

University of Mississippi

eGrove

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---

2011

## Taking Parties Seriously: Gendered Sexuality and Hook Up Culture at Greek Social Events

Brian Michael Knop

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>



Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Knop, Brian Michael, "Taking Parties Seriously: Gendered Sexuality and Hook Up Culture at Greek Social Events" (2011). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 171.

<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/171>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

TAKING PARTIES SERIOUSLY: GENDERED SEXUALITY  
AND HOOK UP CULTURE AT GREEK SOCIAL EVENTS

A Thesis Presented for the Master of Arts Degree  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
The University of Mississippi

Brian Knop

May 2011

Copyright 2011, Brian Knop

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a qualitative sociological analysis of gender and sexuality at Greek parties and in the broader Greek system in order to better understand hooking up and rape culture. While past work on rape culture has tended to look at fraternities as isolated organizations (Boswell and Spade 1996, Sanday 1990), this research takes into consideration that sororities and fraternities are constantly interacting within the Greek system and therefore must be analyzed together. I interviewed 14 sorority and fraternity members in order to uncover how Greek members interpret the behaviors, norms, and interactions at organized parties and in the broader Greek system. The sorority and fraternity members made distinctions between the types of parties that Greek organizations host. Most notably, there was a difference in how members talked about the date-centered parties versus the non-date parties. This research highlights the importance of understanding the party environment in which both hooking up and rape can occur. Sociological discussions that make generalized claims about collegiate parties overlook the significance of how different parties may create different experiences for those who attend them.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee for their endless enthusiasm and insight. Thanks to Kirsten Dellinger for all the valuable time and energy that she put in to this research as my thesis advisor. Her guidance and patience were especially helpful throughout this process. Thanks to Ross Haenfler and Minjoo Oh for their encouragement and insightful feedback. Thanks to Katie Rolley, who listened to me sort out my ideas and who stayed up with me during the late night writing sessions. Thanks to Joey Brown and all the other sociology graduate students who I gladly shared this experience with. I would also like to thank Matt Dukes, Sean Looney, and the rest of my friends and family who supported me throughout this research.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Abstract	ii.
Acknowledgements	iii.
Introduction	1
Dissecting the Party	15
Sororities and Fraternities: Gendered Organizations	24
Is a Party Just a Party?: Gendered Social Events	37
Conclusion	52
Bibliography	62
Appendix A	67
Appendix B	70
Vita	72

## I. INTRODUCTION

My interest in Greek social events began when I found out that a former high school classmate- now an undergraduate sorority student- was raped at a fraternity party on campus. The last thing she remembered before falling unconscious was trying to fight off the fraternity brother who eventually raped her. A few days later, she built up the courage to confide her assault to her friend who had taken her to the party. Her friend responded by requesting that she not go to the police for fear of getting the fraternity brothers in trouble. In the coming weeks, she experienced harassment from several of the brothers who were pressuring her not to report the rape to authorities. As far as I know, the brother who raped her at the fraternity party never received any repercussions for his actions. I was shocked and bewildered that everyone involved protected the rapist's actions while either ignoring or discrediting my classmate's account of the rape. I became interested in the context within which this rape occurred. This is a study of Greek organizations and the parties that they host. This research is intended to analyze gender and sexuality at Greek parties and in the broader Greek system in order to better understand hooking up and rape culture.

### **Literature Review**

In this section, I will explore several theoretical concepts relevant to this study. First, I will outline how sociologists define and understand gender. Second, I will

examine the usefulness of using the gendered organization perspective for understanding sororities and fraternities. Third, I will analyze the ways in which hooking up has been discussed in social science literature. Finally, I will define rape culture and discuss its relevance to the Greek system.

### *What is gender?*

This research is guided by a sociological understanding of gender. Sociologists make a distinction between sex- the biological differences between males and females, and gender- the behaviors, characteristics, and identities associated with biological sex differences. We are constantly “doing gender” in everyday interaction (West and Zimmerman 1983). Men and women learn expected masculine and feminine identities and behaviors through culture, interactions with others, and institutions such as family, law, and religion.

Femininity is a relatively under-theorized concept in sociology (Schippers 2007). It is often understood as ‘what women and girls do,’ or are expected to do (Paechter 2006). Women are expected to be passive, agreeable, and nurturing (Butler 1999). They must simultaneously be sexually desirable but not sexually active (Basenberg 2008).

Femininity is culturally defined in heterosexual terms: women are expected to attract and keep a male partner (Fenstermaker 2002). They must either be the “good girl” that men want to have as romantic partners and child bearers, or the “bad girl” that men want to have as sexual partners (Conrad 2006).

Masculinity is not simply a set of traits, but is rather a practice that is accomplished (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is an



organizing force in society that insures men's domination and women's subordination (Connell 1995). Although there is a hierarchy of competing masculinities in society including marginalized, subordinated, and complicit, hegemonic masculinity is always culturally dominant. It is a highly visible and highly valued "ideal" form of masculinity (Connell 1995). Connell (1995) suggests that "To sustain a given pattern of hegemony requires the policing of men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women" (Connell 1995: 77).

Michael Kimmel (2004) describes masculinity as a homosocial enactment in the article "Masculinity as Homophobia." He stresses the importance of male-to-male approval in understanding masculinity, suggesting that "Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood" (Kimmel 2004: 104). Masculinity must constantly be proven to other men and to women to the point where it is a continual, nearly unachievable process. For Kimmel, masculinity is defined in relation to everything feminine. "Being a man means not being a woman," Kimmel argues, "Masculinity is defined more by who one is not rather than who one is" (Kimmel 2004: 103). Because masculinity is defined as strictly non-feminine, homophobia plays an important role in policing men's behaviors. According to Kimmel, men experience homophobia when they fear that other men will emasculate them, exposing their failure to measure up as a 'real man.' Labels such as 'fag', 'queer', and 'bitch' must be avoided at all costs. These epithets are often used by young men in order to position themselves as masculine while positioning other young men as non-masculine (Pascoe 2004). Because of a fear of being called out as non-masculine, men are often propelled to enact hypermasculine behaviors and attitudes. An important aspect of hypermasculine

behavior is sexual prowess and sexual aggressiveness towards women. In the never-ending pursuit for male peer acceptance, women are disposable sexual objects. Kimmel writes that “Women become a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale” (Kimmel 2004: 106).

Homosociality among men sometimes molds their sexual relations with women, as well as the meaning given to their sexual involvement. In the article “Men, Sex, and Homosociality”, Michael Flood (2008) notes several ways in which homosociality organizes men’s relationships with women. First, male-male relationships are viewed as more important than male-female relationships. Second, in some male-homosocial environments, non-sexual friendships with women are avoided or demeaned. A third way in which homosociality molds some men’s relations with women is that sexual activity is a key to masculine status. Male peers are the imagined and sometimes literal audiences for sexual activity. In some fraternity environments in particular, a brother may intentionally leave his bedroom door unlocked or his window open while hooking-up with a girl so his brothers can watch (Sanday 1990). Finally, men’s sexual storytelling can be shaped by a homosocial masculine environment. When sharing sexual stories in a homosocial group, men may exaggerate their experiences in order to assure others of their status as a sexually active- and therefore exemplary- man. The sexual storytelling ritual may be informal- as conversations between brothers, or formal- as written and discussed jokes and stories about hooking-up during house meetings (Sanday 1990).

### *Gendered Organizations*

Analyzing gender and sexuality in the context of Greek parties requires an understanding of sororities and fraternities as gendered organizations. Cultural ideas about masculinity (and femininity) are embedded within the ideologies, practices, and norms of organizations (Dellinger 2004). Organizational structure is far from being gender neutral. Organizations are gendered in that they create hierarchies, identities, and meaning on the basis of a distinction between women and men (Acker 1992). Male-dominated organizations, such as the military, often create marginalizing or unfavorable conditions for women through official practices (Sasson-Levy 2007). Cultural beliefs about gender- such as women's assumed passiveness- are embedded within the structure of organizations, perpetuating and justifying gender inequality (Williams 1995). Organizations, then, are not simply neutral spaces that become gendered by individuals. Instead, they play an active role in constructing and reinforcing gendered situations through ongoing practices (Britton 2003). Understanding gendered organizations thus requires a close analysis of formal and informal practices and processes (Acker 1992). Acker (1990) outlines five processes in which gendering occurs. First, there are divisions of labor, of allowed behavior, and of power along gendered lines. Second is the construction of symbols and images that reinforce these divisions. Third, women and men are constantly "doing gender" in everyday interaction within an organization (West and Zimmerman 1983). Fourth, organizations produce gendered components of identity for individuals, which includes "language use, clothing, and presentation of self as a gendered member of an organization" (Acker 1990: 147). Finally, gender is an intrinsic part of organizational logic, including written rules and expectations.

### *Hooking up*

Pertinent to this analysis of gendered sexuality at Greek parties is an understanding of the hook up culture. A hook up describes a broad range of sexual interactions ranging from making out to having sex. The term refers to “casual sexual encounters often initiated at alcohol-fueled, dance-oriented social events” (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). The two individuals involved are generally either acquaintances or friends, but are not in a relationship together (Manning, Giordano, and Longmore 2006). However, a hook up can sometimes lead to a relationship or occur between two individuals who were previously dating. A hook up generally occurs in a party or bar setting in which two people begin to talk, dance, and flirt (England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007). The two individuals generally move to a private location where the sexual activity occurs. A hook up between two people can become an ongoing sexual relationship (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009).

Some journalists and social scientists have viewed hooking up as being an unfulfilling or even dangerous culture for women (Bogle 2008; Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Stepp 2007). In her book, *Unhooked: How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love and Lose at Both*, author Laura Sessions Stepp (2007) characterizes hooking up as a new phenomenon that is quickly replacing dating. She suggests that hooking up is damaging to women, putting them at risk for depression and low self-esteem. Sociologist Kathleen Bogle (2008) suggests that the dating script of today is a complete reverse of the traditional dating scene of the 1950s: whereas relationships once preceded sexual activity, young adults now engage in sexual activity prior to entering a relationship with someone. She argues that women and men generally have different intentions for hooking up:

women want hook ups to develop into a relationship while men prefer “no strings attached” hook ups (Bogle 2008).

Sociological research in recent years has challenged some of these embellished and presumptuous claims about the hook up culture. England and her colleagues’ (2008) found that hooking up is neither new nor is it replacing committed relationships for young adults. Hamilton and Armstrong (2009) point out that Bogle reinforces assumed gender differences by portraying women as relationship oriented and men as sex oriented. Some researchers have proposed viewing the hook up culture as a space where gender inequality is potentially reproduced, rather than as inherently detrimental or unfulfilling for women (Armstrong, England and Hamilton 2010; Kreager and Staff 2009). For example, Kreager and Staff’s (2009) work highlights that the sexual double standard- rather than the hook up itself- may cause unfavorable experiences for women. This research will similarly analyze hook up culture in the context of Greek parties as a space in which gender inequality is potentially- but not inherently- reproduced.

### *Understanding Rape Culture*

While the party environment of collegiate and Greek life can produce positive sexual encounters, it is also a space in which rape can occur. In the late 1980s, Mary Koss’ groundbreaking study of college campuses revealed that 1 in 4 undergraduate women experience sexual assault (Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski 1987). Sociologists have used the term rape culture in order to describe the cultural beliefs that may reinforce the high prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses. Rape culture can be defined as the “set of values and beliefs that provide an environment conducive to rape” and is

“based on the assumption that men are aggressive and dominant whereas women are passive and acquiescent” (Boswell and Spade 1996: 182). These beliefs are exemplified in the sexual double standard in our society which positions sexually active men as “studs” and sexually active women as “sluts” (O’Sullivan 1993). This double standard gives legitimacy to rape myths- the stereotypical, false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists (Burt 1980). For example, the ‘boys will be boys’ trope suggests that it is in young men’s nature to be sexually aggressive and untamable. Underlying this argument is a belief that men and women are inherently different. Boys are “expected to test the boundaries of behavior” while girls are “expected to be feminine, attractive, cute” (Lefkowitz 1997: 63).

