Armstrong et al. on “party rape” on campus

Based on ethnographic observation on a women’s floor in a “party dorm.” Sexual assault is the outcome of the interaction of gendered and non-gendered processes at individual, organizational, and interactional levels.

Partying is part of campus life and is the primary way for women to meet and get attention from men, who want sex from them.

Restrictions on alcohol in dorms pushed students to fraternities. Homogeneity of students (white, middle class, etc) intensified social anxiety and the importance of partying. Men controlled every aspect of fraternity parties: transportation, entry (first-year women preferred), and alcohol.

“Party rape is the result of fun situations that shift—either gradually or quite suddenly—into coercive situations.” Cultural expectations for partying require heavy drinking and losing control and women ceding control to men and being “nice” to them. Cultural expectations about sex are that men are naturally sexually aggressive by any means available and women are supposed to be “gate keepers” (but alcohol leaves them vulnerable).

“Party rape is accomplished without the use of guns, knives, or fists. It is carried out through the combination of low level forms of coercion—a lot of liquor and persuasion, manipulation of situations so that women cannot leave, and sometimes force (e.g., by blocking a door, or using body weight to make it difficult for a woman to get up). These forms of coercion are made more effective by organizational arrangements that provide men with control over how partying happens and by expectations that women let loose and trust their party-mates. This systematic and effective method of extracting non-consensual sex is largely invisible, which makes it difficult for victims to convince anyone—even themselves—that a crime occurred. Men engage in this behavior with little risk of consequences.”

“The most common way that students—both women and men—account for the harm that befalls women in the party scene is by blaming victims. By attributing bad experiences to women’s “mistakes,” students avoid criticizing the party scene or men’s behavior within it. Such victim-blaming also allows women to feel that they can control what happens to them. The logic of victim-blaming suggests that sophisticated, smart, careful women are safe from sexual assault. Only “immature,” “naïve,” or “stupid” women get in trouble.
Sean Michael Gilmore on “Sport Sex”

Based on interviews with college-age men and women and open-ended surveys. Gilmore describes two differences between how men and women talk about sex.

1. Sexual promiscuity was viewed as positive for men but not women. “The ‘mythology of the stud’ is constructed through the discourse of ‘scoring’; that is, men bragging about the number of women they sexually conquered.” Men were rewarded for having sex with different women in different ways; monogamy is stigmatized and sometimes punished.

2. Men discussed sex in terms of games and contests. Women framed sex in terms of the development of a relationship.

“Language defines and constructs what is and is not real. To label an object is to construct what it is and what it is not. For example, to call an object a ‘chair’ is to position the object as something useful that people can sit on, but that same object can be labeled a ‘piece of junk,’ defining it as useless, something to be discarded. Language and labels suggest how actors understand and value their experiences. This research shows how a group of young males created a discursive reality in which women were not just sex objects, but points in sexual contests.”

“As long as there exists positive symbolic reward for males who have sex with multiple partners, and simultaneously negative symbolic punishment for young men who demonstrate signs of commitment toward a woman, many young men will be socialized into competing with each other for studhood. When competing for studhood, sex becomes a game and women become points, objectified as something to score. Young men never say, ‘I got some human being last night. As a matter of fact, I’ve gotten more human being than you have this year.’ Men must objectify women, strip them of their dignity and respect, dehumanize them, in order to play these sex games. By playing these sex games, young men create a reality in which the objectification and exploitation of women becomes the accepted and encouraged norm. For too long, young men have been bragging about sex games and competitions behind closed doors. When we expose the true nature of their sexual discourse and the negative position it creates for women, then action can be taken to rectify the situation.”