

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.