



Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus

Peggy Reeves Sanday

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This widely acclaimed and meticulously documented volume illustrates, in painstaking and disturbing detail, the nature of fraternity gang rape. Drawing on interviews with both victims and fraternity members, Peggy Reeves Sanday reconstructs daily life in the fraternity, highlighting the role played by pornography, male bonding, and degrading, often grotesque, initiation and hazing rituals.

In a substantial new introduction and afterword, Sanday updates the incidences of fraternity gang rape on college campuses today, highlighting such recent cases as that of Duke University and others in the headlines. Sanday also explores the nature of hazing at sororities on campus and how Greek life in general contributes to a culture which promotes the exploitation and sexual degradation of women on campus. More broadly, Sanday examines the nature of campus life today and the possibility of creating a rape-free campus culture.

Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus Details

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From Reader Review Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus for online ebook

Cate Linden says

Cheery read, let me tell you.

Anna says

"Fraternity", as she explains in the introduction, means any kind of all-male group which defines their gender identity as the antithesis of the feminine. Accordingly, the book's conclusions can be applied beyond college campuses.

There are some important points made about society in general. Though few solutions are offered (apart from stricter university rules governing sexual assault on campus), the author articulates some of the problems very well.

Some gems in particular include:

-Society devalues and negates the feminine as weaker and undesirable, and so do men in constructing their gender identity

-The status of women is assigned according to the nature of their sexual interactions with men. Feminine subjectivity is defined in terms of passivity, and their social status depends on being accepted by men (obviously this is changing, however I think it is changing more slowly than women would like it to)

As an aside, men tell me that women should be able to "choose" to dress sexy, act submissively, and dream of a life as a housewife. I don't think it is so much a choice as a necessity if we are to feel desirable by men (which we heterosexuals still want, generally speaking). I personally would rather be seen as desirable due to my superior intellect and wit rather than my beauty, since I enjoy learning and interacting with people much more than plucking my eyebrows or putting on makeup. Acting sexy or dressing sexy is not empowering, unless one considers it empowering to mold oneself into what others desire in order to get attention and feel loved.

-A "boys will be boys" mentality is destructive. Men who blame biological, and therefore uncontrollable, factors for their sexual aggressiveness have an infantile conception of responsibility, as they continually lay blame outside the self. These men are not reflective, they are reactive.

-Following this discourse, women must protect themselves from the explosive, "wild" nature of male sexuality. If a woman gets into a situation where she is alone at night with a bunch of drunken men, she gets what she deserves. She "deserves it" because she has not carried out her appointed task of regulator of her own and male sexuality. If she stays, then she serves another function. She helps the men discover the "wild" masculinity that the broader sexual discourse about being male tells them is supposed to be there... By blaming women for provoking male sexual aggression, women are controlled through the agency of fear. The fear is that a woman who doesn't guard her behavior runs the risk of becoming the target of uncontrollable male sexual aggression. Thus, although women are ostensibly the controlling agent, it is fear

of the imagined, explosive nature of male sexuality that ultimately reigns for both sexes. This fear instills an aggressive attitude in men and a passive, fearful attitude in women. (p. 106)

And the ultimate conclusion of the author's study...

-Social ideologies, not human nature, prepare men to abuse women. Whatever the underlying psychological and biological needs might be, cultural templates will change and alter these tendencies. (p. 195)

AMEN!

Jenna says

Peggy Reeves Sanday is an incredible researcher and a compelling author. I read this as research for my thesis in college and was devastated by it. Sanday's insight into the the nature of gender segregation and it's effect on masculine identity is both horrifying and enlightening.

Laura Avellaneda-Cruz says

Prof. Sanday not only offers detailed descriptions of fraternity life and the conditions that contribute to gang rape and other forms of sexual assault, but she also illuminates, from an anthropological perspective, many of the mechanisms by which sexual violence continues to be "normal" in US society.

Her research into a particular incident of gang rape at UPenn and further investigation into fraternity culture around the country reveals many details of fraternity party life. These include practices of "working a yes out;" the use of drugs, alcohol, coercion, pressure and social power to obtain sex from women; and the function that such sex serves within fraternities (namely, to assure the men of their manliness and heterosexuality and gendered dominance in the eyes of one another and in the college social order, and to reinforce their bonds with one another--a bond that requires being a group superior to and over women and Blacks. She also reveals the process of pledging and initiation and the construction of new identities within fraternities, through stories shared to her by former frat brothers. Very importantly, she also shows the important role that pornography plays in making abusive sexual behavior seem normal and exciting to these young men.

