# Social Psychological Processes that Facilitate Sexual Assault within the Fraternity Party Subculture

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## Abstract

Rape on the college campus has gained increasing amounts of attention in higher education, mainstream news, and public policy. The prevalence rates of rape are especially high among students who frequent campus parties, such as those hosted by fraternities. Researchers have described this increased risk by focusing on individual attitudes and behaviors of fraternity members or on the organizational norms and practices within the fraternity party subculture. To incorporate these studies into a single theoretical framework, this essay uses a social psychological approach to connect individual-level attitudes, (sub) culture, and behavior. I describe and apply identity theory and affect control theory, two structural symbolic interactionist theories, to explain why certain men are drawn to high-risk fraternities and how membership reinforces hostility toward and abuse of women. In doing so, I suggest several avenues for future research that would increase social psychological understanding of the heightened prevalence of sexual victimization within the fraternity party subculture.

It has been estimated that between one in four and one in five women experience attempted or completed rape while enrolled in college (Fisher et al. 2000). Parties on college campuses, such as those hosted by fraternities and athletic teams, are environments with increased rates of sexual victimization (e.g., Grossbard et al. 2007; McMahon 2010; Nelson and Wechsler 2001). Research consistently shows that a higher proportion of campus rapes are perpetrated by fraternity members, in fraternity houses, or after fraternity functions, an issue that has received increasing amounts of attention in public policy and the media (e.g., Copenhaver and Grauerholz 1991; Mohler-Kuo et al. 2004; Murnen and Kohlman 2007).

There is a multitude of ways to understand violence against women. Psychological studies examine individual-level factors like personality, social learning approaches demonstrate individuals learn sexually aggressive behavior from their peers, and feminist studies explore broader social forces like gendered inequalities in sex and social power (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2011). On the individual level, researchers find that men in fraternities are more likely to hold rape-supportive beliefs and sexually aggressive attitudes toward women than non-fraternity members (e.g., Boeringer 1996, 1999; Humphrey and Kahn 2000; Lackie and Anton 1997). Gender scholars have taken organizational- or group-level approaches to the topic and have examined interactional and institutional mechanisms that enable rape. Rich ethnographic studies of college dorms and fraternity houses have revealed how expectations for heavy drinking and hooking up, sexual competition among brothers, and collective disrespect of women make fraternity rape a virtual inevitability (e.g., Armstrong et al. 2006; Boswell and Spade 1996; Martin and Hummer 1989).

Examining the types of men who perpetrate, and environments in which the risk of violence is heightened, is important for prevention efforts (Koss and Cleveland 1996; Martin and Hummer 1989). However, (deviant) attitudes and environments are not enough to explain

(deviant) action, and explanations of rape often lack explicit mechanisms that link culture to behavior (Kalkhoff 2002; Miles 2014). There has been little theoretical development that aims to formally connect individual and cultural processes under a single theoretical model in the rape culture literature. How these levels of analysis intersect and reinforce one another should provide insight into the frequency of sexual violence among fraternity men and partygoers.

Following a recent call for strengthened connections between cultural sociology and social psychology (Collett and Lizardo 2014), I use both identity theory (Burke 1980, 1991; Burke and Stets 2009; Stryker 1968, 1980) and affect control theory (Heise 1977, 1979, 2007; MacKinnon 1994; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2006; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988) to increase understanding of why certain types of men are motivated to join fraternities, how involvement in high-risk fraternities engenders subcultural values and identities, and why engagement in the fraternity party subculture increases the likelihood of sexual coercion and abuse. I start by summarizing what we know about the attitudes, behaviors, and interactions common within the fraternity party subculture. I then present the core concepts of identity theory and affect control theory to offer a social psychological explanation for the high prevalence of sexual deviance and violence in these environments.

Before introducing and connecting the literatures, it is important to add a caveat. Although I frame deviant behavior within the college campus party subculture as a symbolic process of self-verification and meaning maintenance, in no way do I aim to minimize or normalize the perpetration of sex crimes or ignore institutional forces that make campus rape possible. Numerous studies, some of which I review here, have demonstrated how institutionalized or cultural forces shape the likelihood and context of sexual assault on college campuses (e.g., Armstrong et al. 2006; Fisher et al. 2010; Martin and Hummer 1989; Sanday 2007). The argument that gender, power, and constructions of femininity and masculinity play a role in sexual assault on and beyond university settings cannot be overstated (e.g., Anderson 2007; Anderson and Doherty 2007; Brownmiller [1975] 2013; Skaine 1996; Ussher 1997; Walby 1990). However, I take a different approach. I use social psychological theory to integrate individual-level and cultural explanations of rape in order to better understand sexual violence in the fraternity party subculture.

