

Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs

Volume 40 | Issue 1

2024

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Recommended Citation

Sasso, P. A., Manning-Ouellette, A., Bullington, K. E., & Price-Williams, S. (2024). White girl wasted: Gender performativity of sexuality with alcohol in national panhellenic conference sorority women. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 40(1), 32-61. <https://doi.org/10.20429/gcpa.2024.400102>

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White Girl Wasted: Gender Performativity of Sexuality with Alcohol in National Panhellenic Conference Sorority Women

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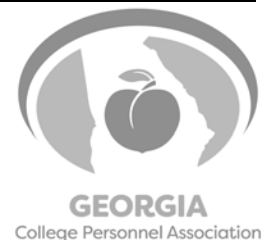
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This narrative qualitative study explored how sorority members negotiated their identities within systems of hegemony with their student communities. Sorority members used women's empowerment discourse to rationalize how they consumed alcohol, engaged in frequent consensual sexual relationships, and navigated relationships with fraternity men and across their campus sorority/fraternity communities. Implications for practice included harm reduction, sex education, and supportive policies.

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ISSN: 2330-7269



National Panhellenic Conference (NPC; 2022a) sororities provide their undergraduate members with leadership opportunities and interpersonal relationships (Biddix et al., 2016; Pearlman et al., 2023). Sorority participation leads to increases in campus involvement and gains in leadership development compared to unaffiliated students (Aren et al., 2014; DiChiara, 2009; Hevel et al., 2014; Martin et al., 2012). Sorority chapter members also demonstrate gains in leadership skills, diverse interactions, sense of belonging, and interpersonal relationship skills (Long, 2012; Long & Snowden, 2011; Martin et al., 2012). There are also gains, such as peer support networks for mental health support, career readiness, and increased self-efficacy (Gastfield, 2020; Grace et al., 2022; Kelley, 2008). Yet, many of these relationships are sustained by alcohol misuse, which is heavily influenced by fraternity men through their positionalities and co-constructed sorority/fraternity hegemony (McCready & Radimer, 2020; Sasso, 2015; Sasso et al., 2018). NPC members' alcohol use supports the transfer of social capital and culture and consolidates power to create a system of hegemony with fraternity men (DeSantis, 2007; Kaylor et al., 2022; Sasso et al., 2023).

NPC sorority members socialize new members into chapter cultures, consume more alcohol than non-members, which is

characterized by heavy drinking, and compete with fraternity males in alcohol use during events such as college parties (Rancourt et al., 2020; Russett, 2017). These are typically at fraternity parties which are frequently depicted as heteronormative and hypermasculine spaces “where the objectification of women starts at the door, where members allow women to enter free of charge and force men to pay” (Ray, 2013, pp. 41–42) indicating a broader pattern of problematic NPC sorority alcohol misuse connected to fraternity men (Cook & Reisling, 2020; Hardy et al., 2023; Zimmerman, 2022). There are interconnected, gendered relationships and disparities in how sorority and fraternity members engage in alcohol use and safety (Myers & Sasso, 2022). Thus, how NPC members use alcohol may be more sophisticated and have a gendered context across chapters and among fraternity males (McCready & Radimer, 2020; Sasso, 2018). Yet, these behaviors have not been examined in sorority members who also engage in heavy episodic (binge) drinking and nuanced forms of gender performativity related to how they negotiate parties and other fraternity environments, which is colloquially referred to as the “white boy wasted” or “white girl wasted” phenomena by undergraduate students (Hardy et al., 2023; Jensen & Husson, 2019; Myers & Sasso, 2022; Sasso, 2015). “White boy” or “white girl wasted” is a

vernacular colloquialism that began in approximately 2009 and expressed by “White women, persons of color, and other historically marginalized groups to describe themselves in situations in which they are heavily intoxicated and engaging in the performativity of ridiculously exaggerated behaviors” (Sasso, 2019, p. 135). Previous scholars have suggested exploring beyond the frequency and volume of alcohol consumption to investigate the symbolism of alcohol within the sorority and fraternity co-constructed culture (Barber et al., 2019; Biddix, 2016).

Scant research investigates NPC sorority members' interwoven relationships with alcohol use and fraternity men and how alcohol use interacts with sorority members' sexual behaviors outside of potential outcomes (e.g., sexual violence) (Kaylor et al., 2022; Maples et al., 2019; Sasso et al., 2023). Previous theorists (Belenky et al., 1986; Josselson, 1987) support the idea that woman-to-woman relationships are sites of identity development and that alcohol is used to sustain these bonds through gender performance (Sasso et al., 2015; Sasso et al., 2023). This study extends the current body of knowledge regarding the experiences of NPC members with fraternity members and gender performativity through alcohol consumption by examining the concept of *White Boy Wasted* (Sasso, 2015) as “white girl wasted” in sorority women.

