DIFFERENCES IN INFORMAL ALCOHOL PROTECTIVE BEHAVIOR STRATEGIES BETWEEN FRATERNITY & SORORITY MEMBERS

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Institutional interventions and formal policies designed to reduce alcohol misuse among fraternity and sorority members have been largely unsuccessful. However, informal policies to address alcohol use concerns can also develop within this subculture. This qualitative multi-case phenomenological study examined the informal policies chapters adopt to reduce risks associated with drinking. Findings suggested considerable informal policy development, which varies between fraternities and sororities. Sorority groups implemented more protective behavior strategies for members' safety, whereas fraternities often focus on monitoring outside groups. Implications for practice suggest a combination of risk and harm-reduction approaches that facilitate peer-led protective behavioral strategies.

Early studies of alcohol use demonstrated the increasing trend of alcohol use by college students during the 1970s and 1980s (Gonzales, 1986; Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1986; Weschler & McFadden, 1979). This established the concept of *heavy episodic drinking* which is defined as pervasive and sustained alcohol misuse over a period of time. Later, the Weschler "Harvard" alcohol studies during the 1990s continued to reinforce the notion of problematic drinking by establishing patterns of drinking among specific subpopulations of traditional (full-time) undergraduate students and established the concept of *binge drinking* (Wechsler et al., 2001). Within this line of research, fraternity and sorority members emerged as a high-risk group for alcohol misuse (Sasso & Barber, 2021). Fraternity and sorority membership has been cited by college administrators as an avenue to alcohol access (Sasso et al., 2020). Additionally, an association with fraternities and sororities has be found to promote underage alcohol consumption and binge drinking (Fabian et al., 2008; Hughey, 2020). As such, universities began targeting fraternities and

sororities specifically for health programing (Sasso & Barber, 2020).

Health promotion programming to reduce alcohol misuse and associated harms adopted a variety of approaches in the past two decades. Initial student responses to institutional interventions to reduce heavy episodic and binge drinking have taken forms of traditional undergraduate student rebellion. This response is consistent with previous historical trends to regulate fraternity/sorority alcohol consumption behaviors (Sasso et al., 2020). Some early studies found that sororities, and particularly fraternities, increase the frequency of binge drinking and volume of heavy episodic drinking if policies are perceived as restrictive (Crosse et al., 2006; Larimer et al., 2001; Toomey et al., 2002).

More progressive programs have used what is considered the *harm-reduction approach* in which fraternity/sorority members are taught to consume alcohol in moderation and address the negative individual tertiary health outcomes which include increase injury (Hamm, 2012). While the harm reduction approach has demonstrated some success among

certain pockets of undergraduate students, behavioral change regarding alcohol use among fraternity and sorority members was not demonstrated in response to these programs (Hughey, 2020). Other approaches to teach "safe" partying, individual responsibility, and student self-governance referred to as *risk-reduction approaches* were instituted by the insurance industry such as Fraternity Insurance Programming Group (FIPG) but were dismantled or abandoned due to lack of accountability and inconsistent implementation (Norman & Biddix, 2020). Negligence and liability case law has also specifically identified the harm-reduction approach as college and universities endorsing underage and binge drinking, particularly related to cases which involve alcohol-related hazing deaths or injury (Hughey, 2020; Sasso et al., 2000). Therefore, many institutions have moved away from this approach and have shifted towards back to restrictive policies. However, these restrictive policies have been found to subjugate alcohol misuse to underground student venues and continue to reinforce that alcohol is culturally ingrained within fraternity/sorority chapters (Crosse et al., 2006; Larimer et al., 2001).

A new, more grassroots approach has evolved to combine risk and harm-reduction approaches that is referred to as *protective behavior strategies* (PBSs). A PBS is defined as, "skills used by drinkers to moderate their drinking and/or resulting consequences" (Prince et al., 2013, p. 2343). A PBS can also be an approach that individuals use to restrict others from engaging in negative alcohol behaviors (Learnet, 2018). PBSs include drinking control strategies and alcohol reduction strategies such as limiting drinks, establishing a designated driver, and avoiding drinking games (Pearson, 2013).

Factors that may affect the adoption and norming of various PBSs is one's cultural alignment within the university system and to alcohol. Within the subculture of fraternity and sorority life, alcohol use has been associated with social status (Sasso & Schwitzer, 2016; Trockel et al., 2008). For instance, some research suggests that frequency of socialization with alcohol at events has been connected to chapter prestige through an informal ranking system, prospective members self-select into heavy drinking chapters, and significant gender differences exist (Capone et al., 2007; Sasso & Schwitzer, 2016). DeSantis (2007) suggested that fraternity and sorority members also consume increased amounts of alcohol to validate and perform traditional gender roles of masculinity and femininity. Members in fraternities and sororities face a greater risk of drinking more heavily, encouraging each other in addition to normalized peer conformity (Fairle et al., 2010).