Research on rape culture in the Greek system has focused on fraternities. Martin and Hummer (1989) found that fraternities sometimes create an environment in which coercing women into having sex is normal. One way that rape culture is reinforced by some fraternities is through the division of expected behaviors. They suggest that some fraternities stress dominance, conflict, and sexual prowess for brothers in the organization, yet ostracize women who show the same behaviors. The pledging process, in particular, of some fraternities centers on toughness and obedience as well as juvenile and wild behavior. Some fraternities reinforce a rape culture through the formal and informal expectations that these organizations have. As part of their pledging process, for example, one fraternity in Sanday’s (1990) study systematically used verbal abuse to make the pledges individually feel dumb and disoriented. As a result, the pledges are meant to feel a dependence on the fraternity for approval and social survival. While pledges endure victimization in order to gain acceptance into the fraternity, sexual

violence against women may similarly be seen by some fraternities as a justifiable process (Sanday 1990). Some women may be expected to endure sexual victimization in order to associate with the fraternity.

Martin and Hummer also argue that fraternity culture commodifies women. For many fraternity brothers, sexual coercion is a game and women are simply objects in this game. Mindy Stomblor's (1994) article "Buddies or Slutties: The Collective Sexual Reputation of Fraternity Little Sisters" also considers how women are heavily commodified in the culture of some fraternities by studying "little sisters". Little sisters are young women who help to plan social events and recruit new pledges for a fraternity in exchange for social capital. They are sometimes stigmatized as "easy" girls who are always sexually available for the fraternity brothers. Stomblor argues that little sisters are systematically dominated through a hierarchy that places them at the bottom, through being objectified by advertisements for their fraternity, and through a lack of control over their sexual reputation. For example, because the fraternity brothers write the rules and scripts for social interaction at fraternity events, Stomblor suggests that they hold power over the little sisters both individually and collectively. This includes the power to cast little sisters as sexually available objects (slutties) or as platonic friends (buddies).

### *Research Questions*

Research on both hook up culture and rape culture give special attention to the "party" environment. However, past research has shown that we should not assume that all parties are the same (Boswell and Spade 1994). This research seeks to expand on the

work of Boswell and Spade (1994) and others by looking at both sorority and fraternity parties and the broader Greek system.

There are several fundamental questions guiding this research project. First, how do Greek members view fraternity-hosted parties compared to sorority-hosted parties? Second, how might various Greek parties be structured differently? And, what can the different types of parties tell us about hook up culture and rape culture?

There are several benefits to using Greek parties to better understand hook up culture and rape culture. Much sociological literature has pointed out that the Greek system is an environment that sometimes reinforces rape culture (Boswell and Spade 1996, Martin and Hummer 1989, Sanday 1990). This research contributes to this literature by focusing on Greek members' interpretations of sorority and fraternity norms and practices. Furthermore, while past work on rape culture has tended to look at fraternities as isolated organizations, this research takes into consideration that sororities and fraternities are constantly interacting within the Greek system and therefore must be analyzed together. There is a benefit to analyzing how people perceive two highly gendered organizations in relationship to one another. This allows us to more clearly see that gender is not a set of biological traits, but is instead constructed through the formal and informal rules and the reputations of these organizations and their parties. Powerful messages about gender and sexuality are learned through the interaction of sororities and fraternities. Messages about femininity are not solely created "in sororities" and messages about masculinity "in fraternities." These ideas are created and solidified through interaction between two kinds of organizations.



This research may also be able to fill in holes in the literature on hooking up. Past research focuses on how individuals talk about hooking up without giving considerable attention to the environments in which they occur (Bogle 2007, England, Shafer, and Fogarty 2007). This research, on the other hand, focuses on how differences among Greek parties affect how people experience hooking up. I also attempt explore what people find “fun” and “exciting” as well as “risky” or “undesirable” about sex within the hook up culture in order to complicate the traditional framing of sexuality as *either* “dangerous” or “pleasurable.”

## **Methods**

### *In-depth Interviews*

This study is based on face-to-face in-depth interviews. I used in-depth interviews because I was interested in the individuals’ interpretations of their experiences. My research is not intended to make generalizations about all Greeks and their various social gatherings, but will rather be used to shed light on these events as interpreted by sorority and fraternity members. In-depth interviews are particularly useful for exploring a topic in great detail because they allow for open exchange between interviewer and interviewee (Esterberg 2002). They also allow the researcher to obtain the interviewee’s point of view. Events, interactions, and practices can all be understood from the perspective of individuals by using in-depth interviews.

I interviewed 14 current and former members of the Greek system at a university in the South. I interviewed members from sororities and fraternities, and from predominantly white and predominantly black organizations. I also interviewed members

from both top-tier and lower-tier predominantly white organizations. This helped to ensure that my study would have Greek members from a variety of different organizations.

I informed the interviewees that I was doing research on Greek organizations and parties to better understand members' opinions about relationships and gender norms. I tape recorded the interviews and then transcribed them at a later time. In order to ensure confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for each interviewee (see figure 1) and their organization. I conducted my interviews between October of 2009 and February of 2010, upon gaining formal approval by the Human Subject Review Board associated with the university. I conducted the interviews in the sociology graduate student office, at a terrace outside of one of the university's buildings, and at campus benches located away from busy or heavily populated areas. I tape-recorded the interviews and transcribed them at a later time. I took notes on each of the interviews during the transcribing process. I coded the interview data for significant themes that emerged. The major themes in my data were 'sorority and fraternity parties compared', 'hooking up', and 'heterosexual hunt/homosocial bonding'.

### *Sample and Rationale*

I used a purposive snowball sampling method to collect my research data. This method involves beginning with a few members of the target population and then asking them to provide information to contact other members of the population (Babbie 2004). The snowball sampling method was useful for me to use because many of the members of sororities and fraternities had numerous contacts to members of other Greek

organizations. I also found interviewees through friends and acquaintances of mine who put me in contact with Greek students they knew.

My sample included six women from sororities. Of that six, two were from predominantly white top-tier sororities, two were from predominantly white lower-tier sororities, and two were from predominantly black sororities. My sample also included eight fraternity men. Of that eight, three men were from predominantly white top-tier fraternities, three were from predominantly white lower-tier fraternities, and two were from predominantly black fraternities (see figure 1).

My sample represented members from twelve different Greek organizations. Two of the men in this study came from the same fraternity and two of the women came from the same sorority. My sample consisted of seven current members, three alumni, and four that quit their organization (see figure 2). All of the interviewees were current students at the university at the time of the interviews. Among the three members who had graduated, one was in graduate school at the university, another was in the university's medical school, and the third student had re-entered the undergraduate program at the university. All four members who quit their organization were currently undergraduates at the university.

One might expect there to be differences between current and former members' responses in the interview. Those no longer in the organizations may be more likely to have a more critical viewpoint while those in the organization may be more likely to portray their organization in a more positive light. However, I did not find any overall differences between the way current and former members talked about Greek organizations and their parties. Also, with the exception of one former member of a

lower-tier sorority, all of the current and former members spoke positively about their organization's reputation. All of the members that had quit described still having close relationships with people in their former sorority or fraternity. Two of the former members cited financial reasons for leaving. One former member cited disagreements with some of the executive members of his fraternity for his departure.

One of the methodological challenges faced in the early stages of this project was in trying to focus on rape, considering Greek organizations' propensity for secrecy and a desire to protect their and other people's reputation(s). This led me to shift the research focus to analyzing parties and looking at rape in a less direct manner. Also, being a white male interviewer may have impacted the interviewees' responses. For example, hooking up was talked about primarily by the white male interviewees in this study. Their similar racial and gender appearances may have led them to be more likely to openly talk about hooking up with me than the other interviewees.

### **Structure of Thesis**

In the chapters that follow, I will present the findings from this research. In chapter two, I provide a description of the structure of the various Greek social events. In chapter three, I focus on Greek members' views about fraternities and sororities as organizations. I also discuss in this chapter the gendered reputations of different sororities and fraternities at the university. In chapter four, I analyze the Greek members' views about the different types of Greek parties. In the concluding chapter, I discuss the contributions and implications of these findings for understanding gender, the Greek system, hook up culture, and rape culture.

## II. DISSECTING THE PARTY

The social Greek system on college campuses all across the U.S. is made up of several dozen sorority and fraternity organizations for undergraduate students. In the chapters to follow, I will use the term “Greek social events” to describe the various types of organized parties that sororities and fraternities host. The three main social events that the current and former members from the predominantly white organizations discussed in this study were swaps, formals, and date parties. The current and former members of the predominantly black sororities and fraternities, or National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) organizations, talked about Greek parties. In this chapter, I will outline the structure of the different social events that the current and former Greek members discussed in the interviews. Questions about the planning and the format of the social events were in the interview guide (see appendix). Members were asked questions such as “Who helps plan the events?”, “Who is invited?”, and “Who pays for the event?”.

### **Predominantly White Organizations**

#### *Swaps*

A swap is a Greek social event that is jointly hosted by one fraternity and one sorority. The party is a closed event, meaning that only the members of these two organizations that currently attend the university are allowed to attend. No dates or other outsiders are invited to these events. One of the most important identifying features of

swaps is that they are themed parties. Everyone from the sorority and fraternity attending the swap must dress according to the party's theme. Some of the themes mentioned by Greek members in this study were "cowboys and indians," "80's swap," "redneck wedding," "Mardi Gras," and "gangster swap." In some instances, each sorority and fraternity member is paired up by costume.

Swaps are typically held at a local bar. The sorority and fraternity hosting the swap rent out the venue for the evening. They are usually scheduled on a night during the week and last from 9pm to 12am. Either a live band or a DJ provides music for the swap. All the women from predominantly white sororities described getting to and from the swap by a charter bus that they were required by their sorority to ride. At the event, members of the two organizations mingle with one another, dance, and drink in their costumes. When the swap is over, an after party usually referred to as "late night" is held at the fraternity's house. Stephen explained late nights held after his fraternity's swaps:

So after a swap, [be]cause being that they are on school nights, generally, they will end at midnight and then everyone goes back to the [fraternity] house and drinks some more, not everyone, but a good percentage of people there do.

Because many members are under 21, bars that are lax on rules about serving alcohol to minors are sometimes chosen. Describing what makes an ideal location for a swap, Amanda said:

Usually you have to pick a place that is pretty lenient on under-age drinking- I was 18 or 19 when I went to these swaps and I was drinking, so, I guess that's what they base it on.

Most swaps occur every year during the Fall academic semester. One sorority member referred to this period as "swap season." Bruce, whose fraternity regularly

swaps with all 12 predominantly white sororities on campus each year, described this time period:

Most of the time it takes place after the new kids come in. After rush is over. And it ends in December. So really it's like in a five or six week period, like you'd have two a week- that was pretty normal.

Here, Bruce explains that sororities and fraternities typically begin having swaps soon after new members or "new kids" are brought in. Each year, the predominantly white sororities and fraternities take in new members, typically freshmen students. Several people recounted that the first swap of every year is typically one of the biggest events for their sorority or fraternity because it is the first major gathering involving new members.