## The fraternity party subculture and sexual aggression

Numerous studies have demonstrated that fraternity men are more likely to engage in sexually aggressive behaviors than non-fraternity men (see Murnen and Kohlman 2007 for a meta-analytic review). Fraternity men have been found to use alcohol incapacitation, verbal coercion, threats, and force to obtain sex at higher rates than non-members (Boeringer 1996; Lackie and Anton 1997). In a recent longitudinal study, Loh et al. (2005) found 30 percent of college males reported engaging in a sexually aggressive act since age 14. However, fraternity men were three times more likely than non-fraternity men to report sexually aggressive behavior during a 3-month follow-up period. Scholars have explained this heightened prevalence by demonstrating that fraternity men are more likely to engage in problematic levels of alcohol use, that they hold different attitudes about rape and gender than non-fraternity men, and that the fraternity party is an environment in which women are objectified and taken advantage of.

### Problem drinking

Between 50 and 74 percent of sexual assaults that occur on college campuses involve alcohol use by the perpetrator and/or victim (Mohler-Kuo et al. 2004; Muehlenhard and Linton 1987). Thus, an analysis of campus rape without discussing alcohol use and abuse is incomplete. Studies

of college males have found strong links between drinking behaviors and sexual aggression: college men who self-report perpetration of attempted or completed rape are more likely than non-perpetrators to be dependent on alcohol, and severity of sexual abuse is positively associated with intensity of alcohol use (Koss and Gaines 1993; Ouimette 1997). There are a number of physiological explanations for this robust association (see Abbey et al. 2004 and Seto and Barbaree 1995). For example, alcohol impairs cognitive processing, leading men to misconstrue ambiguous comments as sexual cues, and intoxicated men retaliate strongly to threats and are less able to generate non-aggressive solutions (e.g., Abbey et al. 2000; Giancola and Zeichner 1997; Hindmarch et al. 1991; Sayette et al. 1993; Taylor and Chermack 1993). Thus, one reason why women are more likely to experience sexual assault when they are drinking is due to an increased likelihood of coming into contact with males who misread cues and act aggressively (Koss and Dinero 1989; Krueger 2008; Mustaine and Tewksbury 2002; Schwartz et al. 2001; Testa and Livingston 1999).

Borsari et al.'s (2007) summary of college alcohol use shows that members of fraternities are more likely than non-Greeks to hold positive views of alcohol consumption and consider alcohol a means of social lubrication (Cashin et al. 1998; Faulkner et al. 1989; Klein 1992; Lichtenfeld and Kayson, 1994). They are more likely to engage in heavy drinking and episodic drinking and meet the diagnostic criteria for alcohol dependence (Canterbury et al. 1991; Grekin and Sher 2006; Loh and Globetti 1995; Schall et al. 1992). Since drinking behaviors in high school consistently predict drinking behaviors in college (Grekin and Sher 2006; Hartzler and Fromme 2003; Read et al. 2002; Reifman and Watson 2003) and Greek students report increasing levels of heavy alcohol use after membership than non-Greeks (Borsari and Carey 2001; Brennan et al. 1986; Cashin et al. 1998), both selection and socialization processes are associated with fraternity involvement.

## Attitudes about rape and gender

Rape myths are prevalent beliefs about rape that justify or trivialize the perpetration of sexual violence against women (Bohner et al. 1998). Examples of common rape myths include the following: "If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped," "rape accusations are often used as a way of getting back at guys," and "if the accused 'rapist' doesn't have a weapon, you really can't call it rape" (McMahon 2010, 7). These attitudes excuse perpetrators who use coercion or incapacitation to obtain sex, blame victims for making themselves vulnerable, and perpetuate ideas that only violent stranger rape is "real rape." Rape myth acceptance is closely associated with a general hostility toward women, male dominance, the acceptance of interpersonal violence, and the perpetration of sexual aggression and coercion (Foshee and Bauman 1992; Sadd 1996; Simonson and Subich 1999; Suarez and Gadalla 2010; Wood 2001).