One of the factors that may establish the cultural norms around alcohol within an organization is senior leadership. Sasso and Schwitzer (2016) found that alcohol consumption is tied to expectations set by senior membership and masculinity among fraternity members. Fraternity new members conform to higher expectations for alcohol use and will increase their drinking (Sasso & Schwitzer, 2016) in a case of "follow the leader" (Cashin et al., 1998). Sorority members tend to label their fellow sorority sisters as "very approving of alcohol use" due to its use in socialization (Borsari et al., 2009), though understandings of messages from executive members within the group is less studied.

Though norms may exist that are aligned with misuse, norms can also exist regarding the adoption of PBS. One way a subculture may create a norm around alcohol risk reduction is by adopting an informal policy within the organization to establish the norm and enforce the appropriate behavior (Biddix & Norman, 2020; Soule et al., 2015). Previous research regarding PBS adoption indicates the nature by which PBS are adopted and implemented differs between sororities and fraternities. Differences in gender suggest that sorority members have constructed a social structure requir-

ing them to observe and police peer behavior (Arthur, 1999; Armstrong et al., 2014; Berbary, 2012; Boyd, 1999; McCready, 2019; Rowen, 2013). Fraternity members have more individual approaches related to reducing self-harm (Sasso, 2015). In this regard, informal strategies among groups of peers and protective behaviors should also be examined and encouraged as they may prove to be beneficial. Given the differences in gender, more exploration is necessary to determine how fraternity and sorority members potentially have developed their own informal protective behavior strategies.

This study builds on that understanding by examining informal alcohol risk reduction policies within chapters and how these informal policies differed between fraternity and sorority organizations. There are potentially disparate implementation strategies constructed by fraternity and sorority members. A deeper understanding of the gendered performance of PBS may better inform the design of PBS intervention curricula and development of new approaches to reduce self-harm within this heavy drinking subculture. The purpose of this study was to address this gap in the research and inform practice to better understand the ways in which sorority and fraternity members differently implement a PBS to reduce self-harm. To address this research gap and inform practice, this phenomenological qualitative study attempted to identify the different uses of PBS between members of fraternities and sororities in a purposive, stratified sample of North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) and National Panhellenic Conference (NPC). This study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What informal policies do fraternity and sororities use to keep each other safe when drinking? and; (2) In what ways do fraternities and sororities differ in their informal risk reduction policies?

The authors recognize there is little representation of historically marginalized communities within research as there is little representation or participation by members of National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc. (NPHC), National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO), the National APIDA Panhellenic Association (NAPA), and the National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC). NIC and NPC members were selected because the majority of the alcohol research suggests that NPC and NIC are engaged in heavy episodic drinking, rather than members of other councils (Biddix et al., 2014; Hughey, 2020).

Methods

Research Design

This was a phenomenological qualitative multi-case study using multiple host institutions which sought to identify the different and various ways in which sorority and fraternity members implement PBS. This also allowed researchers to: (1) explore how leadership in a chapter established and enforced rules around alcohol use and risk reduction as a group and (2) understand the extent to which informal alcohol policy regarding PBS was systemic, even if not required by a written risk management plan or their governing national councils.

This study followed the research design of similar previous studies that examine college subculture, gender, and alcohol (Sweeney, 2014) and PBS (Soule et al., 2015). Similar qualitative approaches have been used to develop a nuanced understanding of sorority and fraternity alcohol use (Sasso, 2015) and gender (Berbary, 2012; Harris & Harper, 2014). A phenomenological multi-case study design was selected because it allows the researchers to gather rich descriptions and interpretations of participant experiences by examining multiple cases which provided a broader description of their experiences relating to PBS implementation and integration (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). This research design was also selected because it challenges generalizations about the phenomenon and how

participants experience it using multiple case studies drawn from focus groups (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Multi-case study phenomenology does not begin with a hypothesis about the phenomenon of study to mitigate the influence of predetermination and is guided by naturalistic inquiry (Sokolowski, 2000). Therefore, this study was guided by the following questions: (1) What informal policies do fraternity and sororities use to keep each other safe when drinking? and; (2) In what ways do fraternities and sororities differ in their informal risk reduction policies?

Positionality

Jones et al. (2014) suggested that qualitative researchers should disclose their assumptions and perspectives. Both of the authors are active researchers that explore undergraduate alcohol use, previously served as health educators, and respectively affiliated with NPC and NIC organizations. They collectively identify as identify as cisgender scholar-practitioners. The first author identifies as a White woman, and the second author identifies as a heterosexual Latino male. Dr. Jaime Myers has spent over 15 years in the bar and restaurant industry. Dr. Pietro Sasso acknowledges his experiences in supporting those with alcohol misuse challenges as a wounded-healer. Both of these lived experiences may influence perceptions of alcohol use. The researchers used their previous knowledge about how fraternity and sorority groups develop separate sets of informal PBS to circumvent or bolster existing alcohol use policy to drive the data collection as members of similar NPC and NIC organizations. These affiliations also assisted with building rapport with the focus groups. This could have impacted the way participants shared, the amount of detail they provided, and guided responses to the probes used during the focus groups. Someone who was not previously affiliated with sorority and fraternity culture may have approached the focus group from a different perspective. The researchers sought to use data collection to understand how participants used PBS with the intent to increase student safety.