Literature Review

Alcohol, Sexual Behaviors, and Gender Performativity

College is when students navigate more diverse environments, become more aware of their sexuality, and draw attention to sex, sexuality, and sexual behaviors through interactions with peers and organizations (Edwards, 2016; Manning-Ouellette, 2015). Further, casual sex, dating, and intimate relationships are shaped by socially constructed notions of gender, the perpetuation of heterosexuality, and attractiveness (Wade, 2017; Wade & Ferree, 2019). Over time, the notions of college as a way to seek a mate have evolved, and current campus sexual culture has allowed more women-identifying students to focus on education rather than dating (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Buss & Schmitt, 2019; Taylor, 2013).

This evolution of dating, casual sex, and culture around sexuality is coined as *hookup culture* or hooking up (Wade, 2017). We define *hooking up* as a casual sexual interaction that includes but is not limited to kissing, sleeping in another person's bed, vaginal or anal intercourse, oral sex, and can occur once or multiple times with one or several partners (Bogle, 2008; Wade, 2017). Wade (2017) argues that not all students are hooking up in college; almost a third will graduate without hooking up. However,

hookup culture influences sexual behaviors, heavy drinking, and rating the attractiveness of peers. Hooking up is closely aligned with extensive alcohol use during college (Kimmel, 2008). Hookup culture implicates all students, even the ones who opt out, but is often found in smaller campus cultures such as fraternities and sororities, in which gender is frequently performed through socialization through alcohol use (McCready & Radimer, 2020).

For many sorority women, gender is performed through alcohol use. Socialization experiences are indirect, such as “offering to get a peer a drink, buying a round” (Borsari & Carey, 2001, p. 393) or indirect ways like drinking games (Borsari & Carey, 2001). This gender performativity is “the interface between the individual and the world, defining what the individual will stand for and be recognized for” (Josselson, 1987, p. 8). The concept has been applied in other qualitative studies on women and gender and situates contemporary undergraduate womanist identities about systems and social structures (Danielson, 2011; Stogner et al., 2022). Gender is also a situational and performative social construct expressed through alcohol use because it is used to reinforce gender norms and identity formation in undergraduate sorority members (Alcoff, 1988; McCready & Radimer, 2020). Alcohol is also used in single-gender organizations to

reinforce stratified, gendered, and hegemonic social systems (Cohen et al., 2017; McCready & Radimer, 2020).

Sorority Alcohol Use

Identity in sorority women is fluid, subjective, and contextual, and there is no singularity of identity, but it can be compartmentalized by alcohol use; identity experiences for women are not monolithic (MacPherson et al., 2016; Ortiz & Thompson, 2020; Tisdell, 2000; Zimmerman, 2022). Alcohol also gives women currency and symbolic power (Borsari & Carey, 2001; Caretta & Szymanski, 2022; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017). As a result, sorority members use alcohol to express various aspects of their multiple identities (Russett, 2017). They push against what they perceive as oppressive patriarchal and male privilege systems across multiple constructed spaces and social systems with fraternity chapters through women’s empowerment discourses (Sasso et al., 2023).

Current power dynamics within sororities do not allow them to host their parties with alcohol (NPC, 2022), and they often use fraternity-sponsored spaces such as houses or apartments to usurp risk management policies (Hardy et al., 2023; Myers & Sasso, 2022). NPC sororities have alcohol restrictions in chapter residences and events to reduce insurance premiums and liability for national organizations, which were

recommended in 1995 by the NPC-NIC Joint Task Force on Substance Free Housing (Sasso & Barber, 2020). Yet, sororities continue to engage in unsafe drinking practices and high levels of frequency and volume with alcohol consumption in alcohol-free (dry) housing contexts (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Sasso & Barber, 2020). They leverage their relationships to influence fraternity chapters to host their parties and purchase top-shelf liquor and other alcohol (Sasso et al., 2023). These discourses through alcohol co-construct a vernacular or language to sustain sisterhood, identity, and chapter cultures (Sasso et al., 2023).

Alcohol use before entering college and sorority life is predictive of increased expectations for future heavy alcohol use in the undergraduate experience (Russett, 2017). Sorority members with established pre-college alcohol consumption patterns will self-select into heavy drinking chapter cultures (DeSimone, 2009; Routon & Walker, 2019). They seek friendships with others who engage in heavy episodic drinking and socialize women into chapter cultures (Cohen et al., 2017). As a result, this influences how undergraduate sorority women express, develop, and form their identities (Weedon, 1997).