In their meta-analysis, Murnen and Kohlman (2007) found fraternity men endorse higher levels of rape myth acceptance. Importantly, they are also more likely to exhibit heightened levels of hypermasculinity, hold traditional beliefs about gender roles, and endorse positive attitudes about dominance and otherwise rape-supportive beliefs (e.g., "being roughed up is sexually stimulating to women"; Lottes 1998; Bleecker and Murnen, 2005; Kalof and Cargill 1991; Schaeffer and Nelson 1993). Murnen and Kohlman (2007), like others before them, argue that these all-male groups socialize men into a particular form of "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) in which "hyper" or "hostile" masculinity is valued and associated with violence, aggression, and dominance over women (Malamuth et al. 1991; Mosher and Sirkin 1984; Muehlenhard and Cook 1988; Muehlenhard and Linton 1987).

These attitudes have implications for interactions among fraternity men and with women. In Loh et al.'s (2005) study, fraternity men scored higher on the Reactions to Offensive Language Behavior Scale (Kilmartin et al. 1999). Higher scores on this scale indicate increased comfort in situations where "women are being objectified, assaulted, or verbally degraded" and decreased willingness to intervene (p. 1331). Thus, even when fraternity men are not explicitly involved in sexual assault, they contribute to this sexually hostile environment by tolerating their fraternity brothers' violent attitudes, jokes, and behaviors.

### The high-risk fraternity subculture

As described above, alcohol abuse and rape myth acceptance have been linked to the increased likelihood of sexual assault perpetration among college males. Because fraternity men are more likely to engage in problem drinking and endorse these attitudes, it is not surprising that sexual assault is more likely to be perpetrated by fraternity men, particularly against sorority women and at or following fraternity functions (Copenhaver and Grauerholz 1991; Mohler-Kuo et al. 2004; Murnen and Kohlman 2007). While the aforementioned individual–level studies are helpful in demonstrating personal characteristics and behaviors, it has been argued that one must also examine group structure and processes in order to explain fraternity rape (e.g., Koss and Cleveland 1996; Martin and Hummer 1989).

In their qualitative study of Greek life, Martin and Hummer (1989) witnessed a preoccupation with hypermasculinity and dominance, encouragement of (hetero)sexual prowess, and sexual competition. They call fraternities a "rape prone context" (p. 458) and focus on how the social construction of fraternity life creates an environment in which women are commodified as sexual bait, servers, or sexual prey (Ehrhart and Sandler 1985). These attitudes and behaviors reinforce stereotypical, negative stereotypes about the roles of men and women. The authors also argue that the stress of brotherly bonds, secrecy, and loyalty allow for sexual abuse and the silencing of victims. They do not suggest that these processes exist among *all* fraternities but argue "rape is especially probable in fraternities because of the kinds of organizations they are, the kinds of members they have, the practices their members engage in, and a virtual absence of university or community oversight" (p. 459). Thus, party rape is a social problem that should be examined across organizational, individual, and institutional levels (Armstrong et al. 2006).

Martin and Hummer's (1989) classic study is supported by Boswell and Spade's (1996) participant observation of fraternities. They found members of "high-risk fraternities" – those that were notorious on campus as places that are *dangerous* for women – engaged in degrading, humiliating, and objectifying treatment of women, discouraged monogamy, and bragged about sexual exploits (p. 138). Parties hosted by high-risk fraternities were sexually charged and involved problem drinking, aggression and dominance behaviors, and loud music (which encouraged going to a more isolated place to "talk"). Brothers in high-risk fraternities described women as "sexual outlets" and a means of "getting as much sexual, physical pleasure as she'll give you" (p. 139, 140). Conversely, at "low-risk fraternities," which were known to be *safe* places for women to party, fraternity members had a higher level of respect for women and interactions were generally friendlier. At parties hosted by low-risk fraternities, it was common for couples to attend parties together, and brothers were not discouraged from having monogamous relationships—women were not "faceless" but girlfriends or friends (p. 138).