Participants

Participating chapters were recruited through email and social media messages with chapter leadership, most typically chapter Presidents using a purposive sampling procedure as outlined by Jones et al. (2014). A stratification according to gender was included in order to examine the differences in PBS development and implementation between fraternities and sororities. Eight focus groups were conducted with the executive boards of sororities and fraternities who belonged to NPC and NIC councils. The focus groups were composed of four to ten members for a total of more than 30 participants.

Inclusion criteria for chapters included campus recognition and an active executive board. Participation in focus groups was limited to executive board members of each chapter, as these are typically the decision makers for the organization and in charge of enforcing rules, including an executive board member who oversees risk management for the chapter (Norman & Biddix, 2020). Each of the chapters was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality (see Table 1). All participants were from five different Mid-Atlantic institutions and were members of their NPC and NIC councils. Council membership allowed researchers to compare chapter policies to formal national standards for risk management. Most of

Table 1 Summary of Chapter Demographics

Chapter	Type	Institution Type	Setting	Council	Chapter House	Approximate Chapter Size
Alpha	Fraternity	Public Liberal Arts	Rural	IFC	No	20
Beta	Sorority	Private Doctoral/ Professional	Suburban	NPC	Yes	60
Gamma	Fraternity	Public Master's Comprehensive	Rural	IFC	Yes	25
Delta	Fraternity	Public Master's Comprehensive	Rural	IFC	Yes	60
Epsilon	Fraternity	Public STEM	Urban	IFC	Yes	35
Zeta	Sorority	Land-Grant/ State Flagship	Suburban	NPC	Yes	120
Eta	Sorority	Private STEM	Urban	NPC	Yes	75
Theta	Sorority	Public STEM	Urban	Local	No	20

the students originated from major urban centers across the Mid-Atlantic.

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview guide with probing questions varied slightly between participants depending on comfort level and rapport during each interview. The topics explored through the interview guide were informed by previous research related to PBS and gender (Barry et al., 2016; Sasso, 2015; Soule et al., 2015). Clarification of meaning was used when vague language was introduced by the participants or when they used institutional specific vernacular.

This study used semi-structured chapter focus groups which lasted approximately 30 to 80 minutes. Although uncommon in phenomenology, focus groups were selected because previous research suggests the interdependence of PBS among sorority and fraternity members (Soule et al., 2015). Thus, understanding the interconnectedness of PBS among chapter members allows

the researchers to preserve the individual lived experience within a group context (Bradbury et al., 2009). Focus groups have also been used in other health outcomes studies (Rorvet et al., 2021) and particularly to understand the interdependence of a phenomenon (Harrison et al., 2021).

At least two members of the research team were present at each focus group. One took the role of primary focus group leader and the other took notes during the interview. The role of focus group leader alternated based on availability and rapport and not based on gender roles. Therefore, the female and male researcher both led fraternity and sorority focus groups.

Interviews took place on campus in a location selected by the chapter leadership to facilitate increased authenticity of responses in which they were presented with a standard informed consent form. Participants were provided food during the interviews as well as a certificate of recognition and a donation to their philanthropy for their participation.

Interview transcripts were professionally transcribed to prepare for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Findings were conceptualized through the interpretive relativist ontology paradigm in which epistemology assumes that the researcher cannot separate themselves from what they know (Patton, 2015). Phenomenology data analysis was selected to explore how sorority and fraternity members implemented and constructed PBS across the multiple case studies. This method was selected because its, "... purpose of psychology as a human science is precisely the clarification of the meanings of phenomena experienced by human persons" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 98). Case study boundaries were defined by gender and institutional setting (see Table 1). Using these boundaries helped the researchers to better understand the differences in PBS implementation between sorority and fraternity members and their interdependence at their institutions as found by Soule and colleagues (2015). This also allowed the researchers to capture the variations and identify patterns (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021; Giorgi, 2009). Thus, to begin analysis, the researchers also used memoing to "sensitize to potential patterns of the data" and as a "written conversation with oneself" (Jones et al., 2014, p. 82).

During focus groups, the researchers used social world/area maps to denote proximity or location of participants. These written notes were used to contextualize group dynamics in typed transcripts. The coding process was multiphasic. Codes were derived from the data and not from preconceived, logically deduced hypotheses such as with axial coding. The researchers used the constant comparative method which involved data comparison through each stage of analysis to advance coding development. The researchers engaged in memo-writing to elucidate categories, clarify their properties, and define relationships between categories. A team of three developed the codebook and analyzed the data. Coding of data followed the iterative process of Saldana (2021) by using open and focused coding because the researchers also engaged in consensus coding. After the codebook was finalized through the iterative process, a final phase of coding began. First the team independently coded the transcript, then the team met to compare coded transcripts. There were high levels of agreement after the independent coding phase. A transcript was considered final coded when all team members reached consensus on code application in face-to-face meetings. As a result, there is 100% agreement reached for each code. Coded transcripts were then entered into QDA Miner Lite software to assist with the selection of quotes to best represent codes and themes identified. Included quotes have removed filler words such as "like" or "um" where it did not alter the meaning of the passage.

