearance and behavior. Women were expected to look sexually appealing to men and play the role of enthusiastic party-goer, deferential and grateful to their fraternity hosts. To challenge such expectations, heterosexual women risk relinquishing access to the fun, social, and sexualized spaces that attracted them to the scene in the first place. In this way, institutionalized heterosexuality props up and reinforces gender inequality in Panhellenic and IFC relations. Female participants articulated numerous complaints with men's dominance of Greek party

culture, but in the absence of larger structural changes, they relied on individual strategies and adaptations to manage the vulnerabilities stemming from this socio-cultural context.

CHAPTER THREE

GENDERED SUBJECTIVITY AND SEXUAL HARM

For this study, the disaffiliation between Panhellenic and IFC provided an obvious prompt to inquire about issues of sexual harm in the SFL community during interviews. Given the publicity of the events that transpired, most participants agreed that their community struggled to combat and address sexual harm, and that it impacted their community negatively. That said, one key contrast emerged with respect to how students positioned themselves in proximity to the problem of sexual harm—that is, the degree to which one might identify with issues of sexual harm, and express familiarity with (or knowledge of) the problem.

The concept of *proximity* more commonly refers to nearness or closeness, but here it is used to invoke the opposite—*distance* or *detachment*. Although some participants described their experiences with sexual harm as victims/survivors, or witnesses, others struggled to relate to the issue, never having experienced, or "seen it." Some brought it close, with personal stories animating their engagement; others only related to it vicariously through the stories of others. Proximity must be understood in both emotional and experiential terms, as it is central to shaping how men and women relate to sexual harm in clearly gendered ways. Discussions with students reveal the gendered subjectivity of sexual harm—a relationship constituted over time through experience and framed by cultural narratives regarding sex and gender. Where men's relationship to sexual harm involves distance, women's relationship to sexual harm involves closeness or intimacy. This "shows up" in their respective narratives about sexual harm, and, in turn, their relationship to risk and prevention.

When speaking of sexual harm and risk, women often referenced their own experiences of discomfort or boundary violation, identifying themselves as victims or potential victims of

sexual harm. Subsequently, they understood *risk* at a party to mean the risk of being assaulted, or the risk of another woman being assaulted. This is unsurprising given the extant research that estimates rates of sexual assault for college women falling between 20% and 36% (Cooper and Dranger 2018; Fisher et al. 2000; Krebs et al. 2007; Mellins et al. 2017). Moreover, numerous studies have found that participation in Greek life and the fraternity party scene is particularly hazardous for women (Armstrong et al. 2006; Boyle 2015; DeSantis 2007; Mohler-Kuo et al. 2004; Wright 1996). Generally, women are cognizant of these risks through statistics and cultural narratives, but many also carry personal experiences of commonplace harassment that heighten their awareness of the threat of sexual harm.

In contrast, men often positioned themselves as relative outsiders to the issues of sexual harm. To the extent they felt connected to the problem, they identified as allies, and interrupters, rather than victims themselves. They heard stories from sorority members or witnessed other men badgering women for time and attention, but rarely did they report experiencing sexual harm themselves. Although some of the men described receiving occasional unwelcome attention, they generally did not identify as victims or potential victims. When describing the problem of sexual harm in their community, almost all participants described an issue whereby reckless or clueless fraternity men violated the boundaries of sorority women. Still, most men were hesitant to position themselves as potential perpetrators—a relationship that would involve intimacy, or proximity to the problem. Rather, they situated themselves as bystanders, ready to intervene when questionable situations arose. Men frequently understood risk as an *organizational* problem, fearing institutional repercussions should an incident occur at their property or involve one of their members.

Women and Proximity

As discussed previously, the disaffiliation between Panhellenic and IFC exemplified the way in which sexual harm emerges in the SFL community as a particularly gendered grievance. Panhellenic took action as the aggrieved party, a position put forth by the leaders of Panhellenic sororities and reflected in my interviews with various sorority members. Women's organizations, frustrated with the frequency and persistence of sexual harm impacting their members declared a halt to the relationship between men's and women's organizations. Faced with a lack of other options to force cultural change in their community, sororities at UC Davis opted for what amounted to a "party strike." The decision to disaffiliate due to the harms experienced by members (and the danger of future harm) illustrates the way that sorority members relate to this problem—as the primary recipients of unwelcome sexual contact.

In lieu of, or in addition to their own experiences, women invoked the experiences of their friends and sorority sisters to illustrate the problem of sexual misconduct in the Greek Community. Their narratives of sexual harm were further informed by gender and sexual scripts learned through childhood and adolescence, which warned them to be wary of men's motivations, particularly in the realm of sex and sexuality. Stories of assault and harm that circulated among sorority women tended to reinforce the narrative of fraternity dangers, a narrative that often was further bolstered by personal experience.

When asked about consent and sexual harm in their community, sorority women brought up first-hand accounts often, referencing experiences where they were the recipient of unwanted advances or touching. The experience of sexual harassment or harm was a part of their biography. One Panhellenic president, Gemma, remarked,

> Right before I came to college, I had my own experience that was like, 'Okay, I don't know if that was okay.' And that was something that I carried with me a lot. And through

> these conversations, I think it's brought a lot more of this out in me—an awareness of these issues and being as responsible as I can. When I came to college, and specifically when that first instance of the rumor of someone being sexually assaulted at that fraternity happened, I was very awakened. This is something that needs to change, and I'm not going to sit here and wait for that to happen. I really want to be involved in that conversation [about the disaffiliation].

Although she initially hedged about the nature of her experience, Gemma noted that she carried it with her through college. Upon hearing stories of women being assaulted in the community, she leveraged her experience as motivation to take action. Gemma's identification with survivors of sexual assault inspired her advocacy as a sorority president, and her desire to make change in the SFL community.

Weaving connections between personal experiences and other women's experiences, sorority participants understood sexual harm as a broader social issue. They framed their own stories of harm as routine transgressions experienced by the vast majority of women. When asked about inappropriate behaviors that she had seen or experienced, Melissa (Panhellenic) responded,

> One thing that is talked about is women do not like when we're dancing or walking around—and this is like something that we always talk about—and a guy has to get through and instead of just being like, "Excuse me," and walking through, he has to place his hand on your waist or somehow touch you to move you so that he can get through. And that's just something that everyone despises. I've never met a single woman that likes when someone does that.

Melissa expressed a collective grievance when highlighting this particular offense. The experience of unwelcome touching was so common that Melissa and her friends frequently talked about it. She viewed this form of imposed and unnecessary touch (of women by men moving through a crowded space) as a part of the larger problem of sexual harm within Greek spaces. Opportunistic groping is one piece of a larger pattern of men's entitlement to women's bodies. This transgression exemplifies a sort of casual, everyday violation of women's bodily

autonomy. Such boundary violations follow patterns identified by Carol Gardner (1995) in her book documenting street harassment of women. Gardner labels behaviors such as following and touching as *exploitations of presence*, calling attention to the fact that this sort of harassment "involves an abuse of the routine situations in which a person is near or comes into the ken of a stranger when in public" (1995:132). Sorority participants described scenarios where men would take advantage of their passage through a tight space (with a grope) or follow and corner them in conversation if unaccompanied. Although fraternity parties are not public spaces in the same way that a movie theater or park operates as a public space, women understand that their presence at a party often carries the risk of frequent and recursive intrusions.

"Common" exploitations like unwelcome touching in a crowd can have an enormous impact on feelings of safety. Lana (Panhellenic) expressed this sentiment, emphasizing the fear and discomfort that she had experienced when groped anonymously at parties: "I can speak from my own personal experience; you just walk through a party and people will touch you. And you don't know who, you don't know what's going on. That's super scary." Lana further described the gauntlet she encountered walking from one end of the room to another in a crowded and dimly lit fraternity house. Moving through these spaces, women described being startled and violated by anonymous and opportunistic hands. Spatial features like loud music, lighting, number of people, and available seating can all impact the ability of sorority members to navigate an environment safely (Boswell and Spade 1996; Hirsch and Khan 2020). These environmental factors exacerbated Lana's feelings of powerlessness while being groped, creating a "super scary" situation.

Women often used words like *scary* or *creepy* to describe the discomfiting experience of harassment. Lauren (Panhellenic) described an incident at a fraternity where she felt

uncomfortable: “My friend was seeing a guy in this frat, and I went with her to an event, and this one guy, he kept creeping me out. He just kept doing things that made me really uncomfortable. I won't go into too many specific details, but I was in a situation that I didn't want to be in.” In that particular case, another fraternity member noticed Lauren’s discomfort and intervened. Many sorority participants recounted the experience of getting cornered by a man who was either oblivious to, or disregarded, their signaled desire to exit the interaction. These signals include, but were not limited to, lack of eye contact (or eyes searching around the rest of the party), minimal verbal engagement, avoiding physical contact, and increasing physical distance. All participants tended to understand such signals as a desire to leave the interaction. Hannah (Panhellenic) commented,

> Getting to know people is very common [when] meeting people, but getting hit on, complimented, is kind of creepy, especially if I've never met them and I don't know any of their friends and stuff like that … making me feel kind of cornered or getting me stuck in the conversation when I'm clearly visibly uncomfortable, unable to kind of read my body language about it.

Given that parties are social spaces that expect and encourage heterosexual mixing, Hannah felt trapped when cornered by men who continued contact in spite of her lack of participation or engagement in conversation. Although they did not offer these stories as examples of sexual assault, women identified these sorts of incursions on their space and time as an indication of the ways men disregarded their communication (body language or otherwise) and demonstrated entitlement to women’s attention.

Sometimes parties served as a prelude to other troubling encounters sorority members had to navigate. Vanessa (Panhellenic) explained the difficulty in extricating herself from “invitations” to leave a party:

> For me, I think a lot of that happens, not at the party itself. It's kind of like, “Oh let's go somewhere.” And there's been times when I've been like “No, this isn't going to happen.”

> And then they're like, "Oh it's fine, you know, let's just see." And it's like, no we're not seeing anything; I said no. And then, I do start to feel that guilt, like, okay well they keep asking. And it's like no … if I said *no* it should be that way. And so I think a lot of that does happen when people are getting kind of coaxed into leaving when they're not really for it, but whoever's asking was like "Oh, you can just decide later. It'll be fun. Don't worry about it." It's really easy to get dragged into that.

Vanessa described the persistent badgering she confronted when declining an invitation from a fraternity brother to leave a party. She suggested that women might be "coaxed" into acquiescence by the promise that the invitation is open-ended and they "can just decide later" whether or not they want to become intimate. She stressed the difficulty in repeatedly rebuffing men's advances, despite personal clarity that she did not want to leave the party.

Vanessa's guilt at continuing to say "no" revealed the conflict between her personal desire, and the social expectations of the fraternity party. Documenting the cultural expectations of fraternity parties, Armstrong et al. explain that women feel pressure to be "deferential and gracious" to the fraternity men hosting the party (2006:491). This expectation that women "be nice" to men can constrain their ability to respond to harassment or badgering at a fraternity party. After describing the aforementioned scenario, Vanessa confided that, "some people that I've talked to are like, 'Well, I just said yes, because, whatever, it's easier almost.' Or, 'I wanted to, but not that much.'" While women understand they *can* say no (and they do, repeatedly), they are often ground down by men's attempts to extract acquiescence. Such situations can be particularly fraught for sorority members who express social, romantic, or sexual interest in a particular person throughout the course of an evening. Although women communicate boundaries to shape the contours of engagement, they complained that men sometimes dismissed or disregarded women's voices in sexual negotiations. Nicola Gavey (2019) argues that normative heterosexual scripts often scaffold such obligatory or consensually dubious encounters

by encouraging men's active and persistent sexual overtures, while constructing a passive and demurring female companion.

Among the women that I spoke with, there existed a sense that almost everyone had their own story of harassment or assault. Personal stories of harm were not described as isolated experiences, but rather framed by the suite of warnings they had received in adolescence or stories and complaints circulating among other sorority sisters. Beyond their personal experience, women hear the reports of others, a reminder to exercise caution in the presence of men, but they also hear the reminder that no matter how much caution they exercise, they *still* may be subject to sexual harm.

Messages from girlhood and adolescence had cautioned these women that the threat of sexual assault can follow them everywhere. These lessons stress that women must maintain constant vigilance in the presence of men, lest they fall victim to sexual assault. One Panhellenic sorority member, Julie, commented, "That's drilled into your head as a girl from a very young age that, 'You can't walk alone at night; you have to be scared of strange men; don't talk to men,' that kind of thing, from middle school. I think it's just something that we're told a lot more than maybe a male would have, growing up." Such messages reinforce the intimate relationship that women have with sexual harm (as victims or potential victims) but simultaneously hold them responsible for their own safety. Cautionary lessons received in childhood felt relevant as ever to sorority member when attending fraternity parties. In describing these parties, Dara (Panhellenic) commented,

> It kind of felt like the Wild West. I would just hear stories like, you go out and you're kind of just risking yourself even if you're in an exchange setting, but especially in open parties. I remember being in my first two years, just coming to a meeting one day, or coming to a Sisterhood one day and hearing [from] my friend, 'Oh, Maddie got roofied at [the frat] the other night,' like, 'Oh, this person got roofied. They were super sick.' And it's just like, oh shit. Got to be careful.

Stories about women getting *roofied*—having their drink spiked with a sedating drug such as *Rohypnol*—circulated frequently within the SFL community, warning them of a party scene that offered pleasure, fun, and sociality, but often threatened harm. Armed with such knowledge, women understood they must be careful, cautious and on high alert when navigating a fraternity party.

Sororities: Personal Risk Management

The previous section discussed how women often referenced their own experiences of discomfort, boundary violation or harm, identifying as victims or potential victims of sexual harm. Such experiences were supported by broader gendered narratives that shaped their emotional and experiential relationship to sexual harm, and in turn their relationship to risk and prevention. But what does risk look like for sorority members, and how do they manage it?

Women's narratives about issues of sexual harm invoked the risk of being sexually assaulted, but also included experiences of feeling pressured to accommodate or acquiesce to men's desires. They expressed concern for themselves, and concern for other women, both in and out of sorority life, who attend fraternity events. Risk management strategies primarily took shape in the form of individual or group-level practices that sought to guard against personal violation and harm on any given night. Occasionally, sororities escalate measures to take collective action against one (or multiple) fraternities, often via disaffiliation.

Strategies focused on party safety emerged as central component of in the arsenal of almost all SFL leaders when discussing sexual harm prevention. Sorority members cited an array of personal practices they abide by to keep themselves and their sisters safe. Such practices tended to involve traveling in groups, avoiding "open" parties, "roofie" precautions (e.g., never leaving a drink unattended or accepting drinks from others), distraction, and intervention.

> Well, there's always the bathroom rule, that like you never go anywhere in a frat house alone whether it's like even to the bathroom … Obviously, don't drink anything that's offered by anyone. Girls started even playing beer pong [but] will not drink the cups of beer there. They'll drink their own drinks that they brought, because there's still like a fear that like you will get roofied. (Toby, Panhellenic)

> If something's looking a little risky, I will grab you, I will yank you. You are coming with me. That's it. No questions asked. And honestly, out of us, nobody really questions. It's always like, oh, thank you. Like, you know, who knows what could happen. (Marielle, USFC)

> We have … a secret phrase that if we're uncomfortable, if a girl seems uncomfortable, you can go up to them and say this phrase and then they know what to say back if they feel safe and what to say back if they feel unsafe. It's a really casual conversation that the person in the conversation wouldn't notice, but it kind of gets the girl out of the uncomfortable situation. (Hannah, Panhellenic)

These strategies reiterate women's experiences of parties as fun, but perilous spaces. Although fraternities have also implemented various policies (e.g., guest lists, sober monitors, no hard alcohol, etc.) to reduce risk, such guidelines only go so far in keeping attendees safe. These personal strategies attempt to bridge such a gap. Sober monitors cannot be everywhere, for example, and although bystander intervention is widely promoted amongst both sorority and fraternity members, this is no guarantee at a busy, crowded party. In response to widespread concern about being drugged, some sorority women opt to bring their own drinks to a party. They accompany one another when moving through a fraternity house, both to avoid getting trapped or cornered by a random person, but also to help navigate an often confusing and chaotic space.

Within the aforementioned quotes, sorority participants expressed they exercise high degree of caution when entering a party space. Gemma (Panhellenic) noted, "I very much live by the 'I'd rather be safe than sorry' kind of motto. So, I do kind of try and look at *all* of [the fraternities] with zero trust rather than trusting certain organizations over others." Women reported avoiding some fraternities with poor reputations altogether, however they generally

maintained that bad things could happen at *any* fraternity. In absence of broader trust in the community, sorority members rely heavily on their friends and fellow sisters to cultivate safety.