However, men can manipulate these discourses or dismiss or silence other sorority women (Hall & Sandler, 1982; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Hardy et al., 2023; Sasso et

al., 2023). Women are socially positioned and socialized into oppressive systems and positions (Pease, 2022; Weedon, 1997). From these experiences with alcohol, sorority members experience more tertiary-related consequences than men (Caretta & Szymanski, 2022; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017; Zimmerman, 2022). These problems include missing responsibilities like homework or more serious effects such as alcohol dependence (Clark et al., 2013; Russett, 2017). These gender-reinforcing behaviors and norms play a large role in the relationship between alcohol and sexual interactions between sorority members and many college students (Sasso et al., 2023; Zimmerman, 2022).

Sorority Members, Hooking Up, and Sexual Behavior

Research on sorority members and sexual behaviors is limited, outside of the connection to sexual victimization and violence (Franklin & Menaker, 2018; Hardy et al., 2023; Hoxmeier et al., 2022). On college campuses, women are more at risk of sexually violent behaviors than men (Littleton et al., 2009; Sweeney, 2011). Around 44% of college students who did hookups did so at sorority/fraternity-hosted events (Paul et al., 2000). Sorority/fraternity members tend to be more sexually active than other college

students on campuses (Reling et al., 2017; Scott-Sheldon et al., 2008).

Kelley (2016) found that Panhellenic women engage in high-risk drinking before hooking up encounters, which directly influences risky sexual situations. Conversely, Kelley (2016) found that some sorority members experience feelings of empowerment associated with hooking up in the sorority/fraternity community. However, no matter the outcome, most of the research reinforces the risk factors associated with sorority members who engage in hooking up.

Sorority members may be more at risk for sexual victimization than other students (Franklin & Menaker, 2018; Hoxmeier et al., 2022). Controlled spaces and alcohol consumption maintained by fraternity men also reinforce sexual assault at parties, which influences sorority member sexual victimization and violence (Ispa-Landa & Oliver, 2020; Sampson, 2010; Sweeney, 2011; Tyler, 2023). Sorority members feel the impact of sexual victimization during these types of events but do not report it to campus authorities because they deem it not severe or dangerous enough (Franklin & Menaker, 2018; Hoxmeier et al., 2022). Therefore, the connections to sorority member alcohol use and its relation to gender performativity and sexual behaviors deserve further investigation.

Methods

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to better understand how sorority women engage in "white girl wasted" gender performativity through alcohol use by following the design of previous qualitative alcohol research about sorority drinking (Kaylor et al., 2022; Sasso et al., 2023). Thus, this study used narrative inquiry to examine individual accounts of sorority women in which the researchers assumed that people construct their own identities through storytelling in which they learn about their identities and how they fit into their surroundings through these stories (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Reissman, 2008).

Narrative inquiry is "an epistemological stance and mode of operation for the examination (and interpretation) of (a) complex relationships, (b) cultural artifacts, (c) social contexts, and (d) researcher reflexivity" (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021, p. 21). It focuses on narrative and seeks to capture stories to gain a comprehensive understanding of lived experiences (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Narrative research can be used to center "discussions of race, gender, class, and sexuality as part of a larger political and epistemological struggle for a better and just future" by recounting participant realities from the perspective of identities in

subordinated contexts such as women at college parties (Tyson, 2006, p. 25). Narrative inquiry allowed the researchers to conceptualize participants' lived experiences through storytelling, which cannot be separated from their own storied lives (Reissman, 2008). The following research questions guided this study: (1) How do undergraduate sorority members describe their experiences with gender performativity through alcohol use? and (2) How do undergraduate sorority members describe interacting among fraternity men at parties with alcohol?

Positionality

When conducting qualitative research, researchers should engage in a reflexive process of analyzing their positionality in connection to the study participants to invalidate patriarchal views and avoid perpetuating hegemony (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). To begin, the researchers acknowledged the omnipotence of patriarchy in American history and contemporary society, which pervades power structures such as college fraternities, and we recognize forms of sexism used by fraternity men in using alcohol to acquire women as property and cultural capital (Sasso et al., 2023). We examined many intersecting womanist identities, such as race, gender, and socioeconomic class. We recognized the privilege and influence we have as a result of our dominant identities and the

duty that comes with those identities to push for sorority reform.

We are current or former campus-based sorority/fraternity advisors or campus support staff. The male researcher is of mixed Latino ancestry, the women researchers are respectively White or Biracial, and all identify as heterosexual and cisgender. Given that oppressive institutions constantly reinforce dehumanizing patterns of thought, we recognize our distinct positionalities, which limit our viewpoints and necessitate the constant deconstruction of internalized hegemonies. These collective identities and techniques created a nuanced understanding of the gendered spaces and culture of alcohol consumption embedded in sororities. We considered that fraternity males hold influence over subordinate women, who attempt to balance this power differential through alcohol control within their chapters.