The following Jones' et al. (2014) trustworthiness strategies were employed: (1) consensus coding; (2) member checking using the interview transcript data; (3) observation notes from focus groups, and (4) reviewing and questioning the main themes and questions to clarify researcher bias.

Findings

Each participant shared their experiences and perspectives with protective behavior interventions and described the different ways in which they negotiated university alcohol policies. Both sororities and fraternities have internal informal policies that involve self-policing with respect to alcohol safety that are not part of formal risk reduction programing. Sorority members had more informal policies to decrease drinking risk and enforced them more rigidly. Fraternity members view outsiders as alcohol risks, not internal members and create more policies as such.

"You're Cut Off"

As formal risk management policies

indicate that no one under the legal age of 21 will consume alcohol, the majority of policies designed to keep each other safe during events fell under an informal level of policy making. One of the core ways fraternities and sororities discussed keeping members safe when using alcohol was taking care of those who became overly intoxicated. According to formal policies, no one should have been overly intoxicated in the first place. However, that standard was widely considered an unreasonable expectation by both fraternity and sorority leadership, and they had strategies to deal with the realities of over drinking. Both fraternity and sorority leadership discussed providing food and/or water for someone who was visibly very drunk.

One method of reducing risk discussed by both fraternities and sororities was to identify individuals who had over-consumed and prevent them from drinking more. Some chapters had the person "cut off" or "flagged" and were prohibited from drinking by members of leadership or risk management. When identified through this channel, failure to comply could result in negative consequences through chapter penalties. However, both men and women also discussed a less formal approach to stopping someone from drinking more that was rooted in caring for others. Within fraternities the process of cutting someone off from drinking more was most commonly an informal process for fellow brothers. Anyone in the group could encourage fellow members to stop drinking. If the member did not stop, it was viewed as an annoyance more than a punishable offense. For instance one fraternity group said,

> You know it's, some of my brothers are going to have too much fun and get hammered... they're going to have too much fun (laughter). You know it's going to happen but you're like as a group collectively know that, you know what I mean, you're all responsible and you're supposed to be watching out for everybody. And if you see someone

that's doing something they're not supposed to be doing. You just pull them off to the side or talk to them hopefully before it gets out of hand.

More commonly, fraternity members discussed a more formalized process cutting off individuals who were not brothers, but rather outside attendees at parties. When monitoring the party, one fraternity said, "If someone looks like they're too drunk, they're flagged and given water."

When discussing how fraternities went about cutting someone off who was overly intoxicated, one fraternity board member stated, "Tell them to stop drinking. You just go up to them. Well, if they have a bottle blatantly in their hands, we'll take it and just throw it out." Sororities also discussed actively removing alcohol from a sister's hands. Female leadership most typically monitored and cut off their own members. One sorority executive board stated,

> Take the drink off of them, out of their hands and say stop. Here is some water. That's generally a good tactic that I found is you can usually just take the drink off of them. And I think I've had my drink taken off of me multiple times.

Similar to themes in fraternity responses, it was not just the sorority leadership's role in monitoring and cutting off members. Other sisters policed over-intoxication without a formal risk management role, too. For instance, one participant stated,

> I would take their alcohol if they – I felt like they were being too much. I just felt, like, it was not that it was my decision, but I just– I had– I just love them, so I didn't want them to hurt themselves, or make an ass of themselves. So that's why I did it.

However, there was a perception that policing someone more senior than you was taboo due to the perception that older members were more experienced and could take care of themselves better than newer members. For instance, one woman said,

> I'm not gonna lie, if a new member

came up to me and told me not to drink at a mixer, I'd be like, "Who are you to tell me not to drink?" You know? It's just, it is a respect thing.

Moreover, this is why senior leadership felt an extra responsibility to enforce the rules, as they had both seniority and leadership roles in their group. Both fraternities and sororities discussed how stopping fellow members from drinking more was a matter of care and concern, which they felt responsible for the other person as a result of their membership in the organization. Due to the shared identity of brotherhood and sisterhood, they felt more responsible for the health and safety of others at the party.

Fraternities and sororities also discussed an extra level of monitoring and care that took place among sorority members. If a sorority woman was identified as overly intoxicated, her sisters were the ones to oversee her wellbeing and care. This discussion of women assuming the responsibility of the care and safety of one another occurred even if she was a guest at a fraternity house and even if the men were willing to assist with a woman being overly intoxicated. This was consistent across focus groups. One fraternity executive board stated with lots of agreement,

> Her sisters will take care of that…. They stick together… They have sober sisters. There's someone from risk management...They don't really want us...It's like, go away. This is our problem. Don't, don't even touch her. They don't want us involved.... Yeah, they don't really want us involved.

Another fraternity group expressed a similar sentiment saying,

> They swarm around their girls. When they– when their girls get a little too much, they swarm in and they take care of them. It's kind of like watching ants– It's like helper ants (laughter) and you just move back.