Beyond personal strategies, sororities have enacted chapter-level policies to mitigate party risk. This often amounts to formalizing some of the practices that individual members were already utilizing. Designated "sober sisters" offer point persons for emergent situations, and generally serve as additional sets of eyes on the comfort and safety of attendees. Additionally, sorority leaders, like their fraternal counterparts, encourage their membership to monitor parties for signs of distress, discomfort, or excessive intoxication. One Panhellenic president, Gemma, stated,

> We're monitoring for girls that seem uncomfortable, for girls who don't have a ride home, who are standing there, and you could obviously tell they kind of have an issue and you want to make sure they get home safely. For girls who are too drunk, for all of those things. So if a girl is talking to a guy and I'm standing there, and I notice this girl is falling over. You know, she's not maybe cognizant enough. We train our girls to be kind of well versed in (A) listening to sober monitors even when you don't want to, and (B) saying, "okay, sister, I think the night is over for you and it's kind of time to go home."

The monitoring that Gemma described falls under broader "party policy" measures often discussed in collaboration with fraternities. In response to safety issues (including, but not limited to, sexual harm), some councils and chapters have worked together to come up with particular guidelines for social events. IFC and Panhellenic, for example, have passed a shared set of policies to follow, including the creation of event forms with contact information, as well as risk management information (e.g., guest list, name/contact information of sober monitors, etc.). Additionally, some members of the SFL community proposed that hosting dry daytime socials could offer a way to build more meaningful inter-chapter relationships. Women suggested that building relationships outside of an alcohol-fueled, hookup-centric space could facilitate less sexually-charged, healthier relationships between organizations.

One additional party-focused strategy involves reporting negative encounters to fraternities. Sorority leaders explained that sometimes a member will come forward to disclose an incident of sexual harm. Women have various intentions for reporting incidents to sorority leaders, including venting, seeking resources, or requesting action from leaders to liaise with the fraternity. Sometimes sororities only ask that fraternity leaders speak to the member in question. In more extreme cases, they express desire to see the brother dropped from the fraternity altogether. Alternatively, they may simply put the brother on their *blacklist*, effectively banning him from future exchanges they hold. Natalie (Panhellenic) explained, "both fraternities and sororities have a blacklist policy where before an exchange, anyone can reach out and say, 'Hi we request that such and such member not be present at this party.'" While a responding organization may inquire why a particular member is on the blacklist, it is generally understood that organizations will abide by blacklist protocols. In this way, women exert some influence over the guest list in an attempt to cultivate a safer environment.

Should all these strategies prove insufficient, sororities might enact broader organizational action. This happens most often in the form of disaffiliation, or a ceasing of social events with a particular fraternity. Disaffiliation serves as a protest against a fraternity who has fallen out of grace with the sorority (most often for issues relating to safety or sexual harm). Lauren (Panhellenic) explained, "My sorority does take it very seriously—we'll unaffiliate with certain organizations. And we have these meetings once a week—you can meet anonymously just with the board, and talk about any experiences you've been facing, how you're feeling in the sorority, how you feel about certain organizations."

Numerous sorority members articulated an expectation for sorority leaders to respond to feedback from rank and file members about troubling experiences with particular fraternities.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, leaders may consider temporarily ceasing to host social events with a fraternity. Disaffiliation is more likely to occur if an alleged assault happened at a particular fraternity, however conflict can arise when making such decisions regarding disaffiliation. Andrea (Panhellenic) recounted her disappointment when the social chair for her sorority ignored a sister's protestations about planning an event with a fraternity dealing with a pending sexual assault allegation. Although disaffiliations are generally enacted in a piecemeal fashion (often without a particular list of demands), the council-wide disaffiliation between Panhellenic and IFC served as a broader collective action with articulated demands. Panhellenic leaders hoped their strategic vision for disaffiliation would spur real change in their community, rather than simply serve as a fleeting punitive measure for fraternity misconduct. Still, creating consensus on collective decisions regarding disaffiliation is perhaps one of the biggest challenges (and limitations) to this strategy.

Constrained Response

Despite developing an assortment of strategies to respond to the threat of sexual harm, women routinely reported constraints on their ability to confront sexual harm. These constraints often involved the threat of retaliation for reporting or speaking up about sexual harm, and emerged on both personal and organizational levels.

Individual Constraints

Although sexual harm intimately impacts sorority women, cultural and structural factors impact their ability to address this threat. In his research on Greek life, DeSantis (2007) details the ways that women are constrained by gender roles when responding to sexual harassment and assault. To get upset or angry in the midst of a party—a social affair where expectations are to be convivial, fun, and lighthearted—threatens reputational risk by being labeled a *complainer* or

killjoy. Kate (Panhellenic) recalled that a leader in her sorority was blacklisted from a particular fraternity (i.e., barred from attending future social events) for intervening while witnessing an inebriated woman go upstairs with a fraternity brother. As a "sober sister," this member was charged with looking out for women participating in the revelry, keeping a particular eye out for new members.

> There was some girl that was very drunk. One of the guys—I think he was actually their social chair at the time—so she knew him a little bit, but she just didn't feel comfortable with him—he was taking [the drunk girl] upstairs, so my friend intervened because she felt the girl was too drunk to be making that kind of decision. It became this big ordeal. The fraternity ended up having a house vote. Even the girl who was really drunk at the time sided with the guy, and was like, 'Yes, that [chapter] member was crazy." They blacklisted her. The exec member from my chapter got blacklisted from the fraternity for intervening.

Although women rely on bystander intervention measures to keep each other safe, they risk negative social consequences when intervening in risky situations, particularly when a host brother becomes the target of intervention. In their study of sexual violence among college students, Khan et al. (2018) argue that there are significant social risks to labeling an event as "assault," whereas ambiguity, or not labeling, enables students to maintain social relationships and group membership. In the case that Kate discussed, one woman's unambiguous perception of the situation as inappropriate conflicted with other attendees assessments of the situation as a normal, drunken sexual encounter. Her decision to intervene caused disruptions to her social life; it led to ridicule (being labeled as "crazy"), and cost her future attendance at fraternity parties. Women recognize that taking an assertive stance against sexual violence can result in various forms of social retaliation.

Another Panhellenic member, Toby, commented,

> I definitely think for some girls, myself included, you almost get used to a little bit of sexual harassment. Like if someone grabs you while dancing, you don't freak out and storm out of there. You might give it a minute or two and then try to move yourself away.

> Or if some creepy guy offers you a drink, I'll take it. I just won't drink. I'll dump it out when he's not looking to make things less uncomfortable, because there always is the chance that you're going to get blacklisted.

Women must consider the social consequences of "causing a scene" when experiencing or witnessing harassment. Toby described how women must be careful to rebuff intrusions while not creating too much social friction or drawing too much attention to themselves. Cultural norms of the party scene dictate that attendees are friendly with party-mates and defuse any tension in order to maintain the "vibes," or a good party atmosphere (Armstrong et al. 2006). In the cases of these incidents, women must bear the personal burden of discomfort to maintain social harmony. Should a woman yell, get upset, or even directly refuse a drink offer, she may risk carrying the label of *disruptive* or *rude*, and be banned from subsequent parties.

Involvement in Greek life requires substantial social, time, and financial commitments. The participants in this study cited being part of a tight knit community, and access to a "home away from home" as a primary reason joining Greek life. For women, speaking out against sexual violence may not be worth the risk involved in exposing themselves to scrutiny from the larger community. Akira explained this consideration:

> I think there are still a lot of people who choose to remain ignorant. I think that deters a lot of people from coming forward because there's that question of "How much support am I going to get? Is it worth it for me to relive my trauma and share my trauma for five people to hear me out?" And I do think that also there's some favoritism of who is claiming it, right? There's always some favoritism. You want to say, "Always believe the survivor," but when it comes down to it, people will be like, "Oh, that girl, she is always [saying this or that]," or "Oh, that guy, he's [always doing this or that]." You know what I mean? There is that favoritism of who you're going to believe and it would discourage them from even coming forward about it.

For many students, speaking up about sexual harm simply is not worth the risk of social fallout. Khan et al. explain, "A social break in one's group presents the risk of enormous affective losses in multiple arenas both by creating conflict in the group and through the fear that

group members would, if forced to choose, side with the person who committed the assault" (2018:445). Women in sororities across councils reported the way group membership in such a college community could have a chilling effect. Marielle (USFC) explained,

> The Latinx community—if you are involved in anything on campus, it's a very small community. I feel like everybody at least knows one other person in another [organization]. But the Greek Latinx community on campus is even smaller. It's very possible to know someone from work, from class. A lot of our circles, as a Latinx Greek community, super overlap. It's kind of insane. So it's extremely likely that you know another Greek [member] outside of Greek life—outside of that scope. They might be your coworkers, your classmates, your peers in other ways and everything … club members. Since you do know them in another way, it could lead to … you not wanting to call out behavior because you do know them from work, from class, through your peers. It's not just my social life. It's also my personal [and] professional life that could be affected by this.

For Marielle, the relative size of Latinx Greek life, and the overlap in campus circles could discourage reporting, for fear of spill over into other sections of their campus life. Although women spoke with passion and conviction about the need to reduce sexual harm in the SFL community, they certainly acknowledged that social costs involved in speaking up have kept many people silent.

Organizational Constraints

Collective action, or disaffiliation, by sorority women as a response to sexual harm has emerged in part due to the limited impact (and personal risks) associated with individual "call-outs." Women band together to enforce a party sanction on poorly behaved fraternities in the hope they will take issues of harassment and assault more seriously. Although the men of IFC control access to party spaces, successful parties are predicated on their ability to attract large numbers of women. To refuse exchanging with a particular fraternity is a tactic used to: (1) keep women safe, and (2) punish, or demonstrate displeasure with, a particular fraternity. That said,

disaffiliation can backfire when members cannot reach consensus on collective action, and when sororities incur damage to their own status and reputation.

While disaffiliation may prevent two organizations from hosting a social event together, it often does not mean a cease of all relationships between members. Ana, a member of a USFC sorority clarified, "When we say, 'We don't associate,' we don't associate with our letters on. So, that means we can't have our jackets on. We can't speak about our organization. We can't say anything that would identify our [sorority]." Ana explained that her organization cannot dictate who her members socialize with, but the critical point is that they do not associate with certain fraternities "formally." Panhellenic presidents expressed similar distinctions, but found it particularly troubling when their members would attend "open" parties at disaffiliated fraternities. Toby, a leader of a larger Panhellenic organization described the dilemma:

> And the problem that we're having is we try to limit our girls to where they're going … So, which frats we put on the "okay" list. In the last year, if they've had any sexual assault cases, hazing, anything like that, we told our girls that we don't feel comfortable with [them] going. Because we can't protect you when you're there. We don't have sober monitors there; we don't have girls that go there. We don't want you getting hurt.

In the case of disaffiliation, sorority members voice concern for the safety of members who may privately associate with the fraternity. In this case, when women opt out of hosting exchanges, they cede any power they may have over party regulations and standards. Serving as a sort of *party boycott*, or strike, disaffiliations are only effective insofar as they harm a fraternity's ability to conduct social affairs.

Despite disaffiliation fraternities often continue to throw open parties, with even fewer safety measures in place. Natalie echoed a sentiment similar to Toby's, explaining her organization's decision to resume social events:

> By us maintaining the principle of disaffiliation, are we putting our women in a worse position—in terms of at least the socializing and parties? I think a lot of us very much

> grappled with the issue. Do we want to go with the devil we know, or with the devil we don't. And so many of us ultimately elected to break the disaffiliation informally and have our social coordinators, plan things for our sororities with the fraternities. So essentially we're back to our regular exchange schedule, even though we were, for all intents and purposes, still disaffiliated.

For a handful of sorority leaders, the tension between safety concerns and members' desire to socialize made Panhellenic-wide disaffiliation untenable. This left some of the women discouraged and disappointed that the social power men had over parties undermined their efforts to affect change. Mia, the social chair of a professional sorority that often socialized with IFC fraternities, struggled to balance the competing demands of her members:

> I'm the social chair, so I plan all of our socials. So I like to ask our members to tell me if they ever don't want to partner with an [organization] for whatever reason. But a lot of members have had issues with a lot of different chapters, which makes it hard, because I'm like, okay, that's every chapter! But they really want socials, so I don't really know what to do, morally. Obviously, there's been incidences where some people feel uncomfortable. But other people want [the socials]. I just had to grapple with how to go to these places, and kind of be able to watch, and make sure nothing happens, make sure everyone's safe, and if that's what they want.

Although disaffiliations are intended as a sanction of fraternities, rank and file sorority members who joined Greek life expecting access to a bustling social scene often felt punished by foreclosed social opportunities, and pressured leaders to lift restrictions on social exchanges.

One noticeable exception to this tension came from women in USFC sororities. While USFC Greeks may host parties, these are generally informal gatherings, hosted at a member's apartment or home. Unlike historically white, social sororities and fraternities (IFC and Panhellenic), cultural Greeks do not have "frat houses" to host formal exchanges. Within this arrangement, men do not have exclusive power over the social scene. In speaking about her organization's disaffiliation with Latinx fraternities, Isabella (USFC) commented,

> We don't really go to any of the parties hosted by the fraternities—there's that disaffiliation there, too. It would be more sororities—sometimes they host parties, too. Whenever they have a new class, or a new line, they'll host *crossing parties*. So that's

> when all the [organizations] would go there. Obviously, because everybody knows each other, you'll see [the disaffiliated fraternities] there, too, but we're not actively trying to talk to them. Sometimes they'll try to talk to us, but we're like, "Yes." Like very short conversations.

Though USFC sororities struggled like Panhellenic to address issues of sexual harm, the lack of a formalized, fraternity-dominated party scene enabled greater leverage when enacting disaffiliation.

One final constraint Panhellenic organizations encounter when deploying collective actions or demands emerges in the form of chapter-level reputational harm. Just as individual women might be labeled as annoying, or "party-poopers" for vocalizing a grievance, whole chapters risk becoming social pariahs if they complain too much about fraternal affairs. Kristen Jozkowski and Jacquelyn Wiersma-Mosley found that when sorority women push back against sexist practices, they risk fraternity retaliation (in the form of refusing to host socials with them), which in turn can "negatively affect the sorority's reputation and decrease its members' social status on campus" (2017:93). The hierarchical ranking of sororities based on popularity with fraternities limits the ability of sororities (regardless of ranking) to respond to sexual harm without jeopardizing their social status.

Many of the participating SFL members made note of the fact that the most "popular" or top-tier sororities were most likely to continue socializing with popular, or, in their words, "rapey," fraternities. In their study of sorority rankings and reputation, Ispa-Landa and Oliver (2020) found that women in top-tier sororities often understood that membership in high-status organizations was predicated on their ability to be attractive and available for partying with fraternity men. Notably, to be "attractive and available" implies a particular racial status (white), body standard (thin), sexuality (straight), and class status (affluent). In addition to quarterly membership dues, significant financial resources are required to purchase appropriate clothing

and accessories for various social functions to maintain one's appearance (e.g., hair styling, skincare, dental work) and to be available (i.e., not working) in order to attend social engagements. Belonging in a top-tier sorority is costly and time consuming. To chastise or sanction high-status fraternities might risk their relative popularity with men and their position at the top of the sorority hierarchy.

For middle or lower tier sororities, the promise of "moving up" in rankings might impact members' collective decisions to "boycott" a fraternity. Adrianna, a participant in a lower tier Panhellenic sorority, who dropped after becoming disillusioned with her sisterhood, recounted her frustration with the overwhelming impetus to socialize with fraternities despite sexual assault concerns:

> It's kind of stupid because we have this whole "Sisters protect each other," but then there's this one instance that ruined a lot of girls' trust. There's a member in charge of the exchanges—who we would essentially just party with. She set up this exchange, but this frat had allegations and they were very recent ones. One sister texted her and was like, "Hey, they have allegations." Then, the planner was like, "Okay, thanks for letting me know." Then, she said nothing to us, so none of us knew until the other girl brought it up.

Adrianna's frustration mirrored conflicts found by Ispa-Landa and Oliver, where some women in lower tier sororities are dismayed to find that their sisters "appeared willing to risk their safety and self-avowed feminist principles for the possibility of shedding their low status" (2020:915). Some women reported that being part of a middle- or low-tier sorority allowed them greater freedom to identify as feminists and be vocal about sexual harm. That said, Danielle (Panhellenic) commented that due to her sorority's lower status, a sanction from a low-tier sorority would not carry as much weight with fraternities: "But I feel like power isn't what you do, it's also how serious other people take what you do. So, a sorority like mine that isn't considered 'top-tier'—us deciding to not go to parties, they don't care. They probably wouldn't want to do things with us anyway." Because fraternities did not want to socialize with them

anyway, Danielle noted that their collective action to refuse social events with a fraternity had relatively little impact.

Although women have an array of personal strategies to try to keep themselves and other women safe, women who are seen as too critical or disruptive of the party scene may suffer social repercussions. Furthermore, gendered hierarchies within Greek life privilege top-tier sororities who do not complain, while stripping social power and status from organizations critical of their practices (i.e., *feminist killjoys*).

