Review

Fraternities and Campus Sexual Violence: Risk, Protection, and Prevention

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Abstract

Campus fraternity homes have long been associated as party houses with ample alcohol and sexual activity. The development of a party culture for universities and fraternities is associated with high levels of alcohol use. Alcohol consumption is a commonly cited risk factor for both perpetration and victimization of sexual violence. This review examines party culture as applied to campus climate, traditional gender roles, and rape culture with a focus on fraternity organizations. Fraternities as both a risk and protective factor are discussed. This review then discusses prevention program techniques of varying success with fraternity brothers and offers suggestions for future research and prevention programs.

Keywords: campus sexual misconduct, fraternities, sexual misconduct risk, sexual violence prevention

Introduction

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT on college campuses is a pervasive problem. Samples of thousands of women in college have shown rates of one in five women being raped during their college career; a rate that has held steady for decades (Fisher et al. 2000; Koss et al. 1987; Krebs et al. 2007). The prevalence is likely higher than one in five due to an extreme lack of reporting by students (Fisher et al. 2000). Student victims sometimes believe an incident is not important enough to report to police, suggesting something special about campus environments and sexual assault (Sinozich and Langton 2014).

There are a variety of risk factors specific to university life that increase the likelihood of a college woman being a victim of sexual violence. Some of these risk factors include alcohol and substance use, fraternity organizations, a campus party culture, and belief in rape myths and traditional gender roles. Many scholars have researched whether there is an increased risk of rape perpetration if the offender is a member of a fraternal organization and found an increased rate of sexual assault perpetration among members of fraternities, at fraternity houses, and during and after fraternity parties (Murnen and Kohlman 2007). This article seeks to discuss fraternity organizations and their relationship with sexual misconduct and sexual assault in the context of the larger campus climate within which the fraternity exists. Drug and alcohol use, fraternal party culture, personality characteristics of men who seek to join fraternities, acceptance of traditional gender roles and rape myths, and fraternities as protective factors against sexual assault perpetration will be reviewed. This will be followed by a discussion of sexual misconduct and assault prevention with fraternities examining what has worked and where improvements can be made.

Definitions

Sexual misconduct refers to a spectrum of behaviors that may or may not include physical contact such as stalking, sexual harassment, dating and interpersonal violence, and sexual assault. Sexual assault refers to any unwanted sexual activity. Rape is any unwanted penetration: whether oral, anal, or vaginal. Rape, sexual assault, and some (but not all) behaviors on the sexual misconduct spectrum are crimes. Rape and sexual assault are always sexual misconduct, but sexual misconduct is not always rape or sexual assault.

Fraternity Culture

Party culture

One commonly cited risk factor for both sexual assault perpetration and victimization is the use of illicit substances (Abbey 2002; Ullman et al. 1999). Drug and alcohol use occurs frequently on university campuses. Parties are often synonymous with substance use. Party culture refers to a student lifestyle of attending parties and engaging in substance use and binge drinking. Party culture has been used to describe campuses and campus organizations whose students engage in frequent use of drugs and alcohol while at a party. Many fraternities carry a party culture perception, regardless of the university where the fraternity is located. This perception exists for a reason: some fraternities are active participants in party culture. Male students tend to engage in binge drinking more frequently than female

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students, and members of fraternity organizations are much more likely to engage in binge drinking than nonfraternity counterparts (Durkin et al. 2005; Peralta et al. 2010). There is a connection between fraternities that are actively engaged in party culture and sexual assault because the increased use of drugs and alcohol can lead to an increased risk for both sexual assault victimization and perpetration.

Fraternities often outnumber sororities on campus and there are not always other places to party with peers. These organizations use this status of exclusivity and superiority to encourage incoming students to join (Sanday 2007). Some fraternities display ''sexual ethos'' at their parties, which include ''denial of any responsibility for sexual abuse that might take place at parties…and projection of fault on to the women who come to the parties'' (Sanday 2007, p. 54). Moreover, fraternity brothers may engage in more sexual misconduct or sexual assault because of peer pressure to have sex (Franklin et al. 2012). Party culture can contribute to an increased rate of sexual assault perpetration at any location, but fraternity houses offer a prime underage party outlet. Undergraduates who do not have Greek membership or who have not yet moved into the fraternity/sorority house seek out fraternity houses for this reason (Armstrong et al. 2006). The popularity of parties in the fraternity house and likelihood of binge drinking can lead to more opportunity for sexual assault.