There was not a similar "swarming" approach mentioned to take care of intoxicated brothers among fraternity men.

"Go Home"

The process of getting people home safely was an issue commonly discussed by both fraternities and sororities. Fraternities more commonly discussed having to find ways to safely get people who were not members or close friends away from the house they were hosting if they were overly intoxicated or if the party was over. One group used a dual stamp system to designate close friends from others that needed to be sent home at the end of the night. They expressed a level of responsibility for the safety of their party guests in getting home. This was apparent when providing a hypothetical scenario where a male potential pledge became unruly when the group stated,

> In that case, probably it wouldn't really be the brother; it would be us as a whole because it's a prospective member and we'd just go about fixing the whole and as a group, we'd take him, we'd take him outside and toss him out. …And make sure he gets back safe.

One common theme was needing to find a close friend to take care of the overly intoxicated person rather than sending them home alone. One group stated, "Since their friends will usually be more sober, we'll be like, can you make it back to your room with them? Will you guys be fine?".

An emphasis on Uber, sober drivers, and utilizing local taxis was reported. If safe methods of getting a person home were not identified, many mentioned keeping the person overnight on a couch. It was often offered as a "last resort." This was typically limited to closer friends of the fraternity members. Sorority members only attended events outside of their living spaces, so organizing how to get a person home safely was more formally planned out in accordance with formal chapter policies that aligned with NPC standards for transportation to and from events.

Sorority members discussed policies around leaving events when they were de-

termined to be too risky or if a member or members became too intoxicated. Identifying the most problematic drinkers and removing them from the party quickly was important as one group stated, "If a girl's still throwing up in the bathroom, we try to get them out of the house first." Another group stated, "...I saw someone who's sick I'd be like, All right, I'm gonna step up and take her home." One sorority had an active group chat designed to notify members that it was determined that an event was ending:

> I think the sister chat does help at mixers too, just because I know usually everyone has their phones out, they're taking pictures, they're on social media and all this stuff. And you'll get a message being, calling cars in five minutes. So you know, all right, either you gotta get upstairs, or let me get my last minute drink in.

Another sorority member of the focus group added:

> That's a good point. That's how I called – that's how I called cars that night. I mean, went and said "Hey, leaving, leaving, leaving." And I had to say it for 15 minutes, but um, I did put it in the chat, and that's how a majority of the girls – 'cause there was two floors. There was a back room. So our girls were everywhere, and I only had me and the sisters who were freaking out, rounding up girls. And um, so it was kind of hard for three or four people to just get everyone together when there's so much going on, there's so much tension, and everybody is drunk and under the influence. So I put it in the chat and people came."

Leaving as a group from official events was an important element described by multiple sorority groups. One group reported requiring the whole sorority to leave an event in case that one of the members became overly intoxicated, but that was not discussed by other sorority groups. The members indicated the policy had support saying, "So if a sister is obviously drinking to excess, and we need to get out, I think sisters trust that judgement."

The role of designated "sober sisters" as a way to get intoxicated sorority members home was consistently mentioned by both men and women. One fraternity stated, "And then the sororities have their sober drivers too. Sororities take care of themselves. Hands down." The informal risk management policies regarding having designated, reliable sober sisters at every party was highlighted.

"Babysitting"

If someone was to the point of passing out or ready to go to sleep, there were distinct differences in the level of surveillance afterwards reported by fraternity and sorority groups. For fraternity members, overseeing the safety of someone overly intoxicated typically meant that someone informally checked on the individual if they were passed out. This might include adjusting their position as they slept, checking breathing, or sending someone to bed. One fraternity group stated,

> We carried him inside, we laid him on the couch and we just put a garbage can right in front of him, talked to him for an hour and made sure he didn't have to go to the hospital.

For women, the responsibility to track the behavior of the overly intoxicated and ensure their safety was far more extensive. As sorority women drink outside of their personal spaces, one of the key priorities discussed was how to get the overly intoxicated person safely home. One chapter said, "But you'd definitely check on the severity of the situation and based on that bring them to the nearest safe environment."

If the group had a sorority house, some discussed bringing the individual to the mutual home. However, often a sister who had the closest friendship with the overly intoxicated person was in charge of getting the person back to their own dwelling in the residence halls or off-campus housing. The process of baby-sitting the overly intoxicat-

ed person was more intense and formalized. Quite often, it was the responsibility of an executive board member to play this role. It could also be a Big Sister in the sorority or someone else they had a close bond with. Additionally, many times the person monitoring the drunk person would report staying with the over-intoxicated sister all night to ensure their safety after getting them home. For instance, one sorority group with a house stated:

> If we ever bring sisters back to the house...We have somebody sit with them. We have always someone with them…..Even if it's overnight someone's sleeping next to them to make sure.

Another sorority chapter mentioned:

> You don't leave them. Yeah, you don't leave them. If you take them back from a mixer, I've known multiple times where a girl was going to sleep with, like, sleep in their rooms, or you watch them. You make sure they're okay.