She also takes the important step of showing fraternity life through the eyes of the women who have chosen to take part in it through drinking and sexual relationships with frat brothers. This is key to understanding the overall dynamic, and these young women's stories are invaluable. However, when discussing the "hook-up" culture and party sex dynamics and why so few women report, I would have appreciated more insight into the subjectivities of women who enjoy or claim to enjoy drunk hook-ups, because that is one of the pieces of the puzzle that many supporters of rape culture hold up to silence activism, and is a perception that keeps many victims silenced. I hope in the future she illuminates this more.

The lurid details of fraternity life she shares (and not all fraternities, she is careful to note--some choose to be distinctly respectful and egalitarian places) are not shared simply to disparage fraternities, but rather to show how male & racial privilege and social dominance, if encouraged by larger social, cultural and economic norms and tacitly condoned by those in power (in this case, by college administrators), will seek abusive

pathways to reassure and continue this dominance. She places this analysis of dominance within a global context, in which she explains from her own and others' anthropological research that some societies are rape prone and in some, rape is virtually non-existent. This has much to do with gender equality and integration, and harmony with versus dominance over nature. She uses this and other discussions of how human sexuality works, to very skillfully take apart the myth that rape happens because of primitive biological urges or is evolutionary to males. She makes a very cogent argument that, instead, rape is shaped by many social influences over sexuality.

She also places her analysis within the context of a few centuries of Western thought concerning sexuality and within the 1st, 2nd and 3rd sexual revolutions and, in the book's afterward, the burgeoning movement for affirmative verbal consent and healthy, communicative, respectful sexuality. I found all of these larger contexts, particularly her cross-cultural anthropological research, to be extremely helpful for understanding the social context of rape in general, and rape in college environments specifically.

There are some areas in which it could be improved, and I do hope that in her future works, Professor Sanday is more clear about illuminating the differences between WHITE male exclusive and privileged environments and those of men of color (through my experience, I have heard that Black and Latino fraternities are different, but I'd appreciate research that reveals if that is true or not and if so, to what degree and why). I also found that Sanday, like many academics, is a bit out of touch with certain aspects of the world outside of the university and the subject she studies. Therefore, she sometimes makes sweeping generalizations about society that don't always hold up.

Despite certain, I would argue small, shortcomings, I highly recommend this book for professors, administrators, parents of high school students that are leaving soon for college, high school and college students themselves, athletic coaches, etc. I also recommend it for anyone wanting to understand the intersections of gender, racial and class privilege and the social construction of a rape-prone society and sexuality--or for anyone who wants to stop sexual violence, period.

Tina Estep says

is an analysis of how all-male groups like fraternities create a rape culture. This is very powerful, but chilling book that goes into rape culture and how it is formed, but this book shed light upon how this problem continues today. We have all seen it in the new with university athletic groups gang raping women. As I stated before this is a chilling book and can make/has made some people feel uncomfortable., but it is one of those many truths that exist within our society.

Helen says

An eye opening look at 1) the atrocities that have been committed against women by such groups and 2)the lengths at which colleges and universities have tried far harder to protect their own reputations that their female students. Those that think that the objectification of women in our culture is "pretty harmless" should be made to read this book.

Margaret Roberts says

Well-researched. Writing was mediocre. Logic irrefutable.

Alexandria says

SPOILER ALERT: There may be some in here, as I discuss the most enlightening things this book taught me as well as some of the personal theories I developed from Sanday's work and my other reading (most notably: *The Macho Paradox* by Jackson Katz). However, I do not actually repeat substantial actual stories from the book, and the book itself is absolutely invaluable for its detailed and often appalling real life examples. I hope my pointing out some of Sanday's main ideas helps readers who are currently reading the book better understand or digest her material and better appreciate the wonderful work she's done. My review and these main ideas are not as successful as her visceral real life examples, and no replacement for reading this work.