Armstrong et al. (2006) argued party culture contributes to the problem of sexual assault on college campuses for several reasons. Partying is viewed as a fun activity. However, with partying comes the expectation of drinking heavily, which can be used as a means for sexual assault. Because someone under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol cannot give consent, the binge drinking that occurs at these parties paves the way for sexual assault to occur.

Fraternities are dominated by men and parties thrown at fraternity houses are planned and executed by men. The fraternities studied by Armstrong et al. (2006) consistently chose sexist themes for their parties, encouraging women to dress scantily and turning away women whose appearance was not desirable at the door. Fraternity members typically have control over who is allowed in to the party and who is given alcohol (Armstrong et al. 2006). Boswell and Spade (1996) support Armstrong et al's (2006) connection between controlling alcohol as a means for sexual compliance. Fraternity men use other methods of control to obtain sex. Fraternity men state their control tactics included ''getting women drunk, blocking doors, and controlling transportation are common ways men try and prevent women from leaving sexual situations'' (Armstrong et al. 2006, p. 491).

The misogynistic and sexist themes fraternity parties use fall on the sexual misconduct spectrum. Language influences attitudes that influence behaviors. Most recently, fraternities at Old Dominion University have made national news because of derogatory signs (''Freshmen daughter drop off,'' ''Rowdy and fun, hope your daughter is ready for a good time,'' and ''Go ahead and drop off mom too''). New (2015) examined the practice of hanging these signs and found it to be widespread and commonplace among fraternities across the country. This practice speaks of the larger issue of allowing and even accepting sexual misconduct on campus, which comes with special prevention challenges to be discussed in detail later in this essay.

The Armstrong et al. (2006) study had two limitations. The study focused on a single campus and used ethnographic methods, so the small sample size may not be generalizable to other campuses or fraternities. Boswell and Spade (1996) also focused on one campus, which does not allow for generalizability. Further research should replicate this study to determine the generalizability of the results to other campuses and fraternities.

Belief in rape myths and traditional gender roles

Greek organizations have been linked with a stronger belief in traditional gender roles and rape myths and these beliefs increase the likelihood of sexual assault and sexual misconduct (Murnen and Kohlman 2007). Fraternities have been specifically cited in the literature as organizations whose members tend to hold stronger beliefs in rape myths, place an emphasis on men to be dominant, and use alcohol more frequently than students who are not participants in these organizations (Bleecker and Murnen 2005; Crosset et al. 1995; Lanza-Kaduce et al. 2006; McMahon 2010). Men in fraternities have a higher likelihood of supporting males as dominant and females as submissive than men not in fraternities and all women (Kalof and Cargill 1991).

Both sexes who intended to pledge to a fraternity or sorority were found to have significantly higher acceptance of rape myths (McMahon 2010). However, in McMahon's (2010) study, although both sexes accepted rape myths at higher rates than peers who were not pledging a Greek organization, men who were pledging had higher acceptance rates than their female counterparts (McMahon 2010). These higher levels of acceptance may underscore a need for prevention programs to place more focus and emphasis on fraternity members. Similarly, Canan et al. (2016) found Greek men to have the highest rates of rape myth acceptance among a sample of Greek male and female and non-Greek male and female students from two separate institutions. The higher rates of rape myth acceptance among Greek men from multiple studies suggest the need for specialized intervention plans that address the larger culture of fraternity life and likely the larger culture wherein these fraternities exist (McMahon 2015). Both the McMahon (2010) and Canan et al. (2016) studies had large sample sizes, allowing for more generalizability. However, both studies used only one or two campuses, so these results may not be generalizable across all college students.