Participants

This study was composed of 20 undergraduate student leaders of local and National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) sororities attending public and private Historically White Institutions through snowball sampling. This sampling procedure was selected because previous research notes the difficulty in accessing sororities and fraternities in research participation (Sasso et al., 2019). Snowball sampling was used to construct an authentic

sample, and no gatekeepers were used to avoid sampling bias (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021).

Seven initial participants were recruited by email and text message after an initial social media recruitment post. The current participants recommended more sorority members based on inclusion criteria. These were: (1) undergraduate status; (2) active

membership in a local or national Panhellenic council; and (3) self-disclosure of alcohol use. Each participant chose their pseudonym. Each participant was asked to provide their academic level, race/ethnicity, length of membership, and institutional type (category of their college) to help create a profile of the sample (Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Information

Pseudonym	Race/Culture	Academic Level	Institution Type	Membership
Sable	White	Sophomore	Comprehensive	1 Year
Jaylah	Multiracial	Junior	State Flagship	3 Years
Lark	Asian	Senior	State Flagship	4 Years
Arya	Black	Junior	Liberal Arts	3 Years
Brynlee	White	Freshman	Comprehensive	1 Year
Arabella	Black	Senior	Liberal Arts	3 Years
Norah	Latina	Senior	State Flagship	2 Years
Isla	Multiracial	Freshman	STEM Institution	1 Year
Londyn	White	Junior	Comprehensive	3 Years
Lyla	Latina	Freshman	STEM Institution	4 Years
Gael	Multiracial	Junior	State Flagship	1 Year
Brantley	White	Sophomore	Comprehensive	2 Years
Paisley	Asian	Sophomore	State Flagship	2 Years
Khloe	White	Senior	Liberal Arts	4 Years
Mila	Latina	Sophomore	Comprehensive	2 Years
Lemon	White	Freshman	State Flagship	1 Year

Anneliese	Black	Junior	Comprehensive	2 Years
Luna	White	Senior	State Flagship	3 Years
Amelia	White	Freshman	Comprehensive	1 Year
Etta	White	Senior	STEM Institution	4 Years

Data Collection

Previous research on relationships with fraternity men and alcohol experiences influenced the topics covered in the interviews (Kaylor et al., 2022; Myers & Sasso, 2022; Sasso et al., 2023). Assumptions were bracketed by what previous research and experiences with alcohol meant to participants and were intentionally broad. We asked each participant 15 questions like "How, if at all, did your alcohol use influence your sorority experiences?;" "Tell me about a time when you and sisters went to a party?;" "What might be your favorite memory or eventful time of drinking with your sisters?;" and "Have you experienced alcohol-related problems with another sister in your chapter?" Interviews began after receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. During each interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes, our semi-structured interview questions varied slightly between participants depending on comfort level and rapport. To facilitate increased authenticity of responses, individual interviews were conducted virtually. When using ambiguous language or institutional jargon, participants were asked to clarify

their meaning. After referral, participants were solicited via email until data saturation and satisfaction occurred (Patton, 2015). Interviews were professionally transcribed to prepare for data analysis.

Data Analysis

In congruence with narrative inquiry, we used narrative analysis (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). We positioned participant stories for contextualization using Gubrium and Holstein's (2009) questions: (1) who produces particular types of stories, (2) where they are likely to be encountered, (3) what are their purposes, (4) who are their listeners, (5) under what circumstances particular narratives are more or less accountable, (5) how do they gain acceptance, and (6) how are they challenged? In addition, we asked, "How does this context bear witness and shape the story?" (Esposito & Evans-Winters 2022, p. 149). We used these questions to initiate data analysis, during which we drafted preliminary memos regarding key concepts to ensure to "make sense of stories outside of the context in which they are situated (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021, p.

149). These included participants' interpretations of sex, sexuality, alcohol use, and relationships with other sorority women or fraternity men.

Finally, individual narrative analysis documents were separately compiled from an initial listing of significant patterns present in individual participant narratives and then collapsed into applied overarching patterns that extended across participants about the research questions to each participant's interview (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Saldaña, 2021). Portions of the transcripts were organized, which identified additional sections that did not fit these themes. Two rounds of participant analysis were conducted, and then the researchers met to resolve any potential inconsistencies. The narrative analysis documents allowed us to further refine the themes and complete thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2021).

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were employed to ensure standards of trustworthiness (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers used an audit trail in the two rounds of coding as well as critical debriefing among co-researchers to engage in self-reflexive processes. Concepts were discussed ideas to remain open to alternative interpretations of the findings. Additional strategies included member checking (participants

reviewed their interview transcripts) and an external auditor, who was a higher education researcher, to interrogate the veracity of the themes. The researchers debriefed with the auditor to resolve any additional discrepancies in the audit trail and preliminary analysis.