Men and Distance

The fraternity men that I spoke to universally and roundly condemned sexual assault and harassment. As leaders or senior members of their respective organizations, these men certainly wanted to project a responsive fraternity image in light of this serious problem. Although many of the men were likely sincere in their efforts to create a safer community, my position as member of the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life staff possibly evoked a particular performance of a "respectful" fraternity brother. Like their sorority counterparts, men largely understood sexual harm as a gendered issue. However, where women were likely to identify as victims or potential victims, men generally (and understandably) did not relate to sexual harm as perpetrators, potential perpetrators, or even victims of sexual assault. Rather, they positioned themselves as outsiders and allies regarding issues of sexual harm. Where women saw risk in terms of potential for personal physical or emotional harm, men tended to regard risk as *liability*. Their discussions of risk primarily focused on: (1) risks of an adverse event occurring at one of their parties, or (2) liability if one of their members caused harm. In contrast to women's fear of personal harm, the men's fears often focused on the organizational harm to the fraternity in the wake of a sexual assault. To a lesser extent, men discussed personal risk in terms of taking

precautions with women to avoid accusations of improper behavior. At an intimate level, where sorority participants feared sexual assault, fraternity members tended to fear being accused of sexual assault. Proximity to the issue, along with differential access to institutional power, shapes men's and women's sense of risk and gendered risk management strategies.

Most men that I spoke with expressed verbal solidarity with sororities regarding the disaffiliation and communicated their desire for broader changes in the SFL community with respect to sexual harm prevention. Although some questioned the efficacy of the disaffiliation specifically, they often understood the impetus for the action. Regardless of whether men felt personally affected or impacted by sexual harm, they reported their own awareness and understanding of the importance of consent in all encounters. IFC members often referenced the numerous mandated sexual assault prevention trainings they attend. One IFC president noted, "obviously we do a shit ton of seminars and stuff." Indeed, the SFL community receives special attention from most universities when it comes to educational programming for alcohol, hazing, and sexual assault. At UC Davis, SFL members are required to attend annual sexual violence prevention trainings, and frequently the national headquarters of fraternal organizations offer additional training and resources to their respective chapters.

The heightened scrutiny on the Greek life community in matters of sexual assault, and efforts towards prevention, have produced a community that generally reports understanding issues of sexual harm and draws upon discourses of consent quite readily. And although participants emphasized the importance of addressing sexual harm, some struggled to articulate how it "shows up" in their community. When asked about issues that he has observed, one IFC president, Josh, replied,

> I personally have never actually seen anything … maybe I just missed it because I'm a dude, but yes, I've never seen anything. I think it was probably one of those things where

> everybody is like, “Oh, yes, but not us.” So, at least I would like to think that it would never happen in our group, so I've never seen anything.

In stark contrast to the various personal examples that sorority women produced when asked about sexual harm, Josh found it challenging to produce a single example. Later in the interview, he commented that since “everyone knows [sexual assault] is bad,” he was not sure how to prevent it. The interview with Josh exemplified a particular way of thinking about sexual assault that made it difficult for him to observe and identify a spectrum of behaviors that might be associated with sexual harm. Because he had not “seen it” (“it,” meaning an egregious case of sexual assault, presumably) or experienced it, Josh had difficulty identifying with the issue of sexual harm. Gender seemed to influence his relationship to matters of sexual harm, and Josh admitted that he may be less perceptive because he is a man.

Although Josh was perhaps an outlier in his assertion that he had not really witnessed any concerning behavior during his time in a fraternity, the sort of exceptionalism that he applied to his fraternity is quite common. Just as all participating SFL members tended to distance themselves from Greek Life stereotypes, men, in particular, practiced a sort of discursive distancing when it came to sexual harm. Tristen Bridges and C.J. Pascoe use the phrase *discursive distancing* to describe how “hybrid masculine practices often work in ways that create discursive space between privileged groups of men and hegemonic masculinity, enabling some to frame themselves as outside of existing systems of privilege and inequality” (2018:270).

Most of the men I spoke to eschewed the stereotypical “frat bros,” *Chad and Brad*, expressing a commitment toward a less aggressive, more feminist version of fraternity culture. One participant explained that in his organization, “the motto is basically change—we’re trying to break and change the stereotype of what it means to be in a fraternity” (Matthew, IFC). This “new Greek man” serves as a sort of hybrid masculinity, aware of the inequalities and injustices

historically associated with Greek life and committed to feminist cultural change. In this way, men could acknowledge the problem of sexual harm in their community without being directly implicated in perpetuating the problem. Rather, these men identified as agents of change. When men externalize the problem by identifying others (i.e., other men, other fraternities) as "bad apples," they selectively confront issues of "bad" masculinity, while engaging and reinvesting in "good man" masculinity.

Men as Bystanders

To the extent that the men in my interviews related to the problem of sexual harm, they primarily identified as bystanders and interrupters. Men often spoke passionately about the need to address sexual harm, and about their own efforts to make cultural changes within their organizations or the community at large. Unlike women, who generally identified as the impacted or aggrieved party, men emerged as allies and supporters in the struggle to combat sexual violence. Although men highlighted the point that sorority women can be overly pushy, persistent, or harass men, too, when speaking about "the problem" of sexual harm and the discord it causes in the Greek community, they recognized a central issue of fraternity men harming sorority women. Like sorority women, most fraternity men were likely to identify the cultural (as opposed to the individual) problem of sexual harm as a gendered grievance, whereby women had standing as the aggrieved party. Although almost all agreed that (hetero)sexual scripts played a role in the persistence of the problem, most participants accepted those scripts as natural and/or desirable. Against the backdrop of the disaffiliation, men had a somewhat complicated relationship to their status as *respondents*. They did not respond to this grievance as assailants or potential assailants (the counterpart to victims and potential victims), but as *allies* in the quest to reduce the prevalence of sexual harm in Greek communities.

When speaking about the issue of sexual harm, by and large men tended to express their support of the issue through allyship of women. While women reported learning about sexual harm through warnings and incursions on their own autonomy and safety, men reported cultivating an increased watchfulness and sensitivity towards interactions unfolding around them. Men explained that observing other brothers' awareness, assessment, and intervention in alcohol-fueled, sexually charged environments helped develop their growing awareness of social dynamics. One respondent, Trevor (IFC), noted how his admiration of this attentiveness shaped his fraternity selection:

> But the thing that got me was . . . it was late in the night, end of the night, and there's this girl who was kind of really drunk and this guy that was kind of iffy. But it was out of a bunch of people and Jordan saw that, and he saw that they weren't there. And he's like 'Where are they?' I was like, 'I think they left.' And he's like, 'Oh no.' So he literally went in his car, found that girl, picked her up and then dropped her off because he recognized that was not a safe situation—in a really weird way where you couldn't really recognize that—I would argue most people couldn't. It was a very difficult thing to pick out and he was able to pick it out. And I thought that was really impressive because I thought most people would not. So I really like that.

Trevor highlighted that "most people" would not identify the above situation as particularly troubling, and expressed his respect for the fact that a leader in the fraternity, Jordan, noticed and took action. Throughout my interview with Trevor, it was clear that Jordan served as a sort of role model for him in the fraternity, and he sought to cultivate a similar sensitivity and responsiveness to troubling situations. Other fraternity men recounted similarly formative experiences, witnessing interventions from senior members of the fraternity, and becoming enamored with the ways in which their brothers "handled" precarious situations.

Luke, the president of an IFC fraternity, emphasized that his organization maintained a culture of mannerly and chivalrous conduct among its members:

> The type of guys that are here typically grow up in older class, older fashioned style of homes, families … whatever. For me specifically, it was always, treat women with the

> utmost respect. Hold open their door, open the car door for her, pull her chair out for her, offer your jacket up, walk on the street side of the sidewalk. Put yourself in harm's way before them because I'm going to be able to take a hit a lot harder than the girl's going to be able to take a hit, sort of thing. I think this same trait kind of carries on throughout the majority of the guys in [our fraternity]. They also had that old-fashioned style of dad that was like, "This is what you need to do. This is how you need to treat women. This is what you need to do to someone that treats women poorly." Yes, it's kind of almost like scare tactics between the guys here. If anyone hears of anything even remotely close, like, "Hey, that girl's trying to walk away from that guy." You see it and he's kind of following her, you're in his face like, "Hey man, you need to stop. Leave her alone. She's clearly trying to get back away from you." So, it's just ingrained in our heads. Don't put up with it and if you see it, do something.

Luke spoke of a zero-tolerance policy for pushy behavior as connected to an old-fashioned style of gendered conduct. In discussing his fraternity's efforts to prevent sexual harm, Luke drew upon traditional gender essentialism as a rationale for intervention: men, the stronger sex, are obligated to protect and look out for women, the weaker/fairer sex. Similarly, Danny said he kept an eye out for cues from women: "[You see] the signals of like, 'Hey, can someone help? This guy's just being too close to me.' I'll be one to go help this person, just butt in, make sure everything's all right." If a fraternity brother observes a man pursuing a woman who looks uneasy or is "trying to get away," they are obligated to intervene and tell the man to "back off."

Within such a frame, women must rely on the benevolence of "good men" to keep them safe from unscrupulous men who disregard their boundaries. Where *hostile sexism* is generally identified by more negative attitudes towards women, and behaviors demonstrating antipathy, *benevolent sexism* refers to positive characterizations and traits associated with women, often invoked when performing chivalrous behavior. These two forms of sexism can be seen as a "carrot and a stick" perpetuating gender inequality, where "benevolent sexism is used to reward women who embrace conventional gender roles and power relations, whereas hostile sexism punishes women who challenge the status quo" (Glick and Fiske 2001:113). Both benevolent and hostile sexism reinforce women's vulnerability and subordinate status in comparison to men, and

are reinforced by a social structure that affords women less control over party spaces. Furthermore, this sort of paternalistic protectionism supports what Courtney Fraser terms "de-agentification," or the way "sexist ideologies and practices reify the association between women and passivity by encouraging men to assume agency on their behalf" (2015:145). Although bystander behavior can be considered *prosocial*, Leone et. al. (2020) suggests that when it is guided by benevolent sexism, men may be more likely to limit their help to those women they deem "deserving." Notably, most women expressed a high degree of skepticism that they could trust any fraternity to keep them safe; rather they tended to rely on each other when devising safety protocols.

Raphael, the president of another IFC fraternity, spoke of developing a sensitivity to unsafe or troubling situations over time. He joked of being proud that he could tell just by the fall of someone's eyelids right when to usher them to the toilet:

> I congratulate myself once in a while, because I think I'm very good at reading when somebody's about to puke. When they look at you, and their eyelids go down—the eyelids they just fall. And I'm like, 'Hey, you okay? What's happening?' And then I just take them—the last like five times I've done that, the second they see the toilet it's just done.

Raphael further described his practice of scanning a party, particularly later in the evening:

> You can sense when the girl is comfortable with the guy. If she's looking at him in the eyes, if she's responding, [if] she's laughing like naturally with them, if there's space around her—they're there, but she's not pushed against the wall, or a chair, or something. It's just like there's that space between them too. And just all the body language.

He explained that reading the room for signs of discomfort was a skill developed over his years of experience in the fraternity, as well as experiences partying in his high school peer group. Similarly, Heath commented that his fraternity cultivates a culture of intervention noting, "We do a really good job of seeing stuff at face value, and being like, 'Hey, if we let this go, then there is something [bad] that can actually happen.'"

In describing their experiences and understandings of sexual harm in the SFL community, the vast majority of men produced personal accounts of intervention during questionable encounters. Whether they observed a "creepy" vibe from a persistent man, or noticed discomfort from a party attendee, the fraternity men reported feeling emboldened to intervene and check in on, if not completely break up, troubling interactions. Where women frequently cited personal accounts experiencing sexual harm, men cited first-hand accounts witnessing and interrupting "red flag" behavior.

Beyond relating to sexual harm as an observer/interrupter, fraternity participants expressed solidarity as allies for the cause. Again, while men might note that sexual violence could be perpetrated or experienced by any member of their community, regardless of gender, they generally understood it to be a women's issue. Support of the disaffiliation, and efforts to spread awareness and education of sexual violence were seen as actions in support or allyship of women. Jared explained that his fraternity attempted to show their support through inter-fraternal relationships they cultivated or eschewed:

> We try not to associate with fraternities that have that reputation [for sexual assault]. Whether it's a formal association or informal. Obviously, not every member of those fraternities are awful people, but it's kind of the culture as a whole, we try not to associate with. So, we definitely do stand up, and stand with [the women]. We tried to talk about how we can be leaders in our letter [responding to Panhellenic about the disaffiliation]. I know this is one thing we talked about—implementing a sexual assault prevention chair. Someone that is specifically tied down to this issue that could help us. And not just us, but just kind of help IFC in general.

Men from a couple fraternities spoke with some degree of confidence that their organization stood out as a leader among IFC in the fight against sexual assault. For example, Danny expressed that his fraternity was comprised of "men that will make a change, or make the statement that will establish a safe environment for Panhellenic woman, as well as women

outside of Greek life." Both Danny and Jared communicated their respective organizations act as a sort of *vanguard* in the Greek community, standing against and combatting sexual harm.

Women as Intimate "Knowers" of the Problem

Much of this chapter has focused on the ways in which students in the Greek community relate to sexual assault, particularly as a gendered grievance. As both individuals, and collectively, women have consistently directed attention toward sexual harm as a pervasive issue in the Greek community. As complainants, women have become the experts or "intimate knowers" of the problem of sexual harm. In many ways, they lay claims to knowledge, as victims, as survivors, and as witnesses. And though fraternity men shared their expertise in the realm of party safety, they often deferred to women as the *experts* at defining the scope and nature of the problem of sexual harm. As previously mentioned, men's proximity to "the problem" was often perceived to be experienced at a distance. Understanding women to have more first-hand knowledge of sexual harm, men frequently relied on women as educational consultants, as well as soliciting their personal feedback on prospective fraternity brothers.

Fraternity brothers frequently cited their relationships with sorority women (as friends or girlfriends) as offering a strong guiding hand in sexual harm prevention efforts. While men may have solicited information from their friends in sororities more casually, a couple of the men made mention of a more formalized position that women held in certain fraternities. In particular, the "fraternity sweetheart" was cited as a critical source of information for fraternities. A fraternity sweetheart is a position traditionally held by a sorority woman with strong ties to a particular fraternity. She is generally well-known and liked in the fraternity, by virtue of her relationships with the brothers (either platonic or romantic). Three of the men interviewed mentioned that the sweetheart of their fraternity happened to be dating one of the brothers. While

the selection process and duties of a fraternity sweetheart may vary from organization to organization, she is typically considered an "honorary brother"—a woman who upholds the values of the fraternity, and acts as a sort of ambassador for the organization. She may be expected to support the fraternity's philanthropy, assist with events, and generally serve as a supportive presence for fraternity brothers.

The sweetheart position may be seen as a vestige of "little sister" programs that were formally disbanded at UC Davis in 1989. Although not full-fledged members of the fraternity, little sisters had to pay quarterly dues, and were expected to generally serve as hostesses for fraternity socials and help out with philanthropies (CAMPUS 1989). Since its inception, the system of fraternity little sisters/sweethearts enable women to serve as supportive helpmates to fraternity men. Although all the men I spoke to insisted that their organization treated the sweetheart with the utmost respect, they shared that other fraternities may sexualize the role, inviting women to participate in a competition to earn the sacred honor. Notably, sororities have no equivalent program that invites fraternity men to become a little brother, or sweetheart brother to the sorority.

Within the context of sexual harm and sorority/fraternity relations, the sweetheart often seemed to serve as a consultant to the men. Fraternity leaders lean on the sweetheart to provide critical education and perspective to brothers about topics of sexual assault, harassment, and sexism. Heath (IFC) explained,

> [The sweethearts] give all of our sexual assault and prevention talks to the candidates at the start of the quarter. They'll come in and give a presentation about, 'Hey, here are the things that I've seen in my experience that I don't like. Don't do this.' And then she'll give guidelines on, 'Here's how you can not be really creepy and weird around girls,' which is extremely vital.

The sweetheart serves as a coach to the men, offering guidance for appropriate conduct with women. Heath followed up:

> A lot of the time, at least for guys in general, I think it comes off better, and it comes off with a better message if it's given by someone you already know, even if the information is the exact same. I think it's just that relationship in general makes it easier to talk about, makes it easier to actually come to a consensus on, makes it easier to understand, all of that sort of thing.

Like Heath, other men reported benefits of receiving sexual violence prevention information from a familiar face. On one hand, they felt more comfortable asking questions of a trusted sorority member. Additionally, stories conveyed by a known peer tended to have more impact than abstract educational scenarios. When speaking of the peer led education offered by his fraternity sweetheart, Ben (IFC) confirmed that those "conversations were more granular. They had more detail, with more speaking directly. 'In this scenario, you don't do this. Girls don't like this type of thing. You might think this is normal, but a lot of girls think this is creepy.'" Men expressed relief at receiving direct instruction from a sorority woman regarding appropriate conduct in social and sexual interactions.