I thought Sanday's *Fraternity Gang Rape* was a very thought-provoking book about male attitudes and entitlement in American culture, and a wonderful explanation about how the traditional conception of American masculinity alienates men from their emotional selves and other human beings... Ultimately priming them for violence against women; (whether the violence/degradation is committed first-hand, celebrated in the peer group, or watched and therefore silently supported and perpetuated). The book clearly demonstrates the dismissive attitudes many men have towards the emotional violence of rape and objectifying (and therefore) rape-promoting behavior due to the cultural norm of victim-blaming; ie the attitude that men are entitled to women's bodies if women "put themselves in that position", as one fraternity member says. This may not be news to most feminists, but the book provides ample anecdotal evidence as well as cites studies that show how continued exposure to violence in one's peer group and media influences future violence... Evidence that is very powerful in using to explain "rape culture" to the uninitiated due to trustworthiness and lucidity of this source; (the author is a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and used students as participant observers in their own Greek system). The book also goes one step further than proving the rape culture that many women are already aware of, by speaking to fraternity brothers about their own experiences in their male peer groups. This is important because it sheds light on the platonic ideal of American masculinity, which I believe is hugely responsible for the huge incidence of rape in America after reading this and Jackson Katz's *The Macho Paradox*. Fraternity brothers openly admit that being seen as sympathetic or sensitive towards women makes them "unmanly" and therefore decreases their social standing in their social hierarchy. This illustrates, as Katz also emphasizes, that men's training in emotional distance is what makes them likely to treat women as objects, because men who show any caring fail to fit the masculine ideal and are socially penalized. The fraternity conversation also speaks to some of the men's huge insecurity in their sexual prowess due to the pornification of the culture, which makes them more likely to join organizations such as Greek Life in order to feel more secure in their normative idea of masculinity. I also found Sanday's cultural "reading" of gang-rape majorly enlightening. She points out that gang-rape, or "trains" as some fraternity men put it, allows them to "perform their heterosexuality" on an unconscious female that really is the tool for subconsciously acting out the brothers' homoerotic desire for each other. Although I do not think Sanday makes this link expressly clear, I believe after reading *The Macho Paradox* that the reason why gang rape holds such an allure for young men, besides the identified need to preserve and perform their "masculinity" is because of the "emotional distance" component of traditional masculinity. This necessity for "emotional distance" often means that men cannot genuinely connect with each other, also due to the homophobia taboo. When something taboo, it becomes desired, and because so-called "true men"

are socialized both to not express emotions and that "sex is manly", I believe this leads to them sublimating the desire for emotional connection with their fellow men into a subconscious homoerotic desire for them... Which they then gratify while surface-level "proving their heterosexuality" during gang-rape. It was very enlightening for Sanday to point this out. In addition, she talks to former sorority sisters about why they hang out with these men to show why women often partake in their own objectification through the sorority lifestyle. They do this because they want to "be one of guys" because, as Sanday clearly demonstrates, "men have the power". However, through the Greek lifestyle, the interviewed women began to realize that any power they derived from "fitting into" the male's desires was ephemeral, and ultimately on loan from the fraternity brothers... Denied to them, ultimately, because of their female sex in this misogynistic system. When reading the sorority sisters' or the female fraternity fans' points of view, I empathized with them and better understood why some women try to fit into misogynistic and narrow definitions of "womenhood". It is because they are often socialized to believe, in a woman-hostile atmosphere, that this is the way to "popularity and belonging", ie, social power. That was very enlightening to me as well. In addition, Sanday also uncovers the violent and ritualistic hazing of fraternity men, arguing that because they undergo such degrading treatment for fraternity acceptance that they then transfer on this "we abuse you so that you can belong" treatment to women... And Sanday also points out the increasing callousness and minimization of trauma in our culture by men who abuse, and women to other abused women, (ie, sorority sisters who do not consider date rape "real rape"). I found this very enlightening, true, and important. Sanday also shows how institutionally, these men are not held accountable for their actions, revealing the complicity of the entire culture (police, schools, etc) in a visceral manner as we learn what happens to many victimized females who did once "belong". She also shows an alternative "rape-free" male sorority, as well as their derision as UPenn's "faggot fraternity", showing at an institutional level how sensitive men are shamed for not fitting into the ideal. The men who founded their rape-free fraternity were in favor of abolishing Greek Life in the end for it's rampant "racism, sexism, and homophobia". This may not be possible, but the book shows us that we need to radically reframe our notion of American masculinity, as well as stress empathy in a culture that increasingly has little. It also has an afterward explaining in detail some of the gains the women's anti-rape movement has made since the original publication of this book which I found hopeful and affirming.