Campus climate

Rape culture is typically thought of to be a culture that not only permits but also encourages rape (Brownmiller 1975; Cahill 2001). Universities have their own culture that is influenced by student demographics, organizations, clubs, administration, athletics, and campus location. The specific culture at a university is called campus climate. Campus climate comprises how safe students feel while participating in college life, whether or not students feel harassed or threatened, feelings of acceptance as a minority student, and ideas of how the university would respond to violent incidents.

Campus climate can have an impact on rape culture and the two may be symbiotic of each other. One way campus climate influences rape culture is campus organizations can create opportunities and resources for both sexual assault

perpetration and sexual misconduct (Stombler and Martin 1994). Because fraternities exist on campus, they influence and are influenced by the campus culture (Martin 2016), further providing evidence.

Typically, rape culture considers attitudes and behaviors that allow for sexual assault to occur. Burnett et al. (2009) extended rape culture to include what happens postassault. "The presence of rape culture influences not only the risk factors related to sexual violence, it influences post-rape behaviors, so as to conceal and perpetuate rape and the culture of rape. Importantly, rape culture appears to foster silencing" (Burnett et al. 2009, p. 467). Rape is under-reported (Fisher et al. 2003). Historically, universities have attempted to deal with rape accusations in-house and administrations have perpetuated rape culture by blaming the victim and citing common rape myths as well as fostering victim silence. Because of the uniqueness of universities that commonly have their own disciplinary review boards, rape occurring on campus is infrequently reported to law enforcement, thus further encouraging postassault silence (Fisher et al. 2003).

Personality characteristics of members

Research has suggested a small number of men commit a majority of rape (Barone et al. 2007; Fabiano et al. 2003; Lisak and Miller 2002). This may be applicable to fraternities as well; a few fraternal organizations may attract members with a higher likelihood of committing rape and then create a space where these behaviors are allowed (and even encouraged) to persist. Boyle (2015) argued some men are attracted to fraternities that are considered high risk for sexual assault perpetration based on their individual personality characteristics. Fraternity members tend to be wealthy, white, athletic, partier, heterosexual, and present themselves in traditional masculine ways. As aforementioned, partier and traditional masculinity characteristics are risk factors for sexual assault perpetration and misconduct (Murnen and Kohlman 2007).

Therefore, men who rush fraternities may self-select themselves in or out of fraternity membership. Those men who subscribe to the stereotypical fraternity brother appearance and personality will continue with pledging the fraternity. When selecting a fraternity, men who believe in traditional gender roles and have dominant, aggressive personality characteristics will be more likely to select a high-risk fraternal organization because they will want to match their attitudes and beliefs with those of the fraternity. "Fraternities attract and retain men who already hold similar attitudes and enact similar behaviors as full members" (Boyle 2015, p. 391).

Although some fraternities may attract and retain members who could be considered sexual predators with high proclivity for rape, prevention should not solely focus on these men. Prevention educators should be careful to look at larger cultural contexts within which sexual misconduct and sexually aggressive behavior are more widely accepted and tolerated.

Protective factors

Not all fraternities are high risk nor do fraternities by their nature only attract men with a propensity for committing sexual violence. Boswell and Spade (1996) found fraternities that were less active in party culture had striking differences compared with high-risk fraternities when researchers observed mixed-gender gatherings. Events at fraternities that were not considered high risk were characterized by equal number of males and females in attendance and considerable interaction and conversation among all groups at the parties. Little swearing, shouting, or aggressive behavior occurred. During interviews, women reported feeling they could attend parties at these frat houses and feel safe enough to get drunk without feeling they would be taken advantage of (Boswell and Spade 1996).

There is a focus in the literature examining fraternities specifically, but research studying other avenues for parties (bars, clubs, and off-campus homes) is limited. This limitation could potentially skew perceptions gained from the literature because of the heavily studied nature of fraternity parties. Ullman (2007) noted in her review that current research is unable to suggest whether fraternity members are more likely to commit sexual assault than their nonfraternity member peers. More research should be conducted comparing sexual assault perpetration at fraternity and nonfraternity locations to address this limitation.