Another group compared the level of monitoring that took place as that of a mother. During specific events, the role of the Big Sister in the safety of younger members was especially apparent, such as initiation. One group stated, "If you're a Big you need to take care of your Little. I'll call you to Standards in a heartbeat." Therefore, failure to appropriately take care of a Little Sister in the chapter while drinking could lead to penalties after being brought up to the Standards Board, which discussed how to properly sanction their members. Overall, though fraternities discussed the process of taking care of someone who was very intoxicated as "babysitting", the nature of the interaction was far less invasive and time intensive compared to what was described by sororities.

"Sober Police"

Though legally anyone under the age of 21 should be sober at events with alcohol, neither fraternity or sorority groups expected this behavior. However, both fraternities and sororities discussed sobriety levels of designated members in charge during events. As part of the formal policies of the chapter, sorority members often had two or more members of their executive board completely sober at all events, typically the risk management chair and one other rotating member. One sorority used a 5:1 ratio for sober designees stating,

> So the ratio is for every five sisters that go, there has to be one sober sister making sure there are head counts making sure everybody is good, nobody goes off in a room depending on where we are, off by themselves. They have to be accompanied by someone who is a sober sister. And then, if they're going to get walked home, depending on who we are hanging out with, we have to have the sober sister walk them home along with one or two other huge guys and walk them home and make sure they're getting back safely.

References to "Sober Sisters" were commonly discussed by both fraternity and sorority groups outside of just being able to drive and get someone home safely. These were often members of the Executive Committee and/or designated sisters for the evening that rotated. For instance, one group stated:

> "Female Speaker 1: Well, if you are driving, you're not allowed to drink, or do any of that stuff. It's very strict that way.
> Female Speaker 2: You just basically have to stay sober the whole entire time."

One fraternity group used the term "Sober Brother" as well. It was the responsibility of this individual to not drink in case someone needed a safe ride home similar to the sorority groups. Fraternity groups also reference mandatory sobriety by certain leadership positions, such as the Risk Management Chair or the New Member Educator during specific events. If the fraternity hosted large events with guests, expected sobriety (or relative sobriety) of designated

members was discussed. One group discussed a large party they held stating, "It was great for rush and we made decent money sometimes, but it was just such a pain because we couldn't have fun because we had to stay sober the whole time." The process of monitoring the party was extensive, described as

> Yeah you both are supposed to stay sober, especially the risk management chair and what you do is you make uh a shift list of different, so we had the bar, the outside door, back yard and the basement and just people walking around.

This requirement of sober oversight was not mentioned among fraternities in informal "get togethers" or closed parties that were smaller in nature. Several fraternity groups discussed penalties for not properly executing security measures during formal events, with the most common penalty being additional sober duty at future events. One group stated,

> "[Staying sober while overseeing parties] was always problematic for one or two brothers, and also the same brothers, but then we have our standard board. We call it High Tribunal. They would be go out in front of them every single time. It wasn't a faultless system but it worked well."

Fraternity members specifically talked about ejecting people from parties and banning them from returning to future events. One fraternity group stated,

> "We try and keep a record of who's coming in and out of our house. So if they're a problem, we ban them."

Several focus groups, both fraternity and sorority, expressed relief when the formal element of a party ended so they no longer needed to be sober as a watchful member of the leadership team. Several groups discussed the burden of a leadership requiring someone to be sober at events. One sorority member stated, "I was really salty that I was sober at all of them, but I was so –... ...Completely sober and I was

so mad, just saying. Cause you're basically the – you're just the mom."

One sorority group recognized this as a situation that was overly onerous for some members, and instead required a rotating member of the leadership team to execute the role of Sober Sister at events rather than always relying on the same person, such as the Risk Manager. One group described this process saying,

> "We have talks even before we go out to a mixer or something, and we make sure you guys are sober sisters. Make sure you're not drinking. And if you need to switch off, just let somebody know. We take care of our girls and try to make sure everybody is rotating."

Despite some negative feelings expressed at needing to be the sober person at events by both fraternity and sorority members, they expressed a strong commitment to its purpose and importance. The value of having responsible people during events was spoken of seriously.

When hosting formal events, men discussed a far more comprehensive risk reduction plan that included policing events. Enhanced risk reduction policies included but were not limited to: registering guests, IDing guests and providing wristbands, requiring guests to BYOB, having Sober Brothers monitoring the party, and taking drivers' keys. Monitoring the guests was considered an important part of alcohol risk reduction policy during formal parties. They monitored for both over intoxication, as well as risky behavior as a result of alcohol consumption such as overly aggressive sexual advances made towards female attendees and belligerent guests who might start a fight. One fraternity group discussed their monitoring practices as follows:

> One person will notice; they'll have a conversation with the person and you'll just tell like from the conversation or you'll see someone they'll be standing by themselves or or like you said leaning, or just like not looking, like their facial expression will give discomfort.

And then so, you just you say to someone else, you get a second opinion and they'll spread it through the frat and then everyone you make a new a group consensus.