Men's reliance on a women's perspective was not limited to educational presentations. Almost every fraternity leader I spoke with explicitly sought out the opinions of trusted women to offer insight on the character of potential new members. Jared (IFC) reported that his fraternity sweetheart had significant involvement in member selection:

> She gets to interview the candidates … she won't come to meetings or anything, but she'll give input on guys, which is great. We really like having a trustworthy female input on new members. Especially because she might pick up a vibe that we don't know about or things like that. Just a different perspective.

Danny (IFC) offered a similar comment, stating that if "a girl reaches out to us and says, 'Hey one your pledges made me uncomfortable for this reason' that's an immediate drop for us, because we don't want anyone in any way to make girls feel that way." For fraternity men,

women's ability to offer unique insight regarding new members is two-fold. On one hand, women are expected to have a more finely tuned *creep radar*—a heightened sensitivity towards suspect behavior, a perspective honed over time as a woman navigating the world. Additionally, women may be recipients of unwelcome sexual attention from prospective members, behavior that fellow fraternity members may not experience directly. In other words, the same behavior from a potential new member may be viewed differently through sorority eyes, *and* sorority women may experience different treatment from potential new members as targets of sexual interest.

Trusted sorority women offer additional eyes and ears to fraternity brothers during the recruitment process. Seen as authorities in the field of sexual harm, women assist with the vetting of potential fraternity brothers, performing a unique gendered labor. Fraternity leaders invite sorority voices to offer comment and perspective on how potential new members conduct themselves around women. The inclusion of these voices can be considered as a step towards greater collaboration in community safety. That said, although women value the opportunity to give feedback to fraternal organizations, their role as fraternal consultant and helpmate has limits. They serve in this role at the pleasure of the fraternity leaders. Ultimately, whether they are good friends of fraternity brothers, or officially designated as the fraternity sweetheart, they will never be a member. Credibility is extended to "trusted women," but not necessarily *all* women.

Interviews with fraternity brothers revealed a complex, and at times contradictory, opinion concerning the more recent adage, *believe survivors*. Fraternity brothers expressed a desire to stand with survivors of sexual assault. To that end, they emphasized the need to center victim voices when confronted with sexual assault allegations. One IFC president, Cody,

emphasized that it was important for "the victim to feel like they have all the privacy that they want, and if they want it to be more—if they want their voice to be heard, then their voice is heard. And whatever punishment they think is best—definitely, we are more than happy to be passing out that punishment." Cody expressed a sentiment echoed by numerous fraternity leaders that survivors' desires should guide the adjudication of sexual assault claims. His particular organization was in the process of rebuilding trust and reputation following a rather public mishandling of as sexual assault allegation in the community. In the wake of "an incident," organizations appeared eager to right their past wrongs and show contrition.

Although men spoke of their desire to stand with survivors and center victim voices, certain comments revealed a deeper ambivalence to the commitment to believe survivors. Some brothers expressed a sentiment that women might deliberately lie about sexual assault to harm a man. Danny (IFC) recounted an incident where he had doubts about the credibility of a woman:

> In given circumstances to be honest, I know some girls may get a little crazy over a bad breakup or have revenge—a vengeful dilemma for a guy. We had this one rush that was accused of sexual misconduct; of making this girl super uncomfortable. This girl was very, very intoxicated while this pledge was just trying to take her home, and make sure that she was okay. And I really believe that he's a very honest man. But the girl, I guess, next day when she woke up, she just felt super uncomfortable when he was walking her home.

Danny's gut feeling about this potential new member, that he was "a very honest man," led him to dismiss a woman's report of discomfort as the invention of an intoxicated girl. That she expressed feeling uncomfortable with his actions (particularly the morning after drinking) was not worth examination since the pledge was just trying to "make sure she was okay." Earlier in the interview, Danny had emphasized the importance of women's feedback in addressing inappropriate behavior:

> Girls come up to me about it. And they ask me, 'Oh hey, just want to let you know that this person X, happened to be like a little more touchy than usual, and he was very

> intoxicated, so if you can talk to him, please, please do. And I say, 'of course.' So I reach out to the brother.

Men reported a commitment to be responsive to the comfort/reporting of women that attend their events, though this responsiveness is not reliable if the woman is deemed not credible in her reporting. While he conceded it was a "good sentiment," Sam, the president of one IFC fraternity mentioned that, ultimately, "You can't just say 'Yeah, just believe the survivor,' because you're gonna have someone who's like, 'Well what if I don't.'" Men employ benevolent sexism to protect credible women that "deserve" to be treated with respect; unfortunately, when women step out of line (e.g., they are too drunk, too assertive, accusing a good man), they are not afforded the same measure of "protection."

Men report understanding sexual harm to be a persistent and pernicious problem in their community. They often rely upon "trusted" women to help communicate the scope/nature of the issue to fraternity and root out "bad apples." That said, their fear of false accusations complicates their ability to trust women and "believe survivors." Men leverage their connections with sorority women to foster safer party spaces and attempt to reduce sexual harm, but this partnership is limited by a gendered adversarial relationship whereby men still fear women might lie about sexual assault to "ruin their lives."

Fraternities: Institutional Risk Management

The narratives that men provided in relation to sexual harm illuminate their perceptions of proximity to sexual harm and risk. Identifying as allies and bystanders, men located primary risk at an institutional level. Unlike the sorority members, they did not recount stories of anonymous groping or calculate the personal risks of partying at a fraternity house with a suspect reputation. Rather, they primarily spoke of the risk involved in hosting parties, and inviting new members into the fraternity.

Most men understood that throwing a fraternity party could be a risky, if rewarding affair. As alcohol fueled and sexually charged spaces, parties offer a space for students to blow off steam and "see where the night goes." For larger houses in particular, the sheer number of people in attendance, coupled with a wide range of motives, can present significant risks. When discussing sexual harm and their efforts to address problems in their community, members of sorority and fraternity life tended to focus on risk mitigation in a party setting.

Fraternity men cited various practices employed to reduce risk and increase accountability at the parties they hosted. They expressed that a closed party or exchange (one where only members of particular Greek organizations are invited and allowed to attend) is less likely to become unwieldy, as attendees must manage their reputation within the community. Both sorority and fraternity members identified "open" parties as the riskiest, since there is no guest list; the anonymity and size of the party are seen to cultivate a more chaotic and uncontrolled event, where anything could happen. Trevor (IFC) reflected a common sentiment: "If you go to another organization and there's an open party—those are way worse for harassment or assault, just because they're not like, "Oh fuck, we can get in trouble," kind of situation. So, the intensity of how scared we all are as Greek organizations, I think helps keep it safe." Other participants communicated similar opinions, believing that reckless or poorly behaved party goers hide behind to the cloak of anonymity at an open party. Natalie, a member of Panhellenic, commented,

> In an open party, because so many people show up, I think a lot of people kind of get high on the sense of anonymity … I think bad things are more likely to happen in an open party than an exchange, only in the sense that I think people get really excited going to an open party and they often party really hard—sometimes more than they can handle.

The open party is seen as a place where people from outside of Greek life come to experience the quintessential fraternity party—a bacchanal, lawless affair. Members of Greek life referenced a

sort of *party tourism*, where outsiders sought to reap the benefits of the Greek life party culture, without any of the attendant community accountability they might expect from sorority and fraternity members. The perception that closed parties are safer is widespread; hosting closed parties, or exchanges, is one way that fraternity men attempt to reduce institutional risk.

Beyond managing the guest list, fraternity members reported various practices they employ to mitigate risk over the course of an evening. Many of these practices were outlined earlier in this chapter, where men reported their relationship to sexual harm as bystanders. In their reporting, fraternity leaders did not only intervene when they saw a troubling interaction; they pro-actively scanned the party for emergent situations, or "yellow-flag" behavior. Discussing parties, Danny (IFC) commented, "You'll see guys just following girls everywhere. And if I consistently see this group trying to lose this guy, and this guy keeps following, then I'll essentially butt in on that one." When asked what they look out for while scanning a party, fraternity men tended to respond that they were on alert for: (1) asymmetrical interactions, and (2) signs that an attendee is too intoxicated to be left alone. In many of these scenarios, men reported using tactics of distraction and delegation to intervene. This may look like interrupting to tell a joke, asking one of the people (either pursuant or recipient) for help with a task elsewhere, or asking friends of one of the party goers to intervene (i.e., remove their friend from the situation.)

Many organizations referenced the use of risk prevention chairpersons. In addition to coordinating educational programming, risk prevention chairs are also responsible for organizing and designating sober monitors for events. Usually two sober monitors from each organization (both fraternities and sororities) are expected to refrain from any substances through the course of the night and are the designated point people in case of emergency. Their duties might

include, but are not limited to, intervening in the case of a questionable interaction, organizing someone a ride home, and speaking to police if the house receives a complaint. Caleb (IFC) explained a situation where a fraternity brother might intervene:

> So, if a girl leaves with somebody, this could be for either way—if a guy leaves with a girl, too—so, the person that is working the door has a responsibility to determine if that person is leaving with somebody that they're comfortable with, leaving with somebody that they just met that night, leaving with somebody that their friends know and that can vouch for them. Because it's one thing to say, 'Hey, I'm taking her back to her dorm. She's obviously pretty intoxicated. I'm just going to walk her back, make sure she gets there safe.' We have sober monitors whose job is for that. So at that point we'll be like, 'No, it's okay. We'll do that.'

Monitoring attendee's departures from the party, especially as the night continues, is seen as a critical risk management strategy. Door monitors might assess the condition of the attendees, as well as the relationship and possible intentions of people leaving together. When in doubt, fraternity members emphasized their preference to lean on designated roles/channels to get party goers home safely. Devon (IFC) commented on the risk of stepping into a "Good Samaritan" role at a party:

> If you see somebody that's completely inebriated, a human thought (if you're [sober]), might be to drive them home. Even if they're a complete stranger. They're like, 'I'm lost, I don't know what to do.' There are things that don't necessarily protect the person that might need protecting, but are there to protect [the fraternity members]. So, if I were to drive someone home, and nothing happens, but they don't remember what happened that day, and people only see that I have driven this inebriated person home, then I'm liable for anything to happen if someone were to say, 'Oh, I think that person did something.' So, you also have to caution your members or our members not to put themselves at risk in this situation, as well.

In this case, Devon spoke of the risk involved should a fraternity member walk/drive a sorority member home, outside of a designated role.

As mentioned previously, men's expressions of support for victims is constrained by their fear that women might make up or conjure an allegation, particularly when inebriated. When drunk women are deemed a risk, men employ personal risk management strategies to

delegate that responsibility to another person. Lana (Panhellenic) described an experience while socializing at a fraternity house late one night:

> One of the guys came downstairs. He was like, "This girl like came [over] after a party. Nothing [happened] . . . like we [were] just sitting and talking, but I think I want to try to call her an Uber home just because I don't want her to sleep here while she's under—while she's on a substance. And I just don't want anything to go wrong. I don't have any intention, but I just don't want it to go wrong. Could you help me convince her to leave?" And so I went upstairs and it was someone that I was close to, and I was like, "It's time to go. It's time to go home. I'll walk you home." And then I was kind of shocked that they were taking that preventative measure of—just to be safe, I don't want anything to get confused. You know, I was shocked that they're being that cautious about a situation like that. Because you know that's not what you think, but I do think that that's kind of the benefit of social shaming and shunning, in a way? Maybe, hopefully, finally, it's scaring them enough to be on edge and be aware of what's going on and take those extra measures.

Lana expressed pleasant surprise that this fraternity member had second thoughts of allowing an inebriated woman to spend the night in his room. Perhaps, she said, invoking some fear amongst men will cause them to take measures that reduce scenarios where sexual harm might occur. That said, this example resembles the sort of risk management that Devon described earlier, whereby the effort was aimed at preventing a misinterpretation of the evenings' activities (after all, this student clarified he "had no intentions"). This is not to suggest that such actions are insignificant; men's desire to prevent sexual harm frequently operates alongside a fear of being accused. While some efforts seem targeted at keeping women safe from sexual harm, other efforts aim to keep men safe from accusation.

Beyond event-specific strategies, member selection and ongoing member education are central methods of risk management. Gemma (Panhellenic) said,

> No one's going to sit there and be like, 'Oh yeah, I would totally sexually assault a woman.' No one's going to do that. So talking about that, and [acting] like it could happen to any of your members is something that we did have a conversation [with fraternities] about. You know, every bid that you give out is a risk. You only know these people so well.

Although Gemma emphasized that it is not possible to assess all new members' propensity for committing a future assault, her comment that every bid offered is a "risk" urged fraternity men to keep the notion of sexual assault risk central during member selection and evaluation. Leaders like Owen (IFC) took such warnings seriously:

> We have a five-week pledging where—essentially, it's almost like a trial for [potential new members] to see if they belong in the brotherhood. And even before pledging begins, you need a bid to become a pledge. And so one thing we always do is that we actually do our background checks on these guys we're about to bid. And so part of that involves figuring out, do any girls know these guys? What do they say about this guy? And there'll be times when we'll bring up someone to bid and then someone will come up and say, 'hey, I talked to a few of these girls that know him. They said he's kind of weird at parties; that's all they have to say.' And we immediately say, 'okay, no bid.' We throw him in what we call *the F pile*. Even if he comes to more events, we're not bidding him and that's all the evidence we need. We don't even need to know the details. We don't need to know if it's true or not. We don't need to know why they said it. That's enough for us. We don't even want to take the chance and we don't tolerate that.

For Owen, the mere suggestion of weird or creepy behavior can get a potential new member thrown into "the F pile," eliminating his chances at becoming a fraternity brother.

Through my interviews with fraternity leaders, I came to understand that alcohol (and excessive alcohol consumption) played a significant role in their screening process. Beyond the "meet and greets" to determine general fit and feel in the fraternity, brothers stressed the importance of observing a potential new member's behavior while inebriated. As mentioned previously, alcohol is a key feature of Greek social life. While each member may have a unique relationship to partying, the fact that partying remains a central mode for community building and bonding remains largely uncontested. Within this milieu, fraternity leaders often expressed that they need to feel confident in a potential new member's ability to "handle" himself. For fraternity brothers, alcohol serves as a truth serum, revealing the true character of a potential new member, or at least revealing the upper limit of their risk. Many leaders reflected a similar

sentiment about the importance of watching men interact with alcohol, women, or both, during recruitment:

> I want to see their whole character come out. I don't want to them to be at a party or a social with girls before I get to know what they're like when they're drunk. That's my entire reputation of my organization if that one member does something bad … I almost feel like if I don't get someone drunk during the rush process, that's a risk to *me* because I don't get to see who they truly are. (Trevor, IFC)

Jared, Heath, Cody, and Danny all reported similiar versions of this opinion. Given their access to parties, alcohol, and social events with women, fraternity leaders encourage potential new members to drink to excess in order to reveal concerning behaviors that may surface through the course of their membership.

As evidenced, women serve as a litmus test to help fraternities evaluate potential new members. Hannah explained her role in the vetting process:

> I'm pretty close with one fraternity on campus, and as one of the close girlfriends of the house, every time they have a new class of pledges, they ask me to go around to kind of get to know each of them. They'll go around the party and ask girls, 'Is there a new guy here that's making you feel uncomfortable?'

The combination of alcohol and women is presumed to draw out potential perpetrators, allowing leaders to drop undesirable or risky men. Presumably, this leaves the organizations with a more "trustworthy" class of new members, a group of young men expected to step into the role of interrupter.

Fatigue

Considering the gendered narratives students provided about sexual harm and risk, it is unsurprising that women reported high levels of fatigue. Both men and women employ risk management strategies to combat sexual violence. That said, men's strategies often rely upon the labor of sorority women. Whether providing peer education to brothers, acting as "undercover

informants" to help vet potential new members, or offering informal guidance on how to avoid being *creepy*, women continually guide and assist fraternity brothers in their efforts.

The vigilance required to combat the threat of personal sexual harm, coupled with community conversations intended to increase awareness, often invoke the frustrations of many sorority women. Jess (PSFC) stressed the importance of educating men about women's experiences with harassment, but felt exasperated by the frequency of such conversations, noting that, "it's really aggravating to have to teach men what the reality is for us [women]." Lana (Panhellenic) felt similarly, specifically considering how educational efforts did not feel particularly impactful. She commented, "Most of us, at least as women, are pretty fed up with this kind of stuff happening over and over again; and sometimes you can see it coming, kind of, [and] sometimes you can't." Like many other women involved in Greek Life, Lana articulated a sense of exhaustion regarding the persistence of the problem. Gemma (Panhellenic) stated,

> I think that as women, sometimes talking about this can be a lot, especially when we've been talking about this for like, a year now. And they've had to go to like, three or four workshops already. And sometimes I just think it can be a lot to put on women. When I have girls text me and they're like, I cannot go to this [sexual assault prevention training] because I cannot listen to a stranger—I mean, sometimes they're also very triggering. My sophomore year, we had a lady who recounted her own experience, and it was very powerful. But a lot of girls felt like they could relate to that. And it wasn't in a positive light. It was like she's talking about it, and I am feeling like I'm in my own situation again, and kind of triggered.