Humphrey and Kahn (2000) administered surveys to high-risk and low–risk fraternities and athletic teams and a non-affiliated comparison group. In support of Boswell and Spade (1996), they found high-risk group members scored higher than low-risk group members on

measures of sexual aggression, hostility toward women, drinking frequency, and drinking intensity. Low-risk group members, however, did not differ significantly from non-affiliated participants. These studies suggest it is not simply fraternity membership but membership in a *particular type* of fraternity that facilitates sexual assault. Fraternities at any given university are located on the same campus, draw from the same population for new members, and have to follow the same rules, laws, and regulations. However, it is only the groups easily named as "high risk" by students that contain the values, norms, and practices that increase women's risk of sexual victimization.

## Social psychological theory

Multiple studies document the presence of heightened rape myth acceptance, stereotypical gender role beliefs, drinking behaviors, and practices of objectification, sexual competition, and sexual aggression within the high-risk fraternity party subculture. These studies come from a range of disciplines and utilize numerous types of methodological inquiry. Quantitative studies use an individual-level, often psychological, approach to understanding the characteristics of perpetrators, while ethnographic research uses institutional or cultural frameworks to illuminate meaning and gendered social processes. Although these literatures increase understanding of fraternity rape, they generally speak past one another by focusing on either the individual *or* the subculture.

Here, I offer a social psychological approach that encompasses cultural, social network, and individual-level factors to understand the heightened prevalence of rape within certain fraternities (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 2011). Identity theory and affect control theory, two sociological theories of identity and meaning, demonstrate how cultural and structural factors shape individuals' interactions. Furthermore, these theories offer an explanation as to why individuals may be drawn to certain types of groups and how subcultural participation reinforces their attitudes and motivates their behavior.

### *Identity theory*

In his seminal work, Cooley (1902) maintained that the self develops in response to the appraisals of others (Stryker 1980). Similarly, Mead's (1934) core principles stated that individuals are uniquely able to take the role of the other and adjust their behavior based on their interactions. The reflexive process of taking oneself as an object of study and acting in accord with self-meanings laid the groundwork for both streams of research in identity theory (Burke 1980, 1991; Burke and Stets 2009; Stryker 1968, 1980). Burke, Stryker, and their colleagues drew from these classic symbolic interactionist ideas to specify how identity relates to culture and shapes behavior.

### Self-selection into fraternity life and identity verification

Burke and Tully (1977) measure identity using *role identity meanings*. They drew from Osgood et al.'s (1957) semantic differential, a seven-step scale that conceptualizes "meaning as internal, bipolar responses to stimuli" (Stryker and Burke 2000, 287). In their study of gender identity, Burke and Tully (1977) examined sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade girls' and boys' ratings on scales anchored by terms such as "not emotional/emotional," "timid/bold," "girlish/boyish," and "brave/cowardly." Where a person rates his or herself on these continua reflects his or her gender identity and replicates internalized cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity (Burke and Stets 2009).

Burke and colleagues (e.g., Burke and Reitzes 1981, 1991; Burke and Stets 2009; Burke and Tully 1977) also contributed to the growth of identity theory by specifying an *internal mechanism* to explain how individuals maintain congruity between self-meaning and behavior. In this view, *reflected appraisals* from the environment (i.e., treatment by others) signal to a person how others see her or him. These reflected appraisals are compared to the individual's *identity standard*, the identity that is being enacted in that instance. The discrepancy (if any) between reflected appraisals and one's identity standard creates emotional distress, called an *error signal*, and motivates the person to engage in restorative behavior. When confronted with consistent, continual evidence that is discrepant from one's identity standard, one will likely exit the role or adjust his or her identity standard (Burke 1991; Granberg 2011). Following the example of gender identity (Burke and Tully 1977), a man seeks to *self-verify* by acting in a masculine way. If signals from his encounter (reflected appraisals) suggest others do not see him as masculine, he experiences identity disruption and may adjust his behavior or leave the interaction.

College is a time when students attempt to "establish, test, and refine" their identities (Borsari et al. 2007:2; Scheier et al. 1997). The Greek "rush" process ensures a new member will be able to self-verify his previously held identities, such as his gender identity. During this time, hopeful students meet with current fraternity brothers and select groups they would like to join while brothers extend bids of membership to those who fit the values, attitudes, and image of that fraternity (DeSantis 2007). For example, participants in Martin and Hummer's (1989:460) study chose athletic men "who can hold their liquor" and declined membership to men with less masculine appearances or interests. Of course, the likelihood of social acceptance in Greek life is not only shaped by stereotypes about masculinity, but a certain *type* of masculinity: Greek life overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) consists of White, upper middle class, heterosexual students (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; DeSantis 2007).