Although many people might believe that this book is dealing with very narrow subject matter (just college Greek Life), college Greek Life is one of the finest microcosms to study in order to explain our larger rape culture. This is because Greek life is often held up as the "ideal" with the members designated as "popular" and therefore, socially powerful and aspirational images. Greek Life is also important to study, because people could make the argument that those with social power are simply the one's who are best at conforming to society's dominant cultural values; (ie, the head of the pack of the rat race)... And it does seem like Greek Life values are emblematic of American Youth Culture these days, (drink drink party Instagram), making this not only a study of a specific slice of Americana, but what much of young mainstream Americana wants to be. In addition, the fact that this studies UPenn is infinitely important because their graduates have social power and are also intelligent, demonstrating that these misogynistic attitudes affect everyone, from top to bottom, regardless of education level. People who go to UPenn have social and cultural power, or will one day. If these men in power are acting that way, then this work is a massively clear sign that something about our cultural values need to change. Respect to Peggy Sanday.

(Also to clarify/point out any biases: I am a 19 year old college student at a top 25 university, and am a fraternity gang rape survivor. This book was invaluable to understanding what happened to me, and in my healing process. If anyone wants to talk, definitely message me. You are not alone. Once again, thank you Sanday for your help).

Chloe Wells says

As a young woman going into her freshman year of college, Gang Rape, the disturbing and incredibly graphic documentation really opened up my eyes to the not so glamorous life of being involved in the college greek scene. Although the book leaves you feeling quite uneasy, it's upsetting truth is truly something to think about. Sanday offers a visual text regarding the sexual assault incidents occurring at the mentioned university linking to the entitled frat pledges. It opened my eyes to the fact that the greek rape culture is not only limited to the states. It brings up an incident over the seas in Japan, discussed near the middle of the book. Other universities were brought up as well, such as the University of Colorado Boulder, University of Tennessee, Duke university and many others. Overall, I think the authors goal is to really open the eyes of the readers to a topic that gets overlooked in many different schools around the US. As someone who always leans towards the mystery, biting your nails type of books, I loved the true life crime showcased throughout the novel. It left me wanting more which is what the author intended. However, with the intense stories shared, it did make colleges in america seem incredibly dangerous for women to attend which is not always the case. There will be bad apples no matter where you go, it just depends what type of situations you allow yourself to get into. I do think this is an important read for those who are freshman in college, or even seniors in high school. The horror described in the book really got me thinking about the type of people I'll allow myself to interact with in my future, as a student and as a grown woman. Sanday offers several other books pertaining to sexual harassment of women such as "A woman scorned", which is a study of women's sexual-stereotypes, and acquaintance rape and i do plan to look into some more of her work, she's truly an incredible author with great things to teach and say.

Megan Lengel says

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this. I am a feminist through-and-through, and reading any study on rape culture or rape itself proves to be simultaneously upsetting and fascinating. I had to read this for my Intro to Cultural and Social Anthropology course, and I found it to be extremely informative, especially as I read this around the time the report from Rolling Stone about UVA's rape epidemic and the disappearance and murder of one of their students. The circumstances around which I read this book in combined with my past experiences and education about the matter and what I had been taught in this course all colluded to make this book an extremely interesting read. I would recommend this to anyone that wants a comprehensive look at the culture of fraternities and the brothers that live within. One of the only complaints I have with this book is that despite it being a SECOND edition, it still holds too many spelling errors to be deemed acceptable. That is all.

Rickie says

This reminds me too much of what I don't like to think about. It wasn't easy to read, but it was good to read someone else confirming what I had been thinking.

Aaron says

FRATERNITY GANG RAPE: SEX, BROTHERHOOD, AND PRIVILEGE ON CAMPUS is a

fearsome and equitable unearthing of the social psychology native to the sexual culture that aims to legitimize fraternity gang rape. The book provides plenty of space for readers to dissect and interpret the pathologies of the modern pledge, insofar as ideological malleability and escapist behavior influence sexual relations, sex as a gateway to camaraderie, or sex as a tool of social expression meant to explicitly reinforce power structures based on gender, race, economics, and corrupted illusions of meritocratic idealism.