Sexual violence prevention programs and Greek life

Greek life on college campuses—fraternities and sororities—often presents a dilemma for sexual assault prevention educators, scholars, and policy makers. Do fraternities and sororities lead to more campus sexual violence? Does participation in campus Greek life have any protective factors for sexual violence perpetration? Fraternities are often spotlighted in the media for their bad behavior. One fraternity was recently in the news for posting illicit photographs of women on social media (Associated Press 2015). Sorority women carry a higher risk for sexual assault victimization, whereas fraternity men are associated with a higher likelihood of sexual assault perpetration. Yet there is also evidence to suggest fraternity men can be strong allies for prevention if they receive comprehensive prevention education programs. Fraternities emphasize brotherhood, service, and leadership—all positive qualities when considering how to create safer campus climates. Fraternity men who actively participate in Greek life are, therefore, uniquely positioned on their campuses when it comes to sexual violence prevention. They are situated on college campuses in ways that could be an asset to sexual assault prevention programs due to their leadership roles, connection to other men, and emphasis on community service.

Finding what works for sexual violence prevention on college campuses can be difficult: evidence of behavior change is difficult to measure and large studies utilizing rigorous methods are few and far between. Studies on prevention programs also have mixed results, with some showing more long-term success than others. Although fraternity men are in some ways similar to their nonfraternity counterparts, there is evidence to suggest that fraternity men have a higher risk of sexual assault perpetration than their nonfraternity member peers (Foubert et al. 2007; Murnen and Kohlman 2007). The literature focusing on prevention programs specifically targeted to fraternity men is small but growing. From this literature, it is possible to discern the features of more successful programs and to pinpoint the practices most likely contributing to lasting change in the attitudes, beliefs, and future actions of male

students active in campus Greek life. This section examines studies from sexual violence prevention programs targeted to fraternity men to discover promising and best practices from sexual assault prevention programs specifically tailored to fraternity men as well as implications for practitioners and policy makers.

Promising practices

Research on sexual assault prevention for the general population of college men consistently finds that single gender programs focusing on men's empathy toward victims are most effective (for review see: Vladutiu et al. 2010). Most programs are able to increase men's knowledge of sexual assault and male privilege directly following the prevention program, with waning impacts can be observed at long-term follow-up (Garrity 2011). These impacts will be discussed further hereunder in relation to fraternity men. Programs aimed at men in fraternities fall into four categories: bystander intervention, empathy based, psychoeducational, and peer education/theater based.

Bystander intervention programs

Bystander intervention programs are one of the most popular and effective forms of prevention programming for fraternity men. In addition to being at higher risk of sexual violence perpetration, fraternity men and incoming students who are drawn to pledge Greek life organizations exhibit lower levels of ''bystander positive'' attitudes at baseline (McMahon et al. 2011). Most bystander programs focus on providing participants with knowledge of sexual violence such as definitions, information on how to support rape victims, and suggestions for bystander intervention tactics to diffuse potentially dangerous situations among their peers (Elias-Lambert 2014; Moynihan and Banyard 2008; Vadovic 2014). These programs are most successful when delivered in the context and setting of a fraternity or sorority because students may feel most comfortable in these environments and, therefore, be more receptive to the messages (Moynihan and Banyard 2008). However, Moynihan and Banyard's pilot study (2008) had a relatively small sample size ($N = 106$) and did not include a control group. Every prevention program must also overcome the inherent limitation of linking behavior to attitudes, although some research suggests they are linked (O'Donahue et al. 2003).

Delivering targeted bystander intervention programming to fraternity men may reduce the amount of sexually coercive behavior among them (Elias-Lambert 2013). Sexually aggressive behavior is often glorified in fraternity culture without any acknowledgment of the consequences of such behavior. Bystander intervention questions sexually coercive behavior in a way that engages fraternity men as potential do-gooders, tapping into the positive quality of service promoted by many Greek life organizations. Males in fraternities who are cultivated as allies have more credibility within and access to predominantly masculine spaces on campus (Messner et al. 2015). They can use their credibility to reach others and ''challenge these men to be better men'' (Messner et al. 2015, p. 147).