Findings

The themes from this study are (1) White girl wasted and (2) sexual bravado, which both are rooted narratives in heteronormative perspectives. "White girl wasted" describes sorority women's shared experiences with alcohol as well as their nuances about how alcohol impacted them differently. "Sexual bravado" explores sorority members' brash expressions of sexuality as empowerment as they negotiate heterosexual environments with fraternity men in their attempts to find amorous relationships or desires to locate love. Participants were unapologetic about their sexuality and felt empowered to engage in casual sex and consistent alcohol use while exploring their sexuality with fraternity men. There were no differences between new members and initiated sorority women with regard to the alcohol-related behaviors and perspectives within these chapter cultures.

White Girl Wasted

Participants shared ubiquitous personal narratives and frequently referred to themselves

as *white girl wasted* to rationalize as well as experiences about sex and alcohol. These typically involved casual, consensual sex with fraternity men or how their sexuality was used to recruit other men into fraternity chapters. Norah shared one example of a “white girl wasted” experience:

My sisters and I probably get White girl wasted probably at least twice a week, and I have woke up in the back of a campus bus one time. I just got off and slept on the grass and woke up next to my puke. That walk of shame was not fun in my Manolo Blahniks. I had a bunch of texts from strange dudes and pictures in my phone I don't remember.

The perspectives and experiences shared were heterosexual encounters; none of the participants discussed same-gender sexual experiences involving alcohol or drugs, even when asked to clarify; their narratives were rooted in heteronormative perspectives. Sable stated:

There were a few times where I got really wasted and blacked out. Then I just woke up really drunk and next to someone. It was like that old Ke\$ha song where I woke with a bottle of Jack, but like, I didn't feel like P. Diddy. But like...thank God for Plan B.

Participants discussed frequent and casual drug use involving prescription drug abuse (i.e., Adderall) or illegal drugs (i.e., cocaine). Arya shared that illegal drugs often appear at parties because “there are always a few women in the chapters who buy it off the dark web, get it from their boyfriend, or even text their dealer. They will usually pre-game with them or do them in private in their rooms or at the fraternity house.” Illegal drug use was also commonly shared by participants who suggested the purpose was to allow them to keep drinking or to “get fucked up even more” as shared by Brantley. Sable further noted there was a “dark side ” when she often saw her sisters pre-gaming “with drugs before parties at someone's apartment or the house. It helps us drink more through the night to get lit.” Sable and other participants also suggested this dark side was more complex because sorority women struggled with negotiating the dark side of their hookups (e.g., drugs and sexual assault).

Multiple participants reported knowing at least one chapter member who had experienced alcohol-related sexual violence. Khloe shared:

I can name a few women in my sorority who got too drunk, and stuff happened to them. No one deserves that, no matter if they were drunk or were intending to hook up. As women, we don't ask for it because of how we

look. Some other women in my chapter got wasted, and they woke up with no clothes on. They got tested and they were lucky, but they never told anyone publicly about it. I think they were ashamed.

Participants experienced sexual harassment from fraternity men, particularly at parties with alcohol, and were supportive when there were unwanted sexual advances or activities. They shared examples of how there was a “mother hen” like Arabella who looked after other sorority members or how they had pre-gamed or pre-contemplated how much they were going to drink in an attempt to remain safe. Participants often identified fraternity chapters where they felt there was a greater risk and discussed the culture of silence when there was a sexual assault. Lark disclosed:

I think a lot of my sorority sisters are really nervous going to fraternity houses, and so instead we all band together to help each other out. This is because a number of them were sexually assaulted, but none of them reported it. They were ashamed and did not want the stigma. It’s totally cringy.

The experiences of white girl wasted were slightly different for participants who identified as Women of Color (Jaylah, Lark, Arya, Arabella, Norah, Isla, Lyla, Gael, Paisley,

Mila, Anneliese) who all disclosed they engaged in white girl wasted behaviors of alcohol and drugs. They suggested there were few racialized experiences in their party behaviors, except reciprocating the “mother hen” behaviors. Women of Color in this study often felt abandoned by their White chapter sisters when they were sexually threatened by non-White fraternity men. Women of Color suggested their White sorority sisters were uncomfortable defending them to other Men of Color rather than to a White fraternity member. This, unfortunately, led to Gael’s sisters abandoning her at a fraternity house: One time I was like, say less...I am pretty sure there was one time I passed out with my shirt on and then woke up with it off, but no one was around. I might have been groped.

A Multiracial sorority member suggested that she often felt alone in her sorority because her sisters felt unsure of her racial identity and were unclear about who was attracted to her. She suggested that because she was “mixed,” her White or Black sorority sisters did not know when to intervene because they felt all men were attracted to her. They were also uncomfortable stepping in because they did not want to appear racist. Participants were often unclear on how to support one another across racial boundaries for unwanted sexual advances, yet were unified in their approaches and strategies for alcohol and drug use. However, sorority

women reflected a broader theme of confidence related to the unabashed expression of sexuality and femininity.