Of the myriad moralized perspectives available for examination in the media or in academia concerning fraternity rape, this book generally eschews soap-box rhetoric in favor of case studies purloined from newspaper reporting, field surveys, recorded interviews, and court records. This approach may feel colder than the emotive survival tales that wreak havoc on the emotions, but the author is well aware of the importance of rendering clear how certain misconceptions about crimes of a sexual nature function on a fundamental level. Indeed, it is at times impossible to garner understanding of the obvious without first documenting and exploring it to the fullest extent.

And while individual accounts of individual cases, both high- and low-profile, populate much of the book, Sanday's dutiful analysis of these events and of the casualization of behavior that led to such events is what gives **FRATERNITY GANG RAPE** its true value. Correctly and succinctly defining *brotherhood*, for example, as the most effective means of ensuring that ritualized masculinity influences (or inflates) social capital, is one of the book's lasting achievements. The aggressive fending off of loneliness and inadequacy with promises of status and acceptance, writ favorable through false integrity, insults, homophobia, and thorough lack of respect and self-worth, as well as a fear of female authority, is altogether an epiphany and an irony that shall stand true for as long as college and university Greek-housing systems remain in place.

Additional critical analyses follow. The deconstruction of *party culture* and its fervent overreliance on alcohol accessibility, drug use, loud dance music, and sexually thematic archetypes is very important. The *dynamics of consent* is a conversation that articulates and provides evidence of the deliberate undoing of newer and stronger concepts of womanhood by means of coercion, fragmented memory, coordinated victim-blaming and a lack of communal solidarity, and the manufacturing of a false sense of security. The modern sexual contract is discussed, but not before pulling the reader through all forms of conspicuous behavior (and ideology) known to infest fraternity life.

The contaminating effects of *group consciousness* provide what is perhaps the most enthralling conversation in the text. Ranging from assumptions of solidarity and the conferring of privilege upon the ignorant, to notions of sacrifice/preservation to elevate status, to the implications of a collective force vowing to dehumanize its pledges for the sake of institutional pride, the group consciousness is eternal. It is the premiere emotional pivot. Neither family nor friends are of value unless the group consciousness deems them worthy. All matters of individuality succumb to the programming of the group. It is a constituted bond by which "group identity and attitudes become personalized" (p. 148).

The first-person accounts included in **FRATERNITY GANG RAPE** lend veracity to debates concerning ongoing societal issues that are ever present but become magnified in the context of college life. Discussion of *female stratification*, for example, as the structural denigration of women and of women's agency, is intensely detailed. And while the criminality of sexual violence via frat groups is explored at length, both in terms of its legal as well as societal perpetuations, the book's *dialectic on sexual discourse* is extensive. The author articulates what mythologies produce the cultural placement and identity of these cultic figures; articulates the process of normalizing exploitation and its superficial importance; articulates the role of initiation, ritual, and meaning-making to ratify unresolved, emotional privilege; and so forth.

There is a lot packed into this book. New means of media engagement and revised public outlooks may have

shifted the public face of accountability in cases of fraternity gang rape, or of rape on college campuses in general; however, many of the institutional problems that claimed these victims rest under cloak of secrecy, and therefore remain woefully unresolved.

Chris says

I'm pretty sure I live very near the U. in this book. Good companion book to Susan Brownmiller's work or to Gail Dines.

Robin says

I learned from this book but didn't love it. The empirics and descriptive analysis of the dynamics of gang rape were solid (& disturbing). The analysis of motivation & understanding of porn was less convincing.

Namrirru says

There are a lot of angry reviews on amazon about this book. I read them all. This book hit a lot of nerves with former fraternity members with them saying things like "that wasn't our fraternity," etc etc.

This is definitely one of those books where it is necessary to read the introduction (both), forward, and afterword.

The first part of this book is an anthropological case study of a rape that happened at a certain fraternity house in the 1980's. She examines the fraternity's party culture, the individuals' beliefs and attitudes, the rape that happened, and the judicial responses. The second part of the book deals with what can make a fraternity and sorority rape prone. She never implies that all fraternities are rape prone, but she details the signs and symptoms of an environment that can lead to violence against women. In the afterword, she gives a long generous example of a rape-free fraternity that exists on the same campus.

The book: It was good, well-written. It could be longer. I think she could state the obvious a little more since this book is likely to be read by people whose immediate reaction is going to be defensive.