The identification with, and experience of sexual assault, combined with a pre-occupation with preventing personal victimization has resulted in a fatigue expressed by numerous women. This exhaustion becomes particularly pronounced in discussions of sexual violence prevention and educational programming. Another member of a Panhellenic sorority, Akira, expressed similar frustrations with sexual violence prevention trainings:

> In the past, I want to say when I was a freshman, [the trainings] would always be done together. So, all fraternities and all sororities would come together and do these [sexual

> assault] trainings, and then—I think it was two years ago—one of the chapters or a committee complained about it, being like "This is super counterintuitive. You're going to talk about [sexual assault] while I'm in the same room as people who have assaulted me, or friends of my assaulter?" Obviously, it's telling them different things, right? Those presentations in the past were much more catered towards fraternities and less towards the people in sororities.

In the last "mixed" IFC/Panhellenic presentation I personally attended, the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life invited a speaker from outside the university to give a talk on sexual assault. She had been a member of Greek life in college, and recounted her experience being sexually assaulted by one of her best guy friends. Women in the audience reported being heavily triggered by the presentation; not only by the all-too-familiar content, but by the fact that they witnessed men in the room, ignoring the presentation, or on their phones. Akira felt that these sorts of presentations cater towards raising awareness of the men in the room by putting women's sexual trauma on display—an exercise all the more offensive to the women when they see men actively disregarding the presentation.

Still, the shift to gender-segregated presentations did not necessarily offer any breath of fresh air. Women's reception of these presentations were rather chilly, from my own observations. The energy of the room during sessions was muted, with respectful if obligatory engagement from the women. In interviews, women expressed feelings of over-saturation regarding educational discussions on sexual assault. Statistics and narratives of assault were all too familiar/triggering, and guidance on assault prevention felt frustratingly repetitive. In comparison with their fraternal counterparts, sorority women believed they received far more sexual assault education than fraternity brothers, an imbalance in education and awareness that felt all the more infuriating, given that women generally felt they were "not the problem." Although both fraternities and sororities receive the same number for mandated university

trainings, whether or not chapters receive additional training is generally up to the individual organization. Lana articulated her frustration at risk prevention education:

> It's about how to manage alcohol and not put yourself into bad situations. During most of those [meetings], I just found myself sitting there frustrated. I'm not the problem here. I'm not putting myself in this situation, because why can't I go enjoy myself and not have to worry about this [for myself] or not have to worry about this happening to people that I like?

These frustrations reveal a core belief expressed by many sorority women that men, and men's apathy towards sexual violence, are central components of the problem.

During the course of the training, students have the opportunity to submit anonymous questions. At each session of the sorority presentations, some iteration of this question was asked, "Why do women need to be educated on how to *not* get sexually assaulted?" Although much of the content covered reporting options, confidential resources, and bystander intervention practices, to some of the women in the room, it felt like a lecture on how *not* to be sexually assaulted. These comments did not respond so much to the course content as they did to a frustration with the persistent threat of sexual harm, despite such education efforts. In this case, the proximity of women to the issue of sexual harm did not stimulate interest in sexual violence prevention programming, rather it incited indignation and resentment. To women whose "expertise" has been forged through enduring sexualized violence (some at the hands of fraternity men), compulsory attendance at sexual violence prevention trainings feels insulting, if not downright offensive.

This stance did not preclude women's admission that sorority women can also harass and harm other members in their community. To the extent that it happens, women usually perceived that sororities took more swift and decisive action in the face of allegations of sexual harm than fraternities. Discussing response to allegations, one sorority member, Vanessa, remarked,

> There was a situation this year. It was from the other side—someone in a sorority not consensually doing something with someone in a frat. And he didn't give consent for that, and she was out immediately within a couple days. There was no question, and I think a lot of the time, it seems like that's not the case for frats. It drags on, much more. And I think the covering up is the bigger issue that I've seen.

Vanessa expressed an opinion echoed by many sorority members: while fraternities have been increasingly vocal about zero tolerance policies for sexual violence, they remain reluctant to take immediate action to remove alleged offending members.

Although men identified as *allies* in the fight to combat sexual harm, their relative "distance" from the issue compromises their ability to take stock of the issue from a structural perspective, and to take action with any urgency. Perhaps such distance might be a result of their relatively privileged gender position within the SFL community. Men experience sexual violence, but the structural conditions of Greek life do not support sexual violence against men to the same degree that they support and enable sexual violence against women. That said, their distance is also a product of the way men selectively engage with particular narratives or frames of sexual harm. The frames of harm at play in student discourses of sexual harm, and potential implications will be reviewed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONTINUUM OF HARM

Framing the Problem

Chapter Three discussed the different ways that fraternity brothers and sorority sisters related to or identified with issues of sexual harm. Where women understood sexual harm as a familiar, intimate, and even commonplace problem, men tended to understand sexual harm as exceptional, at least within their circle of brothers. As mentioned previously, men frequently externalized the problem as something that happens in other fraternities, and more frequently at other schools. Still, they took the threat of sexual harm seriously, understanding that an adverse event connected to their organization could threaten the existence of the brotherhood. To take the problem seriously requires that members consider how, why, and where the problem exists.

This chapter will explore the explanatory frames that SFL members used when describing the problem of sexual harm. According to Erving Goffman, *frames* refer to "schemata of interpretation" that allow individuals to place and make sense of occurrences in their life and the world around them (1974:21). When reviewing my data, I attended to the ways that students explained or made sense of sexual harm, in addition to their proposed solutions. In considering students' explanatory frames, I reviewed the data with these questions in mind: *What is the problem? Who or what is implicated in the problem? Why and how does it persist?*

Explanations for sexual harm generally fell into two competing frames: (1) an aberrant criminal act committed by a pathological individual (i.e., a "bad apple"), and (2) a range of acts falling on a continuum of normalized behavior perpetuating violence against women. While the first explanation locates "the problem" at an individual level (i.e., the "bad apple"), the second points to structural and institutional factors enabling sexual harm. Most students did not

subscribe solely to one explanation, but expressed understandings of sexual harm that identified both individual and organizational culpability.

"Bad apple" framing approaches the problem as a *deviant* act, committed by a pathological perpetrator. Within this framework, organizations have little need to examine their values, practices, and norms, but need only concern themselves with rooting out the aberrant "bad apples." This sort of framing tended to show up most in men's accounting of the issue. In this case, individualized framing prompts particular interventions that largely ignore cultural and structural features within Greek life that contribute to sexual harm. Additionally, framing sexual harm as perpetuated by "bad apples" enables men to engage with a gendered crisis of sexual harm while maintaining a sense of themselves as "good guys."

Identifying sexual harm as a structural problem centers the arrangement of relationships (interpersonal and organizational) over individual-level factors. When students located the problem at a structural level, they did not absolve individuals of culpability for their actions. Rather, they identified broader cultural and organizational issues within the community that encouraged or enabled harmful behavior. Despite the fact that students (often women) recognized that structural issues contribute to the persistence of sexual harm as a pervasive issue in Greek life, constrained by their position as transient students, they struggled to implement interventions beyond the individual level.

Good Guys and Bad Apples: Emergence of the Feminist "Frat Bro"

Almost all fraternity men who participated in this project resoundingly denounced sexual assault, expressing a desire to create safer spaces for all members of the community. Just as SFL members have tended to distance themselves from Greek life stereotypes, men in particular sought to distance themselves from stereotypes depicting fraternity men as predatory rapists.

Much of this distancing was evident in the previous chapter, as men described themselves as bystanders and allies in the fight against sexual assault—never the perpetrator.

Confronted with the wholesale disaffiliation of Panhellenic with the IFC, men were forced to ask, "Who is the rapist?" (Messner 2016). The implication that they are complicit in a system that perpetuates sexual violence against women presents a crisis for fraternity men invested in the safety and well-being of women in sororities. How do fraternity men reconcile their investments in Greek life with the accusations by sorority women that they are perpetuating a "rape culture?"

In light of this conflict, fraternity men have drawn upon the proliferation of anti-rape discourses that seek to engage men in the fight against sexual violence by leveraging their presumed masculine strength to protect, rather than harm, women—think of the "My Strength is not for Hurting" campaign (Masters 2010). Rather than utilizing gender analysis to challenge patriarchy and overturn gender relations—a central focus of radical feminist work—these sorts of campaigns simply reconstruct new forms of dominant masculinity, more sensitive to violence against women (Pease 2019). Michael Messner, Max Greenberg, and Tal Peretz (2015) label this paradigm the "good man/bystander approach" to violence prevention. If radical antiviolence work of the 1970s and 1980s used to make men feel "bad" about patriarchy, or were experienced as "anti-male," this new approach draws men in with "positive pitches to masculine responsibility and honor" (Messner 2016:63). Such a frame enables men to confront the crisis of sexual harm without challenging hierarchical patriarchal relations. In fact, by engaging with sexual harm as "good men," fraternity brothers bolster their claims to masculine identity. This framing allows men to confidently reinvest in Greek life masculinity as a *solution to*, rather than a *cause of,* sexual harm.

"Not in My Frat House." Sexual Assault as a Problem for *Other* Fraternities

Recall the question, "Who is the rapist?" Many men in my interviews pointed the finger at another fraternity, one with a "bad culture" that disrespects women. Discourses that invoked the "bad apples/good guys" dichotomy emerged when: (1) men compared their chapter with "rapey" fraternities, and (2) in discussions of vetting to weed out men of poor character. In doing so, men affirmed their commitment to addressing sexual harm, while simultaneously affirming their position in a reformed masculine hierarchy as "good men."

In discussions with students, I had the opportunity to learn about why they joined Greek life, and what drew them to their particular chapter. Most of the men reported the importance of selecting a fraternity that aligned with their values. Multiple men cited the value of women's assessments of their fraternity in the decision-making processes. When asked about how he selected his fraternity, Caleb (IFC) reported,

> Something I really took into consideration was [the sororities'] opinion on the fraternities—what the general reputation was. And my girlfriend is also in a sorority. So, I reached out to her, and the older people in her sorority—her big [sister], and people she knew—to kind of get the reputation for what these fraternities were … so I'll quote one of the things that my girlfriend's roommate told me, [which] was that [redacted fraternity name] was the "safest" fraternity. That to me was like, okay, that's obviously the green flag. If they feel that they can go to a party or an event, or just any sort of social thing with these guys, they're gonna feel totally safe. They're gonna feel like they can be themselves. They can have fun, and they don't have to keep a guard up, and they don't have to kind of have that subconscious awareness of like, I could be sexually assaulted or something like that.

Similarly, Jared (IFC) noted reputation among women as a primary factor guiding his decision towards his fraternity. "The big thing for me was that girls that I knew said, 'Guys in [redacted fraternity name]—I'd feel comfortable if they would walk me home. They're not creepy.' It's not what you think of when you think of fraternities." Both Caleb and Jared placed a high value on joining an organization that was well-regarded by women and whose members

were considered safe enough to walk a woman home. Similarly, in considering his fraternity selection, Owen (IFC) steered clear of organizations where he felt, "getting with girls was a bigger focus for them than other things." Zayn (IFC) also cited sexual assault reputation as a central cultural component guiding him towards his chosen fraternity:

> I'd say there are a few [organizations] that I would just never be involved with, to be honest with you. I know one of them currently has three Title IX cases actively against it. Just members that aren't held accountable for their actions and only held accountable if other people know about it. Once it goes public, that's when they're like, "Oh, this person did something bad. We should maybe start thinking about doing something about it."

Caleb, Jared, Owen, and Zayn were proud of their participation in fraternity life, but drew clear boundaries between their exceptional behavior, and groups who did not hold their men accountable. There was undoubtedly some selection bias in my sample, as men who believed in the value of research on sexual harm were more likely to respond to my request for interviews, while men in fraternities with poor reputations in relation to sexual assault may have been reluctant to speak with me. Multiple men in my sample disavowed the sort of "Chad" masculinity that has often come to be associated with fraternity culture. According to these brothers, real men can be trusted to walk a woman home; real men are not solely concerned with "getting girls;" and real men are held accountable for their actions. Although the content of these values might be admirable, time and again they are packaged within a frame of benevolent sexism that reinscribes masculine dominance.

In my interviews with the fraternity members, sometimes sexual assault felt like a hot potato; the fraternity with the most recent or notorious allegation(s) could become the "reason" for the negative associations between Greek life and sexual assault. Indeed, the reputation of one particular fraternity came up often in my interviews. Although no fraternity has a clean record in regard to sexual misconduct, the notion that certain fraternities take the issue of sexual harm

more or less seriously deeply impacts their reputation in the community. When discussing the disaffiliation, one fraternity member commented, “But they're probably just gonna let everybody back … like, some of these chapters just, I swear to God, they just get away with sexual assault” (Sam, IFC). Within the Greek community, there exists a sentiment that popular fraternities can “get away” with sexual assault or are not held accountable for transgressions. Many men pointed to these fraternities as largely responsible for the poor reputation of Greek life or for the disaffiliation. One president noted,

> Because of those people, the two or three organizations, fraternities in IFC that failed to conduct anything, it ends up being a consequence for all of IFC, including us. It was just overall very frustrating. My first thought was just like, yes, this is very devastating; they should have taken better action. Obviously, it is something we are all dismayed at, but for [those of] us that have been very proactive in that area—for us to still receive consequences, was very disappointing. (Danny, IFC)

The leaders who professed investment in creating a culture free of sexual harm often expressed disappointment that other fraternities did not share their commitment to cultural change. At the same time, the existence of organizations known for poor culture with respect to sexual assault offered a ready scapegoat for persistence of problems related to sexual harm. Danny expressed frustration that his “proactive” organization received the same sanctions from Panhellenic as those fraternities with bad reputations. Referencing the disaffiliation, Luke commented,

> Basically, the end goal … is to be able to have social events that take place exclusive to Greek life, between IFC and Panhellenic, while maintaining the safety of primarily women. Also, guys—but for the most part, the concern in Greek life is for women. I'll admit that. Nothing's happened here, for example, but there's certainly time and time again you hear about stuff happening with Greek life, which is unfortunate because it does bring a poor name to it.

Luke expressed solidarity with the disaffiliation and the end goal of safer social events between Panhellenic and IFC. For the most part, he attributed a culture of sexual harm to other

organizations—organizations where "stuff happens," as opposed to his organization, where "nothing's happened." The men frequently deployed "bad apple" frames for organizations, as well as individuals.

This tension among fraternities was particularly acute during one of the mandated sexual assault prevention trainings offered by the UC Davis campus Center for Resources, Advocacy and Education (CARE). Each year brought a slightly different iteration of sexual assault prevention training as CARE and SFL attempted to refine content and respond to student feedback. One year, SFL divided the organizations by gender when assigning sessions, with the exception of the professional organizations, which were offered a single co-ed session. During each of the sessions, students had the opportunity to submit anonymous questions that might be answered by the facilitator. One of the questions submitted referenced a particular fraternity with a reputation for "getting away" with sexual assault: "Is there a [redacted fraternity name]-specific version of this [sexual assault training]?" This question spoke to a resentment reflected in the interviews that only certain fraternities were responsible for committing the sexual assaults plaguing the UC Davis Greek community. The feeling that some fraternities "needed" this training more than others was palpable. Some men who felt like they "got it," expressed frustration at the supposed complicity of other fraternities. In this training, fraternity members arrived in groups with each other, sitting amongst their respective brothers, with a clear view of other organizations who "needed this training more" or took sexual assault less seriously. Numerous invocations of a particular fraternity with a reputation (for sexual assault) demonstrated a widespread belief that only select fraternities required this education. Many men in the room seemed to be asking, *Why are we being punished with this training when they're the rapists?*

In both the interviews and in this training, men "mobilized rape" to position themselves as the "good guys"—that is, men who embodied the "right" kind of masculinity. C.J. Pascoe and Jocelyn Hollander explain that in a historical moment where "being identified as rapist has come to be seen, at least in some contexts, as unmasculine," men can mobilize rape to assert dominance over other men (2016:74). By labeling another fraternity as "the rapists," these men exonerate their own chapter and lay claim to a particular form of privileged masculinity that does not need to resort to rape to have sex with women. These efforts demonstrate resilience of masculinity to adapt in the wake of what Connell (2005) terms "crisis tendencies"—the ways in which patriarchal power must shift and adapt when confronted with the inevitable tensions and conflict produced by inequality in the gender order. Facing critique by sororities, some fraternity men recast their masculinity to incorporate knowledge of, and sensitivity to, women's issues.