Sexual Bravado

Participants expressed sexual bravado and confidence that they had control and command of their bodies, sexual reality, and decisions. They suggested that alcohol made their collegiate and sorority experience more entertaining and enjoyed these borders of uncertainty. Their sexual activity and behaviors were synonymous with alcohol use. Amelia shared her sexual confidence, "This is my body, and I can do whatever the fuck I want. No man can devalue this fat-ass drip. I am snatched." Members were concerned about a different form of slut shaming or negative social stigma connected to sleeping with the *wrong* fraternity man. Paisley pointed out that:

Times have changed, ya know, it's not like if you get with too many people, it's a bad thing. Really, it's like if you sleep with the wrong frat guy, you get judged by your sisters. Slut shaming really doesn't happen unless you are with some fuck boy or shitty guy who no one else wants.

In response to their sexual confidence and activities, they freely discussed contraception and other barrier methods. Luna expressed, "I take the little pill 'cause I ain't

tryna have no Bebe's kids." Participants all suggested that they made sure their consensual sexual partners used condoms and were not ashamed that they provided one. Using sexual protective methods for sorority women was empowering to them to ensure their safety, even while drinking alcohol. Participants were unapologetic about their sexuality and felt empowered to engage in casual sex with fraternity and other men. This sort of sexually affront discourse was exemplified by Lyla, who stated, "I deadass tell bros that I am interested in them, *periodt* [sic]. They don't need to chase me." Women placed value labels on sexual relationships and experiences with fraternity men from higher-ranked chapters. Some stories involved sexual competitions regarding who could have sex with specific chapters or men. Brynlee added, "My favorite are freshman students because they are such simps [sycophant]. They will get me anything like top shelf stuff (liquor) I want and I sometimes try to get all their meal swipes."

There were also narratives on targeting first-year male college students. Lemon expressed her sexual confidence and behaviors by adding, "Yeah, sometimes I pretty much took advantage of men who were simps. I just wanted the D, and it wasn't cuffin season, and I did not want to end in a situation." When asked to clarify their spectrum of sexual behaviors, participants

suggested not all of their sexual activity involved physical intercourse or were one-time hookups. These activities were often compartmentalized, dependent on their levels of alcohol consumption and which fraternity was involved. There was not much open discussion of sexual activities outside of a few trusted chapter peers.

However, the underpinning was that ultimately, these sorority women were looking to be “drunk in love,” as termed by Mila [referring to the Beyonce song], but in some cases, they just wanted to hook up. Etta concluded, “I mean, as women in the end, aren’t we all just trying to find love? We are in these college streets learning what love means, and sometimes it hurts, but we have our sisters for support.” All participants unapologetically honestly shared at least several sexual experiences involving alcohol but confided in their peers about sex, competed against others for men, and felt alcohol use brought them closer as a form of sisterly bonding.

Discussion

This study identified the various complexities of how NPC members engaged in alcohol use and interactions with others. Through the findings, these interactions, often fueled by alcohol use, are embedded in hookup culture and experiences with fraternity men, thus perpetuating the *White Girl Wasted*

phenomenon (Jensen & Hussong, 2021). Participants were confident and open about their sexuality and alcohol use but were admittedly nervous about the risks of sexual violence during fraternity parties (Franklin & Menaker, 2018; Hardy et al., 2023; Hoxmeier et al., 2022; Sweeney, 2011).

This study corroborates prior findings that alcohol use is an integral component of sisterhood (Zimmerman, 2022). When sorority members drank with their sisters, they reported feeling closer to them and claimed drinking was a crucial means of learning how to be a woman (Sasso et al., 2023). Participants indicated they drank heavily, especially with other members (Cohen et al., 2017; Hardy et al., 2023; LaBrie & Cail, 2011). This supports the theory of socialization, where women who surround themselves with heavy drinkers are also likely to drink more (Zimmerman, 2022). Some women reported blackouts and other negative health-related outcomes from alcohol use (Capone et al., 2007; Cohen et al., 2017; Kaylor et al., 2022).

Others discussed more serious implications related to hooking up and alcohol use, like the potential of being sexually assaulted, consistent with research on sexual violence (Caretta & Szymanski, 2022; Hardy et al., 2023; Sampson, 2010; Worthen & Wallace, 2017). Participants continued to navigate misogynistic spaces and environments

related to party rape (Hardy et al., 2023; Mapples et al., 2019; Sampson, 2010) and experienced sexual victimization from other sorority/fraternity community members about sexual behaviors (Franklin & Menaker, 2018; Hoxmeier et al., 2022). One way that the participants responded to navigating these environments was the use of group strategies to protect each other at parties (Myers & Sasso, 2022). However, these experiences were more liminal for NPC Women of Color (Snider, 2020).