Each of the predominantly white Greek organizations typically has an elected social chair who is responsible for planning the organized parties (sometimes with the help of a social committee, made up of fellow members of the organization). With swaps, the chairperson from a sorority or a fraternity often contacts the other organization to set up a swap. The number of swaps that an organization typically has a year ranges from zero to twelve. Some Greek members explained that their organization swapped with other organizations outside of their tier on the status hierarchy, while others only swapped with organizations whose status paralleled theirs. Anna, who was formerly in a top tier sorority, explains that her sorority only swaps with the top tier fraternities on campus because they have a larger membership than the lower tier fraternities:

I think it's the size, like you didn't want to have a swap with a fraternity that has 30 members when there's 90 girls in your freshmen pledge class...So I think that was one thing that kept them from doing swaps with smaller fraternities because then it kinda defeats the purpose if the girls outnumber the boys 4 to 1.

Some of the current and former Greek members explained a less frequent variation of swaps, called “super swaps.” Super swaps are different from regular swaps in that they involve two sorority organizations and two fraternity organizations.

### *Formals*

A formal is a social event held by one sorority or one fraternity. The event is exclusive to members of the hosting organization and their dates. Members can bring a non-Greek to a formal, but it is common to bring a fellow Greek. It is typically held at the end of every semester. The dress code for formals is usually a suit and tie for men and a dress for women. Several people likened the structure and atmosphere of formals to a high school prom. Josh explains why he likes formals, saying “[the] formal is nice in the fact because it’s sort of like prom, but with no rules.” He later added that formals were like “prom on steroids” because there is “no supervision” and because of the “amount of alcohol” at the event.

A major distinguishing characteristic of formals is that they are often held at a resort. Also, unlike the other common Greek social events, formals sometimes take place at a location in another city. There is an important distinction between sorority and fraternity formals with regards to location. Several people explained that sororities are only allowed to hold formals either in town or in a nearby city, such as Memphis. In addition to these locations, fraternities also hold formals outside of the north Mississippi region. Julia explained this difference between where sorority and fraternity formals are held:

I don’t know about other sororities, I know we’re not allowed to go out of town or do any kind of overnight thing; just another liability thing. But usually



fraternities, for their Spring formal, they'll go out of town somewhere. Like I've been to one in New Orleans and they rent the hotels and everything. So that's a big difference I guess.

All of the men from predominately white fraternities in this study talked about their fraternities' formals sometimes being held in New Orleans. These "destination" formals involve a weekend excursion with the actual formal event being held on the second night of the trip. The fraternity members and their dates are required to ride on a charter bus to and from New Orleans. Just as formals were related to prom, the bus ride to formals was described as being analogous to a school-related trip. Greg described his experiences with riding buses to formals in New Orleans:

Like in high school, like I played basketball. If your basketball team went on a three hour bus ride to go play somebody. It's like that, but with alcohol and girls. So it's like loud, everybody's laughing, everybody's having fun, everybody's drinking. So it's like a bus full of drunk people, guys and girls.

The social chair or the treasurer of the hosting organization is generally in charge of picking a venue, booking a band or DJ, and renting buses for the formal. For fraternity formals held in New Orleans, the social chair or treasurer is also in charge of arranging hotel rooms for the weekend.

### *Date Parties*

A third type of party that was frequently talked about among the predominantly white sorority and fraternity members was the date party. Like formals, date parties are held by a single organization. All the sorority members and all but one of the fraternity members said that their organization regularly had date parties. Sororities and fraternities generally have one date party per semester. They can be held either during the week or

on a weekend. Like the other social events, date parties are usually organized by a social chair.

For this type of social event, members of the hosting organization invite a date to accompany them. Like swaps, date parties are held in town at a bar or restaurant that is rented out for the party. The dress code for date parties tends to vary from casual to business casual. Some people described date parties as a more casual version of formals:

Date parties are usually a lot more casual events, we just kinda went to a bar and hung out as opposed to formal where you probably rent out something nice (Bruce).

[Y]ou're not wearing...you're not dressing up as much as formals but you're like, I wore like this [t-shirt and jeans] [laughs], but somebody will wear like a shirt and tie. But you just ask a date and you go, there's no like, it's not like a dance, you just go to a bar. You just show up at a bar and they close the bar off to that fraternity and whoever they ask (Greg).

Both fraternity and sorority members talked about taking a charter bus rented out by their organizations to get to and from the event. At the event, people generally drink and chat. Although a band is sometimes booked for this event, few people talked about dancing at date parties compared to swaps and formals. Some people referred to formals as a "dance" and date parties as a "hang out" event.

### *Other Events*

There were several other social events members of the predominantly white sororities and fraternities discussed. A number of people talked about weekend-long Spring parties held by some of the fraternities. These parties are typically held in an open field and generally involve drinking alcohol, eating crawfish, and listening to a live band. These events are usually open for anyone to attend, although sometimes there are rules

about who can attend. For example, Bruce explained that guys not in his fraternity have to be put on a list in order to attend: “All girls can get in without having their name on the list, but guys have to be added. Like other fraternity guys, non-fraternity guys.” He also explained that high school seniors who may potentially join the fraternity are invited: “That’s usually a huge weekend, especially for recruitment. You want to get new guys to come so a senior in high school comes out.”

Some people also discussed philanthropy-based social events, in which money is raised for a charity organization. For example, one sorority has a dance competition in which people pay to watch different sororities compete for a prize. This research, however, focuses on the party-based social events.

## **Predominantly Black Organizations**

### *NPHC Greek Parties*

One of the biggest social events that the NPHC sorority and fraternity members talked about was “NPHC Greek parties.” Both sororities and fraternities throw parties. Most NPHC sororities and fraternities throw between one and three parties a semester.

For a Greek party, the hosting organization rents out a local club for the evening. The parties are open for anyone who wants to attend. Because the parties are often used as a fundraiser for the organization putting it on, there is usually a cover charge to attend. At the fraternity parties, however, women sometimes get in for free or at a discounted price. David, an NPHC fraternity member explains why charging women less increases attendance at the fraternity parties:

But I've always thought we had a lot of attendance because guys know there are gonna be a lot of girls at our party, so they're willing to pay. Because we actually usually charge females less too.

A DJ usually provides music for the parties and people drink, dance, and mingle.

Greek parties were described as an event that you wouldn't necessarily bring a date to.

### *Other Events*

Another social event discussed by one of the sorority women, Robyn, is the ball.

Every year, her sorority partners with a NPHC fraternity to host a ball. This event is also open to any student who wants to attend. Robyn described the ball in relation to Greek parties:

[I]t's like a party but you dress up for this party. Like strolling and strutting doesn't necessarily happen at this party. It's more like what I would call a grown sexy- like nice music, you sit and talk to people, you eat, you may dance a couple times but it's not just like "I'm going to get buck wild" type event.

Because the ball is only hosted by one of the predominantly black sororities and fraternities on campus, it is not a central focus of this research on Greek parties.

Besides the Greek parties, the NPHC sororities and fraternities members also talked about performance-centered social events, such as step shows and stroll offs. Step shows and stroll offs are both choreographed rhythmic and dance routines performed by members of a sorority or fraternity. An event is typically held on campus once a semester in which people pay to watch each of the sororities and fraternities perform their step show. The stroll offs typically take place on campus and are open for any students to attend.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I outlined the structural differences between different Greek social events. The central focus of this research will be on four of the parties discussed in this chapter: the swap, the date party, the formal, and the NPHC Greek party (see figure 4). This analysis will help to better understand the experiences of sorority and fraternity members at these different social events, which will be examined in the next few chapters.

### III. SORORITIES AND FRATERNITIES: GENDERED ORGANIZATIONS

The Greek members interviewed for this project report clear differences in the norms and behaviors at sorority and fraternity social events. Both women and men share common perceived differences between sorority and fraternity events. Also, the views about differences between sorority and fraternity events are shared by members of both the predominantly black and predominantly white organizations. I found very little resistance to the hegemonic idea that men's and women's organizations are different.

In order to examine Greek members' perceived differences between sorority and fraternity events, I will analyze Greek social clubs as gendered organizations. Like all other organizations, Greek social clubs are gendered through official and unofficial rules, culture, interaction, and identity, on the basis of assumed differences between women and men (Acker 1990; Britton 2003). Organizations play an active role in constructing and reinforcing gendered situations through ongoing practices (Britton 2003). Understanding gendered organizations thus requires a close analysis of formal and informal practices and processes (Acker 1992). Acker (1990) outlines five processes in which gendering occurs: a division of allowed behavior, the construction of images, interaction, identity, and organizational logic.

Women and men's perceived differences between sorority and fraternity events highlight cultural ideas surrounding the sexual double standard. The sexual double standard refers to the idea that being sexually active boosts men's reputation while

hurting women's reputation (Bogle 2008; Risman and Schwartz 2002). Ronen (2010) argues that under the double standard, "Women reckon with the heterosexual relational imperative in which they are judged if they do not confine sexual behavior to committed relationships, but men are expected to pursue sexual behavior of all kinds" (373). This expectation about men's sexual prowess is reinforced through the notion that 'boys will be boys.' The 'boys will be boys' trope suggests that men are naturally sexually aggressive, wild, and predisposed to crossing boundaries (Lefkowitz 1997). If 'boys will be boys', then women are left with the responsibility of controlling men's sexuality (Kimmel 2008).

In this chapter, I will first analyze Greek members' perceptions about sororities being rule-bound and fraternities being wild. Then, I will connect these perceived differences to the reputations of sororities and fraternities.

### **Rule-bound vs Wild**

The Greek members in this study associate the sororities as being more rule-bound. Describing the differences that she sees between sorority and fraternity events, Kelly explains:

[T]here's a lot more rules [at the sorority events]. Like the way that you behave is that you're a lot more accountable for your behavior. I think in a fraternity event it's more of a 'whatever goes' kinda thing.

Kelly considers people to be "more accountable" for their behavior at the sorority events. She does not specify who exactly is held accountable, but instead talks about the differences more broadly. Her views illustrate the gendering of Greek social events: the

fraternity events are associated with a “whatever goes” mentality where boundaries are expected to be pushed; sorority events are associated with rules and accountability.

Amanda describes a specific experience she had involving the rules put in place by her sorority at their social events:

I remember we had this system called the double tap, and I got the double tap for doing suggestive dance moves on the floor.

*So what's the double tap?*

Basically if you're dancing on the bar or doing something else that looks pretty terrible... [I]f you did any of those things a sorority sister would come up and tap you twice just to let you know to stop doing that. Then usually you'd get called in to uh...I forget what it was called but at the next chapter meeting they'd read off a list of names who'd have to go and talk to the president in the little secret room.

Although dancing to music is a part of almost all of the social events, Amanda explains that a sorority sister who is “dancing on the bar” or doing “suggestive dance moves” would be formally penalized. The rules that she describes are specifically for policing the sorority sisters at their social events. Amanda experienced the “double tap” at a swap, the social event that is jointly held by a sorority and a fraternity.

Josh explains that he considers sorority events to be more strict:

As far as formals, I feel like the girls it's much more strict. I feel like the girls in sororities, especially at their functions. The ones that I've been to, a lot of my dates have been worried about what the girls are going to say, what the other sorority sisters are going to say after the night. If that makes sense, the repercussions of whatever was going to go down that night or whatnot.

Here, Josh implies that the sorority women he knows have a fear “especially at their functions” that there will be social repercussions for hooking up with a guy.



The sororities have national rules that prohibit them from having alcohol and place strict rules about male visitors. Eric, a member of a predominantly white fraternity, explains the differences between sorority and fraternity events in relation to the structural rules put on the organizations:

Sororities have a lot more rules as far as, say alcohol and location are concerned. Also with sorority functions, you can't have functions at the house. I don't even think guys can be in the house, or like in an area not in the living or the common room and dining room. So there's no house sorority parties.