Whatever the symbolic values are in a given fraternity, potential new members both self-select and are selected based on value congruence with that organization (Scott 1965). If a potential new member challenges the norms of a high-risk fraternity, particularly gendered norms of masculinity and heterosexuality, he would experience recurrent, distressing identity challenges and likely be rejected by the current members or self-select out of Greek life (Arthur 1997; Borsari et al. 2007; Sweet 1999). Thus, fraternities attract and retain men that already hold similar attitudes and enact similar behaviors as full members.

There are several potential avenues for understanding selection into fraternity life through identity theory. First, researchers would need to determine what roles and attributes comprise the "fraternity brother" identity among current fraternity men. Based on studies of Greek life, this might include partier, athlete, man, masculine, drinker, wealthy, and the like. Second, cultural conceptions of what a "fraternity brother" *is*, to particular fraternities or Greek men in general, can be used to predict whether new students will join fraternities. Researchers could survey incoming freshmen and then follow up with them at the end of their first semester. It would be expected that new students whose identity meanings are closer to those of the "fraternity brother" identity would be more likely to rush, be accepted by, and remain in a fraternity – the fraternity subculture would be an identity-verifying and attractive environment.

## Socialization and commitment to the "fraternity brother" identity

For Stryker, identity-related behavior can be understood through the concepts of *structural commitment* and *salience*. *Structural commitment* increases with the number of ties or relations that are related to that role. The more one is committed to a role, the higher this role will be in *salience*. The self is constructed of an individual's set of roles, organized by importance in the *salience hierarchy*. Stryker (1980) hypothesized that the higher an identity is in the salience

hierarchy, the more likely she or he will be to seek out opportunities to enact that role. Commitment to and the salience of an identity lead one to expend more energy to maintain congruity between one's behavior and behavior relevant to that identity. This is largely accomplished through participation in interactions and behaviors that sustain that identity (Burke and Reitzes 1991).

If granted membership to a fraternity, men go through a socialization process that reinforces or creates ideals, values, and skills relevant to fraternity life. Many Greek organizations (73% according to Allan and Madden's 2008 national study) engage in a hazing process in which new members are isolated from non-members and are forced to engage in bonding rituals (including alcohol abuse), and a sense of group identity is developed (Arthur 1997; Kuh and Arnold 1993; Schall et al. 1992; Sweet 1999). In other words, new members are learning the *role identity meanings* of the "fraternity brother" role and becoming increasingly *committed* to that role. Coupled with the peer pressure to drink heavily and hook up with women, it is likely that alcohol-fueled sexual deviance is simultaneously verifying, rewarding, and reinforced over time within high-risk fraternities (Boswell and Spade 1996; Martin and Hummer 1989). Researchers could examine how frequency and length of membership and the number of social ties connected to the fraternity brother role influence the likelihood of engaging in problem drinking, disrespect of female partygoers, and sexual assault perpetration.

### Affect control theory

Affect control theory (ACT; Heise 1977, 1979, 2007; MacKinnon 1994; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2006; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988) also provides a structural symbolic interactionist understanding of behavior (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934; Stryker 2008). ACT assumes that interactants aim to experience a world they understand, in which their views of self and others are not disrupted (MacKinnon 1994). These views are conceptualized as *fundamental sentiments*, which are learned through socialization and guide individuals' expectations for and understandings of interactions (MacKinnon 1994).

Like Burke and colleagues, Heise (1977, 1979) drew on the work of Osgood et al. (1957) to measure meaning. Osgood et al. found, cross-culturally, that the three primary relatively independent dimensions of meaning were *evaluation* (good or bad), *potency* (powerful/big or powerless/little), and *activity* (fast/noisy/lively or slow/quiet/lifeless).[1] Heise used these *EPA* dimensions to mathematically represent fundamental sentiments, measuring each on a range from −4.3 to +4.3. These ratings are averaged as *EPA profiles* and compiled into dictionaries of meaning that are accessible on the affect control theory website (MacKinnon 1994). Using this measurement scheme, any concept – identities, attributes, behaviors, emotions, settings, and non-verbal behaviors – can all be measured in the same three-dimensional space (Rashotte 2002; Smith-Lovin 1987). For example, in the 2002–2004 Indiana dictionary, the EPA profile of "university student" is 1.01, 0.34, 0.94 – positive but fairly neutral on all three dimensions (Francis and Heise 2002–3). Conversely, "rapist" is almost infinitely negative on evaluation and rather weak (−4.05, −1.81, 0.09). These EPA ratings determine how we feel about individuals and how we expect them to behave.