In contrast, sorority members' narratives revealed free attitudes and openness about hookups and sexual behaviors during their college experience. Participants discussed using engagement in hooking up and casual sex as a means of empowerment, revenge, and competition (Kelley, 2016; Manning-Ouellette, 2015). These reflections and meaning-making about their sexuality and sexual behaviors support a postmodern feminist perspective and sorority sexual attitudes (Aubrey & Smith, 2011; Elise Radina, 2017). Furthermore, participants engaged in empowered meaning-making regarding casual sex yet navigated systems of sexual violence, perpetuating gendered sex roles (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013), reinforcing unequal power dynamics in sexual relationships, and continued hookup culture forced students in and out of groups and sexual victimization (Hoxmeier et al., 2022; Wade,

2017). Participants used empowerment, competition, and disassociated meanings of their hookup experiences to navigate sexual victimization without emotion, situating themselves as a powerful individual in the sexual interaction and shifting sexual roles.

This study provides campus-based sorority/fraternity advisors and scholars with new information about strategies for combating sexual victimization and how sorority women use empowerment and competition to distance themselves from sexual violence systems and the pressures of hookup culture in their environments. The findings build on prior research, helping to expand upon sorority member alcohol use perspectives and their relation to hooking up and sexual behaviors. This study extends the boundaries of existing research by identifying *White Girl Wasted*, which is perpetuated through nuancing how women engage in hookup culture through alcohol use, and adds to existing research by investigating how women use alcohol as power in spaces. While there is a dearth of research on this topic, many outcomes and implications can be drawn from previous studies about the results of this study.

Limitations

There are limitations associated with the study and its findings. This study featured a heterogeneous sample drawn only from NPC

sororities from five institutional types. We did not assume heteronormativity, but the participants did not discuss same-sex experiences. We are past or current student affairs professionals. We may have *a priori* participant knowledge, which may have influenced the responses of the participants, or they may have selectively disclosed because of fear of stigma. Although this study comprised some diversity, we recognize a lack of representation among members of culturally-based organizations within this research. Thus, the findings are not inherently transferable across all sorority member populations and their experiences with alcohol and fraternity men with these considerations.

NPC and discussion about fraternity members were selected because most of the alcohol research suggests that they are engaged in heavy episodic drinking rather than members of other councils (Barber et al., 2019; Tyler, 2023; Zimmerman, 2022). Future research should address the limitations of this study and explore the power dynamics between fraternity men and sorority women among specific council types (e.g., National Pan-Hellenic Council, National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations, National APIDA Panhellenic Association, National Multicultural Greek Council).

Implications for Practice

This study provides several implications for practice that are grounded in the findings. Alcohol and other forms of socialization were connected to identity formation in which these experiences for sorority women were rationalized as liberating and empowering. However, sexuality and alcohol use were subject to peer scrutiny, limiting how women's identity was expressed. This was particularly salient for Women of Color who experienced racialized experiences with alcohol use (Snider, 2020). There are a number of important practices and interventions that can be implemented at three levels to integrate findings from this study: NPC sorority councils (College Panhellenic Councils, individual chapters, and student affairs professionals).

College Panhellenic Councils

Sorority alcohol and drug policies are not as tightly ingrained into individual chapters, as well as reporting and accountability standards (Myers & Sasso, 2022). Sorority women exhibit power because they can control what kind of alcohol and/or drugs are available at the party but cannot host their parties. Fraternity men can deliver on alcohol or drugs, so sorority women will attend the events. Given that NPC organizations have leverage over fraternities for parties, College Panhellenic Councils (CPCs) should coordinate to

facilitate shared host expectations to fraternity chapters.

They should ensure safety and proper risk management strategies are implemented at events such as “mixers” or other parties where there is more than likely heavy episodic drinking (Sasso et al., 2023). Sororities and fraternities in college have very different expectations of protective behavior strategies and safety (Myers & Sasso, 2023). There should be increased mutual reciprocity between sororities and fraternities with regard to party planning to include safety considerations beyond party favors, themes, or the preferred alcohol list.

CPC could also appoint a Wellness Chair to coordinate with other efforts across campus related to alcohol and drug education. This position should broadly focus on health and wellness, which includes the “triad of risk” of sexual violence, drug use, and alcohol misuse (Sasso & Barber, 2020). Additionally, sexual assault is a significant risk factor for sorority women and is necessary to include addressing by a Wellness chair who would support the development of peer-based programs that demonstrate some efficacy (Elam-Geuting, 2016; Makos, 2015; McMahan et al., 2014; Wilke et al., 2014).