This is consistent with the double standard in the Greek system in Hamilton and Armstrong's (2009) study of the college hook up culture. They suggest that "the notion that hooking up is okay for men but not for women was embedded in the organization of the Greek system, where most parties occurred: Sorority rules prohibited hosting parties or overnight male visitors, reflecting notions about proper feminine behavior" (Hamilton and Armstrong 2009: 598).

One of the distinctions made between sorority and fraternity social events is in regard to dress. Greg explains the difference between his fraternity's date parties and the sorority date parties that he has attended: "[N]ormally it is much nicer [at the sorority date parties], you sort of dress up because they're dressing up. The guys' date party, they don't dress up because you don't dress up." He views sorority date parties as "nicer" than fraternity date parties because of the differences in the way people dress at the events. Stephen describes what people wear to social events in order to explain the differences he sees between sorority and fraternity functions:

[T]he sorority events have some dignity, some level of dignity and class. You can probably throw DP in there too, they probably have some level of dignity and class. If you go to a [fraternity] party, probably not....For example, the spring parties: girls are dressed ...everyone dresses kinda

crazy. I remember one of our fraternity brothers, this is all he was wearing: a red speedo that he had stuffed, and cowboy boots.

Stephen uses the words “dignity” and “class” in describing the sorority events and the word “crazy” in describing fraternity events. More specifically, though, he describes the sorority events as having “some level” of dignity and class, implying that the fraternity events have no dignity or class whatsoever. The fraternities don’t have dignity and class, according to Stephen, because of the clothes that people wear. He also considers DP- who he and several other people describe as being the “nerdy” fraternity- to have “some level of dignity and class” like the sororities. The label “nerdy” is associated with being socially inept and excessively studious, and is therefore non-masculine (Kendall 2000). In their study of gay fraternities, Yeung, Stompler, and Wharton (2006) suggest that “Men who do not conform to hegemonic definition of masculinity are equated with women and thus feminized” (6). Stephen doesn’t consider the “nerdy” fraternity to be like the other wild, boundary pushing masculine fraternities and instead lumps them with the sororities. He follows up, saying:

You would not see that type of behavior [at sorority events]. I mean the girls will, you know...I don’t want to say that they dress too slutty, but I mean, they’ll wear like real short shorts and like some baggy shirt [at the fraternity Spring parties]. It’s just much less formal at the fraternity events than it is at the sorority events.

Here, he draws a distinction that he sees between sorority and fraternity events based on what women wear. He describes the way people dress at fraternity Spring parties.

Women wear short shorts and a baggy shirt and his fraternity brother wears a speedo.

This is seen as being socially acceptable at certain fraternity events but not at sorority events. However, women and men’s actions are not interpreted the same at the fraternity

events. This is illustrated in Stephen's example of what women and men wear at the fraternity Spring parties. Right after he talks about his fraternity brother who wore nothing but a speedo and cowboy boots as an example of people dressing crazy, he prefaces his comment about girls wearing short shorts and baggy shirts with "I don't want to say they dress too slutty." This relates to the double standard, in which "sexually agentic women are judged more harshly than men" (Ronen 2010: 358).

Another area where people draw distinctions between sorority and fraternity events is in the amount of alcohol consumed. Greek members associate alcohol consumption with fraternity social events. Drinking alcohol has long been considered a part of the male domain (Capraro 2004). In response to the question "Would I be able to tell the difference between a sorority and fraternity formal?" Bruce said:

Guys are usually more bare bones [in organizing formals]... basically our issues are we want a roof over our heads and we don't want to run out of booze. Girls want a really pretty place with nice decorations, you know, great band and try not to run out of alcohol.

While Bruce perceives that both sororities and fraternities are concerned with an adequate supply of alcohol, he implies that fraternities are more concerned with alcohol at their formals, whereas sororities are more concerned with decoration. He considers guys to be more "bare bones" about organizing formals. This is interesting considering that several people likened the formal to a high school prom. Expressing any interest in how dances are organized is seen as a feminized activity (Best 2000). By describing fraternities as "bare bones" in their planning and chiefly concerned with not "run[ning] out of booze," Bruce navigates "doing masculinity" in a traditionally feminized space (Dellinger 2004; Williams 1995). He distances himself and his fraternity from any feminized interest in

the work of organizing formals by suggesting that guys only care about “booze,” while the sororities are concerned about aesthetics such having “a really pretty place” and “nice decorations.” In answering the same question about the differences between sorority and fraternity formals, Anna said:

I felt like for the girls’ formals, there’s so much emphasis on location and decor and they want it to look nice and pretty... I think that the...sororities are more likely to pick a place based on what it looks like, whereas the...fraternities are more likely to pick a place based on how easily alcohol is served to minors.

Similar to Bruce, she describes sororities as putting more emphasis on the decoration for the formal. She describes fraternities as being more concerned about serving alcohol to minors. She implies that fraternity events are centered on alcohol.

The members of the predominantly black organizations also saw differences between sororities and fraternities. Robyn, a member of a predominantly black sorority, discusses the differences she sees between sorority and fraternity Greek parties:

[G]uys’ parties will have ladies drink special, have girls with more alcohol in them and stuff. I feel like guy parties are a little more wild than girl parties. Girl parties, it’s not going to be girls dancing on tables whereas guy parties there will be; not necessarily so, but people feel a little bit more free at guy parties.

Robyn describes a structural difference between sorority and fraternity Greek parties: fraternity parties have drink specials for women. She also explains that she views fraternity parties as “more wild” and “more free” than sorority parties. This relates to the ‘boys will be boys’ notion, in which men are assumed to be wild and therefore experience fewer rules. This practice reinforces the idea the “ladies” should be treated by men in some way. It also encourages women to drink more with the underlying assumption that intoxicated women are easier to sleep with.

The members of the predominantly black organizations in this study also note that fraternities promote their parties to women and charge them less at the door. Michael explains that fraternity parties are bigger than sorority parties because of the different methods of promoting:

We promote through a lot of different avenues. And we promote mainly to girls. Mainly because usually those are the people that talk the parties, so they spread the word a lot quicker than guys. Usually if girls go out to a party, guys come out. So spreading the word to females is our major focus.

Similarly, Robyn explains the differences between sorority and fraternity parties:

[G]uy parties tend to sometimes say ladies free all night long, which means girls are gonna go to the party because why not; I don't have to pay for it. And they'll charge guys more money. So you'll know when it's a guy party if you're a guy because you have to pay more money... I don't think we can do that, we can't say men free all night long because that's just not right [laughs], that's just not right.

Her comment that it wouldn't be right for a sorority to let men in free may imply that men would already go to the sorority parties so there would be no need to give them a discount. It is assumed that men would already go to the sorority parties to meet girls, but that "ladies" need to be persuaded to go to the fraternity parties by way of discounted entry and drinks. This also reinforces aspects of the sexual double standard that positions men as the active sexual pursuers and women as the pursued. It is also couched in the chivalry frame in which men economically "take care" of women.

### **Gender Reinforcement (and Resistance) Through Reputations**

Notions about gender are also reinforced in the Greek system through reputations of sororities and fraternities. In his study of Greek organizations, DeSantis (2007) found that for women, the worst transgression for a member to commit against her sorority is to

be “trashy, easy, or slutty.” Individually and as a group, sorority women must avoid the labels “slutty” or “trashy.” When describing sororities, Greek members used the words crazy and wild synonymously with “slutty.” Describing the reputations of different sororities, Bruce explains “there’s like the slutty sororities, you know, people generally consider those girls pretty wild, or they’re going to sleep with you if you take them to a formal.” Anna, who was formerly in a top-tier sorority, talks about the reputation of one of the lower-tier sororities:

I’ve definitely talked to guys who’ve told me stories about various formals they’ve been to with girls for sororities. And they’re like, “you definitely want to go to Pi.” Apparently they are really crazy, real wild, and all the guys wanted to go to those. But that’s from a 22 year old boy, like “oh yea, crazy girls.”

Anna may be implying that the guys merely perceive the sorority to be crazy and wild. Regardless of whether or not the sorority is actually “real wild,” her comment suggests that they have a reputation of being so. Greek members in this study sometimes described fraternity events as being “crazy” or “wild.” However, in this context, these words were not synonymous with “slutty” or being sexually available. As I mentioned in the last chapter, Josh, a member of a predominantly white fraternity, described fraternity formals as “prom on steroids.” Here, he uses the phrase to describe what he felt was the most memorable aspect of the first formal that he went to with his fraternity: “Just the whole ‘prom on steroids’ with [the] no, no supervision aspect. It’s just really crazy, especially when you’re 19...it was definitely very memorable.” He cites the lack of supervision as one of the most memorable aspects of his first formal. He also mentions the experience being “crazy” for a 19-year-old, perhaps implying that a freshman or sophomore would not be accustomed to the unsupervised practices at the formal. Indeed,

college is seen as the central time in which young men are expected to “break free” of what restraints and rules they may have had as a teenager (Capraro 2004).

The predominantly white Greek members consistently name four sororities as the “top tier” sororities on campus. These sororities are considered to have the most attractive and most popular girls. Anna, a former member of a top-tier sorority, describes two other sororities that are considered to be top-tier:

Omega Delta is always like really pulled together, usually really skinny, they usually have really good bodies... Delta Phi, they're always beautiful and always wear a lot of make-up and always looked pulled together, never look like they've been out the night before. They're very girly.

Eric describes the sororities he sees as being top tier:

*Are there sororities that have good or bad reputations with fraternities?*

There are definitely sororities that are considered, like, where all the hot girls come from. So like, Delta, Gamma, those are like the top tier sororities. Like if you have a date, you want to get somebody from those sororities to come to your functions and stuff like that.

The predominantly white Greek members also consistently name four fraternities as the “top tier” fraternities on campus. They are considered to be the best looking guys with the most leadership on campus. Stephen who was formerly in a top tier fraternity explains one of the reasons why he joined his fraternity:

If you get in a good fraternity, you get a good label associated with you. Like we meet a girl, one of the first questions [is] like “What fraternity are you in?” You know, so if I say that I am Theta Alpha, you know, that is a good answer.

There are also negative reputations for the fraternities. Having a reputation for being sexually degrading towards women or a dangerous space for women is a negative

label for fraternities. Stephen describes one of the fraternities that he sees as having a bad reputation:

Gamma Sigma, I don't have a lot of respect for them. During rush, they had these presentations where we all sit in a room and they have a slideshow and they refer to women as cum dumpsters and had pictures of like- I don't know- just obscene things, and they were talking about going and like "We fucked the hottest bitches on campus."

He explains that he has little respect for Gamma Sigma because of the degrading language ("cum dumpsters" and "bitches"), and images ("obscene" pictures) used by the fraternity. It is significant that Stephen describes that this occurs at the fraternity's rush presentation, which is used to recruit new members. While Stephen describes these actions in a negative light, the fraternity uses them as a recruitment tool. Although sexual prowess is generally seen as a marker of masculinity (Grazian 2007), the fraternity's use of degrading language and images and bragging about "fuck[ing] the hottest bitches" can be seen as over-conformity to masculinity (Kimmel 2005). Eric, a member of another fraternity, describes Gamma Sigma's rush presentation as an example of how some fraternities are perceived as having a bad reputation with sororities:

*And do any fraternities have particularly bad reputations with sororities?*

Some, like Gamma Sigma is more like a party fraternity. I heard they use to have a rush presentation on the second day, where they have girls who'd show up at their parties like showing their boobs or showing their president getting a blow job or something like that. So I don't necessarily think the girls like that [laughs]. So I'd say that's a pretty bad reputation as far as the girls.