Men described their official duties as formal party hosts much more in terms of risk management and enforced informal policy compared to other scenarios where drinking was involved.

Discussion

The findings in this study serve to contextualize the lived experiences of students who are members of NIC and NPC and their perspectives and utilization of protective behavior strategies. These themes directly address the research questions and reinforce the constructs within this study. Across fraternity and sorority members four PBS were implemented which included: (1) cutting off; (2) sending home; (3) babysitting; and (4) sober police.

These findings provide a greater depth of understanding about *how* fraternity and sorority members implement their own PBS as these demonstrate promise because current intervention efforts lack efficacy (Soule et al., 2015). Fraternity members did not implement a PBS to reduce self-harm but to reduce risk whereas sorority women used various interdependent PBS to facilitate support and care. These findings also challenge current research that suggests fraternity/sorority members are less likely to employ a PBS (Barry et al., 2016; Soule et al., 2015). These broader gendered findings are complementary and further existing research.

PBS implemented by fraternity men was anomic, often deferred to individual responsibility, and to "keep the party going" (Corprew & Mitchell, 2014). PBS was implemented to not disrupt the parties. Previous research suggests that fraternity members will rebel against overbroad policies and not respond to restrictive interventions (Crosse et al., 2006; Kilmer et al., 1999).

Alcohol served a central role to fraternity experience in this study in which excessive drinking was acceptable and responsibility was assumed by other senior leaders. Previous research which suggests alcohol use is performed by fraternity men and expectancy influences alcohol misuse (Sasso, 2015; Sasso & Schwitzer, 2016). Senior leaders set these expectations and it is often a case of "follow the leader" for alcohol misuse accountability (Cashin et al., 1998; Fairlie et al., 2010).

Sorority PBS were more formal, coordinated efforts or intentional approaches to police behavior and care for their sisters regardless of the event type. Women indicated they used a number of PBS related to navigating parties, particularly ones hosted by fraternities. Fraternity members became especially vigilant during formal events that they hosted. The brothers often policed guests for potential sexual predators; they often did not do this for their own members. Research supports the elevated policing of events, as fraternity houses and parties have been venues where women are more likely to be victims of sexual violence (Gibon et al., 2017; Seabrook et al., 2018).

This study also elucidated nuanced differences between sorority and fraternity members in *how* they used each of these PBS. The participants in this study did not inherently discuss gender performativity through alcohol use (McCready & Radimer, 2020). Rather, they discussed different styles of PBS which were differently implemented by sorority and fraternity members which extends the findings of existing research (Clark et al, 2013; 2015; Prince et al., 2013: Soule et al, 2013).

Cutting off alcohol use was more informal for men, than for women. Fraternity men were more likely to immediately cut off guests, but only issued a warning to their fellow chapter members and consequences for failure to comply were rare and may include future sober duty. It was more challenging for newer members to hold more senior members accountable who often set

alcohol expectations, which has been found in past literature (Sasso & Schwitzer, 2016). Sorority women continually monitored their sisters and they tended to issue group support or "swarm" when excessive drinking occurred to cut them off which is similar to other studies (Clark et al., 2013; 2015). The responsibility of cutting off guests often fell to senior sorority chapter leaders (Cashin et al. 1998).

Sending guests home was a common strategy issued by fraternity members and taking sisters home was implemented by sorority women (Clark et al., 2013; 2015). NPC sororities cannot host events without alcohol with prior approval, and so much of the liability was shifted to fraternity chapters (Sasso & Barber, 2020). Fraternity men viewed non-members as a liability and would send guests home so that they could continue their parties. They would often ask others such as the friends of guests to leave with their overly intoxicated friends. At fraternity parties, sorority women were careful to attend and leave parties in groups (Clark et al, 2013; 2015). Women tended to go home with their sisters, and it was unclear if fraternity men followed up those they sent home (Prince et al., 2013).

As sorority women went home with their sisters or other friends, they often shared experiences watching their sisters overnight when they were overly intoxicated (Clark et al, 2013; 2015). It was common across sorority and fraternity members to minimally provide a trashcan and water. This idea of "babysitting" was more native to sorority women, than fraternity men who often did not want guests staying after their parties. If they were responsible, they would informally check on someone who had blacked out or was asleep from intoxication (Prince et al., 2013).

Providing sober police was more common for fraternity men during large formal open parties, than for sorority women who instead had a "mother hen" who was responsible for a specific group

of women which is a strategy previously encouraged by FIPG (Fairlie et al., 2010; Norman & Biddix, 2020). Sober police were specifically referenced by fraternity participants when there was a large open party as part of a larger risk management plan (Caudill et al., 2009; Sasso & Barber, 2021). Their role was to intervene with alcohol use only when it was a problem for party safety so that the party could continue uninterrupted (Kilmer et al., 1999; Labrie et al., 2009). The mother hen role for sorority women often included the responsibility of remaining sober and policing the behaviors and alcohol use of fellow sisters (Clark et al., 2013; 2015).