Although nearly all men acknowledged that sexual harm was a problem in their community, the real scourge was externalized—other fraternities who do not take sexual assault seriously. Perhaps because it is such a deeply entrenched issue, many men seek out fraternities that have voiced their commitment to preventing and addressing sexual assault. The stereotype (and connection) between fraternities and sexual assault is so pernicious that being one of the "safe" fraternities on campus becomes a core value and talking point for organizations. Although this commitment certainly shapes their recruitment and organizational management in meaningful and significant ways, the stratification of fraternities into "rapey" and "safe" can obscure both the less egregious actions (present in all fraternities) that may perpetuate a culture of harm, as well as the way the broader Greek system may be implicated in these problems.

Pruning the Tree

Men that I interviewed seemed to have enthusiastically adopted the "good man/bystander" approach to sexual violence prevention. Although this has empowered men to step up and intervene in troubling party situations, it has reinforced the individualized deviant view of the rapist, as well (Messner 2016). This was evident in fraternity leaders' reliance on screening and gatekeeping as a method of sexual harm prevention. Fraternity leaders emphasized their commitment to preventing bad actors from joining their organization. Understanding each bid to be a "liability," fraternity presidents like Jared (IFC) commented on the importance of being attentive to "red flags." "[At the] end of the day, I think it's more just an organizational thing of who you let into your chapter. Obviously, it's something you can't predict, but I think sometimes there are guys that you can see are potential liabilities in your chapter one way or another." Jared understood the importance of organizational policies in determining his fraternity culture. Like many fraternity presidents, however, his primary method for cultivating organizational culture relied upon recruiting the "right" kind of man.

As discussed earlier, brothers took numerous precautions to vet potential new members and ensure they only inducted men of "good character." The centrality of this strategy in fraternal efforts to reduce sexual harm reveals a core framing of the problem. When fraternity brothers identify the problem as the isolated actions of a particular individual (or even particular fraternity), members target their prevention efforts towards rooting out "bad apples" early on in order to prevent the problem altogether. Discussion of this strategy can reinforce the externalized or distant relationship that fraternity men tended to report when speaking of sexual harm. If the problem is located "outside" of the organization, dutiful screening of potential new members will ideally prevent malevolent actors from infiltrating the organization. This "bad apple" theory and

attendant vetting strategy emerged over and over again in interviews with fraternity men. They spoke of assessing the character of hopeful members to determine whether they are the "right" or "wrong" kind of man:

> When it comes to sexual assault, what leads up to it … or, I guess, the personality of someone that may lead to the act of sexual assault. So their characteristics, things in what people are, how they perceive themselves to be, over time, we notice, "Oh this guy's just a recipe for sexual assault case." [Danny]

> As far as prevention goes, it starts with recruitment. Making sure that the people that you're letting in and that you eventually are going to call a *brother* are people that are super safe around girls and make sure that they always make girls feel comfortable … I think the main culture change that we've implemented is just being a lot more selective on who we want to let into the fraternity. [Cody]

Devon, Trevor, and Zayn articulated similar understandings of sexual assault prevention. Following the disaffiliation, many fraternity leaders expressed a commitment to "do better." And while some of this manifested in a commitment towards continued education, most of the men stressed the importance of member selection in establishing a safe culture. For Cody, sexual assault prevention starts with recruitment; becoming more selective and attuned to "red flags" in the process of member selection was expected to produce a cultural shift in the organization.

According to this view, individual attitudes and behaviors shape organizational culture rather than the other way around (organizational culture shaping individual attitudes and behaviors). Devon emphasized the need to probe for information on potential new members in order to avoid the bad reputation that may accompany a "creepy" recruit. For many fraternity leaders, pruning "bad apples" early on in the process was considered much easier than dropping a member, and they expected to produce a healthier organization, comprised of more trust-worthy members. Notably, these strategies do recognize a continuum of harm, whereby presumably more "commonplace" harmful behaviors (e.g., being too touchy, being too pushy) portend risk for committing further forms of sexual harm.

Josh (IFC) articulated the most extreme manifestation of the "bad apples" theory that I encountered in my interviews:

> I feel like if something [like sexual assault] happens at one fraternity in a different school, in a different state, somehow that implicates us and the broader system. Well, maybe the problem is not the system, it's the individuals. So, if you have 100,000 people—there's even more than that, I don't know how many people are in fraternities nationwide—but if you probably take a percentage of people in the general population who commit sexual assault, you're probably going to get some. It's just terrible, but I think blaming the system is pretty terrible and it's just kind of short-sighted.

Whereas most participants referenced some form of individual and organizational culpability (and accountability), Josh proposed that society unfairly scrutinizes fraternities based on the few individuals that will inevitably commit sexual assault no matter where they are. In Josh's account, sexual misconduct is aberrant behavior, completely severed from the culture, values, and norms established in fraternal communities. Framing sexual harm as an individual problem, Josh struggled to imagine how he (or any other member of Greek life) might make any positive or meaningful improvements. When asked what steps he might take to help address sexual harm in the community, Josh laughed, "It's a great question. I wish I knew." The sense of resignation that Josh expressed seemed to be connected to his understanding of the behavior as both aberrant and individualized. Viewing sexual assault as a private, random, and deviant act, Josh could not imagine what he or others might do to prevent it. Furthermore, his references to "it" indicated a more binary and singular understanding of sexual harm as sexual assault—presumably forced intercourse. This stood in contrast to members who viewed sexual harm as a continuum of behaviors, often tied to community norms. Recall women's descriptions of badgering and unwelcome touching as routine, commonplace experiences. Where Josh understood sexual harm as exceptional, committed by a few "bad apples" hiding in our midst, many of the women understood harmful behavior to be quite normative among men.

Although many participants heavily leaned on vetting, they admitted to the inadequacy of such a system for predicting (and eliminating) potential predators. This method tended to cast a net that was simultaneously too wide and too permeable. Those who are simply socially awkward may be caught up in the purge, while charismatic potential new members might generally sail through such vetting without problem. Even the construction of the "predator" and his behavioral "tells" obscure the spectrum of harm by sorting people into binary categories of good men and sexual predators. This framing discourages community members from recognizing when they or their friends (ostensibly "good people") have committed harm, causing survivors to feel marginalized when voicing experiences of harm with well-liked or respected individuals.

Finally, while targeting "creeps" may immediately eliminate the individuals that cause discomfort upon first impression, this focus ignores the fact that well-liked individuals can also cause harm. Matthew emphasized this point:

> Most of the time, especially in Greek life, the person who sexually assaulted [a woman] is somebody who you would not expect to. The people who are doing this are not people who you're like, "Yes, that person has been giving me these vibes." It's normally somebody who you would be like, "Oh, my God. I'm shocked."

Scrutinizing potential new members offers one layer of prevention, however sexual harm persists in the SFL community, and it is often committed by popular, well-liked, charismatic community members. Targeting efforts towards those outside of the community will not capture all bad actors, nor address the ways that organizational or community practices can enable harm to persist.

The focus on intense screening of potential new members is certainly well-intentioned and can have a positive effect on establishing expectations for fraternity members. That said, hypervigilance towards these potential new members can reinforce binary notions of moral character, and lead to overconfidence that a fraternity has only inducted "good men." Danny

proudly stated that the men of his organization "condemn any sexual misconduct. We're men of good character that possess good morals and we stand strongly against [sexual harm]. And we'll do what it takes to show that we cultivate a comfortable and safe environment for [women]." While many men spoke with pride about building a culture of safety with respect to sexual harm, they often believed that a group of "good men" equated to a "good culture." Here, women's safety is dependent upon the benevolence and good character of the men in an organization—an individualized and precarious safety that might be spoiled by one bad actor.

Structural Framing and the Continuum of Harm

Where individualized framing targets bad men (or dangerous fraternities) as culpable for the problem of sexual assault in the SFL community, structural framing brings attention to the institutional and cultural features of Greek life that foster and normalize sexual harm. This structural lens was most visible in women's diagnosis of the problem (as routine rather than aberrant), however, men also identified broader cultural features that impacted their ability to address sexual harm.

The continuum of harm is a useful concept to illuminate the structural nature of sexual violence. The continuum of harm is akin to Liz Kelly's (1988) concept of the continuum of sexual violence. Rather than focus solely on sexual violence as an episodic and deviant criminal act, Kelly (1988) urges us to consider how violence against women is normalized through commonplace misogyny, such as sexist jokes, unwelcome touching or bodily intrusions, and coerced intimacy. In considering sexual violence against women, this sort of framing expands our study and discussion of sexual violence from criminal acts, such as rape, to the broad array of sexualized and bodily violations that women experience on a regular basis. Recall that women related sexual harm as routine incursions on their space, body, and time. DeKeseredy emphasizes

that one strength of utilizing the continuum of sexual violence is that it "highlights the commonalities and cumulative effects of seemingly distinct abusive behaviors" (2021:632). Understanding sexual harm as a continuum allows us to weave routine or ordinary violations together with abuses defined as *criminal* to assemble a broader pattern of sexual harm. Kelly argues that this concept can "enable women to make sense of their own experience by showing how 'typical' and 'aberrant' male behavior shade into one another" (1988:75). The continuum of sexual violence or harm illuminates the broad array of behaviors that threaten or constrain women's autonomy, and reveals the way that socially sanctioned patriarchal norms buttress sexual violence against women.

The women I interviewed did not speak about sexual violence as an anomalous or exceptional experience—it was routine and embedded in the currents of Greek life. In other words, they experience it as a feature, not a bug. I understood students to be referencing the continuum of harm when they introduced more routine examples of unwelcome attention at parties or socials into the discussion of sexual harm. Although students often spoke of men who were "too touchy," unwelcome attention might also come in the form of men trying to "help" a woman they perceived to be intoxicated (e.g., walk her home, talk to her, offer her food/drink). While women certainly identified unwelcome sexual advances on the continuum of harm, they also spoke of their discomfort with men trying to "help" them—as help might be accompanied by ulterior motives or expectations. Women seemed to understand that they may be held responsible for any harm that befalls them should they accept a man's help. Navigating this minefield of (unwelcome) encounters highlights the dual forces of hostile and benevolent sexism.

The gendered dilemmas that women described are supported by organizational policies unique to Greek life. As previously mentioned, since Panhellenic sororities are unable to host parties at their houses, fraternity men retain control over the party scene. Given the importance of socials and exchanges in Greek life, sorority members must maintain positive relationships with fraternities in order to fully participate in Greek life. Many women complained of the outsized fraternity influence on their lives as sorority women. Danielle (Panhellenic) was perhaps most outspoken about this: "I dislike that it's so … I wish sororities could be separate from fraternities. I guess that's part of it. I think the fraternity men have too much of an influence, directly and indirectly, on the sorority members in the system." Danielle explained that she joined her sorority for the sisterhood aspect and could not care less about the parties. The orientation of the community towards parties, and women's reliance on men as hosts, however, overshadows some of the positive aspects of joining.

Implicating fraternity house culture and power, Akira (Panhellenic) was disturbed by the power that men had to provide access to party spaces:

> I would say that the environment of Greek life really enables [sexual harm]. During the beginning of the year, frats would do open parties … and it's so much easier to get in if you're a freshman and if you're a girl. What does that say about preying on younger women and the dynamic of that, right?

Akira was critical of a fraternity culture that seemed to prey on freshman girls, but she was also critical of the larger structure that granted fraternity men control over these spaces. She went on to lament the way women measured their own value in how attractive they were to men, and though things were changing, she believed those standards remained in place because men were still "in charge." Shira (Panhellenic) stated it plainly: "It puts sororities in a precarious position because they have to rely on fraternities for parties. They have to rely on fraternities for providing alcohol." Morgan also cited men's power to provide access to parties and alcohol as a

central factor enabling sexual harm. “If students are under 21, frat parties may be the only place they can go to party.” Morgan commented that women “go along” with men’s sexual advances for fear that they might not be able to attend future parties if they refuse.

Both men and women were likely to cite broader cultural issues with gender and masculinity as contributing to sexual harm in the SFL community. Women, in particular, talked about issues with men’s entitlement, coercion, and toxic masculinity. Students understood these to be deeply entrenched, and difficult to dismantle. Where Panhellenic women might cite toxic masculinity, USFC women would speak of a culture of *machismo*. When talking about issues of masculinity, women spoke with a certain degree of resignation. Though they could provide direct criticism of the Greek organizational structure that enabled men to exercise disproportionate power, they generally accepted the fact that they had little control over broader patriarchal issues.

Men also cited concerns with masculinity. While some of this was directed towards distinguishing themselves as men of good character, most of them also spoke of the importance educating men to generally be more cognizant and aware of other people’s comfort. In contrast to the strategy of putting “creepy dudes” in the “F-pile,” Raphael (IFC) emphasized the value of talking to potential new members about common mistakes, like not paying attention to someone’s body language. In one-on-one meetings, he explained that he would, “tell him what he did wrong, make him understand why it was wrong.” Raphael said, “One possible response is they understand what they did. They imagine how they made the other person feel uncomfortable. And we can work on changing that.” Here he acknowledged a continuum of harm, and intervened not simply to “save” a woman or kick the potential new member out, but to offer an opportunity for growth and learning.

Another fraternity brother, Matthew (IFC), spoke of his shifting understanding of sexual harm and the type of people who commit it. His prior understanding of sexual violence as rape, and understanding of rapists as terrible people, clouded his ability to see his own actions as potentially harmful. Matthew commented,

> People don't understand that it's not all or nothing. It's not either, "Oh, I didn't do anything" or "Oh, I raped somebody." They don't understand there's a whole bunch of stuff in between. It's like you're way over here on the continuum, but there's all of this stuff that leads up to [sexual assault] and if you learn from it, you're never going to reach that point.

Matthew described coming to the realization that some of his actions fell on the continuum of harm. His interview was a rare instance where a fraternity brother brought sexual harm close, by identifying as someone who has committed harm himself. Matthew emphasized the importance of recognizing behaviors associated with "normative" sexually pursuant masculinity as harmful. He believed it was important that men identify and reckon with those behaviors in order to grow.

Although students offered criticism of gender norms in Greek life, only one student suggested abolishing gender as a criterion for membership. David (IFC) contended that sexism was endemic to Greek life in part due to the segregation of members on the basis of gender:

> I think a lot of it is really environmental. So when you come in here, and you're immediately told, you're a guy, and you're different from girls. The girls are over here, and you're over here. I think that inherently pushes into people's minds like, "Hey, I'm different from the girls." You can't take the sexism out of it because sexism is baked into it. That was that was building block one. We are going to have ones for guys, and we're gonna have ones for girls. And so the only way to fix that would be to start new. We need to think of something else. We need to think of something else where people can socialize, people can do substances, where people can party, where people can have this siblinghood.

David emphasized that fraternities offer fertile ground for misogynistic attitudes to take hold and enable a particular form of sexualized "othering." David explained that the single gender environment primed men to think of women differently, and treat them differently in ways that

denied their full humanity. His reflection on the sorority/fraternity divide aligned with Lorber's argument that maintaining differentiation is key to justifying inequality: "The continuing purpose of gender as a modern social institution is to construct women as a group to be subordinate to men" (1994:33). David felt he was confronted with language that reinforced women's "other" or subordinate status on a regular basis. He said, "It happens often enough. And I could be like 'Hey that was sexist,' but if I did that, I would be the odd one out there. I think I would be isolating myself by doing that. I just try to support it as little as possible." David was critical of the pervasive culture of sexism that he witnessed in his fraternity, but only felt comfortable confronting more egregious violations, lest he alienate himself completely from his organization.

Competing frames of sexual harm—as an extreme, aberrant act committed by a "bad apple" as opposed to a continuum of behaviors intertwined with community norms—inspire different solutions in response to the call to address sexual assault in sorority and fraternity life. Although students often recognized the need for broader cultural changes, translating this need into action proved challenging. Most efforts to address sexual harm were geared towards weeding out harmful people. Secondly, education served to offer individual level intervention and hope for broader cultural change. Students incorporating a continuum of harm framework tended to express higher optimism for potential change, imagining a broader array of sites and spaces for intervention.

Institutional Frames

As previously mentioned, student participants drew upon frames of harm to help them structure and interpret their experiences in the SFL community (and of course, the world at large). A particular frame conflict (individualized vs. structural) was evident in student accounts of sexual harm. One additional "voice" in the fight against sexual harm came in the form of UC

Davis-mandated sexual violence prevention trainings. I want to close this chapter with a reflection on the palpable disjuncture between the framing utilized for university-mandated sexual violence prevention trainings and the experiences of sorority women.