Elias-Lambert (2014), who tested the effects of the Bringing In the Bystander program, found holding a leadership position in a fraternity predicted higher willingness to engage in bystander intervention at follow-up. Although Elias-Lambert did include a comparison group, the study utilized a quasiexperimental, pretest, and posttest design that is typically considered less rigorous than a random control trial (2014). In addition, the follow-up period was only 2 months after the program was delivered to participants. There is still little data on the long-term effectiveness of such programs. Despite some limitations with research design, the study does suggest those on campuses who wish to start high-impact prevention programming with at-risk groups of men would do well to reach out to leaders first.

Fraternity men may experience an increase in their likeliness to intervene in situations even after 60 days of participating in a short, single-dose bystander-training program (Vadovic 2014). Vadovic (2014) found even a one-time dose of a bystander intervention program increased the ability of students in Greek life to recognize and report acts of violence on their campus. Campus reports of violence subsequently increased after the implementation of the program (Vadovic, 2014). This finding is notable especially when considering what could be viewed as a study limitation—the convenience sample of men who were mandated to participate in the program (Vadovic 2014). The participants did not self-select into the intervention group, nor were they primed to recognize sexual violence before participation (Vadovic 2014). This limited the study's response rate after 60 days but also suggests that the program has utility for men who do not come in with prior knowledge of and motivation to end sexual violence on campus.

Empathy-based programs

Programs with a central focus on building empathy among fraternity men have shown less success in the literature overall compared with bystander intervention programs (Foubert 2000; Foubert and Newberry 2006). This difference in effectiveness may be due to the more active engagement model employed by the bystander intervention model, which seems to be more effective at reaching men. Empathy-based programs, however, may serve to enhance bystander intervention programs by creating more positive attitudes toward victims (Foubert and Newberry 2006). Foubert and Newberry (2006) found the most successful results among the group of fraternity men who participated in an empathy-based program, *The Men's Program,* and then were also given an alcohol and bystander intervention program (the other treatment group was given an alcohol and consent program in addition to the empathy-based curriculum). This study contained two treatment groups and one control group (Foubert and Newberry 2006).

Fraternity men take on more victim empathy when they are exposed to stories from male rape victims, as they are more able to relate to a male victim than to a female victim (Pinkerton 2012). However, Pinkerton's evaluation of an empathy-based program called the *Men in Violence Program* did not find statistically significant positive change on victim empathy from Time 1 to Time 2 (2012). Feedback from the male fraternity participants (to whom the program was targeted) viewed the content as biased and treating all men as perpetrators (Pinkerton 2012). Victim empathy is an important trait to cultivate—the overwhelming majority of sexual violence victims are female and most perpetrators are

male (Black et al. 2011). Yet teaching empathy toward female victims of rape may be more difficult when men are not approached as potential allies. It is no small task to strike a balance between male accountability and cultivating male allies as care must be taken to ensure some men do not exploit their credibility as allies and "good men" to cause harm (Linder and Johnson 2015).

Empathy-based programs that approach men as allies and potential support providers for victims tend to have better outcomes than those that are educational only, suggesting the ally approach is the most effective basis for sexual assault prevention programming with fraternity men (Foubert and Perry 2007; Foubert et al. 2007). Foubert et al. (2007) concluded from a longer-term, follow-up study from an earlier evaluation (Foubert 2000) that the effects of the empathy-based plus alcohol and bystander intervention programs were long lasting. They included a control group in their research design consisting of men who did not join fraternities but did receive the programming (Foubert et al. 2007). This finding also explains why bystander intervention programs are successful. Men in general and fraternity men in particular are highly influenced by their social peer groups and this influence can be positive or negative depending on the group member's beliefs (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2013). If men see themselves positively, they are more likely to create a safer climate within their social groups.