First, Eric distinguishes Gamma Sigma (a "party fraternity") from his own fraternity- which he describes elsewhere in the interview as a "literary" organization and not like the "typical frat scene." He jokingly says that girls "don't necessarily" like the pornographic images used by Gamma Sigma as a recruitment tool. The sharing of pornographic



images- especially ones showcasing personal sexual conquests- are sometimes used by fraternity men as a bonding tool (Sanday 1990). Anna also describes the negative reputation of some fraternities regarding the way in which they interact with women. Here, she gives an answer to a question about how her sorority picked fraternities to swap with:

[O]bviously the reputation of the fraternity [is a criteria for choosing who to swap with]. Let's face it, some fraternities have bad reputations for drugging girls or being rude or inconsiderate, kinda trashy. So GD would not dare have a swap with someone where they felt the integrity of the sorority's name or the safety of the girls would be compromised ever. Which I think is kinda snobby I guess, but at the same time there are fraternities that if we swapped with...I probably wouldn't have gone.

She says that her sorority avoided swapping with certain fraternities that have a reputation for “drugging girls,” “being rude”, or “inconsiderate.” She uses the word “trashy” to describe these behaviors. In this context, trashy is used differently than when used to describe sororities. Here, trashy is used to describe behavior linked to rape and other negative behavior towards women. It's also interesting that she believes it is “snobby” that her sorority didn't have swaps with certain fraternities that had bad reputations surrounding interactions with women. This alludes to the gendered notion that women who reject men's unwanted sexual advances are subsequently called “snobby” or “uptight.”

## **Conclusion**

The current and former Greek members in this study make distinctions between sorority and fraternity events based on their own perceptions and experiences. These distinctions highlight one way in which Greek social events can be understood as

gendered social events. In this chapter, I focused on sororities and fraternities as gendered organizations. Members describe different experiences with sorority and fraternity events based on the norms and expectations at the events. In the next chapter, I will explore the difference in members' experiences at the specific social events I delineated in chapter one: swaps, dates, formals, and NPHC Greek parties.

#### IV. IS A PARTY JUST A PARTY?: GENDERED SOCIAL EVENTS

Sociologists have recently drawn attention to the culture of “hooking up” on college campuses (Glenn and Marquardt 2001; Hamilton and Armstrong 2008; England et al. 2008; Risman and Schwartz 2002). Sexual activity ranging from making out to having sex can be defined as hooking up (England and Thomas 2006). For the two individuals involved, “hooking up does not imply interest in a relationship, but it does not preclude such interest” (Hamilton and Armstrong 2008: 591). What is the context in which hooking up takes place? In the previous chapter, I explored the differences in members’ perceptions of sororities, fraternities, and the social events they host. In this chapter, I focus on the differences among the types of parties Greek organizations host. I am interested exploring how the different events influence how members experience hooking up.

Past research has focused on differences among fraternities (Boswell and Spade 1996). Boswell and Spade’s (1996) ethnographic work found that some fraternities are particularly dangerous places for women and others foster more positive interactions between women and men. Their work highlights the flaw in assuming that all fraternities equally participate in a rape culture. They found structural differences between the parties held by fraternities with reputations of being “safe” or “dangerous” for women.

Little attention has been given to the differences among various types of Greek parties. On the surface, Greek social events may appear to be indistinguishable. They all

involve some level of drinking, dancing, and socializing. This may lead some to conclude that Greek social events are not in need of sociological analysis at a finer level of distinction. However, as outlined in the second chapter, the various parties are structured differently, each associated with unique norms and practices. Just as Boswell and Spade found differences among fraternities, there may be differences among parties in terms of interactions between women and men. Also, research on the Greek system tends to focus either exclusively on fraternities (Sanday 1990) or on sororities (Risman 1982). However, because of the vast amount of interaction that occurs between members of sororities and fraternities, an analysis that thoroughly analyzes both Greek women and Greek men is needed. Furthermore, if we understand gender as a “pervasive organizer of human activities, practices, and social structure” (Acker 1992: 566), then we should explore whether and how it is embedded within the different social events. I will examine the differences between swaps, NPHC Greek parties, date parties, and formals, and highlight how they are gendered, specifically in relation to expectations about hooking up.

### **Swaps**

The swap is a social event involving one sorority and one fraternity. Only members of the two hosting organizations are allowed to attend this event. Each swap has a theme and everyone attending dresses up in a costume relating to the theme. Kelly describes a few examples of swap themes: “Some of the themes are like redneck wedding, tacky tourists, sometimes tv shows, nerd swaps; decade swaps are always a big one.”

There are several ways in which the swap is embedded with ideas about gender. Sorority and fraternity members in this study describe the swap as a way to meet potential romantic or sexual partners. Kelly explains why she thinks swaps are fun:

I mean that's really why you go, like when you're a freshman, you're thinking "Oh, I'm going to meet a cute boy," like that's what you're thinking while you're getting ready and that's what all the boys are thinking, like "Oh, I'm going to meet a girl." It's the fun of it.

Kelly suggests that swaps are fun- particularly for freshmen- because it provides a chance for girls to meet guys and vice-versa. She specifically talks about the excitement of meeting a guy or a girl as something that sorority and fraternity members are "thinking" as they are "getting ready." In her description, the fun and excitement of the swaps is in the anticipation of meeting someone. Handler (1995) suggests that sororities help and encourage women to bond with their sisters while also pursuing relationships with fraternity members (Handler 1995: 253). The swap provides women (and men) the opportunity to bond with their same-sex friends while simultaneously "doing heterosexuality" (Schilt and Westbrook 2009) by focusing on the "hunt" for a romantic or sexual partner (Grazian 2007). Kelly further elaborates on the fun of swaps when she describes why she no longer attends them:

[J]ust having a boyfriend really does change things because for me, going to the swaps was kinda like so fun and exciting since everyone wants to, all the boys want to meet girls and girls want to meet boys so it's just like you're really kinda going and finding....I don't really know, just someone. So I've never had as much a drive to go now that I have a boyfriend.

Here, she describes swaps as a way of "finding" a girl or guy. Because she now has a boyfriend, she is no longer interested in attending the swaps. She and others perceive the swap as a social event that is centered on heterosexual pairing (Berkowitz and Padavic 1999; Risman 1982).

Julia echoes this idea while describing why swaps have become less fun as she has gotten older:

When you get older it's not fun anymore because you go and a lot of the guys that are there, you know, we have the swaps- fraternities and sororities- the guys that are there are all new freshmen so you're not going to go meet the younger guys [laughs]. Because that's a lot of the reason you'll go, to hang out with the guys that are at the swap, but I guess you just get tired of it.

She states that meeting guys is a major reason for attending the swaps. The swaps became less fun for her as she got older because younger guys are not potential partners to her. However, like Kelly, Julia describes the swap as being just as much about homosocial bonding as it is about the heterosexual hunt:

*What do you remember most about the swaps?*

Probably just hanging out with my friends that were in the sorority and just getting to know them better. It's really about- I know it's cheesy- but sisterhood. You really do get to know people a lot better through that.

Swaps act as a way for newly initiated sorority and fraternity freshmen to meet one another. However, swaps are also described as a way for the new members to get to know their new sorority sisters or fraternity brothers. This homosocial bonding created through the swaps, however, is inseparable from the heterosexual pairing aspect of the event. In his description of swaps, Stephen states:

I feel like there is a consensus in the Greek community that swaps are mainly for freshmen...I think it's kind of a way to get to know your fraternity brothers and get to meet freshman girls.

The swaps are usually held during the Fall, meaning that freshman Greek women and men experience this event not only as newly pledged members of their organization, but also as newly arrived students to college. The swap, then, may serve as an

introduction to the hook up culture for sorority and fraternity freshmen. In his explanation of why he no longer attends swaps, Josh says “I’m going to be a senior. So I really don’t feel like it’s my place to go there, especially when it’s for the pledges. It’s their time to go out and meet girls.” He views swaps as the pledges’ “time” for meeting girls.

The sorority members and some fraternity members describe having to take a charter bus to and from the swap. Swaps are held at bars in the downtown area (which is only a few minutes from the sorority houses). Although it’s a short drive, several sorority women describe this time as a chance to bond as they head to the swap. When asked about her experiences with riding the bus to swaps, Amanda explains why she thinks it’s fun: “It’s like going on a field trip when you are in high school. We never go that far, though. It just gets you hyped up for the swap.” Sorority women are exclusively with their sisters on the bus ride to the swaps. This provides a chance for sorority sisters to get “hyped up” together as they are about to meet the fraternity brothers at the swap.

Similarly, Kelly describes the excitement that the sorority and fraternity members feel before the swap:

So like that fraternity knows ‘Oh tonight we have a swap with Sigma Delta, I’m excited’ and we’re like ‘Oh tonight we have a swap with Phi Omega, and it’s just kinda like ‘ooh’ [excited] and then you meet.

Another ritual that occurs before the swap is the “pre-game.” Pre-gaming consists of meeting at someone’s house or at a fraternity house before a party to drink. Both sorority and fraternity members describe pre-gaming with friends and dates as a part of all the social events. However, with the swap, the fraternity men describe pre-gaming only with their brothers. None of the sorority women discuss pre-gaming before a swap,

possibly because of the rules restricting alcohol at the sorority houses. Grazian (2007) argues that pre-gaming is an important part of what he calls the “girl hunt”- adolescent heterosexual men’s aggressive pursuit to hook up with women. He writes that “[P]re-gaming is a bonding ritual that fosters social cohesion and builds confidence among young men in anticipation of the challenges that accompany the girl hunt” (Grazian 2007: 229). Bruce explains how the pre-gaming ritual in his fraternity provided a chance to bond with brothers:

*What do you remember most about the swaps?*

The swaps were always a lot of fun, especially like when you’re young, like when you’re a pledge they are the most fun thing in the world... [U]sually the fraternity will make all the pledges- unless you had a test the next day and you could prove it to us- you had to be at the house at 7 o’clock before the swap to pre-game, start drinking. But really what that was was an opportunity to hang out with your pledge brothers.

For Bruce’s fraternity, pre-gaming before the swap is mandatory for the pledges. The pre-gaming ritual is used by his fraternity to provide an opportunity for the newly joined members to “hang out” with one another. Bruce also considers the swap, itself, to be an opportunity for fraternity brothers to bond. In his explanation of how much time a fraternity member would generally spend with his brothers compared to the girls at the swaps, he says “swaps are almost exclusively guys. I mean there are girls there, to be completely honest the main objective is trying to get one to go home with you.” Because they are all-male organizations, fraternities sometimes use women to reaffirm their heterosexuality (Martin and Hummer 1989; Sanday 1990). Bruce says that swaps are mostly spent with fraternity brothers, yet the “objective” is to hook up with a girl.



At the same time, Bruce and other Greek members associate swaps as having less pressure around hooking up than other social events. Describing why he likes swaps,

Bruce says:

Swaps are laid back. I like that about them. You go in, you don't even have to talk to a girl. You're not worried about that. You're just having a good time. If you meet a girl and she's attractive and interested in you it's a plus.

He implies that the swaps are not spent getting to know a woman better. From Bruce's perspective, there is less pressure to interact with women, but still the opportunity to hook up.

Kelly describes how the dress at the swap makes it a more relaxed event than others:

The themes that they pick are funny. And so it makes it fun. You don't feel like you have to dress up... They're just a lot more lighthearted and... there's kinda like no pressure behind a swap. And some girls love to go even if they are dating people because they kinda say it's more about being with your friends than going to meet a boy.

Kelly views swaps as more laid back than other social events, in part, because of the differences in dress. She also describes swaps as a chance for sorority sisters to bond, even if they are not interested in finding a potential partner at the event.

## **Greek Parties**

Greek parties are hosted by either a predominantly black sorority or fraternity. They are typically held at a bar and are open to all students to attend. Sororities and fraternities use the event as a fundraiser by charging people to get into the party.