Over the course of my time in the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life, I had the chance to attend annual sexual violence prevention trainings four years in a row. With the exception of one year (when they invited a guest speaker to narrate her experience of sexual assault), the trainings followed a public health format, foregrounding consent, boundaries, and healthy relationships. Numerous scholars have noted that this public health prevention model (developing bystanders, recognizing healthy/unhealthy behaviors, employing safe party practices) has come to dominate institutionalized response systems seeking to address sexual violence (Boyle 2019; Brubaker et al. 2017; Bumiller 2008; DeKeseredy 2021; Messner 2016). Within these models, gender-specific concepts and language give way to a gender-neutral framing of the problem—consider the shift from discussions about *violence against women* to *intimate partner violence*.

On one hand, gender-neutral language can enable us to broaden our critique of structural inequality and sexual violence, moving from a singular focus on gender to include critical analysis of other axes of inequality (e.g., race, sexuality, class, immigration status, etc.). That said, neutral language also enables institutions and practitioners to sidestep "political" conversations of structural inequality in favor of identity-blind, neoliberal, individualized interventions. Karen Boyle (2019) discusses the tension involved when naming or articulating social problems such as sexual harm as *violence against women*, *gender-based violence*, *men's violence against women*, or *intimate partner violence*. While broader umbrella terms offer the expanded potential to draw connections between forms of gendered or sexualized violence, they

may also obscure the overwhelming directional and hierarchical nature of gender based violence. Gender-neutral terms can conceal that such violence is grounded in gender inequality—grounded in patriarchy that often manifests in men's violence against women, but also includes men's violence against men, and violence against gender non-conforming individuals who disrupt gender hierarchies. Does the use of gender-neutral language enable a more complex and multi-faceted analysis of such violence, or does it flatten and erase the persistence of hierarchies and marginalize analyses of gender inequality? Boyle argues that "Naming practices make more or less visible who is doing what to whom, and foreground differing sets of connections" (2019:21). For Boyle (2019), being specific about naming practices allows us to find commonalities or patterns within experiences, but also to understand where they differ. Unfortunately, the mainstreaming of feminist anti-violence work and proliferation of gender-neutral language has often resulted in a flattening of the contours of inequality, rather than an expanded understanding of cultural and structural inequality (DeKeseredy 2021; Pease 2019).

Student response to UC Davis-mandated sexual violence prevention trainings illuminate some of the limitations of a de-politicized public health model. The previous chapter highlighted the exhaustion articulated by sorority women regarding educational conversations on sexual harm, including annual sexual violence prevention trainings. Given that these trainings focused on education about and modification of individual behaviors (e.g., alcohol consumption, ascertaining consent, bystander techniques, reporting options), women interpreted this as advice on how "not to get assaulted." Often, sorority members' critical responses to sexual violence prevention trainings (in the form of anonymous feedback) highlighted grievances framed by gender:

- *Will the frats be getting this presentation too? I feel that they need this presentation.*

- *How does our conversation about these topics differ from the conversations that fraternities have during this programming?*
- *Where are the men? I want them to look at the faces of the people they have/could hurt in the society they allow.*
- *What sexual awareness prevention are the fraternities receiving? I truly want to know; in depth, what they are learning?*
- *Why is this presentation a watered down version of the violence that actually happens to women on this campus?*
- *Why do men not respect us?*

These questions demonstrate the degree to which women frame their experiences of sexual harm as shaped by gender. The anger and resentment reflected in their questions was, in part, a response to the absence of critical gender discourses in discussions of consent and sexual harm. Discourses of consent emerging in the 1970s and 1980s by feminist legal scholars were deeply critical of patriarchal structures constraining women's sexual subjectivity (Brownmiller 1975; Dworkin 1987; Estrich 1987; MacKinnon 1987; Rich 1980). Despite this history, current programming on consent often demurs from engaging in conversations on broader structural inequality (e.g., gender, race, etc.), to focus on complexity of consent involving alcohol, drugs, or general status distinctions (i.e., power imbalances with respect to position a social group). In these questions, women called attention to and named the missing discourse—*patriarchy*. Their questions can be seen as a "call-out" to the university—a complaint that institutional framing of the problem has ignored a critical component of the larger context in which it occurs.

Although women expressed the most criticism of the "gender-neutrality" of sexual violence prevention programming, the absence of discourses of patriarchy can harm victims regardless of gender. One anonymous fraternity participant asked, "What are you all doing to support men when they are sexually assaulted?" Though facilitators emphasized numerous times that "anyone" can be a victim or perpetrator, this student still felt that the discussion marginalized the experiences of men who have been sexual assaulted. Attempts to be inclusive

by using gender-neutral language in presentations on sexual violence prevention fall flat because students do not experience sexual harm as a gender neutral phenomenon. Discussions of patriarchy need not ignore the plight of men who experience sexual harm. The inclusion of feminist analysis of patriarchy could help contextualize both the disproportionate impact of sexual violence on women (and other gender marginalized people), as well as illuminate how normative masculinity often renders men's victimization illegible.

The problem of sexual harm in sororities and fraternities is deeply embedded in a structural and cultural context of gender inequality. Despite this, institutionally available sexual violence prevention trainings have failed to situate this pressing problem in the context of patriarchy. Sophia Strid and Jeff Hearn state succinctly that in "lacking an underpinning idea of structural inequalities, these perspectives and frameworks remain insufficient to explain violence" (2022:322). The disconnect between students' experience of the problem as structural, and the prevention model provided by the university (largely individualized) has led to intense dissatisfaction and frustration, particularly by women. By marginalizing discussions of broader structural inequality, institutions have failed to recognize and acknowledge the situated nature of sexual violence, and deny students the opportunity to engage in meaningful and complex discussions around sexual agency.

CHAPTER FIVE

JURISDICTION OVER JUSTICE

This study has focused primarily on the relationships and negotiations between student actors as they have attempted to manage sexual harm in their community. The call for disaffiliation was an action led by sorority members, and directed towards fraternity members. However, student actions must be situated in a larger institutional context. These student organizations are part of student life at the university, as well as embedded in larger Greek governing bodies that oversee their operations. Students are held accountable to particular codes of conduct enforced by the university, as well as their own organization's national headquarters. They also expect a certain degree of support and accountability from these institutions. In this regard, institutions have failed to live up to such expectations. My interviews revealed deep frustration with both university institutions and national fraternal organizations in responding to, and assisting with, issues regarding sexual harm. Despite campus efforts to offer resources towards sexual violence and sexual harassment prevention and reporting, students often felt adrift when navigating processes to seek accountability and resolution. Mistrust of the university's capacity to adjudicate issues of sexual harm often has left students attempting to resolve these complex matters on their own, with little supervision or institutional support.

As registered student organizations, sororities and fraternities operate under the Center for Student Involvement, a department of student affairs that offers oversight and guidance to all student clubs and organizations on campus. The Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life is housed within the Center for Student Involvement, and provides direct support to Greek life organizations, advising them of university policy and often serving as mentors and advocates for chapter leaders. Comprised of a small team of three full-time staff members and one or two

student staff members, the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life serves as a first point of contact for students in Greek life. Aside from the Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life staff, students most frequently referenced contact with the Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs and Title IX for issues relating to student misconduct. Where the Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs generally investigates misconduct relating to hazing and alcohol, Title IX (housed within the UC Davis Office of Compliance and Policy) investigates and makes determinations on allegations of sexual violence and sexual harassment. Beyond university staff and administration, most chapters also receive support and guidance from their national headquarters (often referred to as *nationals*), who have capacity to revoke an organization's charter in cases of serious misconduct.

When students spoke about barriers to addressing sexual harm in their community, most expressed a lack of confidence in the university or their national organizations to provide meaningful support. Where their relationship with the university might best be described as *adversarial*, they felt their relationship to nationals was mired in *liability* concerns. Students generally felt they were under intense scrutiny from the university regarding any transgressions involving alcohol or hazing. They perceived administration to be hostile to their presence on campus and therefore untrustworthy to assist when they needed help. Although nationals might offer some guidance, students reported that the relationship between chapter and nationals felt fairly transactional—students pay membership dues in return for recognition, access to a national network, and liability insurance.

It should be noted that these institutional landscapes (i.e., both the university and respective national chapters of sorority/fraternity life) are incredibly complex and bureaucratic. The objective here is not to outline the rules and regulations governing institutional response to

sexual assault, nor institutional logics or rationale guiding their response. Rather, I am interested in the ways that *students experience* these institutions as responsive (or alternatively, insensitive) to their needs and concerns regarding sexual harm. It should also be noted that students seeking redress following an experience of sexual harm may have vastly different needs and desired outcomes. Some may pursue formal sanctions against the perpetrator, while others simply want acknowledgement for the harm caused. When considering barriers or deterrents to reporting, one should consider not only whether the institution is fulfilling its purpose (i.e., determining whether sexual violence has taken place and taking action), but whether those actions meet the needs of students who have experienced harm.

Aside from student accounts of mistrust in the university, their reluctance to share about their involvement in Greek life was palpable. Given the associations between Greek life and student misconduct (e.g., hazing, binge drinking, sexual assault), students were hesitant to reveal certain details about their community for fear of reprisals. Although I explained that I was not affiliated with the Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs, and would anonymize all data, students, particularly fraternity members, were hesitant to speak openly about the events and activities that take place at fraternity houses. I understood their selective disclosures to reflect a broader climate of caution, fear, and mistrust when discussing issues of a sensitive nature to those perceived as authority figures in the university. Fear that organizations will get in trouble during investigations of party-related incidents certainly exacerbates the fraught relationship between university administrators and Greek life community members when it comes to issues of sexual harm.

"Nothing Happens." Student Perceptions of Institutional Response to Sexual Assault

Prior research has demonstrated that although sexual violence is prevalent on college campuses, underreporting of sexual assault is a significant problem (Cantor et al. 2017; Fisher et al. 2000; Spencer et al. 2017; Tuerkheimer 2019). Students tend to cite various reasons for avoiding reporting through official channels, including the belief that an incident was not serious enough to report, fear of emotional distress during the reporting process, and the concern that reporting will not result in any sanctions (Cantor et al. 2017). My student interviews largely confirmed these findings, as most of the participants indicated reluctance to report incidents to the school, believing that the costs of reporting (both social and emotional) far outweigh the possible benefits. Melissa, a Panhellenic president, was asked whether incidents were generally handled via university proceedings or internal processes. She responded, "Most of it does not go through the university. At least from my end, a lot of women do not want to have to go through the university." She indicated that students often utilize informal channels based on the perception that they will have greater control over the process and will face less personal scrutiny. Toby, another Panhellenic president, stated that, "Some of our girls said they went to resources on campus and felt like they were [hearing], 'well, because [you were] drunk; it's your fault.'" Toby did not identify which campus resources had left the women in her sorority feeling victim-blamed, however the negative perceptions of institutional reporting options certainly have a chilling effect. Spencer et al. (2017) found that college women often fail to report sexual assault because they were drunk when it happened, or for fear of being blamed. Hearing confirmation from fellow sisters that their behavior may be scrutinized upon reporting breeds further mistrust in institutional processes.

Aside from fear of victim blaming, students declined to report through formal channels due to the perception that no meaningful action will come from it—nothing happens. Isabella (USFC) commented that, in her experience,

> The survivor doesn't want to report it because they're like, "Oh, this is like, the 13th one already and no one's done anything." It's just hard because you hear these stories, but no one wants to report it because they're like, "Oh well, we reported in 2020 and [the accused] are still here."

Participating students also believed reporting to Title IX was an exercise in futility. They repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with formal reporting options, frustrated by a process that required them to re-narrate their trauma only to have nothing come of it. One student at a sexual violence prevention training commented anonymously:

> My friend was sexually assaulted and [Title IX] said she was too drunk to tell an accurate story about being assaulted, and the case was dropped with him just doing an education module (despite there also being a rape case against him, as well, that was also dropped). Since the case is "done," they can't talk about it or refute. What can be done to make things right, if they can't talk about it, but this individual has had several allegations against him?

The Title IX office is charged with investigating and adjudicating complaints of sexual violence and harassment. When investigators conclude there is not enough evidence to determine whether a respondent violated university policy, complainants lose significant trust in the system. Smith and Freyd (2013) use the term "institutional betrayal" to describe the harm incurred when institutions fail to protect their members from abuse. They suggest that "sexual assault occurring in a context where an important institution acts in a way that betrays its member's trust will be especially damaging" (2013:120). Although the efforts of adjudicatory systems at universities may be well intentioned, many victims find the process degrading, and the outcome to be unresponsive to their needs (Harper et al. 2017). When victims feel as though their experiences are discredited or not believed, they may feel as though they are experiencing a "second assault"

(Ahrens 2006). In these cases of betrayal, the harm of the initial incident is compounded by insensitive and largely ineffectual institutional processes. When institutions become the arbiters of truth, their determination that a claim cannot be substantiated is discrediting to the survivor. By declining to report, survivors deny institutional jurisdiction over their experience.

Suspicion and cynicism of formal reporting processes extends beyond sorority members. Fraternity brothers also expressed deep misgivings about the efficacy of formal investigations:

> When it comes to what the hell the school is doing, I wish I could tell you, because there are multiple chapters at the school who have had Title IXs filed against them. Nothing has been done. They haven't done anything to resolve the issue. The person hasn't been punished. (Heath, IFC)

Gabe (IFC) also noted, "There are some fraternities known to have more of these assault claims, and pretty much they always get dismissed by the university for not having enough evidence." Both Heath and Gabe believed that Title IX investigations have failed to sanction perpetrators, as well as the fraternities they believe foster a culture of harm. When men spoke about institutional failures, their grievances did not reside in concern for the harm revisited upon the victim, however. Their frustrations seemed directed at institutional complicity in allowing "toxic" fraternities to continue operating on campus, polluting the reputation of Greek life as a whole. While men did express a genuine desire to reduce instances of harm, threaded through my interviews was their perspective that it was unfair for institutions (and sororities) not to distinguish "good" fraternities from "bad" fraternities, and eject the latter from campus. Here again, it is evident how the "bad apples" vs. "good guys" framing shapes men's sense of justice in the wake of sexual harm. "Good" fraternities tend to feel unduly scrutinized for the violence perpetrated by "bad" fraternities, who rarely, if ever, face consequences for their misconduct. Where for women, the institution betrays them by failing to acknowledge and take action regarding harm that has taken place, men feel betrayed by an institution that fails to punish "bad"

fraternities. Women seem less likely to take up this position, understanding the distinction to be irrelevant when, as Kate (Panhellenic) noted, "It's not certain frats. It's *all* frats."

As evident from my interviews, the participants had two expectations for the Title IX process: (1) to hold a perpetrator accountable for their actions, and (2) to hold a chapter accountable to the community. If students perceive that Title IX investigations rarely accomplish the first goal, they certainly fail to achieve the second. During my research, only one formal inquiry into *organizational* misconduct regarding sexual violence was discussed. The organization received sanctions, however, this did little to rebuild and repair relationships within the community. In their analysis of institutional sanctions for sexual misconduct, Cantalupo and Kidder assert that, "when the campus community and the public see evidence that a college or university imposes only so-called 'slap on the wrist' sanctions, the result can be a foreseeable loss of confidence in the institution's integrity and commitment to its stated values" (2019:2376). Even in instances where sanctions are imposed, students may still bristle at the opacity of the process and limited scope of the sanctions.

"We're Not Supposed to Be Handling this Stuff on Our Own." Community Constraints When Addressing Sexual Harm

Given students' mistrust of formal reporting channels for sexual harm, they have assembled patchwork processes to manage complaints internally. While some processes may be built into their bylaws, many have been applied informally and inconsistently. Assuming the complainant has a good relationship with the responding fraternity, sorority members might find swift and decisive action from reporting to a fraternity brother directly. Lauren (Panhellenic) recounted that, after confiding in a fraternity friend of a troubling incident with his brother, "he reported it to his frat and then that dude ended up getting kicked out." She noted that the member

had received previous complaints, facilitating a quick resolution. Devon (IFC) explained how internal reporting worked in his fraternity:

> My fraternity specifically has a judicial system … kind of. We call it a "Standards Board," where if anything is brought to their attention, they will objectively rule on it and decide either a punishment or you can be kicked out of the fraternity. So, if an individual brings a sexual assault case about one of the brothers, it's kind of up to the Standards Board to determine whether or not they drop the brother. Again, I even think it's tricky for trained specialists to do cases regarding sexual assault. So, if everyone is really social about it, and kind of knows what happened, then it's very easy. We drop the brother easy. When it's a gray area, it remains a gray area.

Devon admitted that "gray areas" were quite common and difficult to resolve. According to most of the fraternity brothers, previous complaints coupled with a "credible" allegation were most likely to result in dropping the member. Unfortunately, allegations are only likely deemed credible if the accuser is a "trusted" woman *and* the accused is considered low-status within the fraternity. When the accused is well-respected, or holds a leadership position in the fraternity (such was the case in the event precipitating the Panhellenic/IFC disaffiliation), the standards board often side with their brother. While internal reporting may offer an alternative to the Title IX process, students are ill-equipped to make such determinations, and risk causing further damage to victims and community members.