Fundamental sentiments are often challenged in interactions – individuals do not always act in accordance with how they are perceived or expected to be (MacKinnon 1994). Thus, each event produces *transient impressions*, which are situational meanings that are also measured on the E, P, and A dimensions. During interaction, culturally derived fundamental sentiments are compared to situational transient impressions, a process called *impression management*. If the two are discrepant, *deflection* is produced. Deflection is commonly defined as a deviation or departure

from a zero point on a scale (Merriam-Webster 2004). In affect control theory, deflection is mathematically defined as the distance between fundamental sentiments and transient impressions (MacKinnon 1994). Conceptually, deflection is similar (albeit different in important ways) to cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1962), in that it is a state of disequilibrium that motivates behavior or cognitive revision of situations (see MacKinnon 1994, 56–58, for a discussion of how the two concepts are related yet distinct).

If deflection is zero, transient impressions have not departed from general, culturally agreed upon fundamental sentiments; expectations are confirmed, and interaction runs smoothly (Smith-Lovin 1990; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988). However, deflection is large and problematic in unexpected situations, prompting restorative action or cognitive revision in order to make sense of the event (Francis 1997; MacKinnon 1994; Nelson 2006). For instance, if a woman is raped by someone she knows – a highly deflecting event – she may re-label the behavior as a "miscommunication" or modify her boyfriend's identity as "cruel" (Boyle and McKinzie 2015). These are attempts to align "learned expectations" (fundamental sentiments) with "incoming stimulation" (transient impressions) (Heise 1979, 2).

Subcultural sentiments and deviant behavior

Although fundamental sentiments are generally stable across members of a language culture, researchers have found meaningful variation within subcultures. Friedkin and Johnsen (2003) suggest that variation in EPA ratings exist because the meanings and perceptions held by individuals are influenced by observation of and contact with significant others. This is supported by affect control theory research: individuals extensively involved in weight loss groups rated slender identities more positively than those less extensively involved (Graor 2008); members of a gay-friendly church rated gay and religious identities differently than members of a more traditional church (Smith-Lovin and Douglass 1992); and EPA ratings varied within a music subculture due to frequency of concert attendance, number of friends in the subculture, and levels of attachment to the group (Hunt 2008). Thus, the length and extent of group membership influence meanings for subculturally relevant identities and behaviors.

The effects of holding (sub)cultural fundamental sentiments on expectations for behavior can be demonstrated by examining meaningful differences in EPA ratings among college men. Researchers could identify "high-risk" and "low-risk" fraternities and survey its members along with a control group of non-members. Surveys would include EPA ratings of "fraternity brother" and other subculturally relevant concepts. Based on previous studies (Boswell and Spade 1996; Humphrey and Kahn 2000), we would expect low-risk members' attitudes (and, thus, EPA ratings) to be more similar to typical male university students. Meanwhile, high-risk members might rate "fraternity brother" as more *masculine* and powerful – like a "big shot," "jock," or "stud.[2]" The fundamental sentiments of these identities are close to behaviors like "tackle," "command," "urge on," and "overpower" in EPA space. They might also rate "sorority sister" as more *submissive* and less positively on evaluation, seeing female partygoers as "lackeys," "underdogs," or "strangers" who are expected to "plead with," "defer to," and "kowtow to." These identities and behaviors are consistent with the gendered roles and interactions described by Martin and Hummer (1989).

Following affect control theory, high-risk fraternity members should experience less deflection than low-risk or non-members when acting coercively or abusively toward female partygoers or observing such treatment. Even though these actions might not result in the actual perpetration of rape, they promote a hostile and degrading environment that is *conducive* to sexual assault, as disrespect and abuse are less likely to be challenged (e.g., Boswell and Spade 1996; Loh et al. 2005; Martin and Hummer 1989). These are, of course, expectations based on

previous studies and the logic of affect control theory, and they would need to be validated by future research. By collecting EPA ratings from fraternity members and measuring their use of coercion, incapacitation, and force to obtain non-consensual sex, researchers can elucidate the ways in which sexual aggression is motivated and perpetuated within the fraternity party subculture.