Psychoeducational programs

Psychoeducational programs are based on a more classically feminist educational approach designed to emphasize gender role socialization and the issue of male privilege in the contexts of dating violence and sexual assault. Breaking down harmful masculinity and critiquing aggressive male sexuality norms are a difficult task, especially with fraternity men. Evidence suggests fraternity men are more receptive to this information when they learn from male presenters using relevant cultural material (Choate 2003; Davis and Liddell 2002).

Psychoeducational programs are also most successful when they are interactive and consist of more than one educational session (Schwartz et al. 2006). Schwartz et al. (2006) strongly recommend participants receive more than one session of the program as they did not measure the long-term impact for their single-session format. Psychoeducational programs do not have a strong evidence base for promoting behavior change or even behavior intention change in participants, but many show increased levels of knowledge about sexual assault, gender role socialization, and male privilege (Choate 2003; Davis and Liddell 2002). Psychoeducational groups provide participants with a critical lens to view the problem of sexual violence. These programs could be a good addition to more behaviorally efficacious bystander intervention programs (Foubert and Newberry 2006).

Other programs

Other characteristics that might contribute to successful programs include cultural relevance for diverse audiences and peer education. Cultural relevance in prevention programs is under-researched. Heppner et al. (1999) found black fraternity men who received a prevention program led by black male educators had stronger and more lasting results at follow-up than their peers who did not receive the culturally relevant program. No other studies have focused solely on the impact of cultural relevance, but it is likely instrumental in the success of a prevention program. Future research on successful prevention programs should assess cultural relevance with diverse groups.

A pilot study of a program called the Fraternity Peer Rape Education Program engaged men for two semesters in a sexual violence prevention curriculum (Wantland 2008). The men reported extensive changes in their worldview and perceived changes in their immediate fraternity communities (Wantland 2008). Although a two-semester program is not feasible for many campuses, the peer education model demonstrates the value in cultivating leaders within fraternities and can be implemented with small groups of fraternity men.

Peer education programs are another model for sexual assault prevention that show promise. These programs targeted to fraternity men often feature elements of bystander intervention, empathy-based, and psychoeducational programs. They are different from other types of programs because they are more than a few sessions in length (many last for a semester or more) facilitated by members of the target group (e.g., fraternity men). Peer education is considered a highly effective method of preventing violence by changing patriarchal and sexually aggressive attitudes in men and thus getting to the root of sexual violence (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 2008). Schwartz and DeKeseredy argue that peer support for men engaged in sexual violence prevention work is key to fostering the kinds of informal social controls that lead to stopping sexual violence (2008). The informal social controls are developed from male peer support and antiviolence work, as allies can be more powerful than formal social controls aimed at preventing sexual assault (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 2008).

Discussion

Fraternity membership should be considered both a risk and protective factor. Men in fraternities seem to amplify the effects of prevention programs, based on the results of several promising studies of targeted prevention programs (Elias-Lambert 2014; Foubert et al. 2007; Wantland 2008). Although fraternity men are considered high risk for sexual violence perpetration, they also have great potential for becoming leaders in prevention.

Fraternity men are likely to be more receptive to being approached as allies and leaders in prevention and more empathetic to victims of sexual assault if presented with stories of male victims (Foubert et al. 2007; Pinkerton 2012). Cultural relevance is very important in programmatic success, although more research should focus specifically on this issue to determine the extent of its importance (Heppner et al. 1999). Similar to cultural relevance, programming should also be current and facilitated by respected members of the social peer group (Choate 2003; Davis and Liddell 2002).

Although bystander intervention programs may have the most promising evidence base, they can also be enhanced with empathy-based, psychoeducational, and alternative prevention programs. Blending bystander intervention with a peer education model would also maximize program outcomes by delivering a high dose of an effective curriculum targeted to fraternity men who are most likely to be viewed as leaders within their social peer group. An additive approach

can strengthen the efficacy of an existing program directed at fraternity men.

Targeting men in fraternities for sexual assault prevention programs is a promising strategy for practitioners. Rather than viewing fraternity men as potential perpetrators, universities and colleges should consider approaching them as allies in creating change.

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