CPCs should consider reinvigorating the use of peer education programs to supplement campus efforts (McMahan et al.,

2014; Wilke et al., 2014). Peer education programs support the development of proactive behavior strategies to reduce self-harm and encourage peer accountability (Myers & Sasso, 2022). These programs are effective in serving as a resource for chapters and their sisters and creating powerful peer support networks (Elam-Geuting, 2016). They are also effective as a process of social norming when individual narratives are communicated and shared with collegiate peers (Makos, 2015).

NPC Sorority Chapters

Individual NPC sorority chapters and sororities should encourage intervention approaches within standards boards rather than punitive approaches (Pearlman et al., 2023). Standards board members should approach such topics with care to offer a community of support rather than removing members because they have symptoms of addiction (Pearlman et al., 2023). Sisterhood can serve as a powerful form of peer protection for sorority women. Sororities can be a powerful space for student persistence and institutional retention (Pearlman et al., 2023; Bid-dix et al., 2016). An educational approach demonstrates to members struggling with substance abuse or sexual violence that their organization cares about their health and well-being (Sasso et al., 2023). Additional chapter connections can be made to the

campus wellness or counseling to support members who demonstrate the need for mental health counseling because of substance misuse or as victims of related violence (Grace et al., 2022).

Emphasis should be placed on the role of alcohol and diversity/inclusion in the new member process by continuing to reform how alcohol is culturally ingrained into chapter cultures (Labrie et al., 2008). Current members should receive harm reduction education about substance abuse and protective behavior interventions (Huchting et al., 2008; Myers & Sasso, 2022). Participants openly discussed illegal drug use, and behaviors like these are often not spoken about in formal spaces, which can be silencing for women, particularly related to issues of sexual violence.

Student Affairs Professionals

Student affairs professionals should lean into new ways of approaching alcohol and drug misuse among sorority women, which should include a harm-reduction and gendered lens. Sorority women and fraternity members have divergent expectations and behaviors regarding alcohol and differently implement proactive behavior strategies (Myers & Sasso, 2022; Sasso, 2015; Sasso et al., 2023). Any new policies should include training and medical amnesty policies, which may encourage a culture of openness and

potentially lifesaving approaches (Zakletskaia et al., 2010).

Given the interdependence of sorority and fraternity members in their co-constructed culture of alcohol misuse, additional policies may support safe alcohol consumption. However, banning parties or common source containers such as kegs places additional liability on chapters may result in increased alcohol risks (Myers & Sasso, 2022). This is because fraternities and sororities implement their own informal risk management policies that usurp national policies and guidelines (Myers & Sasso, 2022). Moratoriums also only result in 25% or more decreases in sexual assault reporting and alcohol offenses, but these, unfortunately, return to normative levels after a ban is removed (Topper, 2023). These restrictions also encourage students to pregame, which is a dangerous form of binge drinking prior to attending an event (Crosse et al., 2006; Kilmer et al., 1999). Student affairs professionals should conceptualize a broader, horizontal prevention and education approach to alcohol and campus safety that includes sorority women, as substance misuse exists across multiple student spaces, not just sororities or fraternities (Myers & Sasso, 2022).

Given the sexuality expressed in this study, sex education is important for sorority women, and a curriculum should be implemented that is power-conscious of

heteronormativity and focus on sexual positivity as well as on sexual assault resistance (Maples et al., 2019; Senn et al., 2011), bystander intervention (Coker et al., 2016; Kirk-Provencher et al., 2023), and common terminology surrounding sexual and gender orientation and identity (Kirk-Provencher et al., 2023; Rioux et al., 2022). These are critical because many individuals attend campus with varying backgrounds or no educational foundations in sexual health education (Manning-Ouellette, 2016; Manning-Ouellette & Shikongo-Asino, 2022).

Conclusion

These behaviors have been colloquially identified in undergraduate culture as *White Girl Wasted*, where hip-hop artists exclaim in the chorus to *White Girl*, “I wanna get loose and party like a white girl” and “White girl in tha buildin’, goose to the head Niki Hilton” (Trina et al., 2010). This song associates White women with drinking and partying. However, little research investigates NPC

sorority members' interwoven relationships with alcohol use and fraternity men and how alcohol use interacts with sorority members' sexual behaviors outside of potential outcomes (e.g., sexual violence). This study concludes with nuanced findings suggesting some women use alcohol to reinforce their sorority member experience or engage in hookup culture with fraternity men as a *White Girl Wasted*. Sexual behaviors, drug use, and other party experiences were shared by sorority members. This study illuminates a problematic culture of substance misuse among NPC women but a strong expectation of sisterhood. Moreover, more education about sex and alcohol safety through protective behavior strategies and harm-reduction approaches is still needed. Future research should continue to unpack the individual themes of this study across more diverse samples of chapters.

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