This study was conducted with some acknowledged limitations. The sample of the study was stratified by institutional type to increase trustworthiness using a multi-case research design. However, it is inconclusive if there are institutional differences across the specific campuses based on the data analysis. Campus environments were not considered in the data analysis.

This study also intentionally featured a homogenous sample of participants of NPC and NIC undergraduate men and women at predominantly white institutions (PWI). Thus, the findings of this study are not necessarily transferable across all student demographics or to other councils such as NPHC or NALFO. The researchers did not collect demographic data such as racial or cultural identities. Not all NIC and NPC chapters are exclusively white and PBS may have been implemented differently by Students of Color (Clark et al, 2013).

The researchers did not use assigned gender roles for focus group facilitation. The primary researchers were members of NPC and NIC organizations and may have *a priori* knowledge which may have influenced the responses of the participants. Also, due to the esoteric and secretive nature of NPC and NIC organizations, some participants may have engaged in selective disclosure regarding all the ways in which they use

PBS. Future research should consider the limitations of this study and its important implications for practice.

Implications for Practice

While this study highlighted several styles of PBS implemented by sorority and fraternity members, fraternity/sorority professionals can glean several implications to integrate into their approaches towards addressing problematic alcohol misuse. These approaches are grounded in the findings of this qualitative study and should be used with some intention, given the aforementioned limitations of this study.

Fraternity members embraced the most informal PBS when focused on their guests, rather than their own brothers. They primarily relied on a sober brother system to facilitate their PBS. There was only structure or organization at large-scale open parties (Corprew & Mitchell, 2014). The most common PBS was sending guests home or cutting them off. However, these PBS were not as strictly followed at more informal parties or gatherings. Professionals should be mindful that sending guests home without proper direction may incur additional liability, particularly where there are dram shop laws in which chapters hold increased responsibility for their party guests (Menning, 2009; Sasso & Barber, 2020).

Fraternity members expressed some apprehension in cutting off their brothers from excessive alcohol use, whereas sorority women expressed little hesitation. However, it was unclear if sorority and fraternity members understood the warning signs of intoxication. Fraternity/sorority members struggle with differentiating serving size (White et al., 2003) and only recognize or identify extreme intoxication or "black out" symptoms (Soule et al., 2015). Thus, mandatory alcohol intervention programming using the harm-reduction approach should help fraternity and sorority members better identify early warning signs

of intoxication, rather than only extreme severity (LaBrie et al., 2009).

Fraternity/sorority professionals should continue to address the delineation between informal and formal events as they all have significant binge drinking. Informal events were more dangerous because of the lack of more organized PBS implemented by all members. The majority of these PBS employed by fraternity and sorority members suggested these are approaches to avoid getting into trouble or getting caught to not disrupt parties (LaBrie et al., 2009). Thus, professionals should encourage the development of harm-reduction approaches which teach students how to safely drink. Fraternity/sorority professionals should advocate for harm-reduction PBS such as "pace and space" or self-monitoring which have individual efficacy (Wall et al., 2012).

Fraternity and sorority members did have a loosely coupled culture of a dependence on sober monitors or older members looking out for their welfare. Fraternity/sorority professionals should better support this existing system with training and medical amnesty policies (Sasso & Schwitzer, 2016; Zakletskaia et al., 2010). These may encourage a culture of openness and are potentially lifesaving approaches (Zakletskaia et al., 2010). The researchers recognize that while this is a foundational study of chapter members' use of PBS, it does offer some promising insight. However, PBS should be used with progressive approaches, rather than those that are restrictive (Prince et al., 2013; Soule et al., 2015).

Banning parties or common source containers such as kegs or placing additional liability on chapters may result in increased alcohol risks, not less (Sasso & Barber, 2021). More restrictive alcohol rules often result in more risky drinking by encouraging pre-gaming which is binge drinking prior to attending an event (Crosse et al, 2006; Kilmer et al., 1999). Members are willing to take steps to reduce alcohol risks when they are clearly tasked with the responsibility of party attendee safety. While fraternity/

sorority members students are found to participate in drinking more frequently, they may also have differing forms of protective behaviors due to their distinctive community. Consequently, differences in drinking behaviors among affiliated students and unaffiliated students can be used to identify safe drinking strategies and provide a student-oriented perspective on the risks of unregulated alcohol usage (Clark et al., 2013; 2015).

Conclusion

This study highlights how sorority and fraternity members construct their own proactive PBS as an attempt to facilitate their own safety and for peer chapter members. Fraternity members attempted to control larger parties by making others leave and restricting access and sorority women negotiated party environments with peer-based approaches because they could not host events with alcohol. Despite having a novice understanding of the tertiary and health impacts of alcohol, sorority and fraternity members believed their strategies kept their guests and their members safe to enable the "good times" of college they desired and sought to construct. This gender gap is a continuing historical narrative and reflects the ways in which fraternity and sorority members have differently approached alcohol (Hughey, 2020). This study presents an opportunity for future scholars to examine the differences in gender in their use of protective behavior strategies. Future research should consider the limitations of this study and include a more diverse population across other councils (NPHC, NALFO, NAPA, NMGC).

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