Amidst discussions between Panhellenic and IFC to improve a climate for reporting, Owen implemented an anonymous reporting system for his own fraternity:

> I felt compelled to make an anonymous *Google* form for our fraternity so that girls could kind of come forward in case anything had happened. So actually, the school—I remember—told us to take it down because we're not supposed to be handling this stuff on our own. At the end of the day, a lot of us are 18 to 21 year olds. (Owen, IFC)

Before being taken down, Owen mentioned they received a couple reports about one particular member, and the fraternity dropped him subsequently. Still, students have no training for resolving issues related to sexual harm, and the risk of causing further harm in the investigation

process remains high. Although organizations attempt to hold others accountable via internal reporting and standards board meetings, many admit to the various pitfalls involved in trying to mete out justice internally. Dara (Panhellenic) was incredulous at the whole process: "If you talk to the leadership of one of our organizations, they're going to have to hold a standards meeting and call that person in and delegate with a group of like, 18 to 21 year olds who don't really have any training on these issues to make this grand decision." Students are not permitted to perform any sort of investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct—they often only come to learn this after the university discoveres such "fact finding" has taken place. Thomas (IFC) explained,

> I'm totally okay with making hard decisions, but I'd rather not be put in an impossible situation. I'd rather there be more support and resources for that. Because we're not allowed to report to proper authorities because the victim doesn't want to. But we're also not allowed to do any fact-finding, or we're not allowed to verify anything about the situation, but then we still have to make a decision about [the respondent's] membership. If we don't, and it gets out, and it was true or something, then we're completely screwed.

Although Thomas wanted to be responsive to allegations, he felt unqualified to do so and was generally unsure which response would be appropriate. Notably, he referenced concern for the reputation of the fraternity should they make the "wrong" decision, over concern of the harm suffered by the victim.

In a climate where sorority members are reluctant to report via formal channels, they increasingly demand greater accountability directly from fraternities. As fraternities are barred from conducting investigations, they must issue a determination based on whether a member has "gone against our values—not whether or not they committed sexual assault" (Michael, IFC). When leaders were confronted with an accusation, they expressed a great deal of uncertainty about how to move forward, particularly when a victim requested discretion.

> Because right now, at least at least in Greek life, there's a very big gray area where it's like, "Hey, what of these offenses should be brought forward to the police? What of these offenses should be brought forward to the school? What should just be handled internally

> within the fraternity? How do we approach this? What's the best way to actually do the right thing?" (Heath, IFC)

Although some fraternity leaders desire to respect the wishes of the victim, and "be accountable," they understandably feel it is inappropriate for them to adjudicate matters of sexual misconduct. Additionally, prior research has demonstrated that individuals marginalized on the basis of race or gender are more likely to experience campus sexual violence and institutional betrayal (Gómez 2022). It comes as little surprise that fraternity men prefer that the university adjudicate such matters, given they are less likely to experience institutional betrayal via these formal processes.

Sorority women, on the other hand, may find their reports or complaints to be shut down, unheard, or filed away. Ahmed explains that in order to subvert institutional imperatives to maintain the status quo, those who complain must create their own pathways and processes to communicate, creating a "tangle" of complaints (2021:298). This tangle is nonlinear, nor standardized. Complaints burst forth during sexual violence prevention trainings, they are aired out via social media channels, and they leak out in discussions between sorority members. Despite university and fraternity efforts to contain and manage issues of sexual harm, complaints continue to spill out in a messy fashion as institutions fail to do little more than serve as containers to hold complaints.

Even when reporting occurs through official channels, students express confusion about how to adhere to university protocol, while being sensitive to other members of their community. Javier (USFC) explained that when a Title IX investigation is underway, his fraternity is unable to speak about, or remove the member:

> There's a disconnect between us and the victim, as well. Of course we believe the victim, but we can't publicly come out and say [so]—there's certain things we can't do because of

> Title IX and defamation. There's a lot of legalities. We have to let the school find them guilty and then we can [kick them out], and stuff like that.

Javier expressed frustration at the lack of transparency in the Title IX process, and his inability to take action as an organizational leader. He was sensitive to the notion that his silence on the alleged sexual misconduct of one of his brothers might be mistaken for complacency. The university investigation process not only heightens the adversarial relationship between university and student organizations, but it can also exacerbate the adversarial relationship between fraternities and sororities when fraternities are perceived to be protecting their brother during an investigation.

In addition to the institutional betrayal students experience in relation to the university, chapters also find that their national organizations fail to offer meaningful guidance or support in these matters. Although sorority members confer with each other about safety at fraternity parties, many of these conversations must happen "off the record." Toby (Panhellenic) explained her understanding of sorority rules:

> Sororities are not allowed to talk about boys, alcohol, or parties, ever. Not at formal meeting, not during recruitment. To have the meetings where we talked about which frats are safe, we had to hold a separate meeting after our advisor left to talk about this type of stuff because, according to our bylaws or anyone's bylaws, we shouldn't be talking about it.

Panhellenic sororities are not allowed to have alcohol in their chapter facilities, though each sorority may have slightly different rules regarding how they should handle mixers and socials. Toby presumably referenced a policy mandating that co-sponsored events must be alcohol-free. These policies take on slight variations, but could include stipulations such as: "Chapters are expected to not co-host or cosponsor, or in any way participate in, an activity or event with another group or entity that purchases or provides alcohol, illegal drugs, or controlled substances;" or, "A chapter may co-sponsor social events at fraternity facilities only if such

events are alcohol-free." Sorority sisters understand that if they are not allowed to be engaging in these activities, they must avoid discussing them as part of "official" sorority business.

Although the intention may be to reduce risk and liability, the impact is that students feel censored regarding what they can discuss with anyone in a position of authority. The result is that sorority women feel unsupported by nationals in their efforts to keep one another safe. This silencing maintains a sort of double-life in Greek communities, whereby some of the most persistent problems in Greek life (those related to alcohol and sexual harm) are kept underground and marginalized in the "official" business of the chapter. Trevor (IFC) pointed to this lack of transparency between nationals and his chapter as a huge barrier to addressing fraternal issues with harassment:

> You know, and I really am a very honest with my [advisor], but there's certain things I just don't say to him just because I know if I say that, I'll get in trouble for breaking one of the violations. And they know that. I know that. Everyone knows that. And that needs to be fixed. You can't fix the harassment without honesty and without truth.

Despite a desire to address sexual harm, student mistrust in both university administrators and national organizations often leads students to attempt to resolve complex issues on their own haphazardly.

My goal in drawing attention to such concerns is not to interrogate the rationale for institutional policies regarding sexual misconduct, necessarily. While policy serves to protect the institution from liability, it may also be in place to ensure the privacy of involved parties and protect both complainant and respondent from retaliation. Rather, I wish to draw attention to the challenges that student communities encounter as they navigate what it means to be responsive and accountable in the wake of sexual misconduct. Responsible for upholding Title IX, the university discourages student communities from managing information related to sexual harm. To the extent that such information circulates in student communities, universities are expected

to be the designated repositories for allegations, empowered to investigate and determine whether university policy has been breached. Finding institutions insensitive to their needs, some students (predominantly women) have turned towards internal processes to resolve problems with sexual misconduct. While these "solutions" may occasionally produce a desired outcome, they are a wholly insufficient response to sexual misconduct and run the risk of causing further harm. The existence of such ad-hoc student interventions is a symptom of the larger dysfunction of institutional response to sexual misconduct and its inability to meet the needs of victims and their communities.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

During the course of this project, the IFC, the council representing social, historically white fraternities, responded (yet again) to public allegations of sexual misconduct. The IFC *Instagram* account released another post about these sexual assault allegations:

> IFC has been made aware of recent online discussions regarding allegations involving members of our IFC-affiliated chapters … As a school-registered organization, we are unable to hold an internal investigation against any individual member—this responsibility is deferred to HDAPP [Harassment and Discrimination Assistance and Prevention Program], who has experience dealing with similar situations and fully understand how to handle them. We encourage survivors to explore reporting through the University, confidential resources such as CARE or Empower YOLO, or law enforcement if necessary. These vile actions are not tolerated in the slightest, and IFC aims to promote safety through educational programming and accountability efforts. (UCD Interfraternity Council, 2024)

Although the cycle of sexual assault allegations in the UC Davis community seemed to reach a sort of apex during the Panhellenic-IFC disaffiliation, it seemed that action did little to shift the overall dynamic between Panhellenic sororities and IFC fraternities with respect to sexual harm. IFC clarified they cannot conduct any investigation into sexual assault, though they roundly condemn such "vile actions" and commit to educational programming and unspecified accountability efforts. The cycle continues.

A historic and notorious bastion for sexism, classism, and racism, Greek life (i.e., social sororities and fraternities, in particular), has received ample attention from scholars examining sexual assault on college campuses. I was specficially interested in interrogating this legacy of sexual harm amidst greater internal calls for accountability and change. Interviews for this study began in the midst of a collective effort by Panhellenic sororities to improve community climate for sexual assault survivors and reduce instances of sexual harm. Despite high hopes for the disaffiliation to prompt significant change, talk of the re-affiliation action plan largely faded out

within the year, and Panhellenic-IFC relations resumed as before. What can we learn from this sorority-led collective complaint and its unceremonious shift into the archive of unresolved grievances? Why does sexual harm persist as a social problem despite IFC's avowed commitments to "promote a safe environment for all students"?

Despite numerous complaints and repeated commitments to address sexual harm in Greek life, it remains a social problem deeply embedded in the structural conditions of this community. And while cultural gender scripts may manifest across all Greek spheres, structural gender asymmetries present as particularly acute in social, historically white fraternities and sororities (Panhellenic and IFC). That is to say, within Greek life, the racial and class privilege of social sororities and fraternities seems to exacerbate structural gender inequality between IFC fraternities and Panhellenic sororities. The relative power of IFC fraternities is undergirded by material resources that enable them to have large houses, insured by their national organizations. While policy may prohibit them from using "official" funds for alcohol, fraternity brothers shared that they were still obligated to contribute additional funds to purchase alcohol for parties. Aaron explained,

> Fraternities are not allowed—at least mine was not allowed—to budget for alcohol for our events. So I would pay dues every quarter, and then on top of that I would have to *Venmo* a brother around the ballpark of like, $60 a quarter for alcohol. It doesn't matter if I drank or not, and I never drank the chapter's alcohol. But I saw to pay that fee because we were buying alcohol for everybody who was coming to our events.

Organizational access to resources (e.g., large houses, comprehensive insurance policies, affluent member base), combined with homogeneous peer cultures that invest in a heterosexualized party scene afford IFC fraternities' disproportionate power within the Greek life campus community. Additionally, gendered cultural expectations in social and sexual situations encourage men's persistence in pursuing sexual objectives, while naturalizing

women's passivity and acquiescence. These structural keystones of Panhellenic and IFC relations produce an environment where sexual harm emerges as a perpetual problem.

Women in Greek life recognize that sexual harm is not merely a "personal trouble" but a "public issue" (Mills 1959). The regularity with which they experience vulnerability to sexual harm, and the commonality they find with other sorority women confronting similar problems, enables recognition that this problem transcends their individual circumstances. Furthermore, these women likely witnessed public institutional reckonings with sexual assault stemming from the *#MeToo* movement. Cultural discourses emerging from this movement empower survivors to frame deeply personal and harmful experiences within the structural contexts that enable sexual violence to continue. Sorority women spoke about, and identified, structural features within Greek life (both cultural and organizational) that produced vulnerabilities to sexual harm. Despite this, their efforts to shift cultural features of Greek life (e.g., de-centering alcohol/parties from social life, shifting gendered norms) were undermined by the structural constraints Panhellenic women encounter (e.g., lack of control over parties/alcohol, persistence of fraternity assigned hierarchies). Unable to gain traction in shifting these broader features, women understand they must return to individualized strategies to combat the threat of sexual harm.

Still, increased demands for accountability targeted at fraternity men seems to have led to some shift in the way that fraternity brothers talk about and engage with issues of sexual harm. Many men have taken up the charge to combat sexual harm by developing more robust bystander intervention and potential new member vetting practices. They seem to understand sexual harm to be a problem in the Greek life community, and adopt various risk management policies in an attempt to "keep women safe." That said, their efforts largely recast a structural problem into an individualized problem, as they attempt to purge "bad apples" from the fold. Men's framing of

the problem as resulting from men who practice a "toxic" form of masculinity allow them to reinvest in a "new" masculinity that often retains traditional gender hierarchies via practices such as benevolent sexism.

Barbara Risman (2004) discusses the enduring resilience of structural inequality in her analysis of gender as a social structure. Risman (2004) argues that we must attend to gender structure at the individual level, at the interactional level (cultural expectations), and at the institutional level in order to understand how the structural model (and attendant inequalities) are reproduced. My research data indicate that the cultural critique coming from Panhellenic sorority women has been quickly and repeatedly neutralized by a robust institutional gender structure propped up by class and race privilege. Additionally, efforts to shift a gender culture within Panhellenic and IFC relations have struggled in some part due to the pleasure that participation in this campus subculture offers a subset of members. While some Panhellenic women would be happy to terminate their social relationship with fraternities indefinitely, other women join Greek life for the chance to socialize with fraternity men, enjoying the social and sexual opportunities it affords. Risman comments, "doing gender at the individual and interactional levels gives pleasure as well as reproduces inequality, and until we find other socially acceptable means to replace that opportunity for pleasure, we can hardly advocate for its cessation" (2004:446). Given the complicated set of factors contributing to the persistence sexual harm in Greek life, what recommendations can we suggest?

Recommendations for Reducing Sexual Harm in Greek Life

As previous scholars who have researched Greek life in the United States suggest, interventions in institutional arrangements to reduce the relative power and control that IFC fraternities have over the campus party scene would reduce the likelihood of sexual assault

(Armstrong et al. 2006; Boswell and Spade 1996; DeSantis 2007). Furthermore, this might enable a wider range of collective responses from Panhellenic sororities as they attempt to improve cultural climate regarding sexual harm within Greek life. Women's efforts to take action (either collective or individual) against sexual assault can result in retaliation from men who largely control access to Greek social life. To the extent that institutions enable social Greek organizations to operate with a concentration of power in IFC fraternities, they are likely to encounter recurring and persistent issues related to sexual assault.

Interviews with multicultural sororities (USFC) suggest that while they, too, confront sexual harm as a social issue, they are less likely to name unequal distribution of resources (between sororities and fraternities) as an impediment to their objectives. Rather, they target gendered interactional norms and dominant notions of masculinity as a primary contributor to a hostile climate for women. Additionally, these students noted that the relatively small size of their community complicated the ability of survivors to come forward, for fear of retribution or ostracization. While this could impact any member of an insular community, smaller multicultural Greeks may feel this particularly acutely if they already feel they exist at the margins of campus and university life. Efforts to address campus sexual assault would benefit from understanding that the mechanisms supporting gender inequality or sexual harm may look different across different campus communities. To the extent that universities can be attuned and responsive to these differences, they would be better suited to support students in combating sexual harm.

The data additionally highlights potential gaps in current sexual assault prevention and educational programming that primarily utilizes a public health approach emphasizing individual behavioral change. While the focus on alcohol risk mitigation, bystander intervention strategies,

communication, and healthy relationships is indeed critical, by not situating these individual practices within broader structural contexts, we fail to illuminate the way structural inequalities shape micro-level interactions. Sorority women's frustration with sexual assault prevention trainings seemed to stem from the omission of discussions about structural inequality, leading them to feel they were being given a lecture about "how not to get raped." Rather than using gender-neutral language in discussions of sexual harm to elide issues of structural inequality, discussions of consent that contend with patriarchy, racism, classism, and heterosexism can enable more robust conversations about the context and conditions of meaningful consent.

This turn towards the structural in discussions of sexual harm might also help fraternities reframe the problem from a focus on individual bad actors, to a broader approach that does not rely on externalizing the problem in order to address it. Men's educational efforts are a good start, though their outsized reliance on women's labor (in the form of trainings, new member screening, and disclosure of personal stories) to provide such education undercuts their commitment to sexual assault prevention. Educational efforts that incorporate discussions of structural inequality, and do not rely on "good guy/rapist" dichotomies could enable members to more fully engage with, and identify, a continuum of harm, to understand how commonplace behaviors and adherence to normalized gender scripts can contribute to a culture of harm.

This study offers an examination of student-led efforts to address and combat issues of sexual harm. Student understandings of this social problem are shaped by cultural narratives, as well as personal experiences of harm. Reflecting on their shared experiences, sorority women come to understand sexual harm as a gendered grievance, and issue collective complaints, or calls to action, inviting discussions of broader structural change. Still, institutional imperatives of the university and Greek life more broadly fail to support structural interrogations into harm and

inequality. My research suggests that many students have a desire to take on complex social problems in their communities in a way that attends to structural inequalities. Unless institutions are similarly willing to engage in this multilayered approach to sexual harm, students will be left to assemble piecemeal and individualized strategies in hopes of keeping themselves safe.

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