## Conclusion

In June 2014, *Social Psychology Quarterly* released a special issue: "Social Psychology and Culture: Advancing Connections." In the introduction, Collett and Lizardo argue "interactional, identity-based, or status-based micromechanisms must be understood as connected to the large-scale cultural patterns that they help to reproduce and generate" (p. 95). Miles' (2014) article in the issue demonstrates that cultural theories, at present, may explain what makes action possible – providing an individual with resources, attitudes, or opportunities – but do not provide a *motivational mechanism* to do so (Swidler 1986, 2008). Miles' (2014) "identity-based model of culture in action" (p. 217) and the current essay advance understanding of cultural phenomenon, like the perpetuation of rape within the fraternity subculture, by using social psychological processes as a means for explaining *motivated* action: fraternity members, like all individuals, engage with institutions and enact behaviors and roles that verify the meanings they hold for their sense of self and for their world (MacKinnon and Heise 2010).

It would be unreasonable and irresponsible to suggest that all sexually aggressive men join fraternities, all fraternities foster a rape culture, or all fraternity men are sexually aggressive. Rather, identity theory and affect control theory provide general theoretical explanations for why *certain men* may select into *high-risk* fraternities and why sexual violence is more likely to occur in these environments: (1) new members select into high-risk fraternities if they are able to self-verify previously held identities; (2) the content of the "fraternity brother" role is learned through ritual, observation, and influence, increasing commitment to that role; and (3) subculturally based fundamental sentiments spread through subcultural involvement and influence high-risk fraternity members' behaviors. In brief, these learned, culturally inscribed meanings provide members with motives for action: to attain identity verification and avoid deflection. Unfortunately, in a high-risk fraternity party subculture, these actions involve problem drinking, disrespect of women, and sexual aggression.

Each of the three proposed avenues for future research would highlight social psychological mechanisms that connect individual experiences, involvement in peer groups, and (sub)cultural meanings and values. Such studies could collect measures related to *both* identity theory and affect control theory and simultaneously examine identity verification, deflection avoidance, the spread of these self- and cultural meanings through social networks, and their effects on the acceptance or perpetration of violence against women. Because fraternities are socially and economically powerful groups on college campuses, driving trends and controlling the popular party scene, the fact that their norms and behaviors reinforce gender inequalities and facilitate sexual assault makes them an important group to examine when studying campus rape (Armstrong et al. 2006; Martin and Hummer 1989).

## Acknowledgement

## Short Biography

Kaitlin M. Boyle is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Georgia. Her research incorporates cultural, social psychological, and criminological approaches to understanding the prevalence and denial of rape on college campuses. Specifically, Kaitlin's research has examined the effects of "real rape" scripts, exposure to college rape culture, and relationship power dynamics on how individuals perceive and label sexual assault. She expands on this research in her dissertation in which she examines identity processes that influence psychological, emotional, and behavioral outcomes of sexual violence, paying particular attention to "victim" and "survivor" identities. She is also in the process of collecting state-and university-level data to examine how women's political and economic status, rape laws, and campus resources and climate influence universities' rape-reporting behaviors. Before coming to the University of Georgia, Kaitlin received her BA in Sociology and in Women and Gender Studies at The College of New Jersey and her MA in Sociology at the University of North Carolina–Charlotte.

## Notes

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[1] For a more detailed discussion of the evaluation, potency, and activity dimensions used in affect control theory, see Chapter 2 in Heise (2010). For a recent discussion about the connection between EPA dimensions and emotions, behaviors, and measures used in other disciplines, see Scholl (2013).

[2] These identities and behaviors were calculated using *Interact*, affect control theory's predictive software program that is publicly available on the affect control theory website (Heise 2013). This program contains the EPA profiles of hundreds of concepts, enabling researchers to find identities and behaviors (as well as emotions and settings) that are close to one another in this three-dimensional space where evaluation, potency, and activity dimensions converge. Here, I used the "find concepts" function to compute identities and behaviors that are close to "masculine male university student" (EPA = 0.93, 1.80, 1.40) and "submissive female university student" (EPA = −0.18, −1.12, −0.41) using the Indiana 2002–2004 dictionary of EPA profiles collected from college males at Indiana University (Francis and Heise 2002–3).

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