Like the swap, sorority and fraternity members describe Greek parties as an opportunity to be around members of the opposite sex. However, the swap is open only

to members of the sorority and fraternity hosting the party, creating a controlled competition environment. Also, the NPHC Greek party is an event in which someone can bring a date if they wanted, but it is not necessarily common. One sorority member says that some of the “it couples” or well-known couples show up to the parties together, but that others prefer to show up with friends. David laughingly says that women and men sometimes leave together, but don’t arrive together:

*With the parties and things like that, is that something people would bring a date to or is that something that you can go to by yourself?*

No, you usually go by yourself. Yea, [laughs] it’s not something that you bring a date to; you might leave with somebody but you’re not gonna go with.

The following three quotes illustrate the notion that women and men attend the NPHC Greek party to meet members of the opposite sex:

If you have a male organization, girls are gonna come to our party because it’s our party, guys are gonna come because they know girls are gonna be there. But female organizations, I don’t know if their whole mentality works like that. Female parties are usually gonna be a lot more guys there... But I’ve always thought we had a lot of attendance because guys know there are gonna be a lot of girls at our party, so they’re willing to pay. Because we actually usually charge females less. (David)

*How would a party from your organization look compared to a sorority’s?*

Our parties are definitely bigger than sororities’ but most fraternity parties are bigger than sororities’. I think the major difference is the ratio between males and females. For our parties, we have way, way more females at our parties than males. I think at sorority parties it’s more of a balance between males [and females].

*Is there any specific reason why there is that difference in ratio?*

I would probably say the way we promote. We promote through a lot of different avenues. And we promote mainly to girls. Mainly because usually those are the people that talk the parties, so they spread the word a lot quicker than guys. Usually if girls go out to a party, guys come out. So spreading the word to females is our major focus. (Michael)

As far as guys attending sorority parties, of course it's to find a girl. I can say there's a nice number of guys. It's not overwhelming. I think it's equal guys and girls at a sorority party as opposed to fraternity parties, it's majority girls. (Britney)

David and Michael both explain that their fraternities have high attendance because men come to their parties to meet women. They also describe the fraternity parties as having a higher ratio of women. This may be a result of the discounted price that women receive at the fraternity parties. However, Britney gives another explanation for why the fraternity parties have a lot of women at them:

I don't know what it is, but I know that girls- especially at [this university]- they really hold the fraternity guys to a high standard. I'm not just saying sexually, although that is the case sometimes... We always know we're at a Gamma Delta party because the Gamma Delta's are known as the pretty boys and you have to go to the back of the club to find the guys [that aren't in the fraternity] because all the girls are on the dance floor trying to see the guys [Gamma Delta's] when they are shimmying and dancing and stuff.

She says that the fraternity guys are held to a "high standard", perhaps insinuating that girls seek them out.

The members of the predominantly black organizations also describe the NPHC Greek parties as an opportunity to be with their same-sex friends. They each talk about strutting with members of their Greek organization. Strutting or "line dancing" is a coordinated and synchronized dance routine done in a line by an organization to show unity. Robyn considers strutting with her sorority sisters to be the most memorable aspect of the parties:

*And what about with the parties, what do you remember most?*

I remember my transformation from non-Greek to Greek. My mom laughs and says "they taught you how to dance," and I'm like "yes! They taught me how to dance." So now I can dance and I can strut and stroll in

the line and do line dances with everyone else. So now if I go to a party, everybody in the sorority or at least five people in the sorority needs to go with me so I can dance.

Robyn's "transformation" to a Greek student was symbolized by learning her organization's struts. Britney explains how much time at a party she spends strutting with her sorority sisters:

We show up fashionably late around 10:30 or 11:00. For us, as a sorority, we make our way through the crowd and start strutting. Especially if it's our party or our fraternity... we go straight to the dance floor and strut. Throughout the night, if it's a certain song, we get out there and do it. We strut the whole night, I think every Greek can say that, now at a party it is more about getting out there to strut instead of just standing and spectating.

I can honestly say the majority of the time, it's strutting. For me, If I had to put a percentage on it, it would be a good 90% of the time I'm out there strutting and dancing is the other 10%.

Britney says that she and her sisters "strut the whole night." Similarly, David describes the line dances and chants as the most memorable part of the parties:

I always enjoy...I don't know if you've ever seen this, it's not necessarily stepping but there's something called hoping or strolling, it's kinda like you're in a line. That's always really fun for me. And also we have different chants for each organization, that's always really fun.

Although it is a chance to bond with sorority sisters are fraternity brothers, strutting can simultaneously be seen as a chance to dance in front of members of the opposite sex.

This is evident in Britney's previous quote, in which she says that "all the girls are on the dance floor trying to see the guys when they are shimmying and dancing."

### **Date Parties**

A date party is organized by one fraternity or one sorority. They are usually held at a bar near the university campus. Members of the hosting organization invite a date to

bring to the event. Partygoers chat, drink, and sometimes dance at this event. The dress for this event ranges from casual to business casual attire.

Sorority and fraternity members in this study frame the interactions between women and men at date parties differently from those at swaps. Greg describes his experiences at sorority and fraternity date parties:

Those are more like you are with that girl. Like you go to a date party and it's like your girlfriend that night. You don't leave her to go dance with somebody else... It's like your girlfriend. And it's all about you're trying to hook-up with somebody.

He describes the date party as having a "girlfriend" for the night, with the goal of hooking up with a girl.

Julia makes a distinction between swaps and date parties in terms of how much time is spent with sorority sisters compared to a guy. When asked about what she remembers about date parties, Julia says:

date parties, you're more focused on your date. I mean swaps you're just kinda free to talk to anybody, meet anybody; you're not tied down to one person. But date parties and formals- you brought your date, you need to pay attention to your date so I guess it's more focused on your date than your friends. But it's kinda like both still, it's not like you don't talk to your friends.

While both the swap and the date party allow for homosocial bonding and heterosexual pairing, Julia associates swaps with being "free" and date parties with being "tied down."

While swaps were seen as a way for freshmen to mingle with potential sexual partners,

John describes date parties as a way to become involved with a girl that's a friend.

Here, he describes the ideal date to bring to a date party:

A lot of times an ideal date- especially at a date party- is a girl that you're good friends with but that you'd like to become girlfriends with. I know my good buddy, Sean, took this girl that he knew in his English class that

they studied together... and he really wanted to start kinda dating her. Well at that date party there's a small amount of alcohol there, you know, a small large amount. So everyone's a little bit more happy, a little bit more expressive, you're dancing and stuff. He made his move and it worked. So they kissed and afterwards it was like... "Obviously we're physically attracted to one another."

He jokes about the "small large" amount of alcohol involved in allowing his friend to make his move. Alcohol typically plays an integral part in hooking up for college students (Owen et al 2010).

### **Formals**

The formal is hosted by one fraternity or one sorority. Members invite a date to the event. Those attending the formal are generally expected to dress nicer than they would at the other events. This involves a tie and sometimes a suit for men, and a dress for women.

Sorority and fraternity members describe formals as the social event involving the most time spent with dates. Stephen describes the differences he sees between swaps and formals:

The swaps, it's just all mingling, you can go there and talk to, you can dance with five different girls and then go outside and smoke a cigarette with your fraternity brothers while drinking a beer on the patio, and then go in and dance with a few other girls, and you just meet a bunch of people, it's a real laid back, casual atmosphere, a lot of mingling, whereas, the formals, because you're there with a date, you're kind of tied down to one person.

The swap, according to Stephen, gives him the opportunity to dance with multiple girls, whereas he feels "tied down" at the formal. Julia views having a date as an important part of the formal:

*Do any of the sisters ever go by themselves? Or can you go by yourself?*

You can, but, I mean I've done that one time over three years. You can go, but I don't think you really want to. At my case, I decided to go at the last minute and I was like "I don't care if I have a date, I'm just going to go and hang out with the girls or whatever." But when you go and everyone else has a date, you kinda feel left out. So I guess you don't really want to go if you don't have a date, if it's a date party or formal. Definitely not a formal, maybe a date party. Formal you have to have a date, that's really important.

*Is there a reason why it's different that way?*

I think date party is just more casual so it's not as big of a deal to go by yourself. Formal it's just kinda expected I guess.

She describes her attempt at going to the formal without a date as unsuccessful because she felt "left out" because everyone else has a date. Similarly, Josh describes the differences between taking a person to a date party and a formal:

A date party could definitely be a friend... it's not a very high costing night... [I]t's usually pretty low key, whereas the formal is definitely that whole prom aspect. You're gonna want to probably bring someone that brings a little more to you because it is so expensive and because you're gonna be sharing a room together for two nights or whatever the situation, and it's expensive.

Josh says that taking a date to the formal is more expensive than the date party. As a result, the date party is "low key" in an economic respect. The formal, however, involves spending more money and sharing a room with a date.

Several people associate aspects of the formals with pressures and expectations about hooking up. Josh describes why he feels there is too much pressure involved in staying with the dates overnight at the New Orleans formals:

I don't like the fact that we go to these formals and you gotta stay, some of these guys are too pressured, and a lot of these girls, to stay in the same

room with the date for two nights. I don't think that's fair to- It doesn't bother me as much- but I don't think it's fair to a lot of the guys in my fraternity because, like I said, first of all it's hard enough one to find a date and two you have to try and explain to her how you're going to be staying in the same room for two nights.

Josh expresses his personal opposition to a structural aspect of his fraternity's formal: that dates have to stay in the same room together. He distances himself, however, by saying that he personally doesn't mind. He may be "doing masculinity" by suggesting that he is unbothered by the pressure involved in sharing a room with a date for the formal.

When discussing the different types of dates that people bring, Anna explains:

[I]f you brought a gay guy, that was always fun.

*Did that ever happen?*

Oh yea, I guess it's not guys who are openly gay... [G]ay guys are the best dates because you really know there's no expectations there. They're not going to hit on you, they're not going to try and do anything.

She describes gay guys as good dates because they don't try to "do anything."

Having a gay date averts expectations to hook up at the parties. She notes that it's not openly gay men that are brought as dates perhaps because it would be taboo to bring an openly gay man. When asked if a gay guy was an ideal date, Anna says:

Yea but...it depends on what you want out of it. If I had been dating a guy, I would have wanted him to go with me. Because you have those romantic feelings for someone and you don't want to go with someone else. But I guess... I think the most fun I've had on any kind of party date thing Greek-wise would be with someone that it was just friends and hanging out because there's no pressure.

She doesn't necessarily feel pressured if her date is a boyfriend or a platonic friend.



## **Conclusions**

The swaps, date parties, and formals are each uniquely gendered social events. Greek members associate different levels of expectations and pressures involved with hooking up among the various social events. The swap and the NPHC Greek party are seen as a chance to bond with same-sex friends while simultaneously mingle with potential sexual partners. The date party and the formal are associated more with being “tied down” to a date. For some Greek members, date parties and formals involve higher expectations about hooking up than other types of parties. Also, the different structures of the parties may create different types of hooking up. The “mingling” nature of the swaps and NPHC Greek parties may create random hook ups between individuals, in which romantic or sexual interaction was unplanned. The date-centered aspect of formals and date parties may create non-random hook ups between individuals, in which romantic or sexual interaction between two people is planned or expected.

## V. CONCLUSION

I designed this research project in order to analyze what Greek members' perceptions about Greek parties may be able to tell us about hook up culture and rape culture. In-depth interviews allowed me to uncover how sorority and fraternity members interpret the behaviors, norms, and interactions at organized parties and in the broader Greek system. I found two major themes in this study. First, the current and former Greek members associated sororities and their parties with rule-boundedness. Conversely, they associated fraternities and their parties as less restrictive and wilder than the sororities. I will also discuss the variations evident in the social rankings sorority and fraternity members assign organizations on campus. Second, the sorority and fraternity members made distinctions between the types of parties that Greek organizations host. These findings have implications for gender and gendered organizations, hook up culture, and rape culture. They help us to understand the context in which people experience both hooking up and sexual violence.

My findings help further our understanding of gender as a social construct. Hegemonic ideas about masculinity and femininity emerged in members' descriptions of Greek organizations and social events. Greek women and men interviewed in this research associated fraternities with being wild and sororities with being rule-bound. The fraternity parties were described as an environment in which "whatever goes." Cultural definitions of masculinity suggest that men-especially young men- are expected to be

rowdy, untamable boundary pushers (Kimmel 2008). The Greek members in this study applied these expectations to fraternities and their parties. The sororities and their parties were described as being more rule-bound. Rules such as the “double tap”- a form of penalization that a sorority member in this study experienced for doing “suggestive dance moves”- are used by the sororities to police their members. This research is consistent with past research (DeSantis 2007) that suggests that Greek organizations are gendered social clubs that often reinforce traditional gender roles for women and men. I found that the parties hosted by Greek organizations are also embedded with assumptions about gender, influencing how members experience and talk about them.

Although the fraternities were associated with being wild and the sororities with rule-boundedness, not all Greek organizations fit neatly into this binary. One of the predominantly white fraternities was considered to be the “nerdy” fraternity on campus. Also, one of the predominantly white sororities was consistently described as the “party” sorority. Both organizations, however, were viewed as low on the status hierarchy. Their low status may be a result of the fact that both organizations were given labels- one as the nerdy fraternity and the other as the party sorority- that were counter to hegemonic gender norms. It is also worth noting that although the top-tier fraternities were seen as partiers, they were not necessarily seen as the wildest or most party-centered. The fraternities with the reputation for being the wildest and for being the biggest partiers were lower-tier fraternities. Being the wildest fraternity can be a potentially negative label because it is often associated with alcoholism or drug abuse. This is consistent with past research on Greek reputations (Desantis 2003) that suggest that high status fraternities may try to avoid being associated with drug or alcohol abuse problems. No

status hierarchy was discussed by any of the members of predominantly black Greek organizations.

The findings in this project are also relevant to the sociological literature on gendered organizations. Organizations play an active role in constructing and reinforcing gendered situations through organizational cultures, rules, and images (Britton 2003). The parties hosted by Greek organizations can similarly be understood as sites in which gendering occurs. For example, the heterosexual “hunt” (Grazian 2007) is embedded within the party cultures of both the predominantly white organizations’ swap and the predominantly black organizations’ Greek party. The unofficial rules and expectations of the formal about bringing a date impacts how members experience this event. The themes of the swap parties sometimes serve as a gender, race, and class-based images. Race and class stereotypes are reinforced at the party through swap themes such as “ghetto swap” and “redneck wedding.” This research also highlights the importance of analyzing the construction of gender in Greek organizations in the context of the interaction between these gendered organizations. Ideas about femininity are not created solely in sororities. Likewise, ideas about masculinity are not created solely in fraternities.

These findings are also useful for understanding the hook up culture on college campuses. The date party and the formal allow members to simultaneously have a date and still interact within a party environment with same-sex friends. Research on hooking up suggests that hooks ups usually involve two people that at least somewhat know one another (Manning, Giordano, and Longmore 2006). Hook ups generally occur at a party because this environment allows two individuals the chance to talk, flirt, and dance

(Hamilton and Armstrong 2009). The party setting also typically provides the two individuals an abundance of alcohol. Each of the parties held by Greek organizations gives people a chance to drink while flirting and dancing with members of the opposite sex. The differences in the Greek parties influence how members experience hooking up in two different ways. First, the swap and the NPHC Greek party were both described as a chance to meet a potential romantic or sexual partner. This is especially true for the swap, a party in which bringing a date is not allowed. Recall Kelly's description of what makes the swaps fun, in which she says "all the boys want to meet girls and girls want to meet boys so it's just like you're really kinda going and finding...I don't really know, just someone." Similarly, recall David's comment about bringing a date to an NPHC party, in which he lightheartedly states "it's not something that you bring a date to; you might leave with somebody but you're not gonna go with." These two parties are conducive to the heterosexual "hunt," where individuals attempt to find a potential romantic or sexual partner. A Greek member may be more likely to experience a hook up with someone that they meet at these two events.

At the date parties and formals, members bring a date. Recall that Greg- a former member of a predominantly white fraternity- described the date-centered parties as having a "girlfriend for a night." The date party and formal may be more conducive to a non-random hook up between two individuals because everyone at these events is paired up with a date for the night. The essential characteristics of the different Greek parties, then, may influence whether a "random" or "non-random" hook up occurs between two individuals. Distinguishing between the two types of hook ups would be beneficial for future research on this topic.

There is a second way in which the Greek parties influenced how members experience hooking up: some events were associated with higher expectations about hooking up than others. The Greek members in this study associated expectations about hooking up more so with the date-centered parties than the non-date parties. These findings suggest that we should give more attention to the context within which hooking up occurs.

While hook up culture can be related to rape culture, I intentionally discuss hook up culture separately from rape culture so as to not conflate the two. These findings are also beneficial for our understanding of rape culture in the Greek system in two different ways. First, current and former members of the predominantly white organizations in this study described spending the most time with their same-sex friends and the least amount of time talking to members of the opposite sex at the swaps. At a swap, Greek members can get to know their sorority sisters or fraternity brothers while scoping out members of the opposite sex to potentially dance with. This could potentially fit Boswell and Spade's (1996) description of the "unsafe" fraternity parties. At these parties, the fraternity men's interactions with women were confined to dancing and potentially hooking up. Having a girlfriend was looked down upon. The date parties and formals described by Greek members in this study could potentially fit Boswell and Spade's description of the "safe" fraternity parties. Date parties and formals were described as involving the most time spent talking to members of the opposite sex. And, whereas the swap involves sex segregated transportation to the party, Greek members and their date ride the bus together to the date party and formal. However, the parties centered on having a date may potentially reinforce a rape culture through expectations about hooking

up. Recall from the previous chapter, for example, Josh's comment about bringing a date to formal that can "bring more to you" because of the financial and time commitment involved. A more date-centered environment, then, should not be assumed to be a safer environment for women.

My findings on reputations within the Greek community are also beneficial to the literature on rape culture. High status men have been associated with being more sexually aggressive towards women (Ray and Rosow 2010). The members of the predominantly white Greek organizations in this study consistently pointed out the same four fraternities as being the top tier fraternities. However, these fraternities were not necessarily seen as being more sexually aggressive towards women than the other fraternities. In fact, Greek members in this study named some of the lower tier fraternities on campus as unsafe spaces for women. We should not assume, then, that higher status for men necessarily means that they are more likely to participate in rape culture. While it is useful to talk about "safe" and "unsafe" fraternities (Boswell and Spade 1996), these two categories may not always parallel low-tier and high-tier statuses.

This research also has implications that are useful for Greek life. Rules regarding male visitors and alcohol in the house among the predominantly white sororities perpetuate a sexual double standard within the Greek system. Also, these rules influence who has control over alcohol, which is important for understanding collegiate rape (Boswell and Spade 1996). For example, following a swap, an after-party between the sorority and fraternity referred to as "late night" is held at the fraternity house. The sororities, however, are not allowed to host late nights. If the sororities were allowed to

host parties at their house, they would likely have more control over the social space and flow of alcohol.

There were several limitations that I experienced during this project that are worth addressing. Because I interviewed sorority and fraternity members from both high and low status organizations, as well as from both predominantly black and predominantly white organizations, my wide sample would have benefited from more interviews than I was able to collect for this project. My findings would be better supported with the opportunity to have more voices from each type of Greek organization.

My social location as a white man may have affected interviewees' responses. In face-to-face in-depth interviews, the dynamics of the interview and the information shared may be different depending on the gender, race, class of the interviewer and interviewee (Singleton and Straits 2005). As noted in the introduction, this may have influenced the interviewees' likelihood of openly talking about hooking up.

Also, the members of the predominantly black organizations in this research each discussed their experiences at parties more so in terms of organizing and preparing, rather than as a participant at the parties. As a result, I had limited data on these Greek members' experiences as partygoers. However, this may be explained in part by the fact that the Greek party hosted by predominantly black sororities and fraternities is a fundraiser. One fraternity member in this study recalls all the members in his organization working "shifts" at the party, collecting money at the door and ensuring that the party ran smoothly. Encouraging members to discuss their experiences at other organizations' Greek parties more so than their own would perhaps help to address this problem.



There is still more research to be done on the similarities and differences between parties hosted by predominantly black and predominantly white Greek organizations. Past research has shown that institutional arrangements- such as white fraternities having houses on campuses- creates difference in how black and white Greek men interact with women (Ray 2009). Analyzing the differences in the structure of predominantly black and predominantly white fraternity parties may help us to better understand rape in the Greek system. For example, the parties described by white fraternity members in this study were secluded events while the parties described by black fraternity members were open for all students to attend. The secrecy involved with the secluded parties may make them conducive to rape. However, the inability to control who attends the open parties may make them conducive to rape as well.

While interviews can provide a great amount of insight into understanding Greek parties, there are limitations to this methodological approach. In relying solely on interview data, there is a lack of detailed context regarding alcohol use, interactions, and other aspects of the parties. It would be beneficial to do ethnographic work in future research on sorority and fraternity parties. This would allow first-hand sociological analysis of the parties themselves. Conducting in-depth interviews with sorority and fraternity social chairpersons would also be helpful for future research that seeks to uncover the organizational logic behind the structure of the parties. There is also a need for more research analyzing the connection between reputations in the Greek system and rape culture. While attention has been given to fraternities in this respect, there is still a need to better understand how the reputations of sororities influence sorority women's risk of sexual assault. Does being in a sorority that has a reputation for being "easy"

make a member of that organization more likely to be a victim of sexual violence? Or, does the “sexual conquest” aspect of masculinity that positions “hard to get” women as more sexually valuable (Kimmel 2005) make the women in the more prestige sororities more likely to experience sexual violence?

This research highlights the importance of understanding how parties are structured differently. Future research on hooking up at parties and party rape would benefit from this analysis. Sociological discussions that make generalized claims about collegiate parties overlook the significance of how different parties may create different experiences for those who attend them. Although they seem like entirely personal acts, hooking up and rape both occur in a broader social context. Analyzing the party environment in which these sexual experiences occur helps us to better understand both hooking up and rape culture.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acker, Joan. 1992. "From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions." *Contemporary Sociology*. Vol. 21, No. 5. pp. 565-569.
- Babbie, Earl. 2004. *The Practice of Social Research*. 10th Edition. New York: Wadsworth.
- Berkowitz, Aleandra and Padavic, Irene. 1999. "Getting a Man or Getting Ahead: Comparison off White and Black Sororities." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. Vol. 27, No. 4. Pp. 530-557.
- Bleeker, Timothy and Murnen, Sarah. 2005. "Fraternity Membership, the Display of Degrading Sexual Images and Rape Myth Acceptance. *Sex Roles*. Vol. 53, No. 7. pp. 487-493
- Bogle, K. A. 2008. *Hooking up: Sex, dating, and relationships on campus*. New York: New York University Press.
- Britton, Dana. 2003. "At Work In The Iron Cage: The Prison As Gendered Organization." New York: New York University Press.
- Burt, M. 1980. "Cultural Myths and Supports for Rape." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 32 No. 2. pp 217-229.
- Butler, Judith. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Chambliss, Daniel F. and Russel K. Schutt. 2006. *Making Sense of the Social World*. Second Edition. Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press.
- Connell, R. W. 1995. "The Social Organization of Masculinity." *Masculinities*. University of California Press. Los Angeles, California. pg. 67-83.
- Connell, R. W. and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society*. 19: 829-859.
- Conrad, B. 2006. "Neoinstitutionalism, social movements, and the cultural reproduction of a mentalite: Promise keepers reconstruct the Madonna/whore complex." *The Sociological Quarterly*. Vol. 47, No. 2. pp. 305-331.
- Dellinger, Kirsten. 2004. "Masculinities in 'Safe' and 'Embattled' Organizations: Accounting for Pornographic and Feminist Magazines." *Gender & Society*. Vol. 18 No. 5. pp 545-566
- DeSantis, Alan D. 2007. *Inside Greek U*. The University Press of Kentucky.

- England, Paula, Emily Fitzgibbons Shafer, and Alison C. K. Fogarty. 2008. Hooking up and forming romantic relationships on today's college campuses. In *The gendered society reader*, edited by M. Kimmel. New York: Oxford University Press.
- England, P., and T. R. J. Thomas. 2006. The decline of the date and the rise of the college hook up. In *Families in transition*, 14th ed., edited by Arlene S. Skolnick and Jerome H. Skolnick, 151-62. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Esterberg, Kristin G. 2002. *Qualitative Methods in Social Research*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Fenstermaker, S. and West, C. (Eds) (2002). *Doing gender, doing difference: Inequality, power, and institutional change*. New York: Routledge.
- Flood, Michael. 2008. "Men, Sex, and Homosociality." *Men and Masculinities*. Vol. 10 No. 3. 339-359.
- Glenn, M., and E. Marquardt. 2001. *Hooking up, hanging out and hoping for Mr. right: College women on mating and dating today*. New York: Institute for American Values.
- Grazian, D. 2007. The girl hunt: Urban nightlife and the performance of hegemonic masculinity as collective activity. *Symbolic Interaction* 30:221-43.
- Hamilton, L., and E. Armstrong. 2009. Gendered sexuality in young adulthood: Double binds and flawed options. *Gender & Society* 23:589.
- Handler, Lisa. 1995. "In the Fraternal Sisterhood: Sororities as Gender Strategy." *Gender and Society*. Vol. 9, No. 12. pp. 236-255.
- Kimmel, Michael. 2004. "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity." in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States, an Integrated Study*.
- Kimmel, Michael. 2005. "Men, Masculinity, and the Rape Culture" in *Transforming A Rape Culture*. Milkweed Editions.
- Kimmel, Michael. 2008. *Guyland: The perilous world where boys become men*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Koss, Mary P., Gidycz, Christine A., and Wisniewski, Natine. 1987. "The Scope of Rape: Incidence and Prevalence of Sexual Aggression and Victimization in a National Sample of Higher Education Students. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. pp. 162-170.

- Lefkowitz, Bernard. 1997. *Our Guys*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Manning, Wendy, Peggy Giordano and Monica Longmore. 2006. "Hooking Up: The Relationship Contexts of "Nonrelationship" Sex." *Journal of Adolescent Research*. Vol. 21, No. 5. pp. 459-483.
- Martin, Patricia Yancey and Robert A. Hummer. 1989. "Fraternities and Rape on Campus." *Gender & Society*. Vol. 3 No. 4. pp 457-473.
- O'Sullivan, C. 1993. "Fraternities and the Rape Culture." in *Transforming a Rape Culture*. Edited by E. Buchwald, P. R. Fletcher, and M. Roth. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions.
- Owen, Jesse, Galena Rhoades, Scott Stanley, and Frank Fincham. "Hooking Up Among College Students: Demographic and Psychosocial Correlates. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. Vol. 39, No. 3. pp. 653- 663.
- Paechter, Carrie. 2006. "Masculine Femininities, Feminine Masculinities: Power, Identities and Gender." *Gender and Education*. Vol. 18 Issue 3. p253-263.
- Pascoe, C.J. 2007. *Dude You're A Fag*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ray, Rashawn and Jason A. Rosow. 2010. "Getting Off and Getting Intimate: How Normative Institutional Arrangements Structure Black and White Fraternity Men's Approaches Toward Women." *Men and Masculinities*. Vol. 12, No. 5. pp. 523-546.
- Risman, Barbara. 1982. "College Women and Sororities: The Social Construction and Reaffirmation of Gender Roles." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. Vol. 11, No. 2.
- Risman, B. J., and P. Schwartz. 2002. After the sexual revolution: Gender politics in teen dating. *Contexts* 1:16-24.
- Ronen, Shelly. 2010. "Grinding on the Dance Floor: Gendered Scripts and Sexualized Dancing at College Parties." *Gender and Society*. Vol. 24, No. 3. pp. 355-377.
- Sanday, Peggy Reeves. 1990. *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus*. New York University Press. New York.
- Sasson-Levy, Orna. 2007. "Contradictory Consequences of Mandatory Conscription: The Case of Women Secretaries in the Israeli Military." *Gender & Society*. Vol. 21 No. 4. pp. 481-507.

- Schilt, Kristen and Westbrook, Laurel. 2009. "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity." *Gender and Society*. Vol. 23, No. 4. pp. 440-464.
- Schippers, Mimi. 2007. "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony." *Theory & Society*. Vol. 36 Issue 1. p85-102.
- Singleton, Jr, Royce A. and Bruce C. Straits. 2005. *Approaches to Social Research*. 4th Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stomblor, Mindy. 1994. "Buddies or Slutties: The Collective Sexual Reputation of Fraternity Little Sisters." *Gender & Society*. Vol. 8, No. 3. pp. 297-323.
- West, C, and D. Zimmerman 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society*. Vol. 1. pp 125-151.
- Williams, Christine L. 1991. "Case Studies and the Sociology of Gender" in *A Case for the Case Study*. Edited by Joe R. Faegin, Anthony M. Orum, and Gideon Sjoberg. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Williams, Christine. 1995. "Gendered Jobs and Gendered Works" in *Still a Man's World: Men Who Do Women's Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

## APPENDIX A



APPENDIX A: TABLES

*Figure 1*

Interviewee Demographics

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Member Status</b>	<b>Type of Organization</b>	<b>Years in Org.</b>
Stephen	21	M	White	Quit	Predom. White, Top Tier Fraternity	2 Years
Kelly	21	F	White	Active	Predom. White, Top Tier Sorority	3 Years
Josh	22	M	White	Active	Predom. White, Lower Tier Fraternity	3 Years
Greg	23	M	White	Quit	Predom. White, Top Tier Fraternity	1 Year
Eric	21	M	White	Active	Predom. White, Lower Tier Fraternity	1 Year
Amanda	23	F	White	Quit	Predom White, Lower Tier Sorority	1 Year
Bruce	24	M	White	Alumni	Predom. White, Top Tier Fraternity	3 Years
John	20	M	White	Active	Predom. White, Lower Tier Fraternity	1 Year
Robyn	22	F	Black	Active	Predom. Black Sorority	2 Years
David	21	M	Black	Active	Predom. Black Fraternity	2 Years
Julia	21	F	White	Alumni	Predom. White, Lower Tier Sorority	3 Years
Michael	22	M	Black	Alumni	Predom. Black Fraternity	2 Years
Anna	22	F	White	Quit	Predom. White, Top Tier Sorority	1 Year
Britney	22	F	Black	Active	Predom. Black Sorority	1 Year

Figure 2

Status of Members

<b>Status</b>	<b>Number of Interviewees</b>
Quit	4
Alumni	3
Current	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>

Figure 3

Type of Organizations

	<b>Sorority</b>	<b>Fraternity</b>
Predom. White, Top Tier	2	3
Predom. White, Lower Tier	2	3
Predom. Black	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>

Figure 4

Types of Social Events

	<b>Predominantly White Organizations Events</b>			<b>Predominantly Black Organizations Events</b>
	Swaps	Date Parties	Formals	NPHC Greek Parties
Organizations Involved	Sorority/Fraternity Pairing	1 Organization	1 Organization	1 Organization
Date Status	No Date	Date	Date	Optional
Dress	Costume	Semi-formal	Formal	Casual/Semi-formal
Location	Local Bar	Local Bar	Resort	Local Bar

## APPENDIX B

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Title: Greek Social Events

Date:

### Interview Questions

#### Personal Demographic

Name:

Age:

Sex:

Race:

Organization:

Status with Organization:

Years in Organization:

Student Status:

#### General Questions

When did you first become interested in joining a sorority/fraternity and what was going on in your life at the time?

Was there anything about the sorority/fraternity that you joined that made you want to join?

Did this turn out to be true?

How big a part have social events been in your experience with your sorority/fraternity?

Just so I have the big picture in mind, could you start by sketching out some of the major parties and social events your sorority/fraternity hosts throughout the year?

Can you walk me through a typical X? What are they like?

#### Planning

Could you walk me through the process of planning one of these events?

Who plans?

Who picks location? What are qualifications of a good location?

Who buys alcohol? How do you pick a sorority to swap with? How do you decide on a costume?

Who pays?

## **Experiences at Events**

What do you remember most about your first X?

How do you decide who to bring? (How do your brothers/sisters decide this?)

Do people ever joke around about who someone's bringing as a date? (good dates? "bad" dates?)

Is there an "ideal" date for these kinds of events? Why? Why not?

Did you (or anyone you know) ever bring "the wrong" kind of date or had a "date gone bad"? Describe.

Is it ok not to bring a date to these events?  
How do people get to the event? What is that like?

What do people do once they arrive? Is there a specific itinerary?

How much time do people spend with their dates vs. the brothers/sisters?

What happens after the event?

## **Reputations**

In your opinion, what is the biggest social event of the year for your sorority/fraternity? (is your sorority/fraternity known for any events, in particular?)

Have you heard other people say things about your parties?

Have you heard any stories or rumors about other sorority/fraternity events? From other men? From women?

Are there fraternities that have a particularly good or bad reputation with sororities in your mind?

Are there sororities that have a particularly good or bad rep with fraternities?

How do your parties compare? Similarities? Differences?

Do people talk about what happened afterwards?

Do people talk about it during rush?

## **Closing Questions**

What makes a successful event?

What do you like most about these parties?

Do you go to all of them?

If you could change anything about them, what would you change?

What kind of advice would you give to people who have never been to a formal? swap?

## VITA

### **EDUCATION**

---

---

Master of Arts, Sociology, University of Mississippi, May 2011

Bachelor of Arts (Honors), *Cum Laude*, Sociology, May 2009

Associate of Arts, General Studies, August 2008

### **PUBLICATIONS**

---

---

“These Kids are Killing Each Other: Gender-Neutral vs. Gender-Specific Framing of School Shootings, 1999-2009” (Forthcoming). Chapter in *Crime Media and the Perpetuation of Racism, Sexism and Class Stereotypes*. Edited by Joan Connors and Denise Bissler. North Carolina: McFarland Press.

### **AWARDS & HONORS**

---

---

University of Mississippi, Department of Sociology Teaching Assistantship, Fall 2009-Spring 2011

University of Mississippi, Chancellor’s Honor Roll, Fall 2007-Spring 2009

Hinds Community College, Dean’s Honor Roll, Fall 2006-Spring 2007

Kiwanis College Scholarship, 2005

### **EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

---

---

#### **Professional Affiliations**

Southern Sociological Society, 2009-Present

Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Society, 2009-Present

Percussive Arts Society, 2007-Present

### **Honors and Service Organizations**

Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society, 2010-Present

Alpha Phi Omega, Service Vice President, 2010-Present

Alpha Kappa Delta Sociology Honors Society, 2008-Present

Sigma Alpha Lambda Honor Society, 2008-2009